

**JEWES AND JEWISH EDUCATION  
IN GERMANY TODAY**

**Volume 2: Interviews with Leading Figures**

**The agenda of the Jewish population of Germany**

*Principal Investigator*

**Eliezer Ben-Rafael**

*Tel-Aviv University*

*Investigators*

**Olaf Glöckner (Potsdam University)**

**and Yitzhak Sternberg (Open University; Beit Berl College)**

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## TABLE OF CONTENT

### List of interviews

1. Toby Axelrod,
2. Dmitri Belkin
3. Evgueni Berkovitch
4. Beni Bloch
5. Micha Brumlik
6. Christian Böhme
7. Gesa Ederberg
8. David Gall
9. Mikhail Goldberg
10. Johannes Heil
11. Walter Homolka
12. Küf Kaufmann
13. Charlotte Knobloch
14. Michael Kogan
15. Sergey Lagodinsky
16. Arkady Litvan
17. Jewgenij Singer
18. Tatyana Smolianitski
19. Joshua Spinner
20. Adriana Stern
21. Lala Süsskind
22. Larissa Syssoeva
23. Yehuda Teichtal

## Leading figures: The agenda of the Jewish population of Germany

As presented in Chapter 7, this investigation aspired to bring in the feelings and analyses of leading figures of the present-day Jewish population of Germany: How do they see the “burning issues” on the agenda of this population. The following brings out the texts of the 23 face-to-face interviews which were conducted during 2008-2009.

### *List of interviewees*

**Toby Axelrod** leads the office of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA) in Germany. She writes for the London Jewish Chronicle, Hadassah Magazine, the Jerusalem Post and Golem; she also works as a translator. Ms. Axelrod was a co-founder of Limmud Germany in 2006, and she chaired the (German-wide) Limmud Festival in Berlin in 2009.

**Dr. Dmitri Belkin**, born in 1971 in Dnepropetrovsk (Ukraine), immigrated to Germany in 1991 and has worked on several joint research projects in Germany and in the USA. He is a member of a Liberal congregation which belongs to the United Jewish Community in Frankfurt. Currently, Dmitri Belkin is the curator for a German-wide exhibition “20 years of Russian-Jewish Immigration to Germany”.

**Dr. Evgueni Berkovitch**, born in 1945 in Irkutsk (USSR) immigrated to Germany in 1995. He works as a computer specialist in Hanover and has created the internationally known Russian language web portal “Notes on Jewish History” (Zametki po evrejskoj istorii).

**Benjamin Bloch**, born in 1943 in Jerusalem, has served as the head of the Central Welfare Board of Jews in Germany (ZWST) since 1987. He is one of the initiators of the project Lehava that brings young Israeli volunteers to Germany to stimulate local Jewish Community work, especially youth work.

**Dr. Christian Böhme**, is a political scientist, historian and journalist. He worked for several newspapers in Berlin, then changed to the Jewish weekly Jüdische Allgemeine. For several years now Dr. Böhme has been the editor-in-chief of the Jüdische Allgemeine, the only Jewish weekly published across Germany.

**Prof. Micha Brumlik**, born in 1947, is lecturer for pedagogy at the Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main and is well known as German Jewish publicist who deals with recent trends in German society and in inner-Jewish development since 1990. For years he was also very committed in the Jewish-Christian dialogue in Germany.

**Gesa Ederberg**, born in 1968, serves as a Reform Rabbi in the Jewish Community of Berlin. She also heads the (conservative) Masorti Movement Center in Berlin **and** its Educational Center (Lehrhaus). Rabbi Ederberg is also a founding member of the General Rabbinical Conference within the Central Council of Jews in Germany (ARK).

**David Gall** is a clinical pharmacologist in Munich and a member of the Liberal Jewish Community Beth Shalom. In 1994, he created the first and best known German-Jewish web portal Ha Galil. Ha Galil is an independent site providing comprehensive information on Jewry and current events.

**Mikhail Goldberg**, born in 1962 in Kiev (Ukraine), is the editor-in-chief of the monthly Evreyskaya Gazeta, established in 2002. The Evreyskaya Gazeta is currently the only German-wide Russian language Jewish newspaper. It is produced in Berlin and has between 30,000 and 40,000 readers.

**Prof. Johannes Heil** is the Rector of the University of Jewish Studies (Hochschule für Jüdische Studien) in Heidelberg. Born in 1961, he is a well-known historian concentrating especially on Jewish history in the period of late antiquity and early Middle Ages. He is also deeply involved in research on anti-Semitism.

**Prof. Walter Homolka** is the director of the Abraham Geiger College in Potsdam, the first Rabbinical College for non-Orthodox Rabbis in Europe. Rabbi Homolka, born in 1964, is also an adjunct full professor at the University of Potsdam and serves as a member on the Executive Board of the World Union for Progressive Judaism (WUPJ).

**Kuef Kaufmann**, born in 1947 in Marx (USSR), has been the head of the Jewish Community in Leipzig since 2003. Kaufmann studied art direction and has also worked as journalist, cartoonist and satirist. He is the first Russian Jewish immigrant who was elected as head of a Jewish Community with more than 1,000 members

**Dr. Charlotte Knobloch** is the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany (Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland) and head of the Jewish Community in Munich (Israelitische Kultusgemeinde München und Oberbayern). Dr. Knobloch is also vice president of the European Jewish Congress (EJC).

**Michael Kogan** works as a Rabbi in the Jewish Community of Düsseldorf. He was born in Moldavia, worked as engineer and theater director in the USSR and later studied to become a Rabbi at the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem. Now an Israeli citizen, he's been working in the JC in Düsseldorf since January 2005.

**Sergey Lagodinsky**, born in 1975 in Astrakhan (Russia), is a judge and publicist living in Berlin, where he is also an elected representative of the local Jewish Community. Lagodinsky studied law (in Germany) and public administration (at Harvard) and also serves as an advisor to the American Jewish Committee in Berlin.

**Arkady Litvan**, born in 1946 in Odessa, is a board member of the **Orthodox** Jewish Community in Hanover (which belongs to the Central Council of Jews in Germany). Litvan was the head of the Jewish Community in Odessa from 1980-1990, before the family immigrated to Germany. In the early 1990's he was committed to (re-)building Jewish Communities in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (Eastern Germany)

**Jewgenij Singer**, born in 1983 in Ukraine, is a political scientist and businessman in Frankfurt am Main. For several years he has been the head of the Jewish Student Union in the federal state of Hesse (Western Germany), and he is also an elected representative of the Jewish Community in Frankfurt am Main.

**Tatyana Smolianitski**, born in 1963, graduated from Moscow State University with a PhD in history and came to Germany in 1992. In the mid-1990's she co-founded **the association** "Gesher – Integration through Culture and Education" (Gesher – für Integration durch Kultur und Bildung e.V.) in Dortmund, which has proved to be very successful in Jewish adult education especially in the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia (Western Germany).

**Joshua Spinner**, born in 1971 in Baltimore, Maryland (USA) is vice president of the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation and leads the Lauder Yeshurun Community in Berlin. The Berlin Center includes also the yeshiva Beit Zion and the Hildesheimer Rabbinical College, which trains future Orthodox Rabbis for Germany.

**Adriana Stern**, is a German-Jewish writer from Cologne, and a board member of the Liberal Jewish Community Gesher le Massoret. Born in 1960, she became well known with several children's and juvenile books. Adriana Stern is also active on committees in several social initiatives and NGOs in Germany.

**Lala Süsskind**, born in 1946 in Poland, has been head of the Jewish Community in Berlin since 2008. She studied sociology and has been active in the Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO Germany and Berlin) for many years. She is also a board member of the German Israeli Society (DIG) in Berlin.

**Larissa Syssoeva**, born in 1948 in Moscow, is a biologist and artist, now heading the Berlin office of the World Congress of Russian Speaking Jews (WCRJ). She is also a member of the Jewish Community of Berlin, and very committed to cultural and arts projects supporting immigrants.

**Yehuda Teichtal**, born in 1972 in Brooklyn, came to Berlin in 1996 and immediately began pioneering work for Chabad Lubavitch in the German capital. Here he has two functions: He is employed as a Rabbi of the **United** Jewish Community of Berlin (belonging to the Central Council of Jews in Germany), and at the same time he is the head of the Chabad Lubavitch Center which opened in 2007.

## 1. TOBY AXELROD

May 13, 2009, Berlin

● *Mrs. Axelrod, you are strongly involved in the organization of Limmud Germany, this year even as chair of Limmud.de and coordinator of the three-day festival. What's your main motivation?*

It has been my intention to contribute actively to the vibrant Jewish life here in Germany, especially to a program without fences and borders, one including all ages and Jewish denominations. I was looking for a movement that reflects Jewish diversity, and that can bridge divergences.

● *What are the prospects for Jewry in Germany in the short-term and long-term?*

From the demographic point of view, I think that the number of organized Jews in Germany will now remain more or less on the same level.

● *Do you think there will be more differences among the several generations of Jews who are now living in Germany?*

As you know, Jews from a Russian-speaking background form a large majority within the Jewish Community of Germany. But we can already see that the younger generation is much less oriented to Russian identity or exclusivity. You can see this already in the rising number of marriages between Jews from the established post-war community and Jews from a FSU background.

Another development is that younger Jews in Germany seem less interested in dealing intensively with the Holocaust. But just to avoid a misunderstanding, there is a commitment to remember the Holocaust, of course. But the younger generation wants to look forward, they want to enjoy life, they like music and celebrations of life. I personally think that the subject of the destruction of European Jewry in the Holocaust needs to be brought up in a new way for this generation, so that they can see perhaps a continuity between themselves and the generations that came before them, and build on this.

Limmud in Germany tends to bridge the generation gaps. All generations – the elderly, the middle aged and younger people – are deeply involved.

● *What are the major challenges facing German Jewry today?*

Probably the biggest challenge is reaching out to the Russian Jews. This is, in my opinion, a twofold challenge. On the one hand, this outreach depends on interest and openness among the Jews of Russian background. On the other hand, it requires the open doors of the post-war Jewish establishment. And there are still prejudices that must be overcome on both sides.

● *What do you personally consider to be the most essential elements of Judaism today?*

I want to answer this in a more practical way. For me it is important to be creative and active, in my life as a writer, and also in Jewish issues. As a journalist I can raise Jewish issues, can connect people, I can help to build networks. For me, the most important *Jewish* activities have been my commitment to building Limmud and my involvement in the Jewish literary journal *Golem* [based in Berlin, but available throughout Europe]. But to come back to your question: I think that for me the most important element in Judaism is *communication and community without prejudice*.

- *Some voices are talking about a new pluralism of Jewish life in Germany. Do you share this view? And if so, what are the most essential components of this new German-Jewish pluralism?*

Yes, I think that expression of diversity is on the rise in the Jewish Communities of Germany. Today, for example, you can find egalitarian and progressive congregations alongside the more traditional ones in bigger towns and cities. I've seen the development of Bet Debora,<sup>1</sup> and I was really impressed. There are also striking developments in traditional Judaism in Germany, for example in initiatives by Lauder or by Chabad. And concerning Berlin, I have the feeling that there's more life now in the new orthodox groups [i.e. Chabad, Lauder, O.G.] than in the established communities. Perhaps it is because people are interested in something new. And competition between the old and new groups seems to have sparked a lot of creativity, which in my view has to lead to positive developments overall.

- *How would you describe the current relations between German speaking Jews and Russian speaking (i.e. immigrated) Jews?*

There is still a lack of communication between both groups, and it seems to me that there are still some false expectations and mistaken attitudes on both sides. For some, the language problem remains. On a personal note, our journal *Golem* has been published in three languages – in English, French and German. I wanted to introduce the Russian language as well.

On the other hand, there is a tendency among some in the “new” Community to remain on their own. For example, the World Congress of Russian-speaking Jews (WCRJ) provides its own Russian language programs. For the established Community, these programs can feel like another, exclusive universe in their own backyard.

However, with *Limmud* we have a mandate to try to reach out to all groups, and we have already seen some progress so far in our two major festivals. People from the old and new Communities have met and formed new friendships. It's a start.

- *How would you describe the current relations between religious and non-religious Jews in Germany?*  
I don't see any significant difficulties in these relations. The only point of tension I see is in the concern of some parents who fear that the new orthodox kindergartens and grammar schools will siphon off children, and thus state financial support, from the more liberal schools run by the Community.

- *Please describe strengths and weaknesses of the current Jewish educational programs in Germany.*

I think it would make sense to provide more support for the Jewish adult education centers (JVHS), just to enable them to widen their offerings. It's definitely necessary. Seen from this point, *Limmud* is also very much in need of more support from outside.

- *Are plans for Limmud moving ahead in Germany?*

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<sup>1</sup> Bet Debora, a conference by and about female rabbis, cantors and educators in Europe, was founded by Jewish women activists in Berlin. Conferences were held in Berlin in 1999, 2001 and 2003. The fourth Bet Debora conference was held in Budapest in 2006, and the fifth will take place in June 2009 in Sofia, Bulgaria.

Yes. Aside from the three-day festival in Berlin, people are planning one-day-Limmud events in some bigger cities like Munich, Cologne, Leipzig and Hamburg. We can provide the initiatives with moral support, and we can also try to get sponsorship to cover their costs. But like us in Berlin, these activists are all volunteers. It's nice to see these fruits of the national festival. Already, Limmud in Germany has had a ripple effect. People came to us at the end of the Berlin Limmud weekend and said, "We don't want to go home now... Now we want to try to organize this in our town, too."

Local Jewish Communities could support Limmud projects by providing the necessary infrastructure.

- *How many registered visitors were there at the recent German Limmud Festivals?*

In 2006 we had a one-day-Limmud festival in Berlin with about 300 registrations and many drop-ins; about the same number signed up for the 2007 one-day-gathering in Munich. For our first three-day festival, in 2008 [Berlin/Werbellinsee] we had more than 300 participants, and just now [May 2009] we had about 420 participants. We had to close registration for lack of space in the dining hall. I think it's not too optimistic to expect more than 500 participants in the coming year. We may have to rethink our venue options.

- *How would you assess the quality of volunteer work in the Jewish Communities in Germany today?*

I can speak only for the Limmud movement, and here the voluntary commitment is impressive in quality, if not in quantity. We have volunteers in all age groups. The youngest is currently 16 years old, and the oldest is over 80. However, the core of activists is in their 30's, many of them are self-employed (including lawyers, doctors, journalists, psychologists) or students.

- *What are the principal Jewish structures in Germany today? Are there other institutions besides the synagogue that play a central role?*

Difficult question. If you mean places like the JCCs in the US, then I would say no. However, there are some new developments in building inclusive centers (in Munich, in Würzburg), and there's a slow trend in building up Jewish cafés, Jewish salons, Jewish discussion groups (for Israelis and Jews in general). Most of these are home-grown initiatives, but recently, an Israeli entrepreneur started a Jewish café in Amsterdam, and wants to spread this idea to other cities in Europe.

- *How would you describe the relations between the German Jewish Communities and German politicians and officials?*

From the side of the German politicians – I would say, there are two types. The first likes to be seen and photographed with Jews, and that's it.

The second group of politicians seems to be really concerned with the development of Jewish life in Germany. I would count to this group, for example, Angela Merkel, Wolfgang Schäuble, Frank-Walter Steinmeier and also the Berlin Senator for the Interior, Erhard Körting. There are also many active politicians in the Bundestag, particularly of Christian and Turkish-Muslim background, who promote dialog between Jews and Christians and Muslims, who take up the cause of Israel, who stand up against anti-Semitism and who support Holocaust education and remembrance.

Let me not forget the very tiny minority of mainstream politicians who still exhibit anti-Semitic tendencies. But they are almost always shouted down immediately, thus they serve as a foil for what's really good in German politics.

- *What do you think about the general media coverage of events that relate to Jewish life in Germany?*

My impression is that in the German media coverage there's an abundance of reports on the past, including local Jewish history. It's not bad, but it's a pity when current Jewish topics and issues are overshadowed by coverage of "dead Jews." Of course, there is media coverage when new synagogues are opened or big Jewish cultural events are held. But in general, the share of reports on current developments is relatively small.

Perhaps mainstream journalists should try to get in touch with local Jewish activists.

I think that many people in Germany are aware that the Jewish Communities have grown significantly in recent years. But their knowledge is rather vague. As a journalist, I once asked people near the *Mahnmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* [Memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe near Brandenburg Gate] whether they knew how many Jews there are in Germany today, and what they knew about Judaism in general. I got all kinds of crazy answers about the number of Jews, but overall people seemed to know that Jewish life in Germany has grown.

Finally, judging by the fact that the Jewish Museum Berlin is one of the most frequented museums all over Germany, people seem thirsty for more information.

- *What do you think of the existing Jewish media in Germany?*

I can't give an overall assessment, but one remarkable fact for me is the huge number of non-Jews who work for or in the Jewish print media. I am used to it, more or less. But for many American Jews, this would seem rather shocking, and a reminder of the lack of Jews in Jewish space.



## 2. DMITRI BELKIN

Frankfurt, June 8, 2009

● *Dr. Belkin, were there any specific motivations for you to take over the organization of a broad exhibition on 20 years of Russian-Jewish immigration to Germany?*

No. This was the specific request of the Jewish Museum from Frankfurt. And I think it's a very good idea. This is, on the one hand, a very young story, and on the other it's already history, because there's a chronological order between 1991-2004/5 and you can say that this story is ending. The museum wants most of all to deal with contemporary current events. That was why they approached me.

● *You mentioned that you're also a member of the Jewish Community in Frankfurt. Where would you place yourself within a specific denomination within Judaism?*

I prefer a Judaism that perhaps doesn't exist yet in Germany. I stand for a more Liberal interpretation of Conservative Judaism, for an egalitarian version. But here in Frankfurt my family and I are in the United Community with the egalitarian minyan, that's a more Liberal version of Judaism.

● *How would describe the general perspectives that Jewish Community life, or Jewish life in general, are facing now in Germany?*

The question is a bit vague.

● *To be more specific, how do you see the demographic development? And secondly, do you think that Jewish pluralism is developing, or is it too early for that?*

Demographically speaking, the situation is still open. It depends on how political this immigration will turn out to be. The Communities were saved by the immigration, but the fact is, and you know this as well, the immigration was very old. The Community members, not all of those who immigrated by any means, but in general the Community members are growing older and older. The situation that could have taken place here already, might turn out to be the situation that we're going to face in 25-30 years again. In 20-30 years the Communities are going to grow smaller again and then a new influx of immigrants is called for and the Russians will be the veterans, and then the Russians or post-Soviets will have to integrate the new ones. I see the demographic development not necessarily optimistically. The future is wide open. This immigration, the main results were of a political nature. There is once again a German Jewry and Jews in Germany. The future is open, demographically speaking.

Talking about the perspectives for pluralism in the Communities, there I'm more optimistic and I hope that the Frankfurt model isn't a bad solution. The United Community tries to unite two-three denominations under one roof. This perhaps won't work in other places, because this construct, this political willingness to compromise isn't always to be found in other places in Germany. So that I think that it will mainly be about if the United Community can be maintained in the long run with this state financing. This is unique in the world. I don't think this model exists anywhere else. We'll have to see if this works. This requires a high level of political willingness and the readiness to compromise.

● *Which are the most urgent problems that need to be solved in the Jewish Community in Germany?*

Not long ago, for the first time after the war, Rabbis were ordained in Germany. They are unmistakably Orthodox. One of them is from this Ukrainian-Jewish milieu. This is exciting and an interesting development. I would like to see the two-three other denominations, which are a bit more Liberal, also receive new Rabbis. Such Rabbis would be able to take care of smaller Communities as well, and I think that's important.

Then the youth work is still a central theme. How can we attract the youth, the socially fully integrated Russian/post-Soviet Jewish youth to the Communities? That's also a challenge.

And there's now for me personally also an exciting challenge. How do I construct a new German Jewish history? Or a Jewish history in Germany? This history no longer has anything to do with the traditional German Jewish history. We need to see how the post-Soviet Israeli and new German discourses can be connected.

- *Maybe as a part of the current collective identity?*

There isn't this kind of collective identity in Germany. There are different identities inside the wider community. And that's the way it should be in part. This is also a model found in Israel. Just here everything is very close on the one hand and on the other very diverse. There you've got to see what happens.

- *How would you describe the current relations between the immigrants from the former Soviet Union and the veterans in the Jewish communities?*

I would say in general, that there is still a pretty large distance between them. This is not growing smaller in my view.

- *Even in Frankfurt?*

Even in Frankfurt. In Frankfurt the thing is that, in the meantime, many members have made mutual contacts through the schools, for example, or Community events. But personal contacts on a normal level between the old and the new members are very few, there is almost no communication. Why this is the case, this is the question that lies with the Germans. Many, the old and the new, have a feeling of being alienated, and that has something to do with being in this country. And now there's a feeling of double-alienation. You can't say it's our fault, or their fault. It's no one's fault. It's just the way situation is. The more post-Soviet immigrants who are more or less fluent in German and mentally are in Germany, the easier it will be. And the veterans should give up many prejudices they have about the so-called Russians. That's a reciprocal process. I don't think the older generation has many chances to improve it, but the younger certainly do. Just out of pragmatic reasons. A chance of meaningful communication, I mean.

- *Is your and your family's closest social network is still primarily Russian speaking?*

No. I wouldn't say that. For my family that isn't so. Russian is spoken at home, and communicating with the older generation also takes place in Russian, but our contacts in Frankfurt are 2/3 German. But that's not on purpose, and there are also many former immigrants who see it as an exception to have German Jewish friends.

- *How would you describe the relations between the active secular Jews and the active religious Jews? Are there tensions, is there acceptance or coexistence?*

It's difficult to say. I think in general the relations are ok. As Dieter Graumann [Vice President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, O.G.] likes to say, here in the Community, and as an editor of the Community paper, the main thing is that every denomination should be Jewish. It doesn't matter how, but it should be Jewish. That's true up to a certain point. On the other hand, if you ask traditional veterans who lead Orthodox

lives, they would say that they are pessimistic about the future because the new ones are almost not religious at all. There are very few, 3-4% who want to have anything to do with the traditions. And the new ones are saying: “What do you want from us? We’re the voice of Jewish schools, of Jews in this city. Why should we uphold the traditions? Why should we be praying all the time? Why should we speak Hebrew?” Then that’s the question. But in this city a balance has been found between these levels and so there’s also a harmony. It’s not without contradictions, but better than in other places. When I read the Russian language media, about developments in Berlin or in other smaller Communities, then I realize things can be much more problematic.

- *So, the Frankfurt Community is an example how it can work?*

People tend to see the ideal case in Germany in Frankfurt. On the one hand this is true. There is Jewish life, there is a certain level of willingness to compromise and talk to each other. On the other hand, you shouldn’t idealize the situation. Many new immigrants distance themselves from the Community, for various reasons. Or they just leave the Community.

- *Indeed, less than half of the FSU immigrants have joined a Jewish Community, and probably on the veterans’ side it doesn’t look much better. Where do you see the main reasons for this?*

I think this relates to societal trends in general, not just among Jews. Christian congregations are losing members as well. People are arguing that their religion is something private and personal, or they’re atheists or can’t deal with structures or institutions, cannot identify with them. I think that’s true for many Jews as well. Secondly, as I experienced in *Bad Sobernheim* [Educational Center of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, O.G.], where I taught a seminar and met the young people there, the question was raised if we should show our Jewishness in public? They answered with no. They’re concerned that there will be anti-Israeli voices at work, anti-Jewish comments from their co-workers and that’s why they’re saying to themselves, no, I don’t want that. It’s a typical reaction that they might have adopted from their parents in the former Soviet Union.

- *Is that a significant factor?*

I don’t know if that’s representative. I’m only speaking about three or four young people I met there and who have said that it was like this. These were mostly young people with university degrees, who are searching for their Jewishness on the one hand, but on the other don’t want to show it publicly.

- *Because they fear discrimination?*

Because they fear discrimination, and because they don’t want people staring at them at work or wherever.

- *Because of their Jewishness, or because of the Middle East conflict?*

As you know, both things are merged in most people’s minds. That’s very difficult to separate when the people don’t take the time to deal with these things, like we are doing. There is a certain tendency to lump everything together: Israel, Judaism, the Jewish religion and so on. And there are pragmatic reasons. Young people think to themselves why should they pay the religious tax? Their money is tight anyway. As a young person you don’t need a senior club to play chess and hear Russian lectures, you don’t need that. You might also not even need religious services, not necessarily. And if you don’t need any of that, what do you need from the Community? The answer is: nothing. So people don’t pay the tax for this simple, pragmatic reason to save money.

- *Do you think that Israel will retain the same importance in the Jewish Communities and networks, decrease or will it even increase? What is your hypothesis?*

My hypothesis is that for this generation over 40, let's say, the significance will remain. In the future, though, this is my feeling, it will decrease, like it will decrease everywhere, in America as well. I think the tendency, also with Obama's politics, partially reflects the developments. People will remain connected to Israel on a somewhat pragmatic level, I'd say. I can't imagine that this flaming Zionism that the veterans had 20-30 years ago will now emerge amongst the new members, or among the Jewish youth in Germany in general. But I do think that the feeling of solidarity will remain and in politics it makes sense to show a bit of solidarity with Israel. In the Jewish school for every holiday the children have to wear blue and white, the colors of Israel. That's interesting, but more romantic. I'm for a pragmatic, still very patriotic and friendly, but basically pragmatic approach to Israel. Valuing the culture and traveling there will remain priorities in any case. But just to say that we're a branch office of Israel, that will also decrease a bit, just as it has in America. It's not as important there anymore as it once was.

- *Ok, that's the political level. But what would you say, in principle, for the cultural, religious and spiritual levels?*

It's not a dependency and it's not about a political survey, but that we're now in a post-Zionist era, where Jewish people across the world are saying that Zionism is one option among others. We're free to choose this, and it's fantastic that this choice exists. There are connections. I'm dreaming of spending a year in Israel, a half year in an ulpan and a half year doing something at the university. Many intellectuals are certainly doing that. That you now say, ok, that's our attitude, and maybe that's the future. That the curve is leaning towards this direction, no, I don't think so.

- *Returning to the immigrants, do you see close bonds remaining with their former countries of residence, even among the young generation?*

That's a very complex question. It has something to do with both German reality and the attitudes of the people themselves. Concerning the reality in Germany, I've often heard that the young people who have been living here since they were 6 or 7 years old, are basically German, speak German almost without an accent, but then they do have a small accent and sometimes they have second thoughts about turning off this country so completely in contrast to me. I was in Ukraine until I was 21, 22, there is no question that's a part of me that will always be carried around within me, the language and so on. For these people, though, there's a division. I think in general, Germany is still, like many European countries including France, not multi-culturally-friendly. In Germany having two-three cultures or two-three backgrounds is not exactly an advantage. You shouldn't demonstrate this, you shouldn't talk about it if you want to start a successful career, and you need to be here, concerned with matters here. That's what we switch off. There are the political beginnings for the recognition that having two-three cultures is an advantage, a huge advantage and not the other way around. That's why there's often a schism within young people, I think. On the other hand, there is a small distancing, or a large distancing from one's parents and their generation, whose roots are mainly in Russian TV. They say: "I can see this picture maybe once a week at dinner, but otherwise, I'm not living there, I can't really relate to that." On the other hand, the Russian youth are practicing, they do want their children to know Russian, at least that they can speak it. They say, ok, I can speak this language in the future, because it's practical, a niche in the market, so that I can work with Eastern Europe in the future and so on. That's what remains. I have hardly ever encountered a big patriotic pro-Russian attitude.

- *Do you know families or individuals who have returned?*

I do know some, I have also interviewed some for our project.

- *And how much are they percentage-wise?*

It is a tiny minority. But there are many who are in transit, who are between 45-55 years old and still have their property and financial means there, but their base is here; they're not receiving welfare, but are here. They go there because they're doing business in Russia which they are unable to do here.

- *After having been here for many years, entering new networks, having gotten on their feet in society and in their careers, is there a majority among the immigrants, and also the veterans, developing an identification with the German nation?*

I think only a small minority would admit it. That's a divisive topic, that's my hypothesis. The people who have come to Germany, they've often learned the language as well or were taught by people, some of whom were from the '68 student protest generation; these people themselves have a divided relationship to their country. If in German books there are pretty critical sentences written, not only relating to the Nazi time, but also to modern Germany then it's difficult. On the other hand you need a certain distance to Germany to understand that life here, also Jewish life here, isn't the worst alternative. You need to step back, go to America and Israel and look around and compare. Then you'll find certain advantages to being here. What I would still see, you've got to be careful here, but I'd see this optimistically, and I think a positive attitude to this country could paradoxically stem from the Jews in this country. That would also be, in my opinion, desirable.

- *You previously said that you can place yourself relatively clear within the Jewish Community in Frankfurt. What are for you personally the most important elements in contemporary Jewry?*

For sure certain elements from Jewish tradition. That you are responsible for a child and then say, ok, I've got to make the decision of how to raise it. And that's the answer. It is a very strong motivation.

- *So the main thing for you was passing on tradition.*

Passing on tradition in whatever form, pretty strongly culturally, but the important thing is having a bond to tradition and continuity. Then learning. It's important and I also want to learn more about Judaism. I would love to delve deeper into rabbinical matters, partially from intellectual curiosity, partially from religious motivation. Not to become a Rabbi, but I would love to systematically deal with Jewish law. I could also combine that to my research, if I had the time and the opportunity, I would love to take a few good courses or lessons. I have a need for this. Then networking, to be connected in a Jewish way. I think that's good and important for the future. Then a lot of things operate on a level that's hard to define, and that's also important. There is a certain "something" that you always have; you are it and you have it and you will live it without overemphasizing it.

- *Are there still any problems with the integration in the Community? Do you think that now - regardless of age group - special measures are still necessary to facilitate integration?*

There is no growth anymore, no one new is coming. Those who were going to come have already arrived, and have been here for four or five years already. Right now this question has been solved by the halt in immigration on the one hand. On the other, I think that the Communities should not take on this mediator function in the long term. The Communities would then remain overwhelmed. This Community, where only 50-60% of the members are immigrants, that was also a huge problem for the veterans and the local social services. For the smaller Communities who have this classic situation with two veterans on the board and 30 Russian speaking members. That can't work out. I think that the immigration should be considered more maturely by saying ok, just like in America and to some extent in Israel there will be a short period with practical help, and then let them find their way. That will also spur people's motivations, allow them to

mature and they will be able to do more. What existed in Germany in the 1990's was like a kindergarten for both sides. That wasn't always helpful. It was seen as an advantage when people were deciding to come here, but it wasn't always good in my opinion.

● *Do you see significant lacks and gaps in the current spectrum of Jewish educational programs offered by Jewish communities and institutions?*

Yes. I can tell you, there is a lack of Jewish programs in English, in the Jewish school. The Jewish school is wonderful, but there is simply not enough English. Now we have Hebrew, Ivrit offered as the foreign language for at least two years. I think someone could come and offer courses, mandatory courses about Jewish topics in English, too. At the end of the day the kids also need to learn English and that's something that's missing. Not just English language courses, but good courses, maybe something cool and funny about Judaism, something with culture, but also in English. That's something I'd like to see.

Otherwise I think that the programs on offer here in Frankfurt are sufficient. What is missing is a classic Community center, but this isn't possible in Germany like in the USA where there is a wide array of activities, a pool, and so on and it's open to the public, but everyone knows it's a Jewish institution. The situation here is too tense for something like that. The infrastructure isn't in place where someone would say, 'Yes, now I'll personally invest in that.' That's all still dependent on the state.

Concerning Jewish education, I'd like to see a less Orthodox approach to tradition. It would be nice if someone were to come to Germany and try, like we're trying here, this egalitarian Conservative Judaism. Currently the children are learning the Orthodox tradition, and I would like to see a wider approach. In Frankfurt, though, things are ok.

● *Something like Masorti in Berlin?*

Masorti is very popular, it's also a compromise, when we have the Argentinians and so on. It's very present across Jewish Communities and there is an apparent need for tradition, but not in the purely Orthodox form. I don't want to completely give this up. For example, we practice the egalitarian forms, but traditional and that's what I am missing here a bit.

● *How would you describe everyday cooperation with non-Jewish German authorities, officials and politicians?*

That it was certainly not simple in the 1990's, I've heard. Particularly the social welfare offices and employment offices were overwhelmed by the Russian Jewish influx. They didn't understand who they had before them. Then the Communities were also overwhelmed as mediators. Often they had only one person responsible, and it was physically impossible for this one person to manage everything; counseling, explaining, translating documents and all of these things, it couldn't work.

Now, I'd see the situation altogether as positive, although, and this has always been my opinion about the situation in Germany; you don't know what goes on behind closed doors, what people are thinking. Within the legal framework, everything is wonderful. I think that on the administrative level everything works smoothly with the officials. Although I have the suspicion that the clerks in the offices tend not to relate to the people at all, they have no empathy with them. They don't show it openly, however, as this is an absolute taboo and would mean the end of their career. Then the immigrants feel this dislike, they know how they're seen. I also know this from the experiences people have told me about. They had to deal with quite unfriendly people who allocate funding that doesn't belong to them anyway, but that these people don't give you the feeling of ok, we'll help you now. This is an experience that many had in Germany in the 1990's.

● *And what about cooperation with the politicians?*

This has been different from town to town. For smaller Communities I've heard things that don't apply in Frankfurt. Here Judaism has a long, strong tradition and is well connected in the city. This tradition is being continued now; there are also very good personal relationships on the political level. That's not unimportant. But that's not the case everywhere in Germany, I would say. I think that the politicians in general are prepared to listen, and that the Jewish institutions are not the last to receive funding. If the communication always works as well as it does in Frankfurt, I'm not sure. I think the smaller the Community, the larger the distance. Probably the German provinces are different and more difficult.

- *What is your general feeling concerning the attitudes from the non-Jewish population?*

There's often a mixture that's atypical for other countries. There is a constant interest here [in Jewish issues, O.G.] but you also often see the feelings of guilt and that can also be traumatic to experience. Then many are somewhat inhibited regarding Judaism. There's no free discussion. There are no possibilities, there's no place to talk about things. The topic remains traumatic. That's what it's like in Germany.

- *Relating to the Holocaust?*

Remembrance, guilt feelings, having Nazis in the family and so on.

- *What is your impression about non-Jewish mainstream media reporting on Jewish developments in Germany on the one hand, and on Israel on the other?*

Concerning Jewish developments in Germany, I think it's mainly emphasized within the framework of this discourse of success: "Look here! A revival in Jewish life! A new synagogue! A new Community center" and so on. On the other hand, there's a strong feeling of missing traditional *German* Jewish life. If you're from a more conservative press then you'll often see that German Jewish gaps are presented.

- *You mean looking for the Einsteins and Bubers?*

Sort of. You also see how large this gap is for the editors. They're looking for it, searching passionately to find traces of Jewish life. Of course you don't find it with the immigrants. This is a certain discrepancy. There are also reports, critical reports, for example in the *taz* [leftist liberal daily O.G.] where they like reporting on problems in the Communities, and in the Berlin Community in particular. They often describe their conflicts. It was often interesting to see that people *from the Community* also spoke freely in these conflict-focused reports. On the other hand, you can feel some uncertainty of the media how to handle topics of Jewish religion and tradition. And here, at this point, I would like to see that some inhibitions would be shed. But the press isn't necessarily free in their reporting. These are the questions that they are posing, this lack of freedom comes from within. No one is forcing them to do so, just, how do I talk about Judaism?

- *And the reporting about Israel and the Middle East conflict?*

I would say it's varies widely. Six or seven years ago the media was significantly more anti-Israel than today. I think that there's been a lot of progress. This is also due to the political tendencies; it's related to the government. However, I think the press is relatively free and can write what they want at the end of the day. They just have their newspaper politics. I think it's ok. I'd say during the last conflicts and wars, the last conflicts in Israel or generally about Israel I experienced the reporting to be much more objective. Not necessarily Israel-friendly, but more objective. I think there was a time, it was the beginning of my experience with German TV, *and I didn't see Israel at all* – except the effects of terror attacks and then you also saw the suffering of the Palestinians and then you didn't really see the country.

- *That was in '97-'98?*

Yes. Now it's a little different and that's an improvement. Now there are reports from Tel Aviv, the reporter is standing in the middle of Tel Aviv or Jerusalem and isn't just reporting about extremes, but about normal life. That's how it should be.

● *Could you say some words about non-Jewish German media reporting on Jewish life in other parts of the Diaspora, beyond Germany?*

That's very rare, I think. Germany is, just like America in parts, Germany-oriented. The events taking place in this country dominate. I'm just now thinking about what you can read in German papers about Judaism in the former Soviet Union or in Latin American or wherever. It's very rare. I think that they might try to build up a transnational line relating to Germany, a family with relatives in America and see how it is, but in general you just won't find an article about Judaism in Buenos Aires, for example, in a German non-Jewish paper. Maybe I don't read everything, but it's very, very rare to find anything.

● *What do you think about the Jewish media in Germany? Do you think that there are good prospects for them?*

That is an important question. On the one hand the market is full; you have the feeling that there are many outlets. On the other hand there is very little to read. That which I would like to read, there isn't much to read. The Russian-language monthly *Evreyskaya Gazeta* is, in my opinion, still important. At the end of the day, they have a readership and will continue to have one in, regardless of editorial policy. Finally, the older generation is not reading in the Internet, they're reading in Russian and they need a paper. That's ok. I think it would also be good to have some *independent Jewish press in German language*. I'm not saying that the *Jüdische Allgemeine* [Jewish weekly, published by the Central Council] is dominated by the Zentralrat, that's the wrong word. But it's financed by the Zentralrat at least and therefore influenced as well up to a certain point. So it would be nice to read some other Jewish press, just for a wider range of plurality. On the other hand the *Jüdische Allgemeine* has gotten better, in my opinion, during the last years. Seven or eight years ago the immigrants weren't present there at all. The veterans stayed amongst themselves, and so was the weekly. Maybe I would've done the same thing. Try to imagine, you're at home and then there's a foreign avalanche rolling over you, and you don't know how you can structure it. But now people have discovered the immigrants and their second generation as a political topic, and now many articles are being written about them. I read the *Jüdische Allgemeine* regularly and will continue to do so. But I'm just trying to think what more I'd like to see in it. I think what I'd like, and this is what you find in the American [Jewish] press, which has sharp, clear voices that are a bit different, polemic, but this works. You have the feeling that things are examined very carefully here in Germany. There are still a few invisible authorities. It's different from American Jewish media, also in the provinces. I was in Los Angeles and read a copy of the *Los Angeles Jewish Journal*, and you could see that people enjoy writing ironically. I miss that here a bit. Here I would like it if journalists would take a few more risks. We shouldn't take everything apart, not that, but have a bit more plurality. The other [Jewish] journals and magazines [in Germany] – like *Aufbau*, or *Jüdisches Europa* are interesting outlets to read as a German-speaking Jew, but they don't often have things that interest me in particular.

● *What about Jewish Radio and TV? Could you imagine a certain development in this direction?*

That's a question I don't have an answer to, to be honest. I would see what's in America. I was there a couple of times and didn't look for Jewish TV. You could do a lot with 120 channels, but it wasn't necessarily what I was looking for. On the other hand, it is, of course, true that you can transmit an amazing amount on TV. If you look at it that way, why not. But what would Jewish TV look like? You often have the feeling that not just Jewish, but German-Jewish means mainly the Holocaust and dealing with this topic. How could I do



something that would be different? I think that on a local level, it's not a bad idea, to have a program here or in Berlin or in Baden-Württemberg, for example.

- *Do you think it would make sense for a Russian-speaking public to have something like the German language Jewish web portal Ha Galil in Russian?*

The Russian Jews, as you know, have excellent web networks and links. They are present in the Internet. They're mostly in the blogs and chats beyond those from the national sites. They're blogging and chatting with Americans and Israelis. For me personally, I don't need it. But maybe because I'm so entrenched here in the German discourse. It's hard to say. Maybe for my parents. It might not be a bad idea, but I don't think they feel the need for it, to be honest.

- *How far will the synagogue hold the major role and how far are educational structures central institutions? Do you see alternative models coming?*

Which model? The religious or the cultural?

- *The cultural.*

It would certainly have a chance, but in Germany it's a question of communication with state authorities. As opposed to America, you get funding here from a central location. Who should distribute the money to many different places, the synagogues, cultural places and so on? As long as this question is being raised, and it's an essential question, you can see it in the discussion if whether Orthodox or Liberal congregations should receive funding; you can see how difficult it is for the local clerks to decide. How can they decide when they don't know anything about the traditions? German officials would need to have a Jewish scholar in every office like in the Russian empire. You know, in Tsarist Russia, there was an office mediating between the governors, a Jewish scholar. That would be a job niche. I would imagine it would be very hard as a representative of the German state to distribute the money. And then to the Jews, as that is such a delicate topic in this country. It's not for nothing that the representatives of the Central Council talk about retaining the United Community. Not because they're such adherents of this model, but because they see that there's no alternative to it now with the state. How this will be when the new generation of politicians becomes active, Jewish politicians in the Zentralrat or in the Communities, that's hard to say. But back to the different models, I'd predict that in the near future, for my lifetime it will remain the type of religious Community in Germany. Germany is also a very conservative country. Not in the sense of being politically conservative, but in the sense that tradition plays a large role. You can't change things from one day to the next here, not like in America, and I appreciate this. This conservatism isn't necessarily negative. You can say that you can continue to build things up.

### 3. EVGUENI BERKOVITCH

May 27, 2009, Hanover

● *Dr. Berkovitch, you are one of the most vocal critics of the joint decision of the German government and the German Jewish umbrella organizations to implement new regulations for Russian Jewish immigration in 2006, regulations that, as we see now, have seemed to bring RSJ immigration to Germany to an end.*

I would say that the process of Russian-Jewish immigration to Germany has been stopped much too early. For forming a stable Jewish Community across a whole country like Germany you need a critical mass. Maybe in America the critical mass was reached a hundred years ago, but in Germany it hasn't been. These 200,000 so called contingency refugees which have come from the former Soviet Union; many of them even non-Jewish or not interested in Community life, this number is simply not the critical mass for the specific conditions here. The new regulations have come too early, and that's a pity and it's dangerous. We cannot predict whether there will be a positive Community development or not.

● *What are the biggest challenges that Jews in Germany are facing today?*

In Hanover the difficulty is that there are three or four Communities and I think that each plays their own role. Of course, there are problems for the religious and non-religious. Now we have a new Liberal Community in Hanover [founded in 1995, O.G.] and that was or is a good example. There is, thank G'd, a Rabbi, originally an engineer from Hungary, Gabor Lengyel. This is the synagogue and the Rabbi. But beyond that there are also other spheres. For example, the kindergarten, a sports center, gymnastics for women, a Jewish library, literary circles and so on. People can meet their quite different interests. Every person, not necessarily religious Jews, just normal Jews, regardless if Russian or German speaking, can be a little closer to Jewish life. In my opinion, that's the most important thing for Jewish life; somewhere, sometime and somehow to feel like a Jew. That's important for further Jewish life in Germany. When the Community works very broadly and as widely as possible, then life can develop.

● *How would you describe the relationship between Russian-speaking and German-speaking Jews today?*

At the beginning there were very large difficulties and very large differences. With the passing of each year, these differences and difficulties become weaker and less pronounced and things will probably be balanced soon. I have noticed that for some lectures in German more and more people come whose native language is Russian. The younger generation speaks German very well. I don't think the important problems are between Russian speakers and German speakers, but to get the new generation who can speak better German than Russian [to be] involved in the Community or Jewish life, that's the more important thing.

● *That's the difficulty.*

But that's a different kind of difficulty than a conflict between two different groups. The older generation is going, new people are coming for whom the German language poses no problem. And therefore I think that the chasm between these two groups has already been bridged, or will soon be bridged.

● *Are there problems between religious and non-religious Jews? Or is there acceptance and understanding on both sides?*

The problem isn't on the inside, the problem is that these groups have too few connections and therefore both groups live separately from one another. That's the problem. There aren't any large conflicts, but the lives of

both are led without contact or with too few contacts. Therefore, in my opinion, if the Communities would host events aimed at both groups, this could be very fruitful. The religious events at the synagogue are attended by the religious people. The literary circles are attended by mostly non-religious people. Our Community leaders should do something which could make contact between the groups.

- *So that would mean that something should be offered that's more interesting for secular Jews?*

Exactly. For example our Jewish library in Hanover, this is brand new in Hanover. There's a section for religious literature and lectures and so on. Just like in every library this library has secular literature and they plan to hold events that are of interest for both categories. The library is located in the new building of the Liberal Jewish Community of Hanover.

- *The space is there and the bookshelves have been bought?*

Yes, the bookshelves and some books have been donated. We have also bought some, but most have been donated. There's computer workspace, and a large screen for films and presentations. The space is very nice I have to say. There are two-three levels that can be completely separate. It's designed that you can also use an elevator.

- *What's the library called?*

The Jewish Library Hanover, run by the *Israel Jacobson Society* of Hanover. I'm a member of the board there. The *Israel Jacobson Society* promotes and puts about general knowledge about Jewish culture and history, offering books, movies and other mediums in growing number and variety. The Society also organizes public discussions, forums, lectures and seminars on political and cultural topics. Special emphasis is given to German-Jewish literature from the period before 1933 and to Jewish Exile literature.

- *What else will be in the library?*

Everything. History, fiction, a collection of Heine, for example. The library wants to cooperate with other libraries in the Hanover region, in Germany and also in Israel and has books in German, Russian, Yiddish and Hebrew, so all these languages are represented.

- *Which libraries are you working with in Israel?*

There are several contacts, and we would like to develop some software together where you can also use it for Hebrew.

- *The Jacobson library will be a public library?*

Yes.

- *Is the financing in place?*

No. Not yet.

- *You are very much involved in Jewish intellectual networks, in Jewish culture, history and local Jewish developments. Was there a specific motivation for you to create the web portal Zametki po evrejskoj istorii?*

No, I would not say there was a specific motivation. Actually, all my life I've enjoyed learning something new, and there was also a great interest in history and then, increasingly, in Jewish history. I really enjoy reading and discovering stories and topics, to consider them a bit more profoundly, and then to forward them to other people. That is how I write my books. And this is also how I started with the Zametki.

- *The web portal Zametki is completely non-profit?*

Yes. It's completely non-profit. The authors do not get paid, and I have only invested my own money.

- *Do you think Jews in Germany feel good about being an integral part of German society?*

Yes. Exactly, I have this feeling. I can't speak for everyone, but in my opinion probably what helped me was that I worked from the very beginning. After several months in Germany I found a good job and since then, after language courses and further vocational courses I was very quickly able to find a good job which fit my skills and experience. I enjoy it very much, also from the technical, professional, material side. We are the largest company of our kind in Germany. Financial information technology was an exact fit for my qualifications. From the very beginning I was very proud of my company, my life and now of *my* Germany. I can say that, too. When Germany plays soccer ... [My son played soccer for many years and I liked it.]

- *What happens with when Germany plays against Russia?*

They don't meet very often. Against Ukraine – that was a problem...

- *And when Germany plays against Israel?*

The question isn't quite fair, because it's like who do you like more, Mom or Dad? I can't say, or just say both.

- *That's also an answer.*

I don't separate both sides and that's important. However, I can really understand if someone has had different experiences and has a different opinion. If, for example, someone didn't find a job and has to live on welfare, then there's stress on your morale and so on. That's something else. I was lucky, that's what I can say. The first few months in Germany, at least the first six months were very difficult, you've got to be heroic. It's not easy to become integrated so fast.

- *It's estimated that almost half of all Jews living in Germany eligible to be members are not connected with the Jewish Communities. What do you think are the main reasons for this? Individualism? Or is it something to do with the Communities themselves?*

The local Jewish Community plays an important role, of course. When the Community is attractive, then people come. The secularization trend is general, not just in Germany *and not just among Jews*. It's not a coincidence that the new Liberal Community of Hanover has gotten a building that just had belonged to a church community. In America, for example, in my experience, not all Jews are members of the Jewish Community. That's life, that's modern life. That's the trend.

- *Would you say secularization is a normal trend?*

Yes. It would be funny to feel Jewish anyway. The religion says clearly that you're Jewish when you go to the synagogue, read the Talmud and so on. There's no other alternative. But you can still be Jewish when you

don't go to synagogue every Sabbath. That's life. Alexander Voronel<sup>2</sup> also said that he is a Jew, but that it would be too crude to say, for example to uphold the 613 Mizvot. Almost no one can live this way, not all 613. It's impossible.

- *What are the principal Jewish structures in Germany today? Is there something besides the synagogue that's equally appealing for Jews in Germany?*

The last question is a little bit outdated.

- *Outdated? Why?*

Because some Communities are well organized and are looking for possibilities to connect more people and to create networks. I can just look around. In Hanover there's an old Community, a so-called Orthodox or United Community [Einheitsgemeinde] that has a nice building and there's an old people's home next door. At first this Community had every possibility. They were alone, there were no other Communities and of course when you wanted to go to synagogue, then you would have gone there. But now there are others. There's ours, the Liberal Community, and there's the Chabad Lubavitch. Chabad Lubavitch is very active and very attractive to lots of people. They are working just like in the Jewish centers in America.

- *You would say Chabad in Hanover is working like a JCC in America?*

Yes. And now if you're looking for Jewish life in Hanover, then you would probably first discover Chabad Lubavitch. For example, last year at Hanukkah the mayor lit the menorah at the main square in Hanover. This event was organized by Chabad Lubavitch, not from the United Community or from the Liberal Community. However, the Liberal Community is also trying to participate in public life. On May 1st, there was a meeting about anti-fascism and there the Liberal Community leaders were represented. But you don't see the people from the United Community. They're sitting in their old building and aren't on the street. That's why the not extremely religious people prefer to go to Chabad Lubavitch or the Liberal Community, and the cultural programs of both Communities are also attractive. Just today I got something from Chabad Hanover, an invitation for Shavuot Ice Cream party, it's fun for the kids and everyone. The Chabad Community is very active. The share of religious visitors [of the Chabad programs, O.G.] might be around 25%, but the other people come as well because the events are attractive.

And the Liberal Community is trying to do the same thing. Not as professionally and it needs, I'd estimate, great financial possibilities. That's why I think that 25%, it's low, but that's life. You've also got to work with the other percent.

- *Would you describe the four Jewish Communities in Hanover as proof of a new Jewish pluralism in Germany?*

Pluralism depends on who's providing the money.

- *How do you mean that?*

I think Jewish pluralism is an important thing. But the Community can only function when it has a good building, and a budget for events and to pay for a Rabbi. The Liberal Community didn't have any particular financial backing for many years. Just now a support association has been established. When the money is there, then pluralism can flourish, that's not a problem. When there's only one source, then it complicated.

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander Voronel, a friend of Evgueni Berkovitch and former Soviet Jewish dissident, left Moscow/USSR in the mid-1970's and later became one of the most well-known Russian Jewish intellectuals and publicists in Israel. He is, among others, editor of the Russian speaking literary journal "22".

- *How problematic would you consider the integration of non-Halachic Jews from the FSU into Jewish organizations in Germany?*

It's a very serious problem, especially for the children from mixed marriages. Let's take an example. Say you were a former Soviet citizen with the name Goldfarb. You spent your whole life in Russia and were considered to be Jewish by everyone. Now you're not recognized as Jewish anymore because your mother isn't Jewish, just your father. Your mother was Ivanova and your father Goldfarb. This is very painful for many immigrants to understand. The Liberal Jewish Communities are taking steps for these people. They aren't being tossed aside. In the United Communities they aren't considered Jewish anymore. They just want to work with "pure" Jews. That's why the new pluralism helps lots of people who feel Jewish anyway. That's important. Back to Goldfarb, if he feels Jewish, his kids can marry Jews and that's why his grandchildren can be Jewish. But if a line is drawn after him already, saying he's not Jewish anymore then the next generations are lost, too. In my opinion, to be a Jew, you've got to feel Jewish. That's the beginning. That's why it's a big mistake that these people are being cut off from the very beginning.

- *How far is Israel central to Jewish life in Germany?*

Israel, for every Jew, is a home. Home. Regardless of where you're living. When we were in Russia, Israel was still our second home, or our main home.

- *Emotionally?*

Yes, exactly. And that's the same in Germany. The problems in Israel are our problems, regardless of where we live, but I've heard many times in Israel at least, that it's a mistake for Jews to not live in Israel.

- *You personally heard that as an accusation?*

Yes. And that Jews should live in Israel and it's a betrayal when they don't. As you know I run a large portal and there's a forum and a guest book. I read and hear thousands of opinions. Personally I've also heard this, but this is, in my opinion, not correct. You don't have to act like G'd yourself. You've got to get your things together, and not the global things that are for G'd to do. If the Diaspora exists, that means that it's necessary for Him. I think that the Diaspora is also serving Israel and Israel could probably not exist without the Diaspora. At least at present. Aid from America and from other Jewish places in the world is essential. And everyone has to decide for themselves where they need to live. It would be important to optimize oneself, or to better oneself. Israel is still always in our hearts, you can't stop it regardless of where you live; in Canada, in America or in Germany.

- *Sometimes there seem to be something like a family conflict between Israel and the Diaspora, but this is also a process of normalization.*

Yes, I think so, too. I mean thank G'd Israel needs less and less help from outside. It's getting stronger and can probably help others. The donors don't have to choose between Israel or the Diaspora, they can be simply for Judaism. There were times when Israel needed the donations the most and now other times have come. Now we need to think about Judaism, and the weaker side now is the Diaspora. The new Jewish experiment in Germany, however, was interrupted before the critical mass was reached. Right now we have an experiment that hasn't been fully carried out and you can't say for sure how it will turn out at the end. Probably Judaism will be able to stay and become stronger, but there is still a strong possibility that there are not enough Jews, not enough people. If, for example, someone plants a flower, it needs to be taken care of for a certain time and not just forgotten. If you forget about it too soon, then the flower will die. Judaism in

Germany after the 1990's is a delicate flower that has been planted. But it hasn't received any further care and that's why we can't be sure that it'll have a rosy future.

- *What is your impression on the non-Jewish media coverage of Jewish developments in Germany?*

First, I'd have to say that the representation is many-faceted. You can't simply say it's just one way or another. Most reporting on Jewish issues is very positive, I think. In the mainstream print media and in the Internet there's a real picture and there are positive attitudes. However, I've also read other things. I recently found a new magazine called *Semit*<sup>3</sup> that's very anti-Semitic, although it's called *Semit*.

Of course you can find anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli voices here, not only in newspaper articles. I've also seen several panel discussions with a pseudo-objective character. For example, there are two people pro-Israel and three-four against. You end up hearing or seeing 90% against Israel. However, during the Gaza conflict in December 2008 and January 2009, I had the impression that German media showed a lot of understanding for the Israeli military operations and for the background and causes that led to the Israeli military actions.

In general, I think that German media is striving for objective coverage. However, if you are looking for information about Jewish life in Germany, you do not necessarily depend on German authorities or German media.

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<sup>3</sup> Evgueni Berkovitch refers here to the bi-monthly magazine *Der Semit* (The Semite), published by a German Jew and renowned for its anti-Zionist attitude.

#### 4. BENJAMIN BLOCH

June 15, 2009, Frankfurt

- *Mr. Bloch, what are the biggest problems the Jewish Community in Germany is facing today?*

The main problem is that the 18-30 year olds are rarely reached by the Communities. We are now looking for solutions to this problem, not just us, but we were talking about this with all related Jewish groups and institutions, we're now looking into ways how to achieve this, how to recruit this age group. The Communities are just not reaching them.

- *Why not? Is it because the people are too busy? Or is it due to what's being offered?*

It depends, and there might be different reasons. The question is how the people were treated at the beginning, how were they integrated? People forget that, for example. Then it depends on what they are offering. Why should young people come? What are they being offered? Is someone having a party? There are more interesting places for that outside the Community.

- *You say that the 18-30 year old age group is the most difficult to reach in all Communities, Is this true also with the students?*

There aren't so many student unions. The BJSD exists on paper, but in reality it looks different. There's a group here and there, but imagine, there are thousands of Jewish students here in the bigger towns. Compared to what there used to be, there is no active student life here in Germany. There are various reasons for this, also laziness. The institutions had told the students they had funding available and didn't do anything with it. They've gotten a negative image over the years that's remained. Now Chabad comes and invites the students to Paris for a weekend, to a five-star hotel. That's not great student work. That's just a nice get-together. Now it's really difficult. The Jewish Community in Germany is facing the question that when it doesn't succeed in recruiting these young people, how should the Jewish Community work in the long term and not just on paper?

- *Then in the worst case scenario it will be like in 1989?*

No, there had been much more in recent times. There was an active student life. There were activists like Dani Diener and Mark Glezermann and really moved things forward.

- *Is the current weakness in young people's activity a German specific problem, or have you heard similar problems from the French, British or Dutch?*

I think it's more significant in Germany than in other places.

- *Why?*

I'm also responsible for Europe where we also try to do some things, and can say that in France and in England, the student movements are much more active than here. Or in Belgium. Much more active. This [here] is a consumer society. Of course, when they get all the support from the state, all the help in those countries. Who supports anything here?



● *It's probably an unusual situation in Germany with the great number of non-Halachic Jews who were also part of the Russian Jewish influx during the 1990's. How should they be taken care of?*

I'm the wrong person to ask about that.

● *It's just about your opinion.*

No, I'm the wrong person to ask. I can't give you information about that. I'm responsible for those who are members in the Jewish Community. I'm not working for everything under the sun. You can do that, and whoever wrote this questionnaire. This isn't in the interests of the Jewish Community.

● *What is your personal impression of the programs conducted together with Israel? To what extent do you think that there the interest is the same as 20-30 years ago, or is the interest decreasing?*

What programs are you talking about?

● *Birthright Israel, for example.*

What's the point of Birthright in Germany? How many people have participated from Germany? About 3,000-4,000, what kind of feedback can you expect from that? This is my criticism. There's was a study from the Brandeis University about the Birthright program, but its conclusions still haven't been implemented up till today. There was a special meeting in London with experts from all over Europe, and we have discussed previous results.

● *Could you say some words about the contents and previous results of the Lehava program?*

This is a project of the Central Welfare Office for Jews in Germany. We began the project seven or eight years ago. We said that we wanted to bring young people here from Israel, put them in traditional homes, and try to assist the Communities in creating and building up a Jewish infrastructure. To sell Jewishness authentically, not necessarily religiously. The next group of young Israelis will arrive in September. I interviewed the people and there will probably be eight people coming here.

● *Eight people?*

Yes, we used to have more, but now we're having eight. We used to have a different Rabbi, but we modified the program a bit last year. Now there are three itinerate Rabbis who work here, supported by the Zentralrat and by us. The Lehava people, there are now four centers where they're active; in Cologne/Düsseldorf, in Dresden, in Berlin, and in Munich. Those are the centers and from there they also outreach communities in the peripheries. That's a greater success. The main problem is the language. The people who came to Germany, there are some who speak Russian, and other languages, but none of them can speak German. They learn German here, we offer an intensive German course, but we also have found the ways and methods how we can overcome this problem. In any case, there are Communities who ask that we send people, for example from Frankfurt/Oder [Eastern Germany] and from Dresden [Eastern Germany]. Besides this, we send people to vacation camps where we can prepare the children for the machanot, the summer camps. The Israelis stay here for one year.

● *Is there a special program that evaluates the Lehava projects? Or do you ask the Community to make an evaluation?*

We ask for an evaluation every time. We ask if people were satisfied, we ask for feedback, where have there been problems, where does it work well. Yesterday I was speaking to someone who was going to Cologne.

He's a qualified psychologist within the framework of Lehava and he can speak Russian. Yesterday he was in our educational commission, and he said he had 150 students from different towns. They get together and do things. But it remains as the weak point of the Jewish Community in Germany, this age group from 18 till 30.

- *Are there still problems in the relations between veterans and newcomers?*

Recently we've been hearing that the immigrants have a feeling of being alienated.

Someone said yesterday in the commission that the veterans have feelings of alienation, too. They have the feeling that in the Community not enough is being done for them, and things are only being done for the Russian speakers. The seniors have the same problem, we have senior trips. But it also happens that the person responsible sometimes has programs for the veterans, where they can feel comfortable.

- *A separate event?*

In German, yes. In Frankfurt there's a meeting place for the veterans, the only group the veterans really attend. We organized it outside the Community, but the veterans come. In Hebrew there's a saying, "Time will tell what you don't understand." There is something going on in the regions, in the youth work and in Community administration. People who just came from Russia speak German so well; you wouldn't realize that they weren't from Germany.

- *So there are differences between the generations among the immigrants?*

We've got to break the silence between the generations. Sometimes the grandparents don't know any German and the grandchildren don't know any Russian, but somehow communication between the generations must be maintained. That's a problem.

- *Would you see a trend that it's easier to motivate the veterans or the immigrants for volunteer work?*

No, I can't say that. Both groups meet, and also meet outside of the Community, they occasionally meet outside. However, many people from Russia don't have any idea what a Community is; they've got to get used to it. They don't understand it. It takes time, a long time until they can even understand how the Communities work here. What do they want, how do they tick? But today there is no other organization that reaches so many [immigrants'] children and families as we [the ZWSt] do. Not a single one. This is also a framework within integration, you can't forget that making a vacation camp costs money and if they're on welfare, then they have difficulties. We can help them financially. I don't know if anyone has told you about our Brückenschlag [bridging the gap] project we established that also involves a lot of students. That's also a great success.

- *What does Brückenschlag do?*

There are four-five seminars a year on different topics. One is about Jewish history, one is about the Holocaust, one is about Israel, one is about their own history; and then we visit a memorial site and go to Israel. From these people we also have a group where we do leadership training. We have a group where we also try to train them.

- *And that's 30 people a group?*

It varies; there have been even 50 in a group.

- *It lasts a year and is for exactly this age group?*

18-30 year olds, yes, and within it varies. Now we're taking a group to Israel next month, also students who are studying social work with 22 people doing their BA at the University of Applied Science in Erfurt in Eastern Germany [since 2007, it's been possible to study Jewish Social Work there]. Next year we'll have the first group with an academic degree from this department.

● *I can remember a conference that took place here in Frankfurt/Main in 2003, which exclusively dealt with the issue of psychological and psychosomatic problems of Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union in Germany. You once mentioned that there are psychological problems and in some cases drug and alcohol abuse among the Jewish immigrants' youngsters as well.*

We don't live in a perfect world. I'll just say we also have these problems. We might not have them to the extent that other groups do, but we do have them; also within the Jewish Community. We can't close our eyes and say we don't have these problems, we do. They are not as serious as in the other groups. Of course when you compare to other immigrants groups, and their integration and problems, then it's a difference.

● *Comparative analyses don't exist up till now.*

Yes, but there have been studies about the ethnic German repatriates and their problems. There have been studies about the problems the [Jewish] immigrants' experience. There's also been a study conducted in Potsdam about the first immigrant generation that was written by Professor Schoeps.

● *If there is a significant number of young Jewish immigrants also having significant psychological and socio-cultural problems, would it make sense to make special programs to support these young people; also making the image of the youth work and the youth centers more attractive?*

They get young people and adults, we have youth congresses and we have each time a few hundred young people. I think we have a good program, socially and the contents are good as well. There must be a connection made between society and content here. The young people come, and it depends how successful they are in attracting active young people for student work. Do we attract opinion makers or social rejects? Do we get the weak members of society and try to include them in a group or do we attract the strong members of society?

● *There are very successful seminars for young people in Bad Sobernheim, in vacation camps, at meetings of librarians. Which of these is most successful the 18-30 generation?*

It depends on the standards of the seminar leader and of the participants. Limmud is all right because it allows for independent work and people can exchange opinions and explore all kinds of directions. It depends on the quality of the seminar leader and the social mixture of the group, for example.

● *After the young immigrants have been here in Germany, most of them fit in well to society. We don't have to worry if they will be able to find a decent apartment or receive a decent education. It's not perfect, but it's working out somehow. What about the middle aged generation and the elderly? Has everything possible been done for them?*

The Communities have done a lot; they've really done a lot. The integration, when you examine the integration, you have to realize it's been a success, not a failure. When I compare it to others and when I think about where we started, and where we are today, then I know that it's been a success. With all of the problems that there are. Even with all of the problems that there are and have been. It's still a success story. What else could be done is simply a professionalization, to improve the professionalism in approaches to problem solving. Sometimes that's still a bit lacking. You can't just do it on the side.

- *What do you think of the idea to hire a single person with a university degree, socially competent, well-chosen and to employ him/her for at least 30 hours a week being responsible exclusively for the 18-30 year olds in big Communities? Would that be worth a try?*

This is like the idea of the event manager. Some Communities have started with this.

- *Yes, in Düsseldorf for example.*

It doesn't matter. You have to have someone who's a professional; it can't be done on the side.

- *Just imagine for a moment you had a certain amount of additional possibilities, to support a large Community, in Berlin, for example, or Frankfurt, with an almost complete chain of social and educational programs. Or you have exactly this money to go to the periphery, Frankfurt/Oder, for example, and try to establish a single group, a kind of provisionary youth center. What would be your priority if you couldn't do both?*

You can't put the question that way. The Community in Frankfurt/Main, regardless if I do more or less, Frankfurt is taken care of. In Frankfurt/Oder it is certainly important, but not only in Frankfurt/Oder. In the long-term the question is which Community will exist. Which Community will continue to exist? If there will be a shrinking process that some Communities will no longer exist in 10-20 years, and there will be larger centers? There is just an immediate answer to what is important today. When I today say what should we choose, Frankfurt/Oder or Frankfurt/Main, then I would say Frankfurt/Oder, even when there are only 200 people there. Otherwise we'll lose them. If the Community will still exist in 10-20 years, I don't know. But I am sure that the Community in Frankfurt/Main will.

- *Demographers believe that the critical number will be around 4,000 community members. Everything over 4,000 has a chance to still exist in 20-30 years.*

This doesn't matter for now. It's simply a question of *how, where and what*. Just look, a Community like Leipzig, even when it has 1,300 members, they have built a flourishing center. I think it's amazing. But of course the question is what will happen in future.

- *Would the ZWSt also support projects that are casually tied to Community structures, but could attract many Jews in town? For example in Berlin, the Jewish cultural association is very strongly secular.*

Again, we work with the Jewish Communities, they are our focal point.

- *In bigger towns of Germany, and especially in Berlin, you can see the development of a new Jewish pluralism, not only in several congregations, but also in different infrastructures. Is it too early for such a structural pluralism, or is it in the right time?*

I think it's ridiculous.

- *You mean, it weakens the structures?*

Of course it's a causing structural weakness.

- *Regardless if it's a kindergarten or elementary school? It's too early?*

No, it's just ridiculous. That will lead to a weakening; we don't have the resources to afford such luxury. It's better to work together, rather than have everyone doing their own thing.

- *Well, Chabad could say they're building a center and by private donations. This is a big boost for their public image, as well.*

You're mistaken. They also go and apply for funding and say we're doing Community work.

- *What do you think about the existing Jewish media in Germany? Do you think that more variety in national Jewish media is unrealistic?*

Through the Internet more variety is possible, but not in the print media, I think. The ZWSt is working on a much more modern Internet site. For example, we have our interactive Internet site and we're also offering e-Learning. Hebrew, German, we're trying to do something with Yiddish, Zionism. We're on it.

- *Do you think Jewish topics are reaching the public also on the radio or on TV?*

In France they have a TV channel. They also have 300,000 people. In Belgium they also have it. Those are the only Diaspora places where they have it, and of course in America.

- *A different question about dealing with German authorities and institutions. Is there a high level of cooperation ?*

The ZWSt has good contacts. We can't complain. I hope they can't either. But Jewish professionals are missing who are fluent in German. Maybe this will change in the next 10 years.

- *Do you have a certain professional group in mind?*

Rabbis. Last week there was the ordination [of two Orthodox Rabbi students in Munich] and you see that what's happening. That's the right way.

## 5. MICHA BRUMLIK

May 29, 2009, Frankfurt/Main

- *Prof. Brumlik, what do you consider the major challenges facing Jewry in Germany today?*

I think the main problem of German Jewry will be finding its own identity as a Community in the diaspora. As yet it is not clear yet whether German Jewry has enough self-consciousness for an existence beyond the state of Israel and the adherence to it.

- *Do you see any other challenges or problems to be solved?*

I think the main problem has more or less been solved, and this was the task of the integration of Jews from the former Soviet Union, but this has already been done. Now we have to look how this new Jewish population and its younger leadership will take over functions in the Communities and congregations.

- *Do you think that the current tensions between German-speaking and Russian-speaking Jews will be resolved the next generation?*

Yes, although I'm sure in some smaller Jewish communities there are still some veterans who feel a little bit alienated by the Russian influx. I think this problem will be solved in the smaller Communities as it has been in the larger Communities like Berlin, Frankfurt, Munich and Cologne.

- *Do you see any problems in the relations between religious and non-religious Jews in Germany?*

Not any more. I mean, there is the fact that there are non-religious Jews which are even not members in Jewish Communities, but those Jews who are not members of Communities are not in the field of a conflict.

- *Some voices are talking about the new pluralism in Jewish life in Germany. Do you share this view? And if so, what are, to your opinion, the most essential components of this new German-Jewish pluralism now?*

I think the main component of this new German-Jewish pluralism is that in most of the larger Communities we have mutual tolerance of very different religious denominations. In a Community like in Frankfurt you have Lubavitcher Chassidim, and you have a female Rabbi, and the parties do not try to exclude the others. There is a very tolerant co-existence.

- *How far is Israel central to Jewish life in Germany? Do you think its importance to Jewish identity will increase, decrease or remain more or less the same?*

I think it will decrease in the long run; however, I do not have the impression that the leadership of Jewish Communities has realized this already. On the whole, Community leaders are having more and more doubts about current Israeli politics, but officially they still stand strongly behind it, and I think that this rather schizophrenic attitude is not going to last very long.

- *How far are Jews in Germany a part of German society? Do you see any differences in attitudes among the age groups?*

Yes, I do. I think that the generation of people aged 60 or 70 or older still remember that it took a lot of hard work to be accepted by German society, to be more than only a living Holocaust monument and to participate

in German politics. This still does not really happen. Young people, however, especially those of the Russian immigration, take it much more for granted that they're living in Germany, and in the process of becoming members of the congregations and taking over functions in the Jewish Communities, they might understand themselves as members of the German society. This is still meaningful in these post-nationalist times, that there are again Jews of Germany rather than Jews in Germany.

- *What do you consider as the most essential elements of Judaism today?*

I am convinced that the central core element must be the Jewish religion. Although I do know that there is a Jewish culture, Jewish movies, Jewish music and so on, but the core which unites them all, no matter to which denomination they belong; at the end of the day it's the Jewish religion.

- *That would mean that the synagogue will hold the major role in organized Jewish life and networking?*

Definitely. The synagogue and Jewish learning. Not only praying. In Judaism learning is as important as praying. So the religious tradition must be studied and known.

- *You have been deeply involved in the German Jewish-Christian dialogue for decades. What have been your motivations for your involvement?*

The original motivation was to do something against anti-Semitism by speaking about religious Christian anti-Judaism, to keep this in check. As the years passed I understood that the Christian faith is a different form, yet very close to Judaism and especially that original Christian writings and scriptures, the gospels, for example, are as Rabbi Leo Baeck has said testimonies of Jewish faith. By dealing with the Christian religion I have learned a lot about Jewishness and Judaism, at least at the time of Emperor Augustus 2000 years ago.

- *You are an educator. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current Jewish educational programs being offered?*

There is one problem. There is a lot for children and there is a lot for youngsters. But there is nothing for young couples with small children. For elderly people again you have clubs and other things, but this generation of young parents is not really accompanied well by Jewish educational efforts and organizations.

- *This is a challenge?*

This is a challenge. This is where something needs to be done, because young families with their children; I mean they will be the fundament of the Communities in 10 years.

- *What are the most urgent measures to adopt for improving the Russian Jewish immigrants' integration?*

A lot is done within the Jewish Communities for the better integration and education of the immigrants. I don't think there needs to be anything else in addition to what's there.

- *What is the status of volunteering in the Communities?*

No doubt, there could be more. I mean there is a lot in Maccabi, in Learning Circles, Jewish Arts and so on. There could be more. This should be developed in those areas we now cover in Limmud or what I was proposing in working with young families.

- *Are you a part of the Limmud movement?*

Yes, I try to cooperate.

● *Many Jews in Germany are not involved with the local Jewish Communities at all. What are the main reasons for that? What can be done about it?*

Let's begin with the non-members. It seems to be the case that except for the Israelis who are sure of their Jewish identity, and so might not think it to be necessary to become members of the Jewish Community, we do have a certain percentage of immigrants from the former Soviet Union with a different religious status according to Halacha. People who do not want to convert formally, people who because of their socialization in the former Soviet Union have a difficult relationship to religion. The question is whether we have organizations which work with those people. In fact, we do have them. For example, the Jüdischer Kulturverein (Jewish Culture Association) in Berlin (JKV) focuses on these people. They even reach them in a religious way.

● *Would you say that the Jüdischer Kulturverein in Berlin could serve as a model for other towns with a large number of non-Halachic Russian Jewish immigrants?*

I don't know. I could imagine that this is a specialty of Berlin because it seems that in all the other larger cities these people of Jewish descent from the former Soviet Union simply disappear into the larger German population.

● *Could the non-Halachic Russian Jewish immigrants be integrated into the Reform Communities? Do the Reform Communities have an answer to this problem?*

No, they do not. In fact, if Jews from Russia become religious, it's been my observation that they rather tend towards an orthodox form of Judaism. If they do it at all, then they do it right. They often have an interest in the mystical as well. The question is whether liberal Jewish congregations in Europe should take over the North American model, in which one does not have to be the child of a Jewish mother, but can also be the child of a Jewish father to be recognized as a Jew. However, in North America that means that the father has to educate his child as Jewish and this was probably not the case for the majority of Jews from the former Soviet Union.

● *So the American reform model wouldn't work here?*

Probably not.

● *What has been your experience with German officials, politicians or the non-Jewish population?*

My personal experiences have been really optimal, but due to the fact that I was a member of the Frankfurt city council for 12 years, everyone knew me in political circles. I've never had any problem.

● *What do you think about the general media coverage of events that relate to the Jewish condition in Germany, the Jewish world and Israel?*

It is obvious that there is a great interest in Jewish life in Germany. Regrettably, there are almost no reports whatsoever about Jewish life all over the world. For the German public the most important topic is Israel. I think here things could or should change. I personally would wish there was more attention paid to Jewish life in North America or in France.

● *What do you think about the existing Jewish media in Germany? Is there enough pluralism in the Jewish media?*



I think the Jüdische Allgemeine Wochenzeitung is quite pluralistic. Then there was a monthly which doesn't exist anymore, the Jüdische Zeitung. Then you have some smaller TV programs, but none of these has ever had much significance. Actually, I think for a rather small Jewish Community of altogether 120,000 people this is, in fact, enough. Besides that, quite famous Jewish intellectuals and others are writing in other organs than the Jüdische Allgemeine Wochenzeitung. Therefore, I think that the Jewish point of view is well represented in the German public.

- *Could a Jewish TV station like there is in France or a Jewish radio station work here?*

I don't think so. I mean some people have tried to establish one, but nothing has become famous or known so far.

- *Returning to Jewish education. How could these programs be best supported? Is there something that still needs to be addressed?*

It will become very important to have contact with the general German public. Firstly and most important is to establish what the churches and the political parties already have, that is a **Jewish Academy**. The Jewish Academy could or should have two functions; integration and education of the leaders and future leaders of the Jewish Communities, but also addressing the non-Jewish public. It could also be a place for educational work with young families.

- *A Jewish Academy would require state support?*

It is a very difficult thing. To solve the organizational problems of such kind of an establishment would require money from political institutions. One important project, a funding system especially for Jewish students, has been established thanks to Rabbi Walter Homolka. It is called the *Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich Studienwerk* and I think this is the right project in the right time.

What I consider as very important as well, at least in the larger cities in Germany, is the establishment of a Jewish student union that could be like the *Hillel Houses* in Great Britain, or on the campuses in the United States. I think it would be very worthwhile to have such Jewish student unions with housing and funding at least in Munich, Frankfurt, Berlin, Cologne and Düsseldorf.

- *Is there something similar to your proposed Jewish Academy in France or the United Kingdom?*

No. These academies, the Catholic Academies, Protestant Academies, political party academies; this is a very typical feature of the German political culture.

## 6. CHRISTIAN BÖHME

**June 4, 2009, Berlin**

● *Dr. Boehme, what do you think are the greatest challenges facing the Jewish Community in Germany today?*

Two things are very important. Firstly the so-called Russians, and secondly the youth. These are the two biggest challenges that the Jewish Community faces in Germany, to the extent that it wants to be organized. Up to 95% of the Communities are now made up of Russian-speaking immigrants and to be able to integrate them into the Communities, to organize it so that they remain committed to the Communities, that is a major challenge and a problem. It's very, very difficult to win the Russian Jews over as members, and that's connected to many different factors. They've come here as Jewish contingency refugees, but most of them are not familiar with their own Jewishness. How should there be a bridge between them and the veterans who cultivate their Jewishness?

Then there are the differences in mentalities, these are due to their Russian-ness. This manifests itself, for example, very clearly on holidays. Not religious holidays, but secular holidays. November 9<sup>th</sup> as the anniversary of the Night of Broken Glass pogrom, is a day that needs to be remembered. The veterans would say this, while the Russians would say no, that's not a special day for them, May 8/9 is their holiday when they were the victors in history. That seems to me to represent the huge differences in mentalities that have a virulent effect again and again.

Then the constellations between the Russian-speaking immigrants and the veterans; a huge group, the Russians, meet a tiny minority, and that's very different to how integration usually works in Germany, where about 80 million Germans have to absorb three million Muslims or ethnic German repatriates, for example. That's nothing. Here there were maybe 20,000 veterans and 200,000 new people who needed to be integrated. That's a source of immense tension that manifests itself in everyday Community life again and again. Those are the problems.

You've got to admit, though, in light of the fact that these problems exist, I think many things are working out very well. The Russians have received many educational opportunities, they seem to be taking advantage of them more and more; and, it seems to me, discovering their Jewishness. They need to overcome the language barrier, and they can do that in courses offered by the state or somewhere else. But these things are a conglomerate, a real challenge. I assume that only when the second generation of immigrants has grown up here, will something happen there. I think that we're going to have a very different Jewry here in 10 years than what we have today. It will be represented very differently.

About the younger generation, the Jewish Communities in Germany have a big problem, not with the very young, not the teenagers, but with the young people, who have grown out of their teenage years and are starting their careers, there's a problem to maintain the ties with these people.

● *You mean with the thirtysomethings?*

Yes, 30+. They are, I believe, largely lost to the Community. The Communities are not able to create their program in a way that's interesting enough so that these people stay. We know that people are entering a new period in their life at this time, they're having children and becoming established in their careers and so on and as I hear, they're leaving the Community. They may have attended in their childhood and youth and were always in the Youth Center, but then there's the break in their biography and also a break with the Community.

● *And that's a trend all across Germany?*

I would say so. The Community really must try to get this generation 30+ to keep attending. I don't have the magic formula of how this can be done.

Maybe you've just got to try to win them over with not genuinely Jewish programs, but in trying to help out in their everyday lives or in bringing up their children or something like this. To do it a little more subtly than saying hey, why don't we sing some Jewish songs? No 30 year-old has time for that. That's a big problem that the Community needs to solve. They need to get them to come. This is directly connected to the Russians, then that's the second generation of mostly Russian-speakers. They, in my experience, are incredibly eager to learn, they are very career-oriented and so on and successful. You've got to offer them something to make them stay. They've got other things on their minds. They want to be successful in their career and make good money and spend time with their families. This is the third level, if they didn't marry Jewish, which also happens, of course, then they're lost. You've got to offer them something if you want them to stay. Otherwise the Communities will simply grow old; this is an empirical, demographic factor. Much more needs to be done. This is a challenge.

● *What Russian Jewish leaders complain about is that they've been here for 15 years, have competent people, but still feel excluded from the German Jewish establishment. That's why people are leaving. It's also causing tension. Do you think that all this will be solved in a generation if the younger generation remains?*

Yes. I think so. That's absolutely possible. I think we're experiencing the beginnings of this now, that things are starting to change. If my impressions are correct, then it's starting, in some individual Communities, to take place what's been announced for 15 years, namely that the establishment is stepping down. Partially they have to step down. That means that the Russians have now established themselves to such an extent that they're saying exactly what you're saying, that they've been here for 15 years, they're successful, they're good, they're Jewish, there's no reason to exclude them. They're starting to replace the veterans. There's a change coming slowly. That's starting now in my opinion.

● *Do you have two - three examples of this?*

Yes, in *Kassel*, for example, and in *Erfurt*. These are small beginnings; it's coming on a small basis. I think that the pressure, the political, demographic pressure will starkly increase over the next few years, and in the long-term the establishment will either have to do something to remain integrated themselves or the others will put so much pressure on that there's no holding them back any longer. The people are good and talented. There isn't any reason to keep them out. There will be opportunities as long as they want them. If they are disinterested in the Jewish Community, and Community life, organized life, then there won't be. But if the Communities want them, because they're saying that's our future, then they must offer them something. And, for example, that means they have a right to have their say, and to be able to participate in decision-making. Their skills are needed because they are the majority. That's clear. You're right that there is a wide base, but there are also not yet enough people who are prepared to take on a leadership position, to take on responsibility among the Russians. That also is a part of it.

● *Except for Sergey Lagodinsky.*

Yes, ok. You can just think of one person. That's not a lot. That's just a pinprick. There need to be more or they won't be able to put pressure on the establishment. This goes back to a point we mentioned before. I think that in 10 years, this is the time period in which I think something will happen, on the local level there will be many more Russians in charge. Russians who didn't somehow come from Kazakhstan when they were 70, and maybe revived Community X because 5 families moved there, but really those who have grown within the responsibility and included. They will be increasingly present. I'm convinced of this. This is, of course, then a different Jewry because they're from a completely different place than what we've known. That will perhaps be a much more self-confident Jewry. You see, the people often don't have the Shoah

background. They're not interested in it. They're the victors and confident and can say to themselves, yes, I'm Jewish and Russian and why shouldn't I have my say?

A lot will change and that's also connected to the whole social complex that eyewitnesses are dying and this will be an entirely new conglomerate.

- *Some voices are talking about a new pluralism of Jewish life in Germany. Do you share this view? And if so, what are the most essential components of this new German-Jewish pluralism? And is it viable for the long term, or just a temporary trend?*

It's not that bad. It still needs to grow, I think that's true, but it is unmistakably there. For many, this variety in mostly different religious denominations is interesting. Now, you can find everything in Germany. You can find what you need. There are the Liberals, Reform, Orthodox, the secular. I don't think it's temporary, I think that by now it is established. For example Chabad; they have cleverly used gaps in the Community work and have filled them and that's why they are so successful. That's going to be the case with the others, as well. Reform is getting better and better. There's a lot going on. And I think that this variety is very good for German Jewry. It isn't as deeply anchored as in the USA, where you have these powerful factions, but that's not possible here. To speak plainly, they didn't have the Shoah. They have a completely different constellation. I think that the new variety in Germany is a great advantage, as long as it doesn't lead to everything unraveling. That the particulars become so strong that it all drifts apart. I don't see that happening now, with all of the different groups, but it's still a united, maybe that's too strong a word, but there's still a common denominator. You've got to make sure that it doesn't fall apart and be careful during the conflicts at the beginning. But if there is a common roof that everyone agrees upon, without limiting their religious preferences, then it can be something good and live up to the term pluralism.

- *Which significance will Israel have for Jewish collective identity in Germany in the future?*

We will have to make distinctions, but Israel will play a large role in Germany in public Jewish consciousness. As a point of reference, the connection between German Jewry, organized German Jewry and Israel is much stronger, which is easily explained by the history, than in the USA, England, France or wherever. It's much different. This is one thing. It will definitely continue, because the German national interest will also continue to evolve and this is a part of that. On the other hand, I think that the significance of Israel as a point of reference will decline a bit in the long-term. For many Russian-speaking immigrants, Israel doesn't play a role. For them it's just a country like any other. From their point of view, it's also clear why this is so. They didn't decide to go to Israel when they immigrated, but rather they chose to come to Germany, much to the chagrin of the Israelis. It is an avowal. We must give everyone the right to say where they want to live and with whom they have contact. I think among the Russian-speaking immigrants, at the beginning Israel was very important, but I think that's becoming less and less the case. The Middle East conflict plays a role here, but not such a strong one. It's more of a question of attachment, of the attachment that doesn't exist among Russian-speaking immigrants, and that can't exist. That doesn't have anything to do with being anti-Israel or anti-Semitism, but it's just not on their radar screen. It doesn't matter to them.

- *The Middle East conflict itself is not as significant?*

Probably it is more significant for the Russian Jews if Chelsea will continue to be financed by Abramovich. It's just a different way of thinking. I think that plays a role. The Middle East conflict is, for them, at the end of the day, not the center of their universe. And of course there's always a lot going on in this area. The Middle East conflict is a dominating topic for some, Iran is a big deal, the threat of Iran, but that will all become relative over time. I will predict that in 10-20 years Israel will no longer play this central role as a kind of insurance. For German Jews it is still the case that they say they like being in Germany, but if something happens, they still have Israel. That's a strongly anchored belief. You won't find that among the Russians, with just a few exceptions. But these are the people who went to Israel anyway. The Russians, I

think you know them better, I'm talking more theoretically, but I would say that they're coming from a mostly Europeanized context and Israel is for them the Orient.

- *What about those critics among the German-Jewish intellectuals who; for example, predict that there will be an increasing isolation of Israel because of its current policy towards the Palestinians? What impact could this have on future relations between Jews in Germany and Jews in Israel?*

You're right, there is a debate questioning solidarity with Israel, the "unconditional solidarity", which doesn't exist anyhow. That's an intellectual debate, not something that will help the man on the street. It also won't help the majority of German non-Jews who aren't interested in the Middle East conflict.

I think the Middle East conflict will rather lose significance here intellectually. This will still take a few years, because Germany is Germany and is something different. Even the Russian-speaking immigrants in the second generation will realize that there are specific national interests. They're growing up with it, so that's why I think it can't just be shaken off. That's why there will be a certain period of time where it will continue like this, but the critique will at some point end like in France or the US, where there are very strong voices who say that they're Jewish and that's good, but Israeli politics just won't do, not at all. That's a legitimate point of view, we know that this theme is exploited from people for propaganda with an anti-Israeli, anti-Semitic agenda, but something will change here. Israel still is very meaningful. You can see this at religious ceremonies here, it's important to include Israeli religious representatives. When the [Israeli] Chief Rabbi is here, that's something special. It is special, but in the USA it wouldn't occur to anyone to invite him. The Jewish self-confidence is much stronger there.

- *Would you say that there is a specific German self-confidence developing among the Jews?*

I think so. Already today in certain circles you can see that patriotism is no longer a swearword and pride in Germany, or the achievements of Germany is becoming more and more widespread. The leading figures in the Zentralrat have no qualms about this; on the contrary, Mrs. Knobloch [President of the Central Council] gave us an interview on 60 years of the Federal Republic, and said she can't understand why so many young people she meets aren't proud of this country. She can't understand it. They shouldn't be complaining that everything's so bad. This is a success story, something to identify with. These are German things that the Russian-speaking Jews, of course, are a bit distanced from. But when they're able to become established in society here, that's the way it is here, why shouldn't they also like it here? They're coping well here, able to develop personally. I think that this will become a more "natural" relationship. It shouldn't necessarily become some knee-jerk patriotism, but why not feel a certain pride in the 60 year history? And I think that this is an achievement, to have one of the most democratic countries in the world, why shouldn't people feel something, including the Russians? They will be able to, not taking into account the German-Russian soul, that will be in two-three generations, but then of course they'll be German. Now they're beginning to be born here, this is just starting now. Those who came here as young people are now at the age where they're starting to have children.

- *Do you think there's something that's still missing in the educational programs being offered by the Communities?*

I have to admit that I haven't dealt so extensively with the educational programs on offer and I don't hear so much about the people involved in the educational programs. You should rather ask Community heads, Rabbis or the executive director or the youth leaders. What I do notice is that what has been widely accepted by the Russian-speakers are things that are a bit distant to religious issues, when it's cleverly packaged. Packaging things, for example, particularly for the young people, like tutoring in math with a bit of religious content. Having a combination and an added value. I can relate it directly to everyday life when someone helps me in something and at the same time I'm learning something about Jewish life. That seems to me to be, although I'm not really up on all of this, a way to attract people.

One area that's been grossly neglected is the Internet. Kids and young people move around to a great extent via Internet portals and sites, social networks. Why not found a group with its own profile and try to find as many friends as possible? This connection to usefulness and everyday life and Jewish life, being Jewish, culturally – in the Internet - has to work better. In this way people might be won over. I think that the Communities are trying, but people don't have the money or don't have the personnel for it. However, it seems to me that it would be a way to reflect the reality of people's lives a bit more, to get closer to people and interest them in Judaism.

● *It's no secret that many Jews in Germany keep their distance from Jewish Community bodies. What are, to your knowledge, the main reasons for that? What is to be done about this?*

I don't want to gloss over the issue. 200,000 contingent refugees who came here as Jews, not all of them are; in all fairness you've got to admit that some of them came on the Jewish ticket. That means that they're happy that they could come here and enjoy the social welfare state and begin a new life, but they said at the very beginning that they don't want anything to do with the Community. They've got this stamp in their passport, and as soon as they're finished with the paperwork, they're out of here, that's it. I don't think that's xenophobic to say, but a fact. It's really not explainable in any other way when not even 100,000 remain from 200,000 in the Jewish Communities. It can't just be the ethnic question. What else? The secularization, of course. The Russians are coming from a secular world of communism, socialism, dictatorship. They had the Jewish mark in their passport, but some didn't even know what it meant. Then they come into a society that is also undergoing secularization. There is no reason to annul this; they can continue to lead secular lives. No one demands it of them. They weren't obliged to join the Community. And that's the way it should be. The Communities were, this should be said, from the very beginning, absolutely overwhelmed. At least the smaller and the middle sized ones. They could absorb a few hundred but not thousands and more at the same place.

● *It seems that the German distribution policy was counterproductive. Do you agree?*

I think the government had good intentions, I don't think anyone was acting in bad faith.

● *How would you assess the general cooperation between Jewish Communities and organizations and state officials and politicians?*

I think that, by and large, the working together is productive. My impression is that it always depends on the local peculiarities. If there is a good chemistry between Community chair X and mayor Z, then the cooperation works much better. Then things can be regulated directly. If there's animosity, then it's much more difficult to get funding.

My impression is that the states and the localities are prepared to help, there's no general attitude of refusal; concessions are made to support Jewish life. All states have by now concluded state contracts with the Jewish Community and they even have improved on them, and gone further. Of course this is symbolic politics, but not only. The people are also doing it out of conviction, and it's also considered good form to support Jewish life. I think that, in general, it works out quite well. There are, of course, one-offs, where it doesn't work so well, but I think that by and large both sides try hard and that's why it works.

As I said, the important thing here is, like in every political act, the chemistry at the local level. Can I work well with this person? Then it will work better when I have to apply for something in the economic stimulus package as when I have trouble with this person anyway. My impression is that the Communities are involved in the daily life of the towns and localities, beyond the days of remembrance. On these days it's always something special, but there are also local initiatives against anti-Semitism, for example, and I think that that's a good sign that Jews as a group are accepted and recognized.

I wouldn't draw a very skeptical picture here, with all the details when, say, 50,000 € is wanted for this and that. It is always difficult when Communities are short on money but tend to build nice, large synagogues and

centers. The state supports them in this, as a rule. What wasn't taken into account by anyone are the resulting continual costs. Electricity, heating costs, maintenance costs. Then the state says that they already gave five million euro for the building, and now it's up to the Community to make it work. The Communities are small, the religious tax is decreasing and the influx of new immigrants is also not endless, so they're suddenly standing before a fantastic building, but no one's coming. That's one problem, how to secure the financing for the future costs. Those are real problems that none of those concerned had considered enough beforehand. There are prestige projects from Munich to Flensburg and it's the same thing. People aren't thinking about what will happen later. That's a concern. Both sides think that they can build something. The thing is they've also got to plan how it can be financed in five years. Where will the money come from to keep it running? There I'm constantly hearing people say that they hadn't thought of that. It's true that they have a synagogue, but they've got to heat it as well. There was a certain naiveté and that has to change.

- *What do you think about the general non-Jewish German media coverage of events that relate to the Jewish world in Germany?*

They like reporting on scandals; Berlin is an excellent example of this.

- *Berlin also has enough scandals.*

There are enough, but whenever something happens in some Jewish Community, then everyone's interested, right up to the Spiegel [well-known weekly newsmagazine]. Remembrance events are well covered. But everyday life has been suppressed more and more over the last few years. You read almost nothing about it. The most recent example of this is how little the German media reported on the ordination of the Orthodox Rabbis, some of whom were educated in Germany. I didn't see any significant articles about it. It was a big deal in the Jüdische Allgemeine, of course, but for the others less so. That supports my hypothesis that they're all fixated on the days of remembrance. I notice this myself in my everyday life. Weeks can go by without a call, which is also ok, but then one of two things can happen; it'll be a day of remembrance and someone will call, "Mr. Böhme, could you please comment for NDR [public radio], how does Jewish life look today?" The other thing is the Middle East conflict. I think that's a shame. Why do I think that's a shame? Because interesting things are happening that are also relevant for the majority society. For example, how can I integrate people? That's a central topic. On the other hand, to be fair, you've got to say that Jews are such a small group in Germany, why should they receive so much attention? That's also unnatural. There I think that a certain quantum of normalcy is missing in the non-Jewish mainstream media reporting. I think that reports can be made beyond the days of remembrance, beyond the memorial culture. Show everyone that there's a living Jewry and how it expresses itself! That Jews also can make a contribution to this society and are doing so. I was talking to a well-known media figure yesterday and told him, "Do you know that there's a group of Jewish Social Democrats in parliament?", and he just stared at me, "What? Something like that exists? That's really something for the media, to report on, yes, that does exist. That's a crazy story, we'll do that now." There is just too little attention paid, not because it's about Jews. Not this affectedness where people say "Oh, we can't say anything wrong because it's about Jews." A healthy measure would be quite helpful, also when reporting on scandals. A lot is blown up in the media here. I know a case in Berlin where somebody was arrested because it was said he was involved in Russian organized crime. And it was such a big deal, actually it didn't matter that he was in the Jewish Community. When it's sensational, then they keep it revolving around the sensation. If that were to be taken down a bit, that would also be very helpful. We don't even need to get into reporting on the Middle East, there's a wide range there.

- *What do you think of the existing Jewish media in Germany?*

I would first ask you what Jewish media there is in Germany?

- *Print media. Evreyskaya Gazeta, the Jüdische Allgemeine, Community bulletins.*

I'm saying there's one German Jewish paper, I can't count the *Evreyskaya Gazeta*, logically. [as German-Jewish media] What else?

- *Ha Galil* [German Jewish web portal] has 400,000 hits a month...

Are those individual hits, or web pages? You need to find that out beforehand, I'm also well-versed in the Internet, but it doesn't matter. What I would like to say is that there is the need for Jewish media, but no one has the wherewithal to take it upon themselves to do, because it's expensive. I would say that one Jewish weekly paper is enough. Not because there shouldn't be others, there just isn't more demand. We're not in the USA, England or France. It is different there. In France there are between 600,000-700,000 Jews. That's another dimension. A TV channel is worth it there. I think that would be ridiculous here, not even mentioning a daily paper, which has never existed in Germany. And Jewry in Germany has seen much better times than today. I think that a radio station could be possible, it's difficult. A TV channel, I think, is not an option. The market is limited, and even the interest amongst Community members. I'm always trying to reach Community members. They don't care. There are other structures. So an important point is the Internet. We're also re-doing our Internet site. That's really important. I'm convinced of it. Where Jewish media in the future will take place is the Internet. If you look at the social platforms, they will blow you away. That's booming. That's why I think a lot that's related to networking, PR will take place over the Internet in the future. We need to react to this fact.



## 7. GESA EDERBERG

May 4, 2009, Berlin

- *Rabbi Ederberg, what has attracted you to Conservative Judaism, i.e. Masorti?*

I think to locate myself within Masorti Judaism was really born out of two considerations: One is the modern, intellectual, very committed approach to Judaism. For me, Reform Judaism was not a really option in terms of commitment to Halacha, and to observance, and also to text-based knowledge. On the other hand, being a woman, Orthodoxy just was also not an option for me.

- *What is your feeling about the prospects of Jewry in Germany, with its unique composition, in the near future and in the long term?*

It is very important to acknowledge the specific mix, just to figure out target groups and the way we can care for them. For example, in the younger generation, let's say 30 and younger, it does not make sense any more to distinguish between Germans and Russians. Education should be in German for this group. It might include providing Russian learning options for the children of the Russian immigrants because they also have to study their mother tongue, but that's a side issue.

In general, that's a target group where we don't need to look at different backgrounds so much. Israelis and Americans also fit into this group, let's say 30-35 years and younger. It's completely different with the older generation. For the older generation, we need language specific educational programs. It doesn't make sense to try to integrate elderly immigrants into German culture. We should just provide them with Jewish knowledge and Jewish information as much as we can.

I would somehow put the focus on the younger generation, students and young families, because the middle generation, of the immigrants especially, are very busy in building their economic lives, and the chance to engage them in Community life when they came here, this chance has already been lost. We might have been able to reach them, but this window opportunity is closed. I would really focus on students, and on young families.

Concerning the difference between the short-term and the long-term perspectives, currently we have a huge lack of teachers, educators, Rabbis and educated, committed people. That's something which creates a vicious circle, because by not having these role models, we cannot attract the people choosing a career to become a Jewish educator. One important long-term goal should be to qualify Jewish educators, Rabbis, cantors and so on *from Germany*. We cannot start a successful school of Jewish education if we do not get the students. So in the short-term we need to import good educators, and we need to do so widely.

For example, there's this beautiful Lehavah project which brings young observant Israel youth and kids to our Communities. However, a big problem remains the language barrier. It's just until they can communicate in German, half the year is already gone. This exchange should be expanded. We need more madrichim, more schlichim, and that means we need a lot of preparation and education beforehand. A mentoring system would also be an important step.

Another very, very important piece is *educational material*. Even an excellent teacher will only be mediocre if there are no materials and you don't always have time to prepare new material.

- *How would you describe the current relations between the German speaking and Russian speaking Jews?*

This is a very complex issue and it's important to look at it closely and not to generalize it in two or three words. By the way: I'm just coming from the Limmud Festival in Berlin which was a celebration of Jewish pluralism, just like in the years before. Obviously, there are cultural differences and the participants might show it in their taste in music or literature. However, people are joining together, and it works.

In daily Community life it's not that easy, admittedly. There are obvious tensions in some of the Communities, especially when *veterans*, most of whom are themselves immigrants from the generation before, feel pushed to the sidelines by the newcomers. But my general impression is that in the last few years the relations have improved a lot. Both sides have understood that they need each other, and they're trying to work together. For example, in some Communities people share a space for the Russian-speaking senior's club and the German-speaking senior's club and there are also spaces where it mixes.

Only to focus on the Russian-speaking immigrants does not make sense because the anchor into the larger society is obviously the German-speaking population. To take an example from the Community in Weiden<sup>4</sup>: there are very few German-speakers, but the president has always been a German speaker. This will change in the long run, because now the children of the Russian immigrants are German speakers in every respect, and that's fine.

In the younger generation, people will just intermingle. There is considerable inter-marriage between German-speaking Jews from German origin and from Russian origin. In the Jewish schools, mixing works very well. The problem of inter-cultural tensions will become obsolete within the next 20 years, obviously.

● *Do you still see a difference in the religiosity in both groups?*

Yes, I would say so. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union come with very little religious background and even an anti-religious background, and some of them really regret that. There is a feeling that the damage has been done and that it cannot be repaired. For example, in Weiden I had a congregant, a Russian Jew in his late 70's, and he said to me, "Gesa, I will attend the synagogue every Shabbat to help to make the minyan, but I'm a complete atheist, and you don't need to teach me because you will not succeed. Unfortunately, you will not make me a religious person, but please take care of my grandchildren." I think that's an amazing step of self-perception and of caring for the grandchildren and their children's religiosity. And that's my experience at large. Therefore it would be a great project to work with a grandparents-grandchildren-combination, because both have time. Grandparents do care about Jewish continuity for their lives, not for themselves, but for their grandchildren, so that's an important piece of work.

Let me add another thing: There are also Jewish people with an East German background, and very often they find themselves in a coalition with the Russian immigrants in terms of socialist mentality and upbringing. But what I see more and more is also such people coming back to Judaism with some Jewish identity within the family, and that's an important piece also to bring them the variety of Judaism.

● *How would you describe the current relations between religious and non-religious Jews in Germany?*

Well, it's a fact that most Jews will not describe themselves as religious. Look at the synagogues on Shabbat, that's the obvious answer. We need to respect that in a full sense, which means to take a very intellectual approach to religion, and to accept where people stand and where they come from. That's a main challenge, to really address religion and tradition on a high intellectual level, and also to accept that within the continuum of Jewish identity there is such a thing as non-religious Judaism. Some people might be interested in Jewish education, but not in religion. That's ok, too.

● *Some people are talking about a new pluralism in German Jewry. Do you see this? And if so, what are its key elements?*

Yes, I share this optimistic view. I see that there is an enormous, growing acceptance in terms of pluralism. There are spaces like the Limmud Festival, and I think it's very important to create and to further develop

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<sup>4</sup> The Jewish Community where Rabbi Gesa Ederberg worked before she moved to Berlin.

these spaces. Places where people mingle and atheists will experience why it is that they can't move on Shabbat. And you know the religious will have to tolerate that people walk around on Shabbat smoking. That's an important point. For Berlin, Jewish pluralism is working quite well. From year to year or even in shorter periods it's really improving, and the acceptance grows.

But Berlin has also always been pluralistic; it's an exceptional place within the Jewish landscape of contemporary Germany. In smaller places with small numbers of Jewish Community members, Jewish pluralism is a big problem. For example, if different congregations and groups in small sized towns in Germany split up into several synagogues' *minyamin*, the problem might be that none of them will have a *minyan*. And to divide resources between fighting congregations, but each of them has only 150 members, like in some places in Lower Saxony, that's just stupid. That's just idiotic, stupid and I would love somebody to force them together. Obviously it's also very often personal differences disguised as religious pluralism, and that's a pity.

So there is a clear limit to pluralism. But on the educational, on the national level we need a pluralistic structure and equal access to resources and funding for the different streams. But on the local level, it's much more about communication and getting along with each other, so supervision might be more important than teaching about religious pluralism.

- *How far is Israel central to Jewish life in Germany? Do you think its significance will grow or diminish?*

Well, personally I think the connection to Israel is very, very important. People need to feel connected and whenever they think about moving to go to study, to find their next position and so on, Israel is an option to be considered. Well, it wouldn't be my strategy to pitch for Aliyah all the time, because that doesn't work. But it's important to create study opportunities and internship opportunities and the like in Israel. I think the German Jewish community has always been pretty Zionist; I'm talking about the post-war period. But what also happened is that many people from the generation that did Aliyah in the 1960's, have come back disillusioned, because Israel was the Zionist dream but they had special expectations and the reality was different for them. However, the strong support German Jews feel for Israel has continued. And just in terms of Hebrew, it's really important to have the twinning between Israel and Germany.

- *How far do the immigrants relate to their countries of origin?*

My impression is that for many of them emigration has been like shutting the door and never, ever open it again, leaving everything there. But in the second generation there is a certain kind of a re-connection. You know, doing business with the country of origin, using the skills they have socially and in terms of language, too. People are visiting back and forth. Obviously, the culture of origin is very important for the immigrant families. It doesn't necessarily mean they have to go there, but could mean listening to music from there, reading literature and relating with other people who are still living there. So *culturally*, the connections seem to remain very important.

- *Do Jews in Germany feel that they are an integral part of German society, or even as patriots?*

Well, with the immigrants it's obviously a long process of becoming familiar with the host country. And it's a very sensitive issue with the Holocaust. With those who were born here, I think most of us do identify much more with local elements. So it's I'm a Berliner, I'm a Frankfurter, or I'm a Weidener. For example, Jews in Bavaria, even in Munich, can have a very strong Jewish identity and a strong Bavarian one. People are still hesitant to identify on a national level, they rather like to discuss differences between the Swabians and the Badensers, so the regional aspects are important and people do definitely identify much more on this level, also the Jews.

In terms of national identity, I think it goes very much by the language. As I said, this generation which did try to make Aliyah to Israel and came back, many of them do identify by the language, and say that they are German by language. Culture is also important. The European identity is strong. Here, many feel as Europeans residing in Berlin.

- *What would you define as the most essential elements of Judaism today?*

Well, I think connection to Israel is very important, the relationship to Israel. There is also a strong Shoah-related identity here. There's nothing to say about it. I mean that's what it is and that's how it is. What I also see as a very important issue is to search for Jewish answers to general, global questions and challenges in ecology, global warming, dealing with immigration in general, xenophobia and so on. Such things are pretty well done in America. For example, Americas Jews have taken up the Darfour genocide as a very important thing, and that's something I'm missing here. What else is important? **Education**, equal access to education for everybody, I mean beyond the Jewish Community. And within the Jewish Community the issue which needs to be addressed and needs to get to a different level is Jewish identity. There's the who-is-a-Jew issue what is currently tearing the Jewish people apart by the different standpoints within the different denominations, and that's a serious problem. Because we either fall apart or there will be a different answer to that.

- *Are the services provided by the Jewish Community sufficient?*

It's not the issue to create any new programs and services, at least not in Berlin. The issue is much more about thinking a little bit more strategically, and making the Jewish content always the underlying contextual goal of everything we do. So, the Community provides social services and I think it should, and in Berlin it does it pretty well. But to bring in the Jewish component, this is a very important part. It's done, but it could be done even better. In a way, that social welfare, social caring, should really come from a more informed Jewish perspective. A very important focus is to train the already existing personnel, to give the professionals a different feeling, to provide them with another level of reflection, of supervision. Probably that's the main point: evaluation and supervision. To focus on quality and to rethink what our goals are and what our mission is.

- *What is the status of volunteering in the Communities? Is more volunteerism necessary?*

I see it differently. For example, the Limmud Festival<sup>5</sup> I mentioned, everything was done completely by volunteers, and it worked. But it's also because Limmud has a voluntary ideology. That's why it works. In other situations and places, that does not work, and there is a lack of commitment. In such cases we need something to be worked into the structure that's related to what we just said before. We should provide services and practical help, but at the same time make our wishes and intentions clear as well. If providing services in terms of we help people find a new apartment, we help people go to the doctor, and so on, but through all this we want to create Community. We should tell the people this, and stimulate an atmosphere of let's give something back. That means some thinking out of the box. However, lack of commitment isn't an overall problem. For example, the social welfare section of the Jewish Community of Berlin, they have a book full of volunteers. I mean, there are 100 volunteers.

- *Here in Berlin?*

Yes, here in Berlin. But still, there could be more. There are other things which we are missing, but it's also a question of how to work with volunteers, it's a skill. This is something you can also train. We need volunteer training and counseling. I think the level of volunteerism depends on the structure and communication within

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<sup>5</sup> German wide Limmud Festival near Berlin, 3-day festival at the beginning of May 2009.

the respective Community and less on the people. If they are not asked to do something in the right way, why should they?

- *What are the main reasons the fact that some Jews do not become involved in the Communities?*

I think one reason is that the Communities have very often been too self-sufficient, too established and not welcoming enough. Newcomers, and I have a lot to do with them, often lamented that they went to this synagogue and nobody even said “Shabbat Shalom” or just said “Shabbat Shalom” and nothing beyond that, so they never went back. Which is a legitimate reaction. I also know a really sad case, in which a family with special-needs-children have been alienated and are now living somewhere else and are not part of a Jewish Community at all.

- *But why?*

Because of prejudice, gossip, people saying how can you bring such a child into the synagogue? Really, really bad attitudes.

On the other hand, you simply won't get everybody into the Community. People might just not be interested; they may happen to be Jewish, but not be interested. There is a real demand to make Jewish Community life more welcoming, and to make it intellectually more challenging.

- *What is your experience with non-Jewish German officials and politicians? Are you satisfied with it?*

In terms of officials, say political, administrative and so on, my experience is very, very positive. It's good and it's easy to work with them. There might be some irritations, with some anti-religious feelings within the former East Germany but that's really the only thing.

- *Anti-religious attitudes among East German politicians?*

Once or twice, yes. But this is really negligible. On the official level, the willingness of cooperation is amazing. And in the non-Jewish population there's sometimes an even effusive interest.

- *Too much non-Jewish interest?*

Yes, sometimes I find myself having to explain to non-Jews why I can't find more time to talk to them. I *can't* spend all my time talking and working with non-Jews, that's just not possible. People take it very hard, sometimes, because they think they have a right to like if they are showing an interest in Jewish issues, then I should be more than willing to accommodate them. But, actually I have to do some other things, as well. So that's a complicated issue. And it's especially complicated in a situation where there are so few educators. If we would have enough Jewish, knowledgeable educators, then we could hire somebody for this task. But if I have to decide do I talk to a group of Jewish children or do I talk to a group of non-Jewish children then of course I choose the Jewish children.

- *What is your general impression of the non-Jewish German media coverage on Jewish developments in Germany?*

Jewish life in Germany is covered very comprehensively. It even tends to receive too much attention. It's covered well and usually also covered very positively. Problematic is the over-attention to internal conflicts. If a Protestant or Catholic congregation of the same size throws out their president or banned somebody from being a member, this would not even make the headlines. Maybe it makes the headlines in the local newspaper. But if such things happen in a Jewish Community of the same size, it's on the first page. It really

makes headlines of German print media. Jewish conflicts are sometimes put under a microscope, and that's strange.

● *How does the non-Jewish German media cover global Jewish issues, and events in Israel?*

I have a problem to provide you with a profound assessment. I'm always interested in reading about Jewish life around the world, but usually I take for that the Jewish press and the Jewish media and I think that's also fine. But if you ask me for my individual impression, first of all I remember reports and articles with a certain kind of exotic approach. For example, there was a editorial in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung about a woman who was on a plane leaving from Miami to New York on Friday noon, and the columnist described somewhat mockingly the exotic behavior of a Jewish family who got off the plane when it was announced that the plane would be three hours late, so it would arrive after Shabbat had begun into New York. First of all, I was like: this could happen to me also, and what is so exotic and why is this worth reporting?

● *Entertainment.*

Yes, something like that. But strange, exotic, indigenous behaviors.

● *Is coverage of Israel and the Middle East problematic?*

It's also part of what I said before. It gets much more attention here than other countries do. It always makes the headlines, and I think the criteria to judge Israeli political behavior are very, very high, and very, very harsh also. And if you criticize this kind of journalism, some critics counter if they criticize Israel they're always in danger of being called anti-Semites. Then it's really complicated to communicate because there is this side of it and sometimes commentators are using anti-Semitic stereotypes without wanting to, and without realizing it and then when you point it out they don't admit it, so that's a complicated issue.

● *Back to education. You said before that there is not enough personnel and teaching material is lacking. Do you have something specific in mind?*

The so-called Jewish bookshelves are pretty empty in German. Very often what's there is too simplistic, too quickly done and problematic. A German Jewish language needs to be developed, like how do you spell things, what marks you use with Hebrew words and so on. I think it's all over the field, but especially urgent with the young children, especially primary school age. For teaching adults and teenagers you can always use English language materials. But materials for the younger children, that's still a very weak point.

I think the most important thing is not to add quantity, but really to focus on quality, to establish programs which train educators, teachers and to do that in a high quality. And to focus on the German language. We need to do some programs in Russian, that's true, but I think we will need German language materials for the future generations to build Community life.

If we want to have a longer impact, to do something sustainable, then it needs to be of high quality. Because, and that's the point, it's not compared to other Jewish programming, but by general programming. That's especially true for the Russian population. They go by educational quality.

● *What are the principal Jewish structures in Germany today? How far does the synagogue hold the major role and how far are educational structures central or even alternative institutions for Jews in Germany today?*

I think the range and breadth of Jewish institutions can grow in Germany You know the threshold to go into a synagogue is pretty high for people today. Therefore, even speaking as a Rabbi, we need to go out of the

synagogue to meet the people and that maybe bring them in. I think we should look deeper at the American models of JCC. If people want to do fitness, so let them do Jewish fitness. I just had in mind the JCC Manhattan which provides everything and that's maybe an important issue. It provides these things on a very high level and high quality level and that's something we need to do. We need to use what's there in general knowledge, in general resources. Let me give you one example with our Masorti kindergarten in Berlin. I want it to be a *Jewish* kindergarten, but even more so I want it to be a *good* kindergarten. The parents might not be able to judge the quality of Jewish education, but they can compare it with a non-Jewish kindergarten next door. We need to have an image, we need to have a café, which is first and foremost a great café that also happens to be kosher. If the newspapers on the racks happen to be mostly Jewish newspapers, fine, but it also needs to be a great café and the cake needs to be delicious. So, that's a very primitive example maybe, but I think that's a way of bringing people in, too. We have to invest into quality. And so with the kindergartens and schools, it's exactly the same thing. The parents who make the choice, they have to feel it. And even for myself, if the Jewish school would be a bad school, I would not choose it. So here in Berlin, we are lucky the primary school is a good school and the high school is as well, but it's not yet excellent, so it still needs work.

*(Specific questions conc. The Masorti Centre Berlin)*

- *Could you just give a short overview about the Genesis and how it came to get established? Who are the people behind it? When did it get started? And what is the main target group?*

Masorti Germany was originally founded in July 2002, as a non-profit organization registered with the clear goal to bring Jewish education and Jewish content from a Masorti perspective into Germany. So it's less lobbying for the Masorti movement, although this is a small part of it. As opposed to the Reform movement, we have decided that we want to be an educational institution and not so much a political lobbying institution. We have several key focuses of which some of them have been more successful than others: The first goal was to establish a "Lehrhaus" (Beit Midrasch) in the broad sense for Jewish adults, which we started small and it remained small.

At that time several educational initiatives for Jewish adults started in Berlin, so it was logical that the group didn't expand that much. It was also my experience with the years that adult education is important, but it is not the key element for Community building. So we switched the emphasis to working with young families, opened the kindergarten and pre-school and nursery. It's for all Jewish girls and boys between 1 and 6, starting with seven children in 2004. There are now 45 children enrolled and another 40 children on the waiting list. With another 40 children on the waiting list, we are thinking about new premises, for example to open another kindergarten. We want to keep that one small because the family education aspect is important. The kindergarten offers full-time (8 a.m. to 5 p.m.) care, there is a mother's group, there is some adult education, and there is counseling. So it's really going into family education and we want to deepen it.

- *Counseling in general?*

Family counseling, yes. There is a strong connection also between the kindergarten and the synagogue Oranienburger Strasse<sup>6</sup> which is because some families belong to both.

For example, next week we will celebrate *Lag ba Omer* together as a joint activity. Another joint undertaking which we did and which we need to do much more in future is publications, educational material. And then we have a series of seminars on a national and international level; sending people for adult education to London, to Paris, bringing people in from Hungary, from Leipzig, from Paris, and this is something what we want to extend.

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<sup>6</sup> Synagogue Oranienburger Straße: Liberal-Conservative egalitarian minyan in the middle of Berlin; a synagogue Community inside the Berliner Einheitsgemeinde (United Berlin Jewish Community).

- *Where does the financing come from? Is it just from Masorti International movement, and is there co-financing?*

The initial money was from the international Masorti movement. There is co-financing from the Berlin Senate for the kindergarten, the regular co-financing for kindergartens which are licensed by the state. We've gotten money from the Ministry of the Interior for a specific project. We've gotten money from the Central Council of Jews in Germany, also project money. And we've gotten money from the Pincus Fund for the kindergarten especially. And there are contributions from those who participate.

- *What about families whose children have Jewish ancestors but who are not Jewish according to the Halacha. Is it possible to send these children to the kindergarten?*

Yes. We do accept children as you say from Jewish families where the child itself is not Halachic Jewish. But if it's only Jewish from the grandparents' generation, we would probably say that's not enough.

- *Do you have a mix of Israelis and Germans and Russians in the kindergarten as well as in the family center?*

Yes.

- *What is the make up?*

That is a difficult question. I think we still have a majority of German families. However, we have a strong emphasis on Israeli kids because the kindergarten is bilingual Hebrew-German. Israeli families here for a couple of years are not the main target group, but they bring the native Hebrew to the kindergarten, so it's very important to include them.

However, I think currently we have 10 different mother tongues in our kindergarten. We have two groups of Hebrew children and one group of English children but the kids have all types of other languages at home also.

- *What is the social mix? Is there also a special effort to include a share of families in need by paying their fees, for example?*

Well, that's not the point. The fees determined by the Berlin Senate. When families are on welfare, they don't have to pay. We have a little additional fee but they this is also determined by income anyway. I don't see a dominance of any social strata in our kindergarten. But what we have are mostly families with a high interest in education, highly educated families. That's the feature and the focus. And that's something challenging, obviously.

- *How many volunteers work at the kindergarten on a regular basis?*

We started with something like 10 volunteers and there are probably 20-25 by now. We have around 10 paid employees, full-time, part-time, educational support and so on.



## 8. DAVID GALL

**May 28, 2009, Munich,**

- *Mr. Gall, how did the idea of a German Jewish Web portal come about?*

My professional background is medical, mainly clinical pharmacology. That's how I got involved with the Internet, through medical information technology and the creation of the first online service for the doctor's pharmacy, for doctors, veterinarians and so on. This is how I was involved with the Internet in Germany from the very beginning. In building this up, I could use the opportunities as they presented themselves at the beginning of the 1990's.

Of course, I also wanted to look at what was there [in the Net] about Israel and Judaism. And it was mostly things that you couldn't just leave as they were. It wasn't what Jews would want, and that's a very personal thing, but altogether things were not correct and then there was all the racist propaganda or missionary attempts or things about kosher butchering, where all the cruelties of Judaism were listed. And because I already knew how you can publish and influence things in the Internet, how community building and these things work, it was clear that something like that was also needed for Judaism. It was also the first site that could be seen as an antidote to the anti-Semitism in this country. It became also clear that there was also a positive basis, that the main emphasis would be Judaism, to present an authentic picture of Judaism from a Jew in Germany, regardless from which denomination, so that Jewish children who aren't necessarily growing up in the large Communities can also see that there is Judaism in Germany, that it's natural and that it is found in the new media also, in every facet of society, like the new media. Judaism is reflected accordingly.

I wanted to bolster the self-confidence of young Jews, to give them something to find, and also to facilitate communication among Jews in general in German-speaking areas, this includes Jeckes in Rio de Janeiro of course, who are looking for a Sidur in German, and now they can find it. It's not really commercial, although, of course, at the beginning there was less on offer. There were also the forums, but the main thing was the informative educational offerings, covering a wide area about religion, Israeli history, Jewish history, Jewish languages, Jewish cinema and so on. Everything that belongs under Jewish education, that's how the religion came into being popular. Right now the emphasis is on current events with reports updated daily, but adapted to our special needs, not just reports that you'll find everywhere else anyway, but reports, maybe on the same topics, but from another angle. From many different points of view, also to make it clear that there are different positions within Judaism.

- *Have you ever lived in Israel?*

I lived there for a while and my children now all live there again. Also the grandchildren. And we're there often, to visit the kids.

- *Then the name you chose for the web portal Ha Galil wasn't by accident?*

No, it wasn't chosen by accident, but at that time I didn't think it would get so big. Maybe I would've chosen something that sounds more German, easier to remember, but Ha Galil has become so established as a name, that we're keeping it. And it also fits. Ha Galil can pertain to the area to the north of Israel near Central Europe. Galim means waves in Hebrew, so it's interesting. It opens up all of these backgrounds.

- *You're an active member in the Liberal Jewish Community Beth Shalom in Munich?*

I wouldn't call it active, but we participate in Community life. However, the opportunities are limited because I have a lot of other obligations.

- *The current state of relations between the veterans and the Russian-speaking immigrant Community members is probably not a problem for Beth Shalom, but rather for larger Communities, isn't it?*

Not really. And even in the bigger communities, I do *not* consider cultural differences and language difficulties as being the core problem between veterans and newcomers.

The German lobby isn't tied to any state support and it can't be passed on, so it's clear that the people go to the Communities that receive state support.

- *It's human nature.*

Probably I would do the same.

- *When did Ha Galil start?*

It was in 1995.

- *How is it financed? Is it still completely by donations? For over 14 years?*

Mainly through donations. There was some state support within the framework of the Uprising of Decency.<sup>7</sup> That was limited and then there were certain problems in continuing the allocation. At some point it stopped. It's hard to understand as no reasons were given for cutting the support. One reason is that they didn't understand how the Internet works, and secondly how pluralism and democracy work. If I've got a CDU clerk and I brought down the CDU MP Hohmann<sup>8</sup>, then suddenly no one answers the phone anymore.

- *I can remember in 2005-2006 it was a big deal and they were saying that Ha Galil can't continue because the state cut off financial support.*

That's right. That was already in 2004.

- *Yes, but this sounding of the alarm...*

That continued for a relatively long time afterwards. There were petitions, TV reports and no one could understand why this had happened. There was a report about it on Monitor [investigative reporting program on state TV]. The Zentralrat (Central Council of Jews in Germany) attempted to intervene on our behalf, but

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<sup>7</sup> After an attack on the synagogue in the German city Düsseldorf in 2000 and an increase of radical right-wing activities in several parts of Germany, the government of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder initiated a program for more civil courage, the Uprising of Decency. The program included funding of projects against right wing extremism and xenophobia and also supported projects for more tolerance and democracy, which included financial support for Ha Galil.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Hohmann, a former member of parliament and member of the Christian Democratic party suggested that the Jewish people could also be considered a nation of perpetrators (Tätervolk, a term usually used to describe Germans for their crimes in the Holocaust), as opposed to always having been innocent victims, referring to the involvement of Jews in the Bolshevik Revolution and its aftermath during a speech made on German Unity Day in 2003. A critical article in Ha Galil first made this speech public, arguing that Hohmann's speech would lead to a belittlement of the Holocaust and a relativization of Nazi crimes in World War II. In the aftermath, Hohmann was kicked out from the CDU fraction in the German Bundestag, and later also excluded from the Christian Democratic Party itself.

if the people in the Ministry don't want it, then... It's such a sensitive issue, so that's why it's really important to have independent Jewish sponsorship.

- *The current financing of Ha Galil is entirely from donations?*

The current financing isn't purely from donations, there's also a bit from advertising, but most of it is from donations.

- *Is the work with Ha Galil done on a volunteer basis? Can you pay someone to supervise and update the site?*

Of course we can. There are two people who work on it full-time and then there are many freelancers all over and independent of one another in Paris, Budapest and so on, who do mostly work for free, out of necessity still..

- *And it's updated daily?*

As events unfold.

- *Can you say how many hits there are a day? On average?*

I don't know off hand. The weekly hits are more significant. There are 400,000 different users a month.

- *400,000?*

Yes, 400,000 people, who apparently speak German. And half of those come directly to a topic via a search engine and the other half, the smaller half, comes regularly.

- *Have you had any problems with hackers or attacks, has anyone tried to disrupt the site?*

Yes, there have been some attacks from the very beginning. A few times this has led us to take action beyond the direct attacker. We could go after the infrastructure that had been built up and see from the outside which server was attacking, what else there was on anti-Semitic content and press charges against that as well. We could sometimes find out who the publisher was. For example, if the site is registered in the USA, but the publisher is sitting in Stralsund, then he can be held liable in Stralsund.

- *So you were able to use that technology and turn it around?*

It is very useful and there have also been ramifications in Parliament. Half of all of those prosecuted, when charges were pressed successfully in the area of Nazi propaganda offenses, were exposed by Ha Galil.

- *Good work!*

Yes, good work, but then you've got to ask yourself what are the federal agents, the social workers, all those people doing who are actually supposed to be dealing with this? Who also have a completely different arsenal of resources at their disposal? And then they're splitting the smaller half of cases amongst themselves.

- *Now I would like to ask a few questions about contemporary Jewry in Germany. What do you see as the major challenges facing Jewry in Germany today?*

As the major Jewish challenge I would say *simply the vitality*. It's not just about the numbers to be found in the Community registers and building large synagogues where 2% of all registered members can go occasionally. But it's about a return to vitality, that it will be clear that there are many different Jews with many different interests, and who have something to say about many different things. Such a vitality could allow and encourage a certain creativity which will also be useful in dealing with all of the other problems.

- *Would you say that the time is ripe for a strong, new pluralism within Jewish life in Germany? Or is it still too early?*

The current Jewish pluralism, it's new in any case, the question is if it's strong. Because Jewish life in Germany itself is not strong. It can't be strong. For these reasons it's also necessary to support and also signal a greater strength than what's there, simply to fend off certain opponents. The support that comes is a little one-sided, especially in Berlin, where you have, for example, Chabad Lubavitch. Chabad Lubavitch is generally very strong. They are also viewed as authentic Judaism by many because they are very striking and picturesque to look at. But a vital Judaism is, of course, is something a little different. And Chabad Lubavitch also has a political agenda, that's clear.

- *What kind of political agenda?*

Regarding the Middle East conflict, for example. The message of Chabad is clear on this point, there should be no peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

- *But do you think this is a priority issue here, in Chabad's daily work in Germany?*

Just that I see things from the Israeli point of view, when I say left-wing, right-wing, then I usually mean the Israeli coordinates. Left-wing people support the peace process. Rabin, for example. And the other side, which is prejudiced against the peace process, includes the Chabad movement.

- *How would you personally deal with the relatively large group of self-identifying but non-Halachic Jews among the Russian speaking immigrants?*

That raises the question if it would be possible to organize a Community membership in the sense of an association member, and then a member of the religious institution. That could be two different things. In Israel there are also not just Jews. So I think this could be one possibility. Of course the possibility, or the necessity of the possibility, is also subject to debate. If you're too rigid, people will ask what do they want? People will be a bit affronted. Is this due to the giyur procedure, where the courses take place? Which kind of giyur should be valid? Is it every kind of denomination, or is it more the Orthodox? These are the questions. Maybe the Orthodox is less attractive for people, but it could also be the other way around. There's maybe the issue of freedom of choice. I would think that more flexibility is needed.

- *Do you think that the identification with Israel will remain as an important factor of collective identity in the Jewish Communities in Germany in the long run?*

I would think that it would be more likely to decrease among those who remain here. But many will leave here and go to Israel. We've got to see if the developments continue in the same way.

- *That many people are leaving Israel?*

No. Leaving here. For some Jewish people here Jewish life isn't attractive enough and of course then they'll go to Israel. And others leave for Israel because there is the closeness and vitality. For those who remain, I

presume, the close connection with Israel will become less, but that doesn't mean that they will lessen their connection to Judaism in general.

● *Do you see conflicts between some European Jewish intellectuals and current Israeli policy makers because of controversial views on how to handle the Middle East conflict?*

I assume that there will be a development of the peace process, and so that it's also to be hoped that these European intellectuals will react accordingly and support it. Sometimes a bit more and wiser deliberation is needed before opinions are shared with others. If I want to convince someone of my opinions, then I need to also be able to understand the others, and these aren't recognized, in my opinion. Attempts at persuasion are needed. Most of this strikes me as if you were trying to convert the converted. Which only increases the fanaticism and narrow-mindedness on both sides and so no communication is taking place. Already today people who call themselves pro-Israeli in the European diaspora, also in the German; they have problems with people who consider themselves critical of Israel. They are called anti-Israeli, or anti-Zionist and these groups don't even speak to each other. There's not only a gap between Israel and the diaspora, but the gap springs up within European Jewry itself. They're not speaking to each other, either.

● *To what extent do the majority of Jews living in Germany today feel that they are an integral part of German society? Do you think that this identification as Germans will increase over the next 10-20 years?*

I think it will probably decrease within the framework of the European Union, which will become stronger. All of these people will be living in the EU and it follows logically that particularly the migrants will skip some of the local patriotism. But in the sense of local patriotism, I can imagine that people who have been here for a long time do feel it somehow, regardless if they're from Kazakhstan or wherever. If they've been living in Munich for 40 years, then they'll have a relationship to Munich. But this is rather a kind of pride or identification with the area, which is more defined within a European framework. So that people will be mobile within the triangle between the Munich Community and Vienna and Prague. But something coming from the direction of Berlin or Hamburg is less interesting for them.

● *Let's switch, once more, to the Former Soviet immigrants. There were 220,000 contingent refugees and not all of them were Halachic Jews, including non-Jewish spouses and so on. But it's still surprising that only 50% have joined a Community. Things are probably not any different on the German-Jewish side. What is your explanation for this?*

There's certainly a difference between the immigrants and the veteran Jewish population. But there's also the similarity that the rigidity of the Community, the exclusiveness puts people off. And there's another point that for many, current Jewish Community life is just not particularly attractive. This affects everyone. Also among the [permanent resident] Israelis, not many of them have become members in the Community. Of course, they come sometimes to the right restaurants, events and so on. But membership in the United Community, that's low. Although for the Israelis there's also the fact that in Israel there are no Community members because there are no Community structures in the same form like there are here.

● *How would you rate the treatment of Jewish organizations and structures by German bureaucracy or authorities?*

I think the Jewish Community and the German authorities work well together. I assume that this functions well. Just everything that goes beyond this doesn't work, and Judaism also exists outside of the Community. But Judaism isn't something that only exists in the Community center or in the synagogue. Judaism is actually more of an attitude towards life, a culture. It can't be limited to these areas and that is something that German authorities have problems with. But the inner-authority level works well. There's also a common interest. No German authority wants to have it said that they do not also take good care of the delicate flower

that is Judaism in Germany at the present. They might treat individual Jews badly, but not the officially defined representatives.

- *How do you perceive the current relationship between Jews and non-Jews in Germany?*

The almost 400,000 hits on Ha Galil every month show that the interest is out there [among the non-Jewish population]. Many are looking for connections to Jews somewhere, even if they just want to meet other Jews. There are people in Munich who spend most of their time with Jews and never have been to the new Community center.

- *They feel inhibited?*

Not because they have inhibitions, but because they just have completely different interests. The center is also representation. Not least that representation of German society as Jewish-friendly.

- *You think that this is too artificial for these people?*

It is artificial in some way, yes.

- *They're avoiding official celebrations in the Jewish Communities as well?*

Yes, it's also not attractive for them. And in fact, what's going on at such political events and celebrations? Usually they begin with a long speech from the chair, which doesn't necessarily tell you anything new; word has gotten out that something terrible happened in Germany. And that's already  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the speaking time. Then you need to say that it's necessary that it never happen again, and that's the last 15 minutes. And each person only has a certain amount of time to live. You don't necessarily want to go through that more than once.

- *There you touch the well-known point of criticism that German Jewry is very busy with Holocaust remembrance and solidarity with Israel, but beyond this doesn't have a lot of its own. Wouldn't you agree that there are a lot of fresh, new, innovative projects at least in education and Jewish culture?*

Maybe so, but these are all things that are coming from outside. If something seems to question the established structures, it has to go without support by the leading bodies.

If something like Limmud has reached a certain size, then they'll open the Community center for a couple of hours. Ha Galil is a similar story. If something has a fresh impetus and continues and is successful, then it will be somehow involved. But these are all things that have come from individuals and been developed further. All of these things are moving in the direction of pluralism. That means that they were naturally *not* initiated within the established structures. I've said myself that normality and Jewish life; vitality in Germany can only exist then when Jewish initiatives are seen as Jewish initiatives in Germany, as part of German society and also the support and sponsorship is direct and not over established Jewish institutions. Today everything having to do with Judaism is first sent to the Zentralrat.

- *Have you already been active with the Limmud movement in Munich?*

No, I haven't.

- *But Ha Galil reports about it.*

Yes, of course we report about it. Limmud was not the idea of the Zentralrat, neither was the opening of the Abraham Geiger College or the establishment of a seminary for future Cantors for Europe.

The question is how could they throw a huge party celebrating the fact that Rabbis were once again being trained and ordained in Germany, which was a huge deal. As much capital was made from this as possible. These are the things that had never been initiated by the official side. These are things that have gotten so big that they can no longer be ignored. First things are blocked. And some things have been destroyed. It doesn't matter if you've got a good plan, some things you can't really begin. The point is you need to be persistent and continue and make new plans a side from established institutions.

- *What is your impression of the Jewish media in Germany in general and how is it developing?*

Jewish media in Germany and how it develops is mostly in the Internet. That's where new things are happening. Otherwise, there are plans to do something in other forms of media; radio, TV. These are more or less, well, less successful. Then there were attempts to establish a print newspaper and that seems also not to have been so successful. Then there's the official central organ [Jewish weekly "Jüdische Allgemeine", published by the Central Council of Jews in Germany]. I don't really know exactly what you mean by Jewish media.

- *I just mean the different Jewish media, as it exists in Germany nowadays.*

It's growing, taken objectively, it's growing however you look at it. But where is it growing? Toward a brand name like Jüdisches Leben in Central Europe? Then every little thing is a miracle. If you have two papers, then that's a fantastic accomplishment, after only having the central organ for 60 years. That they couldn't last long, well, there are probably several reasons for that. I think the fact that there is a central paper also has something to do with it, the fact that they had difficulties. That's what I mean with the problem of only support for the established, which hampers vitality even more. Thus, it would be nice to reach a point where there can be some, independent competition.

- *The demand for communication inside and outside the JCs is growing, isn't it?*

In the Community the main thing is getting the bulletin together, making sure the people who attend synagogue have a version in the language they need, that there are some yarmulkes around. In larger Communities they might need an old people's home or a kindergarten. Each Community does this for itself. Anti-Semitism or Jewish education, which I feel to be closely connected, the more knowledge about Judaism that can be spread, the more immune people will be to anti-Semitic clichés and propaganda. You can't spread the same pack of lies to everyone, for example, about kosher butchering, when people actually know what you're talking about. That's why knowledge is what can protect people against all of this demagoguery and inflammatory propaganda. There's a close connection. The main thing, of course, is Jewish education, which is a value in and of itself. It's useful to those who have it because they are enriched. However, mostly in the area of discourse, Judaism lives from debates. The Talmud is nothing but a protocol of an enormously long debate. The big conflict was about the writing it all down, the oral Torah, because it was forbidden to copy it because things become set after having been written down. The written word carried more weight than the spoken word. On principle, this debate has to continue, also using the medium of the Internet, which easily lends itself to open debate.

## 9. MIKHAIL GOLDBERG

May 6, 2009, Berlin

● *Mr. Goldberg what do you think are the perspectives for Jewry in Germany in both the near future and also in the long run?*

In the near future I don't see any big changes, everything will continue like it is. There's no more, or hardly an influx of new members. The Communities are relatively old, the membership numbers will go down, but I think the Communities will also survive over the next decades. It's difficult to say what the other perspectives will be like. It always depends on how Community life is organized. If things continue like they are now, I would say the interest will dwindle if nothing changes. When they try to change something, and connect with the young and active people in the Community and have them participate, then I could imagine that the level would stabilize at a somewhat lower level and then develop further from this level. But there needs to be active steps taken for this to happen and can't continue how it is today, just a conservation of the present situation.

● *Do you see the 2005 government decision to restrict Russian Jewish immigration to Germany solvent, German-speaking, and Halachic RSJ immigrants as a real obstacle for the development of future Jewish life in Germany?*

No, I don't think it's that strict. I think the problem is less the Halachic Judaism criteria, although there are a lot of strange things that have happened regarding this; in our last issue we had a story about how even progressive Jews had tried to block entry for some, but I think also language hurdles play a large role here.

● *Now there are almost less Jews coming now to Germany than to America. Maybe 1,000 per year, compared with about 19,000 in 2003.*

I would wait and see what the statistics say about this year, because the small number is due partly to these restrictions and also partly due to the fact that some areas in the former Soviet Union have been enjoying a more or less prosperous economy in the last few years.

● *Do you think people just want to wait it out?*

What will happen maybe this year, there may be more people who would like to come to Germany, but it takes a few years because of the bureaucracy. The statistics from 2010, 2011 will be a more reliable indicator if the new regulations will have lasting effects.

● *Are there generational differences when it comes to interest in Community involvement?*

Yes, of course there are differences. Particularly for older, Russian-speaking people in small towns, the Community is the only place where they can meet, communicate with others, and have something to do. In big cities, there are other possibilities, of course. About the very young I wouldn't primarily speak of their interest, but of their parents, if they want to form a connection between their children and the Community or not and that's the main problem. The middle aged, if they aren't particularly religious themselves, or had been integrated into the Community as a child, then I don't think many will create a bond between their children and the Community. Whatever steps which could facilitate this like good schools, holiday camps, opportunities to meet in the Community, these are needed. At some point the child will want to stay with it; but then after a few years, the kids don't come back.



- *Is the percentage of young people who are interested in Community life significantly higher or lower than among older people or the middle aged?*

That's a difficult question. Let's take, for example, my niece. She's 15 and has been in the Community for 6 years already. She and her friends are interested. They go to religious lessons and so on. But this interest must be stimulated somehow, because after two-three years of religious lessons, it starts to get boring for a child. You need something else, maybe a few group vacation trips, but what else? And that's why if there were a program that lasted for many years, which began when the child was 5 years old and ended in the Community when they were 25, then I would imagine that half of these young people would stick with it. They would have made friends and acquaintances and so on. Then the Community would also be popular.

That's one thing. Another is that the Communities that do good work with young people do so separately from other kinds of activities. There's no interaction with the older generation. Things go in two or three directions. There are no connections there and that's missing.

- *What do you see as the biggest challenge facing Jews today in Germany?*

Judaism itself, or the people in this group. Because Judaism in Germany is very heterogeneous; the different groups have different interests and abilities and customs and not necessarily the debating style needed to be able to solve problems amicably. Secondly, due to the state financing, the effect has been created that German Jewry is delicate and vulnerable.

- *Delicate and vulnerable?*

So to speak. The Communities which have to organize their own Community lives are a bit immune to small problems. The Jewish Communities in Germany don't have this. They either get money from some source, and then they use it as they please. When they don't get any money then they don't function. When they don't get enough money then they don't pay what's really necessary for the Community, but spend money on things that aren't that necessary.

- *So the Jewry here has to sort itself out first?*

Yes, of course.

- *Are there particular qualities about Jews in Germany, as opposed to Jews in France, or Holland?*

I don't know Communities in other countries, so I can't compare. The only thing I can say is that when people come from other countries and we're speaking about the Community it'll come up that some person was not accepted into the Community. People can't understand that. That's why this regulation of Community life in Germany is a unique characteristic.

- *Are you talking about the regulation demanding that new Jewish immigrants be Jewish according to Halachic law?*

No, that of course, is understandable, but I mean that someone comes to the Berlin Community and wants to join and has to fill out thousands of forms and prove all of these things. People from the USA or Holland come and think it's ridiculous. In the USA if someone comes and says they want to become a member, they're welcomed immediately and here they're kept out by guards and then screened.

- *How would you describe the current relations between Russian-speaking and German-speaking Jews in Germany?*

That's too general. It's different in every Community. I know the Community in Hagen, for example, where the relations are very good. When I first came to Hagen in 1994, there was a lot of help from German-speakers. They helped in everything from registering with the authorities to looking for an apartment. There are also Communities where it's different, but doesn't just have to do with the Community, but also with the people.

- *How would you describe the current relations between the secular and observant Jews in Germany?*

Sometimes there are confrontations, but these don't have anything to do with religiousness, but a lack of tolerance on both sides.

- *Both sides?*

Both sides, although I personally feel that the religious people are more intolerant than the non-religious. But that's my personal opinion.

- *Do you think that this will have an effect on the long-term development in the Community?*

Yes, a bad one.

- *Can anything be done?*

You can do a lot, but this involves a wide range of questions. It starts with *who or what is a Jew*, because for Russian-speaking Jews, it's not just about religion, but it's also an ethnic question. For German-speaking Jews it's just about religion. So there's no common basis.

- *Some voices are talking about a new pluralism of Jewish life in Germany. Do you share this view? And if so, what are the most essential components of this new German-Jewish pluralism?*

I partially share this view. First, what do you mean with new? Relating to pre-war conditions? Then the answer is yes. In post-war Germany, as far as I understand, there was no pluralism. It's starting to develop now in parts, but these beginnings are very weak, and of course progressive Judaism is a part of this pluralism, although they're also now under the aegis of the Zentralrat (Central Council of Jews in Germany).

- *But not all of them are involved with the Central Council, are they?*

Well, that will happen sometime. As long as there is a standardized method of financing which is tied to being a member of the Zentralrat, and as long as the German state remains uninvolved in this and does not start looking at this in a new way, then nothing will change. There were articles in the *Jüdische Zeitung* that said we know and we feel that there needs to be other opinions expressed.

- *You mean the German language Jüdische Zeitung?*

Yes, I'm speaking about the German language *Jüdische Zeitung*. But there is no real competition on the market due to the state subsidies; and that means that there won't be pluralism.

- *How significant is Israel for Jewish life in Germany today? Do you think that the connection to Israel getting weaker or stronger?*

Israel is important. I can't say whether its importance is becoming weaker or stronger here. I think it's always been important and it's remained important. Recently there are new nuances have been added due to all of the various military activities and social opinion, but in general I'd call it an identification point. There is a lot of room for improvement in the way Israeli politics presents itself in the media.

- *You mean the image Israel presents of itself? Its own PR needs to improve?*

Yes.

- *There's a distortion? We're talking about mainstream media, here in Germany.*

The media reflects what happens in the world, and they also build opinion. I recently read a politician's answer to the question why does Israel always lose the media war, who said that they have only one embassy in every country and the Muslim countries have 60, so that's why they are destined to lose. If you say you're destined to lose, you will. If they tried to do something about it, something active and not just knuckle under and not let anyone in the embassy; whenever you try to get something out of the Israeli embassy, they refuse. Also Israel itself needs to have a better information policy. There are correspondents who find things out and report them, but the official reports are such that no one knows what to do with them, they're too ideological. That's why I will repeat that if Israel wants to achieve something here, then it should think about having its own press agencies all over the world. It's not enough to have Ha'aretz and Maariv in Israel to be quoted all over the world. They need a means to transport media.

- *How could that work concretely? Do you mean that Israelis should take part in German newspapers?*

Why not? It wouldn't function with established newspapers. They wouldn't take to having some Israeli government friendly agency. I don't mean to advertise my own paper, but the Jüdische Zeitung here in Germany has some Israeli backing and could do more to bring Israel here.

- *To what extent do Jews here see themselves as part of the global Jewish Community? As part of a large Diaspora?*

I think we need to separate that into two parts. Theoretically, emotionally, yes. When you're dealing with practical details, then the differentiation begins. Not all Jews who identify with Israel identify with everything that happens in Israel and we in the Evreyskaya Gazeta sometimes write about the incorrect things that are going on in Israel just like in every other country, where these things happen, too. Identification and agreeing with concrete events are two different things.

- *How close are, in your opinion, the ties between the immigrant Jews and their country of origin?*

Very close.

- *So it doesn't matter if they're from Kazakhstan or the Baltic states?*

Everyone has relatives, friends, acquaintances there, they're still interested in what happens there. *They fly there and travel back and forth.* They watch the local TV all day long, they read the papers, not just the ones that appear here in Germany, but also on the Internet.

- *To what extent do the majority of Jews feel that they are a part of German society and the German nation? And if this kind of feeling does exist in the majority or minority, how will it develop in the future?*

At the moment, I think such a feeling exists only among a minority. It will develop positively as the younger generation which is growing up here and getting this feeling of *being German*. Everyone is different, but just the feeling of being at home here is developing.

- *You are strongly involved in Jewish networks in Germany. What are your main motivations to do so?*

Firstly, I'm not a religious person, but I am interested in Judaism. Secondly, I saw the possibility to more or less help a particular group of people in everything; in finding themselves, integration or their personal problems.

- *What are the most important elements of contemporary Judaism today?*

It's the cultural and historical aspects of Judaism and *the feeling of belonging*.

- *Please describe major attitudes among Jews in Germany concerning issues like:*
  - *community services / programs*
  - *community involvement*
  - *educational interests*

I would say that the question is too general, I can't say. If the program is interesting, modern and well-made, then it's well-received. If it's offered by unqualified people then it's not well-received. When the Communities try to offer programs and services that don't have a lot to do with their actual Community activities, then it's as a rule done very badly and won't really be accepted. So everything that's meant well and done well is also broadly accepted.

In Berlin there are positive experiences and negative experiences. It depends on what the goal is when you're doing something. For example, the integration department in the Community had offered dance evenings for older people. Yes, of course you can see that as an integration measure, but it's really just an inflationary use of the term.

- *Do you think that there are enough educational programs?*

When we're talking about Berlin, then there are even too many and there are very many things that are offered twice, that overlap; there's no well thought out system. If you take *jüdisches Berlin*<sup>9</sup> and look at the calendar and see how many lectures about the history of Judaism take place every week, there are at least 10 lectures at different places on completely different topics. And this could be good *pluralism* but it's just the same thing. For example, at Passover there are 10 lectures about Passover and all 10 are mediocre. And 5 - 50 people come to each one.

- *Could you assess the existing Jewish educational programs in Germany according to their strengths and weaknesses?*

I haven't explicitly dealt with these, but I know that if someone feels the need for this, then they always have many opportunities, as there's a lot on offer for every different educational level and religious outlook. You can get what you need.

- *How well developed is volunteer work?*

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<sup>9</sup> The Jewish Community Journal of the JC Berlin (also a monthly).

Very poorly. People might be willing if you a) approached them and explained why it's needed and b) if it's really appropriate. When the board says that it needs volunteers for this or that, but people know very well that there are five paid employees who are sitting around doing nothing, then it's not so good. When a Community hardly has any resources, then I have seen where the people understand that and a lot is done. In the Berlin Community with 380 employees, it's a little unbelievable.

It's also important to explain to people that this work is meaningful. I know lots of examples where, for example, senior groups were created in the Community working only on a volunteer basis, and they were very active and this was interesting for people. But if someone does something just to make a report and says they need a volunteer for this, then it's really hard to find someone.

- *What do you think are the most urgent measures needed to improve Jewish immigrants' integration into Jewish Communities in Germany?*

I can't really do much with the phrase integration into Jewish Communities.

The biggest problem when talking about integration and what the federal government considers to be integration is that no one has a clear idea of what exactly they're talking about. *How can you integrate 90% into 10%?*

- *What would be necessary to motivate the migrants to commit to the existing structures, ie the Communities and a few other organizations?*

I don't think you can control that from above. This is possible in the Communities when the leadership has the right quality to work not for themselves, but for the Community. When the Community board and chair have the Community's interest at heart and not their own, then they can also motivate people to get active. If the board is just thinking about itself, and tries to exclude all others from participating or sharing, whether it be money or information or whatever, then of course it won't work. Then there's dissatisfaction, squabbling. If everything, and this works particularly well in small Communities, when everything is discussed and it's not always the same people in control and the Community chair tries to have someone new take over each project, then it slowly starts to work. Another difficulty is the idea behind what Mr. Kramer<sup>10</sup> meant when he said that the Russian Jews aren't far enough along to be leaders. However, we have lots of examples to show this is wrong; for example, the Community in Bochum.

- *Many Jews in Germany keep their distance to the Jewish Communities and organizations. What are the main reasons for this? And what can be done to change this situation?*

I think you don't need to ask why they keep their distance, but rather why they should go to the Community. The question is what does the Jewish Community do for me? I can go to the synagogue without being a member of the Community, and if the Community doesn't offer me more than the synagogue, then I don't need it.

- *Do you think that it's possible to build up Communities without state funding?*

That's one possibility. The numbers and the emotions say very different things. According to the numbers, we're not even 200,000 and only a tenth would pay if we're lucky, but emotionally speaking these people will have a feeling of belonging and these people would come to the Communities. They would want it and work for it.

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<sup>10</sup> General Secretary of the Central Council of Jews in Germany,

- *What is your experience with the reactions and attitudes of non-Jewish German authorities, politicians and groups regarding Jewish life today and developments in Jewish life in Germany?*

That's a difficult question. For politicians and authorities in Germany, Jews are on the one hand untouchables and on the other alibi Jews. The federal government has their alibi organization and is funding the Zentralrat. In fact for the federal government everything Jewish is limited to the Zentralrat, and it's the same at the state or city level. There's no real contact. There are a few organizations and the Christian-Jewish cooperation groups, but that's relatively limited. Otherwise, I don't see any real interest from politics other than the occasional symbolic act.

- *How would you describe the general attitude from the side of the non-Jewish population?*

Either disinterest or negative interest. Naturally, as the Jüdische Zeitung reports, there's also positive interest among church people, educational leaders, but this is the minority.

- *What do you think about the German media coverage of events that relate to the development of Jewish life in Germany?*

Very one-sided. Either they report about the holidays and high holy days or if someone's involved in a scandal, and this scandal will be more or less covered and not always competently, but ok. Only very rarely will there be any correct research when reporting about the content of Community life. In the best case the Community chair has been spoken to, and the official view is taken, but only rarely do they try to get to the bottom of the story. And that's also understandable, because it's not really of the utmost importance for the majority of readers, but really competent reporting is rare.

- *How is global Jewish life covered in the non-Jewish German media?*

It depends who's writing. It always depends.

- *How is Israel covered in the non-Jewish German media?*

That depends even more on who's writing, because there are people who try to do it well and more or less objective, *Ulrich Sahn*<sup>11</sup> for example.

However, there are also a lot of clichés in the German media. You could see this clearly in the last few months as everyone in the German media used these clichés about Lieberman and no one bothered to read his speeches before they tore them apart. One said that he's racist and all the German reporters repeated this. Is he racist? No, not really. Populist? Well, every politician is a populist, this isn't anything new. But until now Lieberman hasn't said anything against what is in the documents ratified by Israel. Israel did not sign any documents in Annapolis, so he doesn't need to take this into consideration.

- *What do you think of the development of Jewish media in Germany?*

There is no independent Jewish media in Germany now. *No chance*. It would be really, really difficult. The Jüdische Zeitung showed that the interest is there to be competitive, but especially in these times of economic crisis, if only one paper will be supported by the Zentralrat which gives a lot of money to a rag like Zukunft<sup>12</sup>, which translates three-week old articles from the Community, you can't talk about real competition.

- *What do you think of having a Jewish TV channel in Germany, like they have in France?*

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<sup>11</sup> Prominent German correspondent for several newspapers, radio and TV stations, working in Jerusalem.

<sup>12</sup> Small journal of the Central Council of Jews in Germany

This would only be possible with state support and the state doesn't need it, because such programs couldn't finance themselves because the target group is uninteresting for the advertisers. So, it would only be possible through large donations, which won't work, or through official channels and then there would have to be a political will for that, and that won't happen, because then the Turks and Kurds and other minority groups would come and demand the same. The only thing that could work, which is already working to some extent is a multi-cultural religious program where Jewish themes appear occasionally.

● *What are the principal Jewish structures in Germany today? How far does the synagogue hold the major role and how far are educational structures central institutions?*

The synagogues have never played the main role. In the 15 years I've been in Germany, I've never seen the synagogue as the main institution of the Community.

● *So there are there equivalent places and institutions?*

That's the problem with German Jewry, that the synagogue just plays a supporting role in the Community. Aside from the fact that not every Community has a synagogue; even those with a synagogue, the synagogue doesn't play the main role. Russian-speaking Jews are the majority in many Communities, and for them Jewishness is not just about religion, but everything that's connected to it. So on the one hand, the Rabbis in Germany are not doing enough to make the synagogues the center of Jewish life. That's a big problem in Germany in my opinion. They're making two or three mistakes. First, there are too few Rabbis from here who understand this milieu, what's going on here. The role of the Rabbi in Germany is pretty miserable. They're completely normal employees who don't dare say anything that the chair wouldn't like and when the Community members come and want to discuss things in the Community the Rabbis don't like to talk about it because the next day the chair will know about it and the day after the Rabbi will be fired. Therefore you can't demand from these Rabbis that they make the synagogue the central place in the Community. No Rabbi will get involved in a conflict between a member and the chair. They won't offer a rabbinical opinion out of fear. Therefore the institutionalization of Jewish life in Germany is one of the biggest problems. On the one hand, there's the Zentralrat, which represents Jewry, which isn't the case actually, as the Zentralrat is a strange construct. It's neither a lobbyist, which all interest groups have, nor a regulatory body. It's the people who most of all propagate their self-interests, comment on every event in this world, often inappropriately, just because the media and politics need the right words and the right time. Therefore the Jewish Communities either need real structures or they should be completely independent and each Community should live as it wants to, without the stipulation that you'll only get money if you're a member of the Zentralrat.

● *Thus, at the moment you don't see educational institutions within Judaism in Germany that could be just as important as the synagogue?*

I think only interpersonal contact can be that important. To help develop Jewish education in Germany, you can use existing Jewish media, primarily Russian-speaking, because there the need for education is the greatest, also to regularly transport content. For example, to have one or two pages regularly devoted to educational topics and articles.

## 10. JOHANNES HEIL

**June 8, 2009, Heidelberg**

● *Prof. Heil, what do you consider the current major challenges/difficulties facing the Jewish Communities and organizations in Germany?*

As you know the majority of Jewish Communities consist of a Russian speaking majority now, most of them immigrants from the former Soviet Union who came here during the 1990's. A part of them has a very strong religious consciousness, but a huge number of them have lost all contact to the Jewish religion and tradition during Soviet times. The basics have to be imparted to create a European Jewish identity in the Community. It is important to have qualified personnel on the local level in order to form stable Jewish Communities, and first of all to find a way how to involve more young Jewish people.

● *Do you see generation specific problems or difficulties?*

At my visits to the local Jewish Community of Heidelberg, I see that a lot of elderly people are frequenting the synagogue and the events on offer. I also note that the middle age group, let's say those in their 40's and 50's, are almost not present. There are a lot of reasons for this. Some of them seem really unable to join Community events, because they are too busy with finding jobs, or further vocational training. So the crucial question is what about third group, the youth? No doubt, there is a high potential, and it is one of the biggest challenges to create programs that attract the young people and motivate them for commitment.

● *How would you describe the current relations between German Jewish veterans and Russian speaking immigrants?*

Well, history normally does not repeat itself. But what the Jewish Communities are undergoing is just a kind of repetition. Immediately after World War II a few German Jews came back to their former places of residence; some had survived there, having been hidden. However, a majority in the newly founded Communities were Jewish displaced persons from Eastern Europe. So, what you call the "German veterans" are these who are trying now to integrate the recent influx from Eastern Europe, especially from the former USSR. These veterans had their own immigrant experiences a few decades ago. So there might be misunderstandings, some language or other barriers, but the immigration experience is something that many on both sides have in common. I am optimistic in this regard, I think that can also connect.

● *Some voices are talking about a new pluralism of Jewish life in Germany. Do you share this view? And if so, what are the most essential components of this new German Jewish pluralism?*

It's not that easy to answer this question. Yes, I would say, there is Jewish pluralism now in Germany at some places within the Einheitsgemeinde [United Community], and at some places by detached, distinct communities and institutions. I think this is a quite normal process. But it's hard to predict where it will lead. There is much variety in the about 100 Jewish Communities in Germany, cultural differentiations, religious differentiation, different Minyanim, and why shouldn't that be? All congregations have their impacts, it's a normal process.

● *The United Communities have understood themselves as being more or less Orthodox. Now there are strong impacts by the Liberals and also by the Conservatives/Masorti. Do you see chances for a vibrant development for all of these congregations?*



Yes, I see it in the bigger Communities, but not in small Communities with 300-400 members. The small ones have to find out for themselves how to deal with these different opportunities, and it will depend on the willingness of the respective majorities there, regardless whether Orthodox, or Masorti, or Reform. Concerning the bigger cities, not all of them will have different synagogues and Communities, and I think this is also not necessary. If there is a huge synagogue like the Westend Synagogue in Frankfurt which has different places for prayer, then of course, this is the right place to create plurality and to try it.

● *Israel has been a central element of collective identity in the Jewish Communities of Germany during the last decades. Do you think that will continue in the future, more or less on the same level?*

It's hard to say on what level this will continue. Of course, Jewish solidarity with Israel, and lots of individual experiences with the country, kinship bonds, all these are very important elements in Community life. Also from the outside world, Jewish Communities are very often identified by their connections with Israel. However, I do not think, that the connection with Israel has been the only central element in Jewish identity in recent decades. There has been a much broader spectrum of elements that all together have formed Jewish identity in Germany. During the last two decades the membership of the Jewish Communities has grown enormously and this gives space for more and different constitutions of identities. Israel will always remain an important part of identity and Community life, just due to history. Because this is the place where Jews have been living all the time, and where the Shoah survivors found a haven. I'm sure this will also be a major factor of determining the experiences of Jewish Communities in 100 years. There will be several other elements besides this with growing importance.

● *You have been the prorector of the University of Jewish Studies in Heidelberg for two years. What is your general experience with German officials, and how do you see this on the general German level?*

Well, we have full support by the federal government, the local government and the University of Heidelberg. Some have the impression that the official policy is simply to provide financial support in an attempt to try and repair what happened to the Jews in Germany in recent history, at least to repair symbolically, and that they would actually not intend to do that much. On the other hand, there seems to be a kind of conviction that our university can give something back, not only to the narrow issues of Jewish Communities and towards Jewish and non-Jewish religious forums, but also to play an important role in social, political and cultural life. I would say they even expect us to give something back with all the credits of this institution. Not only to Jewish places, but also to museums, the media, conferences, making an impact on the non-Jewish environment as well. The concept of the university fits the bill and there's still a majority of non-Jewish students here.

● *What are the current proportions?*

The share of Jewish students has grown during the last few years but it has still not yet reached 50 percent. And not all of the non-Jewish students are Christians. We have a lot of students here who are without any religious affiliation, especially among those from East Germany, and there are also students with a Muslim background. So you see, our university is definitely not fixed on a Jewish microcosm.

● *What are the proportions between Jewish students originally from Germany and Jewish students with migration background?*

It's rather a question how you want to define it. For example, we have many Jewish students here who came with their families from another country but who have been living here for a long time. We can even say they're already a new generation of Jewish students. All in all, we have 14 different nationalities here among our students. There are also a few Israelis; we have students from China and Egypt. I have doctorate students

from Tunisia, and there are Americans. The majority of the *Jewish* students come from Eastern Europe and has a Russian speaking background. However, many of them received their schooling in Germany.

- *How is the funding of the University split?*

The funding is shared by the federal government of Germany and by the Central Council of Jews in Germany [Zentralrat].

- *So, if the Central Council provides part of the funding, I imagine that there's at least a certain interest for educating some of the Jewish students as professionals for future Jewish Community work.*

Generally, we welcome each student who is going to study at our university. Of course, then there's the question about what to do with the degree in one's future professional life. And here we have two major directions. One group of the graduates tries to enter the field of research, and the other group is prepared for professional work in the Jewish Communities. I can't say that all of the Jewish students direct themselves to the Community oriented programs. Some of them are more motivated for research. And, indeed, we feel obliged to fulfill this role as well, to be a competence center of Jewish studies in Europe, if not *the* competence center in Jewish studies in Europe, and that means also being expected to provide a major contribution to international academic life and the scientific world

- *What about the graduates who go on to work in a Jewish Community, what kind of positions are they in?*

They're working as teachers, community workers, administration and in the future maybe also as Rabbis. Aside from this we have also a program component for Chasanut, so there are different possibilities inside the same program. Teachers, Chasanim and future Community administration workers all get a basic religious education, an academic religious education but also on specific Community oriented issues. For example, those who're aiming for a future Community administration job are then provided with classes in accounting and public law as well, but these are logically not subjects for those students who aim to start a research career.

- *The students who prefer research world, what do they tend to go into?*

It's up to them and to our program, of course. Some fields where we combine lecturing and research are, for example, Jewish history, Bible studies, Talmud, art history, or Israeli literature, just to mention a few.

- *Does the university also offer programs for the non-Jewish public outside the university? I mean here in Heidelberg, or workshops and seminars at other places in Germany?*

We encourage people to take part at our programs as guest auditors, and we take part in programs of other congress centers and academies. But we do not organize our own conferences and workshops *outside* of Heidelberg. Maybe that's something for the future.

- *Are there any possibilities to strengthen the bonds with organized Jewish life in Heidelberg and beyond?*

Of course there are. For example, since last year the university has had its own Rabbi, Rabbi Shaul Friberg. And our Rabbi is making contacts with the people outside the university as well. He is visiting Communities, contacting youth centers, giving lectures. And this is also very good for motivating more young Jewish people to enroll here at our university. When the Communities support young people in their decision to study at the university, this can be fruitful for them as well in the long run.

- *What the perspectives for somebody who wants to enroll at the university but wants to become a Rabbi in the long run?*

It's theoretically possible, and if potential rabbinical students come to enroll here, we welcome them. However, the Bologna Reforms for European Universities do not allow the extension of formal study time beyond five years. But as you know, rabbinical students need as part of their special education a component called "traditional learning". That includes the attendance of a yeshiva, no matter what congregation-, and this for one or two years. Thus, students who want to study here at our university, they can take the full program of Jewish studies here, then go for one year to a Yeshiva in Israel or the US or certain other countries, and then they can return and get the Smicha here from one of our rabbinical partner institutions. That's possible.

- *How many students are currently studying at the university, and how many people are on the staff?*

At the moment, there are about 150 students. The university has eight different chairs. Aside from this we are permanently working with 15 teachers and about five lecturers, the latter, for example, to guarantee a high quality *and quantity* of Hebrew language teaching. Of course, you have to add the university Rabbi and a few clerks in administration.

- *This year, the university is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary?*

Yes, that's right

- *What would you say was the biggest achievement during the last decade?*

There were strong efforts to get stability in the staff, to win high profile teachers not only for one or two years of guest lectureship, but also for the long term. In general, we succeeded in this. Now there is much more stability in the staff.

- *What would you say is missing most in the current educational programs on offer by the Jewish Communities across Germany?*

I would prefer to answer in general, because even in the biggest Communities there will always be always some programs someone will find missing. What immediately comes to mind is that the complete Jewish adult education has to be restructured. For example, Jewish students are coming to us in greater numbers dealing with totally different issues in their lives and profession, but just taking classes as guest auditors at our university, and this shows us that there is a real demand. We also need online programs, further education programs for Community board members, more ideas how to inspire Jewish learning. In this context I really hope that we will soon be able, in cooperation with other institutions, to build up a Jewish Academy, and this would be a great step forward in improving Jewish education especially for adults.

We have lots of topics and programs here that could be provided to a wider public, transformed to a more popular level, and exactly this is the task of the Jüdische Volkshochschule (public adult educational center), and, hopefully soon, also of a Jewish Academy. I feel there are great attempts in this direction now, and do not forget, for example, the program that was established [in 2007] in Erfurt which is designed for Jewish social workers who are already employed by the Communities but get now in-depth professional training for their work and how to impart more Jewishness to their clients as well. To sum, there are a lot of good ideas and activities throughout Germany, but it needs to be a bit more structured and systemized in close connection with the Communities.

- *This new idea of a Jewish Academy in Germany, your university supports it without reserve?*

Yes, why not? I think we are past the times where we thought in terms of concurrence. There is plurality now. There are different Jewish interests and different needs, and the more necessary things we can now develop in cooperation with one another. There is no single institution that would be able to cover all the new educational demands. I want to emphasize that *we* are not a rabbinical seminary, our profile includes Community orientation on the one hand, and research orientation on the other. Other centers and institutions do it differently, with their own focus and demands, and thus it makes a lot of sense to cooperate. So, I am optimistic that we can complete each other and provide real variety in the future.

● *What is your impression concerning the Jewish media in Germany today? Is there enough structure and opportunity, and is there enough pluralism in the contents?*

I think what we have in the moment seems to be enough. I would like to see more, but when I see that a Jewish monthly has just come to an end, then it's clear that the Jewish media market is rather limited in Germany.

Of course, I would enjoy if there would be a Liberal journal, and a Conservative one, and a culturally oriented, whatever, but just now this is a kind of utopia. However, more online forums could widen the spectrum of opinion and communication and I guess it's cheaper than building up new print media projects. Admittedly there could be more, and it would be enjoyable, but I wouldn't say it's a major lack or a major problem of the German Jewish communities today.

It's also thinkable that Jewish issues and topics could be a bit more present in German public radio. You know, there are these short ten-minute programs on some public radio stations on Friday night, like "Shabbat Shalom" and others. However, the public broadcasts are not that popular in the wider public; the commercial stations are more popular. But some popular public radio stations have implemented short transmissions of five minutes in their morning programs filled by Catholic or Protestant personalities, giving a short comment or short prayer, whatever. Why shouldn't Jews or Muslims have such five-minutes-programs, too? It shouldn't be strictly confessional or dogmatic issues, but having reflections and joint social experiences from a Christian, Muslim or Jewish perspective would reflect the plurality of our society. I think that could be a good opportunity, and it should be applied or discussed at the administration boards of these public TV or radio channels. In my opinion, even such small contributions, like in a public radio morning program, could help to create a bit more normality in the relations between Jews and non-Jews, instead of covering the Jewish topic *only* in the context of November 8th/9th (Night of the Broken Glasses) or January 27<sup>th</sup> (Holocaust Memorial Day) or just when something happens in Israel.

● *How would you assess the non-Jewish media coverage of the Middle East conflict, I mean in the German mainstream media?*

In recent times I've gotten the impression that the mainstream media tries to differentiate more in reports concerning the conflict. More than they used to, when the reports could be really unfriendly towards Israel, without understanding the situation. For example, during the Gaza War in January [2009], I had the impression that there was more sophisticated coverage than before, and not condemning just one side.

● *My last questions go back once more to the university. Can you say something about future plans? If I'm right, a new building will be finished yet this year?*

Yes, and it has to be filled. It's not only material progress and modernization. Let me mention intensified cooperation with several universities abroad, and here especially in the form of student exchange programs with the Ben Gurion University in Beer Sheva and with the University of Graz, but also with other institutions in Europe and in America, which enables a *joint network Masters program*. Such a network permits students to go from one university to the other, but still remain based in Heidelberg. However, such goals require a lot of energy and preparatory work at the end of the day.

Now we are also in talks with the University of Heidelberg about a credit school which focuses on relations between Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

- *As a kind of comparative religion department?*

No, they will remain separate institutions. But somewhere we have to take note of the fact that almost 10-15 percent of our students are studying a combination of Jewish Studies and Islamic Studies. By the way, most of the students with this combination are *not* Jews and not Muslims. Such a school would be part of the University of Heidelberg, and it would provide new approaches for everyone who participates, but it also means a lot of preparatory work before it can be established.

However, there are also ideas to develop the University of Jewish Studies much more as a place where Jewish students find their center and their opportunities even when they are not enrolled here. We think its time to establish a Jewish kindergarten here in the old city for all the Jewish parents studying or living in Heidelberg. We have a kosher kitchen here, a kosher cafeteria, a university Rabbi, and a good Jewish background in general. This could be the basis for starting a Hillel Student Center here, maybe reaching the people in the wider Main-Neckar-area from Heidelberg to Karlsruhe and Darmstadt.

## 11. WALTER HOMOLKA

May 28 2009, Berlin

● *Prof. Homolka, as a leading rabbi in Germany and as the rector of the Abraham Geiger College at Potsdam University, where do you see the greatest difficulties or greatest challenges for Jewry in Germany today?*

I think the single most difficult issue is will we be able to offer a meaningful explanation to all those who have immigrated to Germany why they should associate with the Jewish Community? The primary initiative was social. People needed help to set up housing and to find a job and maybe also to mingle with other immigrants, but that, of course, cannot continue to be a positive stimulus of identity for the next couple of years. So we are already very late in providing a meaningful framework for the next generation that will lead second generation immigrants to becoming more engaged in Jewish Communities, and not only for social reasons, but also for religious or educational reasons.

I think a part of the solution is the rabbinical seminary [Abraham Geiger College, O.G.], because, of course, you need change agents in the congregation, professionals that can develop Jewish identity from the perspective of our tradition and maybe offer a stimulus for such an identity in a contemporary fashion. We have experienced that the cantorial program at the college has been particularly helpful because not many immigrants see themselves immediately as a rabbi, which can also be explained by a certain lack of role models. But many candidates are musically inclined, and therefore we have a real run on the cantorial program. Both rabbinical and cantorial tracks provide professionals that will be able to serve as change agents in Jewish congregations and communities.

The third aspect is the 'Ernst-Ludwig-Ehrlich-Studienwerk' [scholarship foundation]. We are in the fortunate situation to be able to organize an institution that looks after young secondary school graduates who are likely to become the lay leaders of Jewish Communities in the future. We can provide them with the incentive of a scholarship; in return they will have to attend Jewish programs, e.g. summer academies. They will be challenged by interesting people and projects in which they can evolve. I hope that through this incentive mechanism the scholarship holders will identify more closely with Jewish thought.

Our hope is that in time we will be able to say that not only have we done something for Jewish religious leaders, but that we will also have done something to develop Jewish lay leaders. I think that is the single most important issue, involving immigrants in a Jewish Community that is not only a social center.

● *How do you define the next generation or the new generation? Would you say they are those who are now student age?*

Yes. I am regularly assessing candidates for the German National Scholarship Foundation, and in the selection seminars of this institution, I see that there is a large number of high achievers among second-generation immigrants. In the first generation we still had such cases of immigrants who had been professors in their home country and were now parking lot attendants in Germany because their credentials are not valid here, or they cannot find a job that suits their academic background. But the next generation is really trying to make it in this country. Therefore, I think we have a high potential, much higher than, for example, Russians of German origin who usually don't make it that easily here – and we have this large group of achievers. But many of the parents in our immigrants' families are also receiving social benefits. This makes it very difficult for children who want to pursue academic studies. If, however, we can develop a mechanism that gives these children a scholarship dependent on the income of the parents, I'm pretty sure that we can offer a necessary step that will make sure that these children are actually getting into the qualified jobs that they aspire to.

- *At least probably for those who are going to run for A-list studies. And not the studies you can get with Bafög [regular national scholarship for German students].*

Yes, but you have to repay Bafög, and naturally scholarship holders will not have to repay the scholarship from the Ernst-Ludwig-Ehrlich-Studienwerk. Also, with government loans such as Bafög, students don't get the ideal support that they receive from us. We also pay book money each month in addition to our basic financial support. Even if you have enough money and your parents have enough money, you still get the summer academies and programs, and you get 80€ to spend on books every month. Now, I'm not saying this is absolutely wonderful and that this alone is sufficient, but what I am saying is that a scholarship program like ours is a valuable incentive.

So, I think especially since the scholarships are predominantly financed by the government, it would be foolish not to use them as catalysts to make sure that second generation immigrants find a future for themselves in Germany.

What we have to make sure of, however, is that the scholarship holders do not only become good citizens, but that they also define themselves more solidly with the Jewish identity. This is our predominant thought.

- What exactly are you planning to do at the 'Ernst-Ludwig-Ehrlich-Studienwerk'?

We are currently working to establish a Jewish foundation that will give scholarships for highly gifted Jewish students on the BA, MA and PhD level. The primary source of funding comes from the Federal Ministry of Education and we have some precedent organizations like the National German Scholarship Foundation, or for the churches the Evangelisches Studienwerk Villigst and the Cusanuswerk.

All of these institutions, together with several party foundations, are eligible to distribute scholarships paid for by the German government. The scholarships are awarded to exceptionally gifted students, high achievers in their respective subject areas.

We have arranged with the Federal Ministry of Education for 50 scholarships annually for BA and MA students and 20 PhD students in all subjects you can imagine. Eligible are Jewish German citizens that are members of the Jewish Community and study in Germany and have a German "Abitur" (German maturity exam), which is equivalent to U.S. high school diploma or British A levels; or if you are a European Union citizen with the equivalent qualification from your country and come to a German university for your studies. It may even mean that Israelis are eligible because there is an association contract between Israel and the European Union and I would think that this is possible.

This means that first you have to apply, and then we will conduct a standardized evaluation seminar. All of this is done by Jewish professors who are on our board of advisors and are tutors and assessors. Applicants can receive a basic scholarship of approximately 660 € per month and an even more support if they are awarded a doctoral scholarship. These scholarships will not have to be paid back and scholarship holders receive financial support for up to five years. However, there is an assessment procedure that looks at your progress during the time that you receive the scholarship.

I said that most of this money comes from the government. There's also an administrative percentage that is given on top of the scholarship money.

Here we have a structural problem, because obviously in the preparative year, that is 2009, and in the first year of operation we are hardly giving out any scholarships. So if we receive 14% of, let's say, a very little sum, you can imagine that the administrative costs in the preparatory year, in the first year are very low. However, in order to advertise the fund and the possibility for these scholarships, in order to set up the program, one already has costs for a person to do execute such tasks, and then one needs brochures, a website, information events, and so on. And we are currently short of 15,000 € in 2009, and 39,000€ in 2010. If we manage to solve that problem, we can establish a mechanism that will annually give approximately 1.5 million € into the Jewish Community not only of Germany, but also of the neighboring countries, and I think it might be particularly interesting for Eastern European students who can study at a German university free

of charge and then also receive this scholarship, which I think is the key to studying abroad for people who cannot otherwise sustain themselves.

The fund is set up like the existing 11 foundations that exist to cater to the Catholic church, the Protestant church, the trade unions, the various parties in German parliament and the German National Scholarship Foundation. As you can see, the Jewish target group has been missing so far.

● *So the 'Ernst-Ludwig-Ehrlich-Studienwerk' has already been established?*

It has already been established as a charitable organization. The necessary steps are being taken to fully start our work with the budget year 2010. We also have an agreed budget with the Ministry of Education as of 2010. What we don't have is funding for the preparatory costs, and as I said there is a structural gap in 2010 because the Ministry of Education does not bridge the time between setting up the foundation and the beginning of operative possibilities.

● *Is the Central Council of Jews in Germany ('Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland') incorporated in the project of the Scholarship Foundation?*

We try to have everybody from the Jewish Community represented on the boards. The assessors come from all universities, and are Jewish professors in their various fields. We have liberal as well as orthodox representation. The patron of the fund is the chairwoman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany and on the board of trustees we have the vice-president, that's Dr. Graumann. We also have the executive director, Stephan Kramer, represented and one of the board members is Benno Bleiberg, who is a member of the board of the Jewish Community in Berlin. The aim is to make it as widely accessible as possible, also over all denominational boundaries.

● *Do you have a kind of overview at least from the Communities the Union of Progressive Jews if there are generational differences when it comes to interest in Community involvement? If the elderly or middle aged or young people are particularly interested or not?*

First of all I think there's no difference between Union congregations and general congregations. There is a great interest in the elderly population because they see it as a safe haven and a focus forum for their social contacts. It's not necessarily a religious urge, but a social and cultural one. We have great difficulties in getting young people into the religious instruction programs, and I must say that some very pessimistic voices assume that we may only retain 3-5% of the immigrants in the midterm. Which means that of the 120,000 only 20,000 or 30,000 will remain in Germany, in which case there is no Jewish renaissance, but merely a small firework.

● *To clarify, you mean just 3-5% from all generations?*

Eventually, when the first generation will have died, only 3-5% will remain. This means that we have not yet found a mechanism in the Jewish Communities to interest the younger generation. I think one argument can be that, for example, we do not have young professionals that can relate to families, young Rabbis who also have children and young families. Currently we only have 70-80 year old people, and this definitely has to change.

We have no interesting, or very few interesting programs for young people and I think the *Central Welfare Board of Jews in Germany* ('Zentralwohlfahrtstelle') is absolutely incompetent in creating interesting youth programs.

Netzer Olami, the youth organization of the World Union, has very successful youth camps in Russia, where one can observe that hundreds and thousands of kids want to go to these camps. It's the single most successful program. I cannot see what the difference is between kids that have remained in Eastern Europe and those who have immigrated because there is a very lively relationship between these two communities.



I am sure that one of the next issues that we have to target is the youth work and we need to find independent operators because the 'Zentralrat' is obviously incapable or not interested in doing this. We need organizations that can provide such camp experiences for the 10-17 year olds, and then Limmud can do something for the 16-30 year olds. With rabbinical and cantorial training, and with the scholarship foundation, we can then provide an additional tool to bring all those who have become interested in their earlier years more solidly into the Jewish Community. In the whole program that I have described, what we are missing most definitely is a mechanism to interest the 8-20 year olds. One good program is 'Jung und Jüdisch' (Young and Jewish) where I can see that the 17-25 year olds are very, very active and I think one should copy and widen that experience. We need to find another step, a basic program, and I think a camp experience can be very valuable for younger Jews.

- *Is 'Jung und Jüdisch' directly connected with Union of Progressive Judaism in Germany?*

Yes, it's an affiliate of the Union and also of the international youth network Netzer Olami.

- *Returning to the Communities again. A couple of years ago we had a broad discussion of language differences and cultural barriers between German speaking and Russian speaking Jews in Germany, also about different mentalities and very distinct ideas of how to build a Community. Do you think these problems are getting better now?*

I don't think that these problems are diminishing at all. Well, I have very positive examples for the integration of Russian leaders. They are successful and absolutely unproblematic.

But there were also problems mentality-wise; for example, that Russians are used to having everything organized for them. And they find it awkward that they should suddenly take an active role and responsibility. Our students, for example, never say, 'You know, I have a problem here or there', but they always paint a very positive picture, so a clearer analysis is necessary to find out whether they actually have problems or not. They would not air these problems themselves. So there are mentality differences. I don't think that they are getting better, but I do think that within the next generation that has been educated here, we will see a great improvement on this specific level.

I also think that immigrants are still underrepresented in Jewish leadership positions, e.g. in the Zentralrat. The current representation is not really influential enough to shape the policy of the Zentralrat in a significant way. This is why I think the main focus of support and stimulus for the Jewish community in Germany can be found in the creation of independent change agents.

The rabbinical seminary [Abraham Geiger College], for example, is only very partially dependent on money from the Jewish Community. Predominantly it's the government that pays for it; therefore we can play an independent role. 'Jung und Jüdisch' is not dependent on the 'Zentralwohlfahrtstelle' and can play an independent role. Limmud is a highly independent program, and therefore, I think, we should stimulate the creation of a Jewish civil society where people can organize things for the Jewish Community. That is the way forward.

- *To what extent do you think that outreach programs for adult immigrants, Jews who came here to Germany and who had little to no knowledge of Judaism, have been successful?*

The Zentralrat administers a great amount of funding, about 900,000 €, that is solely meant to be used for immigrant programs. Local Communities can apply for some of this money.

- *900,000 € exclusively meant for immigration programs?*

Yes. Just integration projects, what can be anything from language courses to other things. But most of the programs are, as far as I know, short-lived. You cannot effectively change such a dramatic social problem as

the integration of at least 100,000 Russian Jews, immigrants from the former Soviet Union, by little seminars or two-three day seminars, two week courses and the like.

Therefore, I put a question mark on the long-term impact of these courses or projects. We have the UJA [United Jewish Appeal] in New York sponsor a lay leadership seminar that is set out for three weekends. We also organized these events and they had some kind of impact, sure. But such events can only be the beginning.

My idea of integration would be to target the money into long-term initiatives so that people who have, for example, been stimulated by the Limmud conferences and who have said

I have enjoyed dealing with my Jewish identity and in studying and I would like to know more can go on particular courses that will enable them also to qualify professionally and receive standard qualifications. That's especially important in a country like Germany, where everything is standardized and where you need a paper for everything, a document showing you have official qualifications. I really think one should focus more on developing professional roles. And it would be great if employment in the Jewish Community were often based on these qualifications.

Currently the only institution that offers qualifications outside of the rabbinate and the cantorate [as e.g. run by the Abraham Geiger College, O.G.] is the Heidelberg Hochschule [University of Jewish Studies in Heidelberg]. The Heidelberg Hochschule only offers one course apart from the academic MA and that is a course that qualifies students to become teachers in the state school system. The demand for this profile is rather limited because we have so few Jewish secondary schools. Those teachers are paid for by the government and may have little to do with the local congregations. Also, there are very few schools that actually have enough need for a teacher of Jewish religious education. We have very few Jewish schools, partly because of the government's insistence that all immigrants are spread all over the country. Therefore, we have a couple of large congregations where a lot of Jews can be found, but we predominantly have little communities spread throughout Germany with 100-200 families.

This is why we, in contrast, developed a job profile of cantor-educator for people that are directly employed in Jewish Communities. Such people can take on a variety of roles within the local Jewish congregation. It would be great if we could get more and more Russian people into these jobs so that the Communities become more self-sufficient. So the qualification issue is central.

• *Undoubtedly the Communities are working on programs of strengthening Jewish identity of the average members. In this context do you think that the significance of Israel, as a modern Jewish State and as a contemporary centre of Judaism will remain the same, or that Israel will even increase its importance in the collective identities of the Communities here?*

Looking at the fact that it is difficult to get the younger generation involved, one way of getting people interested is, as I mentioned earlier, the camp experience. Another way could be a program like Birthright Israel, the American program that provides a direct experience of the state of Israel for its participants. There are a lot of Russians in Israel, and I think one could focus on the fact that this is also an interesting source of identity. So far, however, I find that the topic of identifying with Israel is being neglected. Our experiences with Birthright Israel in Germany show that a lot can be achieved, especially when followed up back home. I think it would be a necessary component of youth work to integrate the experience of two-three weeks in Israel. If one had a structured approach a camp experience could be provided for the 8-14 year olds, a camp in Israel for the 15-18 year olds and then youth activities much like those practiced in America. These activities have to be conducted with a long-term perspective, so that they are not only one-off experiences. I think projects are also best done independently. They need to have self-governing structures and one should not have the feeling that they are yet another group of programs with a top-to-bottom approach. We should establish a bottom up approach, and here Limmud is also an interesting experience. It gives us an experience that if you organize things yourself you can get a good program together. I think that's an experience of *self-empowerment* and this is just what is currently lacking in Jewish organizations. Many people just consume whatever is on offer, but they're not taking any responsibility. I think everything we do needs to be judged by how much responsibility people will be able to take in the Jewish Community.

- *There was an overall survey in the Jewish Community in Berlin whose results were published in the Community journal 'Jüdisches Berlin' in 2003. According to the survey, 52% of the respondents considered the JC primarily as a place for religious ceremonies, whereas the other respondents valued things like social and entertainment activities. Do you see a problem in this constellation of religious and non-religious interests?*

If I look at the figures, I would assume the interest of 52% of the immigrants in religious issues is highly exaggerated. About four years ago the number of Bar and Bat Mitzvahs that were held in the Jewish Community of was so low that only a quarter of the kids eligible actually had a Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Since more engaging rabbis took office in Berlin this figure is rising currently.

- *A quarter of the registered members?*

Yes. That's very low. Therefore 52% with religious interests seems to me to be completely exaggerated. I would say the share of religious interests is probably 12-20%. But then, what does religious interest mean? I think my experience of the debate of the denominationalism in Judaism in the last 15 years has shown that people, especially Jewish people, don't identify themselves by saying, I'm a faithful Jew. They identify themselves culturally. Our attempt should be to say to the FSU immigrants, for example, Passover is exactly your experience. You went out of Egypt into a new country, and now you have positive and negative experiences.

By studying the tradition of the Rabbis, one can create a dedication in these people to say you know, this experience of transience and of uncertainty and of redefinition is a Jewish experience.

Then there is also more room to use other forms that can be employed when establishing a dialogue with other religions. But if you are absolutely unable to express yourself in Jewish terms, because you have not acquired the necessary language for this, I think most people would say I'm not in touch with my Jewish tradition. I think that Judaism does not expect an expression of faith, saying I have a personal relationship with God. The urgent question is whether you live your life according to the three dimensions that are on offer which are social action, Torah study, and prayer. Certainly the social action aspect, especially in youth work can be a very powerful mode of change and of creating loyalty to the Jewish people.

You can always study even if you don't believe in God; you can still be interested in the Jewish tradition and can study Jewish texts. At the University in Potsdam we have 400 non-Jewish students who study Judaism. So obviously there must be something in it.

Then there is the third aspect, that of prayer, that of course can also build on the youth experiences. I find it to be an interesting observation that in youth work one instills interest in the spiritual side through night walks, sensitivity, or guitar playing at the lake; whereas you actually need to enable a knowledge of other dimensions that make you more literate in expressing yourself in religious terms. If you have no literacy for these dimensions you cannot expect that people will use or even understand this language. It's something that you have to get used to. In our discussion we have built a kind of modular prototype of how one can go about helping the current calamity, and therefore I would say the bad news is that we have only 20% who are actually expressing a religious interest. We have perhaps only 3% who will remain in the communities if we don't do anything substantial within the next 10-20 years. Given the fact of how much money the German government has pumped into immigration and integration, we will have lost millions and millions and millions of euros for a small percentage of Jews that have actually stayed in Germany. If we carry on the way we are now, in 10 years time, we might have as many Jews left as we had in 1989.

- *That would be horrible.*

It would be indeed, and we can only change this with a structured approach to youth work in the way that I described. The trouble is that any activity has to be almost totally financed by the organizations because there is very little that these people are willing or able to contribute.

But we have to offer people professional choices so that they get committed to their Communities. Again, I think the leading argument is responsibility. As long as we're not prepared to shift responsibility to the Russians, to the majority of our congregants, we will not succeed. And still I can understand the argument that you cannot shift the responsibility before you have prepared people to do the right thing. First you need to prepare these people so that they use their responsibility wisely, they will in turn know what goals they should define for themselves. The Jewish Community is not a means in itself, it is a means to get more literate in the Jewish tradition. Therefore, the responsibility shift does not work before you have tackled the educational tasks.

● *As the rector of the Abraham Geiger College has your experience in cooperating with German officials and politicians been mostly positive, or rather the opposite?*

I think there's a great interest of German politics to help to make the integration work successful, especially on the federal level. Usually you can overcome this by showing a local politician what kind of a high profile Jewish issues have on a national level. This has been my experience, and I can also prove this by saying that almost 80% of the money for the rabbinical seminary comes from the various states of Germany: For the Federal Republic of Germany, if you have a good plan, you can find a good partner. For example, the cantorial school was built with seed money from an American foundation and once I could prove that an American foundation was willing to put some money in, the German government immediately gave more than double the sum so as to make sure that the project can continue and flourish.

Let me just add that maybe this would be a parallel to the 'Studienwerk' [*Ernst-Ludwig-Ehrlich-Studienwerk*], the scholarship foundation, where the money that the government provides is, I would say, 98% of the expenses. The expectation that the initial set up is done by the benefiting community itself is not too much to ask, given the fact that most of the costs are then paid for by the government.

So I would say the German political set up for such a foundation is ideal, because once you have a good plan and you put in the seed money, you can expect that things then are likely to be subsidized by the federal government.

Therefore, I think it's clear that you get the most out of every dollar or euro you spend in terms of effectiveness, and I also think it's a most interesting country because we have a very flexible and vibrant situation. If we use this well, Germany can become an immense stimulus, certainly for the neighboring Central and Eastern European countries like Poland, or the Czech Republic, but also for France. France has a pretty stable Jewish Community, but they have no rabbinical training center, and therefore the Rabbis for the non-Orthodox Jewish communities in France are now trained by the Abraham Geiger College.

● *French students come over to get qualified as Rabbis in Berlin and Potsdam [Abraham Geiger College]?*

Yes, we work with French students and also cooperate with the Sorbonne. Many Jewish Communities in France have only recently become aware of the problem that many Rabbis are close to retirement age and so they have no institutions that could help in a situation such as this. Again, Germany can become an important factor in affecting Jewish life in Europe because of the high level of government support.

## 12. KÜF KAUFMANN

**June 17, 2009, Leipzig**

● *Mr. Kaufmann, you are successful in several professions and now you have been the head of the JC Leipzig for the last few years. Was there a special motivation driving you?*

Let me be honest. When I was still living in the Soviet Union, I didn't have such a strong connection to Judaism. Admittedly I was Jewish, it was written in my passport and it was impossible to get rid of this, and I didn't want to. Several relatives of mine were killed in World War II, and my mother's entire family; it would have been akin to betrayal for me to say, "No, I'm not Jewish", that wouldn't do. It also was impossible with the last name Kaufmann, to suddenly say, "No, I'm no longer Jewish." Everyone who had a German-sounding name was Jewish, although it could be that they weren't. That is a different story. I came here to Germany thanks to the fact that I am Jewish. I came as a Jewish contingent refugee. I was a refugee, it was 1990, and I came only with my papers, without a suitcase. I later sent for my family. As I had been given the opportunity to live as a Jew in Germany, I also had a sense of duty to represent Judaism myself, me as a single person. Not as a representative of an institution like the Jewish Community in Leipzig. Then the time came when people turned to me and said, "Mr. Kaufmann, please join." Then I thought about it, about my experience in organization. As a director you have good organizational skills, management experience. I've worked with people all my life. I thought ok, I'll give it a try. That's how I began my involvement, and up till now continue it gladly because it is important to support the rebirth of Judaism in Germany. It's already there, and now there's growth in quality. I'm happy. Ten years ago here in Leipzig we had one religious service a month; today it's two religious services a day. Shabbat is celebrated in any case, the holidays as well.

● *There's an obvious trend in Germany Jewry now towards more pluralism and diversity. What can you say, in this context, about Leipzig?*

I've said it once and I'll say it again: Leipzig is not a battlefield where people fight each other because one is Orthodox and the other is Liberal and the third is clueless because they're from a country where there wasn't any sensibility for religion. Leipzig is a fertile ground where all plants can grow. Look at our logo! You see our coat of arms, and it looks like something to do with Saxony, and then a Magen David underneath to show the Jewishness and a bouquet above, what's that called an "*Arbana'im*" for Jewish unity. There are different flowers and plants together. It says every Jew is unique and can find his or her own way within Judaism, but we belong together.

● *Would you place yourself in a certain trend or movement in Judaism?*

No. I wouldn't. I feel responsible for everyone, for taking care of everyone and enabling everyone who feels Jewish and is a Community member to celebrate religious services according to their understanding. I say you need a Torah and 10 men and then we can begin. We'll find room. Respect is the main word that is written on every wall in the Community. Without respect, nothing will work. When we demand that others respect us, then we must first of all show respect to one another, to other Jews. Up till now it's worked out. Today I'm happy that we have a kindergarten, a Torah school, and this beautiful social center. We don't want just to stay amongst ourselves, but to also be a visible part of society.

● *What would you say are the greatest challenges Jews in Germany are facing now, and will face in the coming years?*

That's difficult to say in a few words. I just know that we need to address the younger generation correctly. The younger generation is our future as banal as that sounds, but it is true. Without the younger generation there is no future for the Jewish Community.

- *I understand. We have complains from several Communities that it's much more difficult than originally expected to get the younger generation involved and committed to the Community.*

I'm not a researcher who has studied other Communities. I know that this problem is not limited to Leipzig, but also that it's not limited to Jews. This is a general problem, the younger generation in general doesn't see many perspectives, and I would say, it's also a social problem. If we look at how many young people leave Germany, it's astoundingly high number regardless if they're Jewish or not. If we look at how many young people are leaving Saxony, we are even more depressed. If we look at how many people are leaving Leipzig, we'll get even more depressed. If we look at how many young people have left our Community, then we are completely miserable. They are leaving the Community not because the Community isn't attractive, but because they don't feel they have any perspectives in this town, in this state, or in Germany. This process exists. We don't need to shut our eyes to it. It's not that people are fleeing. It's not like in 1989 in East Germany, no, thank God. However, we do need to be aware and recognize the problem. We in the Community are doing everything we can to ensure that we are offering the younger generation attractive things. But you can't forget, we're the *Israelite Religious Community*, and that means that our selection is in the first place religious – religious education. After a seminar, we can also have a bowling party or shoot pool. We do offer entertainment for youth, that's right. But we also have to understand the special situation of young Jews here which came with their families as migrants. Some of them must sometimes play the role of an adult. Why? Because the adults in their family are not in the position to fulfill their roles as adults. They didn't receive a religious education in the Soviet Union, they came here without a clue what it means to be Jewish and they can't pass on their experience. It's the other way around. The young people who were curious and took courses and learned about their religion can now explain to their parents and grandparents what it's all about. It's a very interesting process. Our young people like to do it. It's not many, but we can say that about 200 people attend our seminars each month. It can be that the same people are coming all the time.

- *Just young people?*

No, most of the age groups are coming here. But anyway there is an age group where I see a problem - those between 30-45 years. These people are almost completely absent. There might be a few members, but I don't see them. There are also hundreds of people who came as Jews and who are Jews, but who don't have any connection to the Community. It's extremely difficult to reach them. We don't even know where they are. If we were to publish something in the paper, they probably wouldn't read that, either. It's hard to reach them. But I think that is our task to reach them specifically. They have been able to integrate into society, they have established themselves in their careers and they have small children. These are young families. I see here our resources; we need to be able to use them.

- *Are you cooperating in the infrastructure with other Jewish institutions in Leipzig? Lauder has the Talmud Torah center here. Are you working together?*

We aren't doing anything against each other. The Israelite Religious Community in Leipzig is the only Jewish Community here in Leipzig. And this will remain the case. Everyone else is our good, strong, or not so strong partner. Of course Lauder is here, they have helped us enormously. The Lauder Foundation is continuing to work here in Leipzig. But this is the Jewish Community in Leipzig with support from Lauder, from the Zentralrat, from the Central Welfare Board of Jews in Germany [ZWSt], and if Chabad, then also Chabad. They [Chabad] were also working on the Jewish kindergarten in Leipzig, but they quit. The financial situation changed and they quit from one day to the next. It was a difficult trial for us, but we managed to

keep the kindergarten afloat financially. I hope that in the future we will continue to be able to do so, but it's difficult because we don't have a budget for the kindergarten, and also not for this social center.

- *And the kindergarten is new?*

Very. That's why we need partners, partners who support us and our projects. We are looking for partners. Fortunately the Rothschild Foundation supports our cultural projects this year, but next year, we don't know.

- *Rothschild Europe?*

Yes.

- *In large cities and Jewish Communities in Germany, what is missing in the chain of Jewish education? Often there's a kindergarten, or there's an elementary school.*

A Torah center as a Lehrhaus, a Beit Midrasch, as a learning center for children and teens and adults.

- *There is no plan for a Jewish school in Leipzig?*

For that, you need to have enough children. Also you'd need the accreditation from the government of Saxony. We are not yet at that point.

- *There are probably also plans for a youth center here and for the older people, they come anyway.*

Not necessarily. But the Community itself does a lot.

- *Where do you see the biggest gap in the educational programs? Where do you need the most support?*

I think we need more support for projects that already exist or have been planned for Jewish culture and tradition. Because these tracks or windows will allow us to reach those people more easily who are still distant to religion and have unfounded fears of religion. People who think to themselves that they're Jewish, but don't want to join because they don't like the restrictions. We need to show people that Judaism has a 5,000 year old tradition and can adapt to modern life, and that it in no way would stand in the way of success. With such programs, we could really reach these Jewish people. I think that it's also important, through the cultural events, lectures, podium discussions, seminars, to show ourselves open to non-Jews as well. We are not a closed sect, nor have we ghettoized ourselves. We are open for everyone; we have the courage to debate issues with people. We are able to hear different opinions. I'm talking about people with a positive approach, not hostile. Such projects that are dealing with culture and tradition are also dealing with religion anyway. They are important; this is a large gap that needs support.

- *Do you combine your outreach efforts among the former immigrants with Russian components?*

We combine that, yes. But what does it mean to combine this with Russian culture? That is not our primary task. We are a part of Russian culture, our general education is based on our roots, and our roots are in Russian culture. It's not about opening a Russian club. That's not our responsibility. We can't just leave it, though, because 90% of the Community is Russian-speaking. Sometimes you can only communicate in Russian. That's naturally a question of time; the next generation won't need it any more. That's also interesting; we offer Russian lessons for children.

- *Right now, here?*

Yes. We're not focusing on it, because we want to offer it. I mean the Russian language belongs to the treasures of world culture; it would be silly just to lose it. Why? When you've had it as your native language, it's a great thing to preserve. And that's what we're doing. Children don't need it to survive here, but later they might need and love it. I know this from my daughter. As a small child she didn't want it, but now she's proud of knowing so many languages, including Russian. Russian can also ease communication. In the Community, there are also Uzbek Jews from Bukhara; there are Jews from Georgia who speak Georgian, also Ukrainians with Ukrainian. We as a Community are already ourselves culturally speaking so colorful, it's perfect. It's unbelievably good. A quilt, a mosaic. It's wonderful. When you come to our concert, for example on the 25<sup>th</sup> we're holding a concert "Shalom My Dear Neighbor" for people from the neighborhood.

- *Part of the Jewish Week?*

Yes. Then our program is colorful, because it comprises all corners of the continent. We're doing a cycle on Sephardic Jews, who aren't so well-known in Germany, as everyone's Ashkenazi. It's interesting and then you find out that Sephardic Jews don't speak Yiddish, but Ladino. I'd like to organize an evening devoted to Cuban Jews. The Jewish world is colorful and huge; geographically huge. And that's wonderful. We've got to understand that we're connected through our faith, not by the length of our noses or the size of our ears, although my ears are rather large, and my nose as well.

- *It's clear that there are many people here in Leipzig who aren't Halachic Jews, but have either a Jewish father or grandparent. This group experienced a rude awakening in the 1990's because then somebody from the Community suddenly appeared before them and said: "You've got to make a giyur; you can't get out of it." What is your personal opinion about this? Should there be a simplified giyur?*

My personal opinion is that of course we need to follow the Halachic principle. This is our law and we need to obey the law. Of course, it is bitter for people who had suffered their whole lives for being Jewish in Russia. Someone comes here with the name Isaac, his father's name was Aaron, last name Rabinowicz and your mother is not Jewish and then he has a nose like mine and these ears and the community says: "Well Mr. Isaac Aaron Rabinowicz, you're not Jewish." "What? Me?" Just imagine, a 60 year old man, who has felt Jewish all his life, with his name and his appearance and his fate. He always had to take the heat for being Jewish and was insulted at least 100 times a month, and then someone comes and says he isn't Jewish. Yes, that is something new for us. But that doesn't mean that it isn't right. When you were to go to England and suddenly discover that there you drive on the "wrong" side of the street, that doesn't mean that this country is doing something wrong. I didn't know that you had to drive that way. There is a way, giyur. But it's not simple. What should I say to an Isaac Aaron Rabinowicz: "Hello, you've got to learn and study and get circumcised."? Well, with the circumcision, okay, but with all the studying when some people who were born Jewish don't have any clue, but they say I'm Jewish. He has to study, study, study. How can you explain this to him? He'll say: "But I am Jewish! Isaac Aaron Rabinowicz." It's not simple. We haven't had much success in this field till now, but I hope that we will at least be able to attract these people in our circle of supporters.

- *A kind of associate membership?*

Just in our circle. An associated membership sounds nice. But it won't work, for example, when there are elections and so on. Why should a non-Jew vote for the chair of the Jewish Community? But we want them at least in our circle of supporters. Maybe granting not every right, but every opportunity. They pay the same fees for events and educational trips as Community members, for example. This is also possible for family members who aren't Jewish, to be in our courses, dance classes and so on. However, some cases remain dramatic. For example, I heard about a woman who came and fell to her knees and said: "Please, allow me to be buried next to my husband after I'm dead. We were married for 50 years." He was Jewish, she's not Jewish. "I want to be next to him after I'm dead." You see, of course we'll do something. Then in the board



meeting the board member responsible for religious questions called a dozen Rabbis how we can find a Halachic solution to let this non-Jewish woman be buried in a Jewish cemetery. We found the way.

- *How?*

You've got to make certain boundaries and so on. The best thing would be to have a section for non-Jewish spouses. It's still an ongoing process. We want to help people. People need to feel like they're in their family and that they will receive support, not the opposite. And the elderly need support for their everyday lives. We have social workers, and we also have volunteers. We try to do everything we can so that the Community stands on the side of Jewish law.

- *What about the kindergarten, can other children attend, or is it only for Halachic Jews?*

No, it's possible.

- *How far will Israel remain as a central element in the activities and in the collective identity of the Jewish Communities in Germany?*

Personally, I think that if nothing stands in our way, it will become even more intensive. It won't decrease. I think of our Community in Leipzig is doing a lot in the direction of working together with the Israeli side. Last year I was in Israel twice with a Leipzig delegation including the mayor. Our goal was establishing a twin city. It will work out with Herzliyah. In our social center we're opening an office for the permanent representative from Herzliyah to Leipzig, a kind of cultural attaché. An office that is within our competence, it was my initiative. The city of Leipzig strongly supported the idea and now it's being worked out that we will have a permanent exchange of people from all age groups, and artists in the center. There will be projects, concerts, exhibits. But also the city of Leipzig, for 15 years or almost 15 years, has been inviting people from all over the world who are from Leipzig, including the "Association of Former Leipzig Residents in Israel". These people who had to leave this town as sad children, return as happy children, because they can once again see their hometown. They see it through a child's eyes. They are the best ambassadors for Leipzig in Israel. They're fantastic.

- *So the twin city project is on with Herzliyah?*

Yes. Every Community member has relatives in Israel, almost every family visits Israel once every two years. They visit Israel and return here. The purely Zionist idea, that all Jews should live there, is foreign to me. I also don't think that all Catholics should live in Vatican City. I'd rather have even more Jews living all over the world. Of course Israel is an important point in our consciousness, but where a person lives, thank God, we have the possibility to decide ourselves. Not like in Tsarist times, when we needed to live in the pale of settlement or even worse, in the ghetto. Of course we, as Jewish people, look in the direction of Israel with concern and heartache about what is happening there. And of course everyone wants there to be peace. Unfortunately, the powerful don't have any vested interest in there being peace. But this is also a personal problem for me. Of course I'm on Israel's side, of course I care what happens there, of course I want peace. I want the world to read about Jews with delight, not that some soldiers have shot some Palestinian child, or the other way around that some terrorists have killed some Israeli children. However, it is not uncommon that we are mixed up with Israeli citizens here.

- *How do you mean that?*

Let's take an example. If I voted here, in Germany, for the liberals and when the liberals didn't get into power, then I know why. They didn't receive enough votes. Then I'm in the position, completely legal, no one kills me, no one is screaming at me that I should be ashamed of myself. When I criticize the government,

it doesn't mean that I'm criticizing Germany, but just the government. But I don't vote in Israel. I'm here. I'm not an Israeli citizen, although people often come to me and say: "*What are you people doing there?*" I'm not doing anything there. I also don't vote there. I don't even have the minimal influence of being a voter. Nonetheless someone comes and then I have to defend and support everything in Israel. That's a little strange. From the society I'm taken hostage by Israeli politics.

- *As an Israeli outpost...*

Yes, an Israeli outpost. I saw a TV program, it was really embarrassing, not just anyone was sitting there, but former Minister Norbert Blüm, a clever person, and Friedman [a German Jewish journalist] was there as well. Blüm was constantly attacking Friedman: "You people have done this and that there..." And Friedman answered: "Wait a minute, I haven't done anything. And who is meant by 'you people'? The Jewish Community of Frankfurt where I'm a member? I want to clarify..." And then the same discussion again... It's making nervous.

- *But that program was a few years ago.*

No, it was just now, this year.

- *Is German mainstream media coverage of Israel objective, or is it filled with clichés?*

Both. They try to be objective; sometimes people are doing their job, which is making headlines, that's clear. You need to sell papers, or else you will lose advertising customers. So often you see a headline like: "Israeli soldiers killed 4 Palestinians". Then underneath in smaller letters you see Palestinians attacked Israeli such and such before hand. I'd like to see it the other way around. Because this, placing the cart before the horse, I think that happens a lot. I also wish that Israel would get more talented PR people.

- *What do you think about the German non-Jewish mainstream media's coverage of Jewish life in Germany? In Leipzig, for example.*

We have wonderful contacts to the media. I can say that the Leipzig media is our partner. We receive strong support from the media, from the main paper, the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, to smaller regional papers and free papers. We get strong support.

- *Also from the content?*

Yes, always ready to find space for articles about us. Always positive when there's something positive to report, but also with enough normalcy. Not this fake respect. I was happy that when they reported about there not being enough money for the building project of the new community center, they took my photo and then they put it next to the headline: "Now he has to go begging". They hit the nail on the head and told it like it is, not "oh, he has to try to raise funds". No, "he has to beg." That was the *Bild-Zeitung*. The Leipzig paper reported it differently, which is also good. It's another kind of paper, with a different readership. But still, the Leipzig paper supports us really fantastically. They fight for us; the reporter covering the story really knew what he was talking about. He didn't just skim the surface, with half of everything being wrong.

- *The building [for the new Jewish Community Centre in Leipzig] permit had been granted?*

Yes, and then a neighbor had sued the city of Leipzig and said that they mistakenly gave us this property.

- *That the allocation was wrong? Was there the fear of Jews in the neighborhood?*

Probably everything together, we won't ever really know now. It took 3 years. I don't know how many folders of paperwork we filled about this. And no one was named, just "resident". We were called "the Jews". And he didn't sue us, but the city of Leipzig. The city of Leipzig won the trial. What was the headline in the paper? "The Jews won, the residents lost."

- *In which paper?*

In the *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, the local paper.

- *Do you think this is objective reporting?*

Well, I called and as I've said, we have really friendly, warm relations. But then suddenly something like this happens. Because this headline was written by someone who only writes headlines. They wrote what grabs your attention. But it was stupid. "The Jews won and the residents lost." It was one resident; thousands of others gathered signatures on petitions *for* the building project. That means that it's also insulting to the residents, this failed headline. But the article itself was fine and correct.

- *You mean it was just the semantics?*

I'm telling you what happened. In Leipzig I really can't complain, but just praise the papers, because they also pay a lot of attention to the Jewish Community. You can just click on this paper in the Internet, and there you'll see.

- *Turning to the Jewish media. Do you think, structurally, there needs to be more? What would you like to see more of, content wise to be more useful for the Communities?*

That's difficult. I haven't really thought about it.

- *It's the same question in principle. Is it helpful?*

You need the media. Particularly our people, the older generation, for them the media opinion is very important. When something was written in *Pravda*, then it was like, "It was in the papers, did you read it? It was in the paper!" You could have 1,000 reasons as to why the world is colorful and someone would say: "No, it's black and white, it says so in the paper!" This was the number-one-argument. It says so in the paper. That's why the opinion in the paper is very important for our people and the Community life, if that would be more present in the paper. If there could be extra pages devoted to this, I understand it's a question of cost, as well, but still. More about Community life, more letters to the editor, a little more connection to the Communities, that would be great. Now the paper has a bit of a, let's say elevated character, the quality.

- *You mean the Jüdische Allgemeine?*

Yes, the *Jüdische Allgemeine*. It's a cut above. The Jewish paper in Russian, the *Evreyskaya*, is crap, but that's why it's so popular. People read it because it's in Russian, of course, but they also like it. It is fantastic as well. There they have the words from the Torah, for Shabbat, for the holidays, Jewish biographies and so on. From the "old country", from Israel, everything together and both sides of opinion: pro and contra. You might think that the publishers aren't from Russia because it's so modern in this sense.

- *We are still talking about the Evreyskaya Gazeta?*

Yes, the *Evreyskaya*. But the *Evreyskaya Gazeta* will also experience some problems in the next few years, 10 years. We are the generation that likes to read in Russian, but I prefer to read in German.

- *Would you like to have more Jewish presence in the Internet like with the web portal ha Galil?*

The Internet is a complicated thing. There are too many unprofessional people running around doing. They create things, they're not just unprofessional as journalists, but then spread things that shouldn't be. It's not just a Jewish phenomenon. But if you're not Jewish and interested and you land on some sites and read this, although it's far below any reasonable, scientific quality.

### 13. CHARLOTTE KNOBLOCH

**June 19, 2009, Munich**

1. *Dr. Knobloch, what do you feel are the greatest challenges and/or problems facing Jewry in Germany today?*

One major challenge is the integration of the new immigrants from the former Soviet Union into the Jewish Communities and the majority society. The Central Council of Jews in Germany (Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland) and the Jewish Communities offer support programs for the new immigrants where they can learn German and more about the Jewish faith, as well as offering concrete help for problems occurring in everyday life. These programs are widely accepted.

Another major challenge is the fight against latent anti-Semitism, which has long established itself in the center of society. Today anti-Semitism is often expressed in codes or disguised as criticism of Israel. Here I would like to stress that objective criticism of Israeli politics is completely legitimate; one-sided sweeping and biased judgement of Israel within the Middle East conflict is not.

2. *How would you describe the current relations between Russian speaking Jews and German speaking Jews in the Communities?*

The relations between Russian and German speaking Jews are good. In the past few years there has been a coming together, also due to contacts in the Communities, or volunteer projects where Russian and German speaking Community members worked together. Learning the German language has also facilitated the process of getting to know each other and allows understanding on a deeper level.

3. *Which measures to improve the integration of the Jewish immigrants into the Communities and Jewish organizations in Germany remain urgently needed?*

The most important integration measures for the Jewish immigrants are learning German and strengthening their Jewish identity. The Central Council and the Jewish Communities offer a variety of programs that will continue to serve as the main integrative measures in the future.

4. *How serious is the much discussed problem of being able to win over the younger generation for a continued commitment to Community work?*

In German society as a whole there are young people who are more socially committed than others. The situation is no different in the Jewish Communities.

The Communities try to forge a bond with young people with attractive programs and incentives. When they can see that their commitment is valued and that they can contribute their own ideas, then they have more of an incentive to be active in the Community.

5. *There are those who are talking about a new pluralism of Jewish life in Germany. Do you share this view? And if so, what does this mean for the concept of the United Community in the long term?*

Both variety and diversity have belonged to Jewish tradition for centuries. Pluralism is nothing new.

In a certain sense the pluralism within Judaism is part of the concept of the United Community. For the Orthodox leaning United Community in Munich and Upper Bavaria, for example, every Community member is welcome to use our facilities such as the school, kindergarten, or cultural center. Everyone is welcome to attend the religious services, regardless of how they practice Judaism as long as they follow the Halacha. We have had a positive experience with this practice and will continue it in the future.

6. *Will the connection to Israel to continue to play a central role in the Jewish Communities in Germany as it has over the last 60 years? Or do you see changes in this relationship on the horizon?*

Israel will continue to play an important role for the Jewish Communities in Germany in the years to come. Israel is the only refuge for the Jewish people in the diaspora which will always keep its borders open during an existential threat. We can count on Israel and Israel can depend on our solidarity, especially in hard times when public opinion has conspired against Israel and self-proclaimed do-gooders stigmatize the Jewish state as the scapegoat in the Middle East conflict.

7. *To what extent do most Jews in Germany consider themselves to be a part of German society and the nation? How will this feeling develop in the future?*

Those Jewish citizens who were born here and grew up with the German language and culture consider themselves to be a part of German society, as Germans of the Jewish faith. We give those who have immigrated here the feeling that they've found a new home in Germany.

We also shouldn't forget that much has changed for the better in the 60 years since the Federal Republic of Germany was founded. As opposed to the early years, German *raison d'état* is now committed to the responsibility resulting from the Shoah and to carry out political action accordingly.

8. *Where do you still see things missing in the Jewish education programs on offer in Germany?*

The Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Central Welfare Board of Jews in Germany offer numerous support and educational programs for all ages, including language courses, political education and religious education. The variety on offer attempts to cover the various interests and educational needs. The programs are expanded, revised or supplemented according to demand.

9. *What is the situation concerning volunteer work at the Jewish Community in Munich? Are there differences in volunteerism among the different age groups or between the immigrants and veterans?*

We have excellent experience with volunteer work. In our social work section we have about 150 volunteers working in various areas, for example; accompanying people when they have to go to government agencies, the doctor, or to other events; providing translation services; health care counseling; visiting people in old people's homes; and practical everyday assistance in areas like housework and childcare.

The volunteers are highly motivated. They are mostly new immigrants, but we also have veterans. For the younger generation volunteer work can be a springboard to the working world and for the older generation it can provide a meaningful occupation.

10. *Many Jews in Germany seem to keep their distance to the Jewish Communities and organizations. What do you think are the main reasons for this? What do you think can be done to change this situation?*

First of all we should give the Central Council of Jews in Germany credit for uniting almost 120,000 Jews from 107 Communities.

There are still too many Jewish people who do not feel that they belong to any Community or organization. However, I'm hopeful that we can win them over by offering attractive programs.

11. *What have your experiences been like in working with German authorities and politicians?*

There are many German politicians that we can count on, also in difficult times. This includes the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who is an extremely reliable partner. There are many other politicians who work very well with us. We have also had mostly positive experiences when dealing with German authorities.

Finding a job is by far the biggest problem for the immigrants. Their expectations are high, sometimes too high to be met. These are not only due to an exaggeratedly positive image of the situation in Germany. Rather, the majority of the immigrants are extremely achievement oriented, well educated university graduates and specialists. Very few are blue collar workers or fit the profile of the "classic guest worker". In contrast to them, the Jewish immigrants held highly qualified positions in their home countries and want to work in appropriate and comparable positions here. This is understandable, but simply not practicable in most cases.

Concerning the so-called Ghetto-pension I hope that the German state pension fund will implement the latest Federal Social Court ruling as quickly as possible. Until now, over 90% of all applications have been denied. For the applicants it's a race against time.

12. *How did the German population react to the growth of the Jewish Communities in the 1990's?*

The German population had different reactions to the growth of the Jewish Communities in the 1990's. Some showed support, some skepticism.

Today there's mostly curiosity about Judaism and an interest in inter-religious dialogue, also due to the fact that Judaism is becoming more present in the center of society. We have the immigration to thank for the fact that new Community centers and synagogues could be built in the last few years. We shouldn't forget this.

13. *What do you think of German media coverage of*

- a) *The developments in Jewish life in Germany*
  - b) *The developments in Jewish life worldwide*
  - c) *The developments and events taking place in Israel?*
- a) Coverage of Jewish life in Germany usually shows a real interest in it. The reporting about the new Community centers and synagogues that were built in the last few years was particularly good. Another positive development is the trend that Jewish programs have become established brands in non-Jewish media.

- b) Developments in Jewish life worldwide do not receive much attention, with the exception of the threat to Jewish life by anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism.
- c) In general, German media reports very one-sidedly about Israel and the Middle East conflict. Through emphasis and the choice of content it's subtly suggested that the state of Israel is solely at fault for the Middle East conflict. Inner-Palestinian conflicts, anti-Semitism in the Arab world and the fact that the Israeli population is constantly vulnerable to a terrorist attack are all largely ignored.

Positive news from Israel is generally found in small print on the margin. Negative headlines are on the front page in bold print.

The one-sided and often tendentious or ideologically colored coverage by German and Western media plays a major role in the one-sided picture of Israel found in German society.

*14. How would you describe the development of Jewish media in Germany?*

The *Jüdische Allgemeine* is an asset for all Jews and other interested readers in Germany. Its focus on Jewishness, the Jewish religion, culture and humor, but also the inclusion of non-Jewish public figures are all additional benefits the weekly paper has to offer.

In general Jewish media has a different take on current events as in other regional or national papers. That's why it's important that we will also be able to become informed by Jewish media in the future as well.

The development of Jewish media depends on demand, just like every other media in Germany. What is able to be convincing in its quality and innovation will also be able to survive.



## 14. MICHAEL KOGAN

**June 12, 2009, Düsseldorf**

● *Rabbi Kogan, let me begin by asking a few questions about your personal background; when and where were you born? What's your educational background? How long have you been in Düsseldorf?*

I was born in 1950, in a small town called Bendery in Moldavia. My parents only spoke Yiddish or Romanian; they learned Russian, but only very badly. There was a synagogue in our town, but it was closed around 1960. Therefore I didn't receive a lot of information about religion at home. I knew that I was Jewish, of course, but didn't connect it to a religion. I grew up in a non-religious world, an atheist, so to speak. After graduating from school I went to Leningrad, now called St. Petersburg, and attended a technical university. I got my degree and was supposed to work as an engineer in a factory for three years. Then I changed my mind about what I wanted to do. I went to Moscow and attended and graduated from a theatrical college as a theater director. Afterwards, I worked in Krasnoyarsk, in Siberia. Then I returned and worked as a director in several smaller towns with different theater troupes. My encounter with Judaism happened suddenly. I was working as a director in Kazan and took a vacation in Moscow right when a Jewish cultural center was being opened. It was a center from Rabbi Steinsaltz, and I was curious and went there.

● *When was this?*

It was in 1989. I really liked it and started going to classes there all the time. I spent practically my entire vacation there and met many people and was able to hear everything that was being discussed there. During this time I put on a yarmulke for the first time in my life. When I returned to my family in Kazan (I was already married and had a daughter); I told them if I want to live as a Jew, then we should all immigrate to Israel. About two years later, we left for Israel. I've been living in Israel since 1991. There I took courses about different movements in Judaism and became more involved in religion. I didn't have so many possibilities to work as a director in Israel. Then I tried out various things new immigrants could do in Israel. I worked as a security guard in a museum in Tel Aviv, then in the opera as a director and then I employed my engineering skills as a stage designer. I became qualified as a foreign language tour guide. I took many tour groups throughout Israel and Tel Aviv. While I was in Jerusalem and other places that were so close, I found myself turning into an Israeli. My immigration became an aliyah. I had become another person. Before this I had met a Rabbi Roberto Arviv, an Italian Rabbi. He had studied philosophy and religion in Jerusalem. He then remained in Jerusalem, and I studied with him. He nudged me a bit in this direction and told me that if I really wanted to choose this direction, then I would have to study and told me where, the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem.

● *The Masorti Rabbinical Seminary?*

Yes, Masorti. I studied there for five years. Then I received my Smicha and completely by accident I met someone from Germany, from Düsseldorf who was looking for a Rabbi, but with one condition, it must be a Rabbi who could speak Russian. That was Herr Strauss. Then I suggested that I come with him to Germany and see how I liked it, if that could be something for me, if that would be possible for me and my family. Since January, 2005 I've been working here.

● *And your family is also here?*

No. My family lives in Israel. My daughter will graduate from the art institute this year in Jerusalem. She's 22. My wife works in Israel, but when she has vacation time, she comes here to Düsseldorf. I also go there.

- *Your work as a Rabbi here in Düsseldorf isn't temporary?*

I signed a two-year contract in 2005. Right now, I'm on my third contract.

- *You're working here as a Conservative Masorti Rabbi in the United Community which is actually Orthodox, is this right?*

I haven't closed myself off to the movement here; I am doing everything that's going on here. More like the Liberal Orthodox. I haven't had any problems with how things are here.

- *Where are the greatest challenges, difficulties or problems in the Communities in Germany which need to be overcome?*

If we're talking about German Communities, even though we call them German, the majority of those coming are new immigrants from the former Soviet Union. These people who attend the Community, have very different cultural needs. I would say the problems are in human relations. If I'm talking about the board or the Community leadership, those are the people who were either born here, or came here after the war, or many years ago. But the people who come, who belong to the Community are new immigrants. Regardless of the fact that everyone's Jewish, whether Russian or German, but they have absolutely different mentalities.

- *You would say that both groups are under a single roof of the Community, but they coexist?*

Parallel to one another.

- *And that's in every age group? Even with the young people?*

I hope that in the meantime the situation is a little different for the young people. In our youth center or student unions, that's another mentality. But these relations take place outside the Community. I mean that the young people who come here, they use this Community as a building, as a space or event location. They come here to put on things and aren't Community members in this sense. They don't live a Jewish life every day. This is a meeting place for them. They come here to events, but don't live as Community members to change anything.

- *That means that it will also be a problem to tie young people to the Community in the long run, so that they will be able to take on responsibilities in the Community?*

In Düsseldorf, as well, probably not only.

- *What can be done about it? Do you have any idea?*

First, I think that the Community leadership and board should realize that this is a real problem and a serious problem; that the young people are not committed to the Community. The Community board is made up of people who have been voted in, you probably need to search among the young people for those with ambition, regardless out of which motivation, but those who want to have these positions in the future. There should be younger board members to speak with young people, students, not necessarily the same age, but younger. They want this location, not to use the Community, but to call it their own. It doesn't have to be in this religious direction. I think that the young people should also find a connection to Israel as well and should participate and establish themselves in these different events; cultural, sports, other things, and should find something there for themselves. Religious, as well, but that's not the main thing.

- *If you come to the Community because you're interested in it, because there's a good cultural program, sports program, educational programs, including secular educational programs, then it's ok, and you have to wait and see what will happen and see what will excite and attract people in the Community?*

I think that what I just said is a fundament for living together and then later you can talk about having different religious movements, cultural directions; but that's all for later, that's the second step. First you've got to find this basis.

- *To what extent can you employ your earlier professional experience as a theater director in the Community?*

Of course when I came here to Germany in 2005 as a director I also had the idea I could do something in the Community. But I wasn't so active. I just put an ad in the paper. I have a big problem, but it's probably only a problem for me, because I am a true professional and I can't work with amateurs. For me, when I'm working with people who aren't actors, it's more like I'm the teacher and they are the students. That's how I feel. Because I'm now working in a completely different direction, I could incorporate my professional experience as a director into my work as a Rabbi, of course.

Of course when I tell people things about religion, I do it in such a way to captivate them, I use some acting skills. I have learned so much about Jewish paths and places in Germany. I've led some tours in Frankfurt, in Amsterdam, and soon we'll go to Mainz and there I show people where Jews lived, what they did there. In this way I try to get people into the Community by telling them about the history and culture and religion.

- *The tour group is made up of immigrants?*

Yes. The tours are in Russian.

- *Do you see a healthy pluralism developing in Jewish life in German, or is it simply too early and rather weakens the entire Community?*

What I'm now saying is absolutely just my personal opinion. Of course the various movements within Judaism are on something of a confrontation course with one another. Each movement thinks it's the main one, and unfortunately sometimes is not so good to the others. I think for the future, for our religion in general, regardless of in Germany or in Israel or England, that is not very good. I don't think it's good. There are little fights in our Judaism; that's not good, that's not tolerant. They can't even come together at one table, and that's bad.

- *That means that because these movements have such negative relations amongst themselves, that this harm outweighs the good from pluralism?*

Yes, of course. People are conducting small wars, that's worse. That there is pluralism, that's not bad. There's something else I want to say about it. If you say that this synagogue is Orthodox, what does that mean? That means either the Rabbi, or someone from the Community leadership is Orthodox because practically all the others, almost 90%, are atheists because they're from the Soviet Union, because they're new immigrants. But I think that the people who are in the leadership; they are the ones involved in the conflicts, not the normal members. The members have no idea what's going on. Just the people in power.

- *That means that you don't believe that the masses are Orthodox?*

They are tending toward something more traditional than what they have brought with them from the Soviet Union, but not Orthodox. When we're talking about the future and if that's for the people who came from the

former Soviet Union, they're not choosing the Orthodox movement. I think they're choosing something more traditional. Like in Israel.

● *How can you make the Community more attractive for those who don't have any connection to the Communities?*

I'm talking about the second generation. Probably the second generation will have an easier time of it, that means the children of the immigrants and the children from the veterans; they will have an easier time of it and will live together within the Community. If we're talking about the second generation, when our children enter the Community, what we've already talked about, that first we need to give these young people reasons. Cultural, and so on. Then these people will most likely discover something within themselves that connects them to Jewish life or the Community.

● *Do you think that the strong connection to Israel will remain so important for the members' sense of identity?*

Everyone immigrant I know has relatives in Israel. That's why I can say that these people will at least continue having a connection to Israel due to their relatives, not necessarily a connection to the state, but to the relatives living in Israel. I often talk about Jerusalem, once a week, and I always ask, who has been to Jerusalem, who has been to Israel? Almost 90% have been there. That's a lot. Of course if you've been there one or two times, regardless of where your relatives live, you develop a connection to Israel. That just happens. If we go to celebrate Yom Jerushalajm once a year in the old city in Düsseldorf and see the flags, the music and everything is Israeli, there's nothing German. You see that the people are thinking about Israel and not something else. The connection is there. We have a video club and we sometimes show movies from Israel and many people come.

● *Are young people coming to the Community for such events?*

No, unfortunately not. Young people come to Yom Jerushalajm and Yom HaAzma'ut . But in general, young people do not frequent the Community very often.

● *Is Israel is a very important part of young people's Jewish identity?*

I know that there are many different programs from the Sochnut and so on. There they have young people who go to Israel to study or work and get to know different things and they have a connection to Israel. Some of them go for a month, some for up to six months.

● *What Jewish educational programs would you say are missing here in Düsseldorf?*

What I would say as a Rabbi is that here in Düsseldorf there's no school for our kids from kindergarten till graduation, a secondary school. We just have an elementary school.

● *There's no secondary school?*

No, and it's a weakness here in the education. There is a connection when they attend the kindergarten and elementary school, but when they go to secondary school with Germans this connection isn't so large anymore. This relates back to what I've been saying, the basis of this important connection for young people must be a normal elementary school and secondary school. A secondary school emphasizing the Jewish religion with Jewish education, history, languages, and then the children are connected and know that they are Community members.

- *You mean there are good things on offer but only up to the 4<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade?*

We're starting to see this happen; that the children are slowly leaving. There are, of course, different Jewish summer camps, but not so many, and then the connection gets lost.

- *Do you work with the local Jewish event manager who's targeting young people?*

She tries to recruit young people, but with, let's say, unreligious things. Different events, or they play poker. They use the rooms in the Community center. I think that that doesn't have so much to do with Judaism. She does invite young people, Community members and non-members, she gets everyone together. It's good, as they come and get to know it.

- *But you can't see any results for the Communities?*

That's hard to say, working with young people takes time. It's a process and she hasn't been working so long.

- *I'm just asking because these are small attempts which the JOINT is supporting as a case study in the Ruhr area.*

I work with the JOINT; too, with Mrs. Smolianitskaya for the family seminars, for example. Together we visit different Communities and talk to the people. Conflicts between old and young people, in this sense of family not as a married couple, but family as generations. For example, in Recklinghausen the topic will be the Jewish family and Shabbat. I'll go there three-four times to make my presentation. It's a course, it's with role play, and I really try to get the people involved. She is very good.

- *Do you have any experience with non-Jewish Germans in Germany? How is it for you as a Rabbi wearing a yarmulke?*

Not far from here there's a cemetery where various soldiers are buried from World War II. It's a mass grave and we assume that Jews are also buried there, and we hold the ceremonies together with Christians. Or, for example, I was at an event in Mönchengladbach where representatives from different religions were invited to read something from the Bible. I read something from Psalms. Those are my contacts because my German isn't very good.

- *Would say that the churches are interested greater dialogue?*

Yes, they're interested. For example once a year we have Catholics who come for Shabbat and we celebrate Shabbat together. The schools come on field trips and get a tour through the synagogue and it's explained what a synagogue is and what a Jewish Community is, for different grades.

- *How is the reporting in German media about the developments in Community life here in Düsseldorf, or in Germany in general?*

Of course I try to improve my German and every morning I begin with the news. I've also caught on that there are programs that talk about Shabbat.

- *Shabbat Shalom?*

Yes. I try to listen to that. The papers that I read are in Russian, like the Evreyskaya Gazeta. I can say that there is a large interest in Judaism and the Communities in general. The relation to Israel and the Palestinian problem is repeated over and over again. I also watch Arte, which shows Israeli and Palestinian movies. The

relationship between Germany and Israel and the conflict is, of course, not simple. But yes, I try to catch a bit.

- *Would you say that the German media tries to report objectively about the Middle East conflict? Or do you think there's a slant?*

It's not objective.

- *Could you elaborate? A slant towards what?*

Unfortunately they can't be objective. I have to say, this is my personal opinion, that Germany, compared to other European countries, supports Israel more and more. Germany today supports Israel much more than other countries like France, Spain or Italy. As Mrs. Merkel was here receiving the Neuberger medal, she said in her words of thanks that the conflict with Iran and its atomic program is actually a German problem.

- *Which medal was that?*

The Neuberger medal. Every year it is bestowed on a very well-known person from German politics, from the Community directly. Next year I already know that an artist will receive it. The artist responsible for the Stolpersteine (Stumbling Blocks), Gunter Demnig.??

- *Did you mean Germany supports Israel in the conflicts, wars and developments more and more and that this is also present in the media? That there's a pro-Israel tendency in coverage of the Middle East?*

No, I meant it the other way around. The media is the other way around. Mrs. Merkel told us how we support Israel, because that's our problem, but in the mass media it's the other way around.

- *So that's a contradiction; German politics is very close to Israel, but German mass media is very distanced from it. A last question. What do you think about the Jewish media in Germany?*

Mass media can do anything, it's powerful. Mass media is very difficult. As a Rabbi, a person, I think it's very bad, a very bad influence. You read something and suddenly you've changed your mind. I don't see any pluralism in the Russian language Jewish media, or in the German language Jewish media. If we take the Jewish newspapers as an example, most of them describe Jewish Community conflicts. There are other topics as well; Germany, Israel, social and political issues but not a lot. Mostly there's local news, what happened in individual Jewish Communities and conflicts, conflicts. Of course this sells. It's capitalism, and to sell papers, you've got to have hot news.

- *When we consider the younger generation of both the veterans and the immigrants, probably only a few of them read the Evreyskaya Gazeta or Jüdische Allgemeine. They're in the Internet. Do you think it would make sense to support and expand this?*

I know some people from Israel who are trying to set up their own websites to post news and information about Israel. The Internet is absolutely better for the young people. The second generation reads the Internet, not a paper.

## 15. SERGEY LAGODINSKY

**June 11, 2009, Berlin**

● *Mr. Lagodinsky, what would you say are the main challenges and main difficulties to be overcome for Jews in Germany in the short-run and in the long-run?*

In the short run creating competent leadership, definitely. There is a gap and a lack of Jewish politically savvy and politically effective leaders who understand the Community as well. In the long run the main task is keeping identity, the Jewish identity.

● *Would you please say a few words about the demographic perspectives? How do you assess them?*

Demographic? I mean, I'm not an empirical scientist, but my projection would be we'll have very small Communities in the near future, mostly around larger cities. I think that most of the small Communities in Eastern Germany, or somewhere in little villages will die out. Most of the people will focus and concentrate in larger cities: Berlin, Frankfurt, Munich and a few others.

● *How would describe the current relations between the newcomers from the former Soviet Union and the German veterans after 15-16-17 years of influx and attempts at integration?*

I think there is a shift in rhetoric, which is positive. It's no longer just about integration, but creating something new. There's a sense of respect, also respect to biographies and to the backgrounds of the immigrants. So in theory, this all works. In practice, I think we're still not there. Especially there is still a disparity between the base, which is mostly Russian-speakers, and the top, and I think it's natural, but the top hasn't adapted yet. Not only the language, but also in terms of their policies, to accommodate the needs of the base, to understand their approach. I think a big problem is that there's still no opening in the Communities toward paternal Jews, non-Halachic Jews, there is still no recognition in efforts to secure the welfare of older citizens. More than that there is an implicit or explicit understanding that the older ones are fine, and that there's a feeling that what else could they want? They came here, they got the welfare and it's their fault if they're not happy. So this whole focusing on the younger generation, basically hijacking the younger generation and taking them away from their parents and saying we will shape them, we will make real Jews out of them. We don't care about the older generation. I think this is a problem. Because it's also a sign of disrespect to the biographies. You know, it's a bit similar to the disrespect paid to the biographies of people from East Germany in the political arena.

● *You mentioned paternal Jews. Do you have any idea of how to keep in touch with the non-Halachic Jews? Maybe an associated membership?*

Well, that's what I'm trying to do on the Berlin [Jewish Community] level, but it's very hard. There are various things we can try. For example, I tried to push for the change of election statutes here in the Jewish Community, which forbids to anyone run for a Community seat in the parliament if they have children who are minors and who are not Jewish.

● *You're talking about children?*

Right. If your children are not Jewish, you are not eligible to run for a seat in the parliament of the Jewish Community of Berlin. And I think it's discriminating; it's clear where it's targeting. I was actually trying to change this situation. The head of the Community supported me and joined the petition, but the majority

didn't want it. We didn't get the 2/3 majority in the representative assembly. The majority wanted it, but we needed the 2/3. I think this was only the first attempt, we will try it again. But you see, this is a blatant example of discrimination. As for membership, there are no real chances to institute the associated membership right now, I don't see much openness towards this idea.

● *From many places we've been told that it's very hard to get young FSU immigrants committed to continuing Jewish Community involvement. You have worked for several Jewish institutions in Germany. Do you agree with this assessment?*

Yes. I see the problem, I understand the problem. I think the problem is not the people, but the ways to recruit them and to work with them. The problem is the overall image of the Community. And the overall image is not sexy. Why should they come and commit? I mean, they live here, they're well integrated into German society; basically we're losing these families. They have to pay extra taxes if they join the Community; this is one of the big problems for them.

● *So you would say this is a natural trend, also occurring in France and Great Britain? It's not a specific German problem?*

No, I think it's a specific German problem. I don't know the situation in France or in Great Britain. But I know that here the Community is very bureaucratic, and which in many cases does not have the means or the fantasy to work with them. It's a very closed Community. For example, if there are younger fathers who are in an intermarriage, they're automatically excluded. Why should a young father be a member of this Community and pay the extra taxes for it if his children are not accepted as full-fledged members of the Community? So it all hangs together. Also there are no ways of looking at the American experience. How can we bring programs from the United States to Germany? This is what we are trying to do with Gesa Edelberg [Conservative female Rabbi in Berlin, O.G.] here, who is very open to American ways of recruitment and we're hoping that we can use some of her techniques.

● *Some voices are talking about a new pluralism of Jewish life in Germany. Do you share this view? And if so, what are the most essential components of this new German-Jewish pluralism? And is it viable for the long term, or just a temporary trend?*

I'm a proponent of plurality. I think it depends on what you understand under Community. I say that we should open up the Community and make it a true "community". For me, the Community numbers are not the numbers of the people who are on the record and who pay taxes, but for me the numbers are of the people who actually participate and who feel engaged and are interested in this belonging to something, to this group, to this Community of Jews. In that sense I don't care what means you take, as long as it's not missionary and intolerant to other groups. It's fine. I don't like all these fights and struggles between different Jewish organizations.

● *How would you describe the current relations between religious and non-religious Jews in Germany? Are there problems, or is there an acceptance of one another?*

I mean in cities like Berlin the secular-religious relations are not a problem. It's actually quite normal. But in cities like Kassel, where I come from and where my brother is now, I think that there isn't a broad acceptance in the Community. I mean the Rabbi there is the one who's orthodox and there are a couple of people who are orthodox, but otherwise everyone is Russian. And I think it doesn't matter what means you employ trying to get them interested. Many Russians have a problem with reform movements, they have a problem with female Rabbis, but these are questions of working with them and educating them and showing them the plurality of their Jewish life.



- *Would you say that most Russian Jews who came here have started to really be interested in religion turn to orthodox Judaism? This seems to be the situation in Israel, for example.*

I think if you don't work with them, yes. But you have to work with them to explain the beauty of the diversity. And you see this in Berlin, actually, where many Russians go to Rabbi Teichtal [Chabad Center], but not so many go to Gesa Edelberg, or to Oranienburger Strasse [egalitarian minyan, O.G.]. But now Rabbi Ederberg has started working with them and reaching out to them. In general, I think that the candidates for reform and conservative movement are mostly people who are well integrated, and who feel German. So it needs more of an effort to get them on board. I think Russians do have the potential for joining the reform movement as well; you just have to activate it. You know we're coming from a secular but conservative society. It will take some time for not a few of the immigrants to accept a woman being a Rabbi.

- *Do you think that the identification and solidarity with Israel will remain an important element of collective Jewish identity in the Communities over the coming decades?*

That's hard to say.

- *Explain.*

Originally, I used to think the solidarity with Israel will become stronger through the Russian immigration. Now I'm having some doubts. I think that people who come to Germany, they come to Germany. They consciously did not go to Israel. They come to Germany to build on their lives. Then it's an effort to explain to them why they should have a special solidarity for Israel. As I said, from my anecdotal evidence, of course I see only people who are very pro-Israel within the Community. If you start talking to them, I have a feeling that their solidarity with Israel is less vehement, less passionate than those who used to be here. Which I think has something to do with this willingness to be part of this society and to connect with it first and then through family bonds or whatever bonds have a special view of Israel. This doesn't mean that these people are, for example, pro-Palestinian. They have their conservative views, and they have their sometimes radical nationalistic and fascist views, but these views are more like a political discourse, it's less a personal discourse.

- *That would mean that the engagement or commitment for Israel felt among the younger generation, which has an almost 80% migration background, could weaken? That there's solidarity, but maybe not so much identification?*

I don't think that identification with Israel has to be the cornerstone of Community life. There has to be information about Israel, there has to be solidarity with Israel, but identification with Israel is not something that people want and need.

- *Do you see a growing distance between the Jewish Communities in Germany or Europe in general and Israel resulting from the developments in the Middle East conflict, or from the developments inside Israel?*

No. Admittedly the generational change will bring upon a different way of positioning ourselves to Israel. That's what I meant, there will be no pressure to identify with Israel, but I think there will be a healthy way of somehow presenting the solidarity. Again, it depends on what you were talking about. Are we talking about the institutions? Or are we talking about the broader Jewish Community? If we're talking about the institutions, then of course per definition you will only have people there with strong identities who will be more pro-Israel. Whereas if you say, ok, let's look at all the other 30-50,000 people who came here and have nothing to do with the Community, I think they will be more critical and more distant. But again, the question is are they relevant, if they're not even counted?

- *Looking at the educational programs offered in the Jewish Communities today, what programs are still missing?*

Conversion courses. They may be in Russian, for Russian-speaking people. I think what is also missing is a targeted effort of communicating religious values and religious content in a way that Russians understand, which is on an intellectually higher level. Also I think what is lacking is an intergenerational approach, so, for example, grandparents and grandchildren, something like that which brings two generations together, which acknowledges the biographies of the older, but frames it within the new narratives of the younger. Something like that. I think this would be an interesting approach. Also because due to the immigration and the integration process, these generations live in different worlds. You have in one family two different worlds; the younger world and the older world. And the Community could be the bridge between these two worlds, bringing them together and saying your Jewish identity is something which links you together.

- *Do you think that the synagogues in Germany will remain the core of organized Jewish life in the long run? Or can other educational or cultural institutions play an almost equal role, and be able to attract the thousands of secular Jews who don't attend a synagogue?*

I do think that the core is religion and it should be so, because it ensures the continuity. I think what we need is having the nucleus being religion and having a whole Community center around it with opportunities for people who do not identify with religion that much to feel part of the Community, of the broader Community. I wouldn't know how to convey to people their identity without referring to religion. What I think we should stop doing is expecting that people actively see themselves as religious people. We should offer them an opportunity to participate in religious life without a profession of faith.

- *Do you think the Communities could offer more to the elderly?*

Again, I think a great thing would be bring them together with younger people, bringing younger people to talk to them about religion, for example. I think that they're living in a bubble and it's sad. I don't blame them, it's not their fault. I think we should be trying very softly and kindly to find ways for them to communicate with the world based on things other than their past. Acknowledging their past, but bringing them back to the real world. I think this would be nice. Maybe it's too abstract. But something in that direction.

- *Should there be some kind of political support from the Community in order to improve the social situation of the elderly immigrants in Germany?*

Well, I'm lobbying for this.

- *What is your experience in working with non-Jewish German officials and politicians?*

The irritations are always there on both sides, but it's always like that, not only with Jews, with anyone. I think that the political capital is scarce, but my impression is that the official Jewish structures are very generous with wasting it. And at some point the political structures just aren't perceptive any more to arguments that come from Jewish Communities.

- *Is there a lack of political sensitivity?*

This is exactly what I mean, and this also happens on the Jewish side. You have to be selective about when you do PR. You have to be selective about wasting attention, public attention, political attention. If you want

to make a big fuss out of not being invited somewhere, then the next time when you have a real issue, you won't get what you want.

- *What is your impression about non-Jewish German media coverage on developments in Jewish life here in Germany? Is it objective?*

Very short-sighted, and also, I think, promoted by many Community leaders, focused on integration problems. Also basically equating integration problems of Russian-speaking Jews with Russian Germans, equating them to Turkish immigrants. Saying they have the same problems, which is not true. Though there is a new trend now of reporting with a bit more nuance about our people. Another issue is understanding the difference between the several Jewish identities and accepting the secular Jewish identity. This you will not find. You will not find this in the press. For them it's like a church, for them it's about religion and you have all the problems stemming from that. This way of thinking is also applied to Israel and the Middle East conflict, where they reduce the conflict or reduce Israel to a Jewish religious state, which is simply not true.

- *This is the mainstream media?*

Yes, I would say so. Some papers cover Jewish religion equating it with the sharia, and the Jewish State then becomes something like a Jewish Sharia State, but it has nothing to do with that.

- *So there are lots of clichés and stereotypes?*

I wouldn't call them stereotypes, I would call it lack of information and unwillingness to deal with a nuanced reality.

- *Jewish Sharia State is a stereotype.*

I think it's just taking one dimension of Jewish identity and projecting it on something. They wouldn't write Jewish Sharia State or theocracy. They wouldn't say it directly, but in the way the argument flows you will notice it. Also in the way they talked about the Gaza war and the way they talk about Lieberman. People don't understand the difference between Lieberman and Shas! They think that Lieberman is a Jewish radical, and therefore he is a danger, he embodies the danger of Jewish ultra-religion whatever state. Which isn't true, it's exactly the opposite, but people don't understand this. I just had this discussion about generalizations.

- *So you see a chain reaction in the coverage of Israel?*

No, they take the internal political debate in Israel which is, of course, polarized. It's like here, some public figures argue that the CDU is a right-wing extremist anti-Muslim party. So when Germans say that the CDU is an anti-Muslim party, Christian Democrats in Germany must be anti-Muslims in general, and this is how it works with Israel in the German media. Of course the Israeli discourse is totally polarized and they just take what they want, instead of actually dealing with issues and content.

- *How do you see the development of the Jewish media in Germany? There are only a few papers, but do you see any pluralism?*

No.

- *How can the structure of Jewish media in Germany be strengthened? Maybe by adopting models from other European countries with strong Jewish Communities?*

We should be realistic and see that we won't have the numbers of consumers. I don't think we'll have the numbers for a Jewish newspaper, radio channel or whatever. I think the Jüdische Allgemeine is doing a good job and they are diverse within the limits that a weekly of the Central Council can have. That's why it was good that we had the Jüdische Zeitung, which unfortunately closed. The Evreyskaya Gazeta is a different type of newspaper of course because it's in a different language, but also because of the way that they deal with this discourse. I think with all my respect for them, and I like what they do, but I think that one of the problems is that they foster debates which cannot survive in the majority society. These are debates which nobody is interested in. The way the debates are fostered, I mean with all these struggles and fights within the Jewish Community and someone's writing oh, we wrote to Merkel and an open letter to Steinmeier and they think that this is enough to do political work, well, this is wrong. So there is this lack of understanding, not so much from the editors, but from the readers of this newspaper of how political processes work here. And what you need to do to influence politics, to organize a change.

- *So you think the Jewish media is not reaching the younger generation?*

Yes, I mean the Jüdische Allgemeine and Evreyskaya Gazeta, I don't think that anyone who's young reads them. I think they read German newspapers.

- *What do you think about opportunities for web portals, websites, more online?*

They should try. I think it is important to have media, which, like Ha Galil, are diverse in themselves. Because we are now dominated by bloggers, who have a very specific Jewish and non-Jewish lack of nuance.

## 16. ARKADY LITVAN

May 27, 2009, Hanover

● *Mr. Litvan, when you resettled from Odessa to Germany, did you come straight to Hanover? And how did you become involved with the Jewish Community?*

No, the first two years my family and I spent in Berlin. Then, in 1992, I moved to *Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania* (North East Germany) and worked there in *Rostock*, where we established a Jewish Community. Then I was in Schwerin for a while; there we didn't found a Community, but we revived one. I was also the chair of the Community there for a while. Then I received an offer to come here to Hanover; this was still in 1993. I've been in Hanover since then, and I'm still active in the *Landesverband* [Association of Jewish Communities in the federal state of Lower Saxony]. And then at some point I was active in Community life in the sense that I can't imagine life without the synagogue, that's clear. And it was twofold. After some developments in the Community here in Hanover I felt that I should become much more active in Community life here, and since then I've been involved in managing Community life. I cannot remember exactly, but I think I've been in the community board for seven or eight years.

● *You're like a crisis manager.*

Well, what I do at the communal level professionally, that's one thing. What I do in the Community is another. Basically I do everything, not alone, of course, but I do many things that need to be done.

● *Let's begin with some Community issues. What would you say are the major challenges facing Jewry in Germany in the next 10-15-20 years?*

Jewish living. Let's say the closeness to the Community. Admittedly, some things are still a bit different for all the Jews who participate in organized Community life. The so-called Russians, or some of them, still have to establish themselves a bit more in society. But in fact those who will become established have already done so, or are at least on their way to doing so.

The entire Jewish population, I mean Russian-speaking, or formerly Russian-speaking, will split up along age lines. There is a part that's still active or has to become active and there's a part, let's say of people who came when they were 55 or 60, and you can't really expect much from them. I mean, professionally, and in public life. Maybe a bit in Community life, maybe, but they can't really be much more involved in professional life. Those who don't expect anything more, they have more or less gotten used to this idea and they've more or less arranged things accordingly. Of course, that doesn't mean that there aren't any problems. There are many problems.

And the other part, the younger generation, they can speak German so well by now that sometimes you can't even tell the difference. The really young, there's no difference [between them and Germans]. Sometimes they have more problems with Russian, but that's also a shame. And a real difficulty for the very young generation is to involve themselves in current Community life. That's a Jewish problem. The other problems will be solved in some way, in any case. I mean the social, professional, educational, and so on. Those will be solved. But the problem how to attract the young people to Jewish Community life, this problem will remain. The Communities must do more, but they don't have enough possibilities, in my view. Except some big and rich Communities, which can afford it, most of the other Communities just aren't equipped to deal with this challenge.

● *Do you also have the problem in the JC Hanover that the middle generation is the one that's missing the most, because they're busy and working?*

That's definitely true. The younger generation is also missing. We can only offer a few attractive things for them. We have some alternative places, and people react differently to different offerings and Communities. In our town there's also a Bukharian Community from Bukhara. People grow up there completely and continuously within the Jewish tradition. Regardless of how old they are, regardless of how many there are, and there are usually just a few. But in tradition they are very connected. They have fewer problems with integrating their people into Jewish life.

In many Jewish families the roots had been cut off after three generations under Communist rule. But the people who came here, *they are Jewish*, but often very far away from Judaism as we understand it. These former Soviet Jews have to be won over to Judaism. That's what's got to be attractively packaged and sold well. We just don't have the resources for that. Because in all honesty, when all other things are equal, when people go somewhere, the question is where and with whom? Where it's the most interesting, and the Jewish component is not at the top of the agenda. That's why we need to become more attractive than the others.

- *Is the Bukharian Community a part of your Orthodox Community?*

Now I must correct you. We don't have Orthodox Communities, we have a so-called United Community. We are not an Orthodox Community, although we try to preserve Orthodox rites during the religious services, but everyone can participate if they want. In contrast, I would say, the Liberals are so liberal in the meantime that they can only remain amongst themselves. But that's a completely different problem. We try to offer a place for everyone, and we can. But the Community has established itself - I mean the Bukharian. They are a charitable organization and they were located here, but now have moved. We have very good relations with them, but it's a separate Community.

- *You mentioned earlier that it's difficult to offer what's attractive for young people especially, young immigrants. Has the Community tried to work together with Israeli initiatives, like Lehava, for example?*

Yes, the Lehava project was very active in helping us out. But the thing is, they aren't an institute which can really develop activities. They do help us and participate, recently not so much, but they were really active. But they help us, work with us, are an accomplice, so to speak.

- *Do you think that the relationship between Russian-speaking Jews and veterans has normalized, or are there still large cultural, lingual barriers?*

First I want to mention that I can only talk about the Community in Hanover. I'm not that familiar with the situation in other Communities. Here the situation is that we have hardly any German Jews, as good as none. Two-three families, relatively old, and they seldom attend. There are a few more, but also not so many, who have lived in Germany for a long time, Polish and a few others, but also not so many by number. There are maybe 100-150 veterans in all out of 4,000 members. And otherwise there is no tension, probably because the veterans are relatively old and usually don't come.

- *They don't have the energy to fight.*

Yes, not only not to fight, unfortunately. They're already pretty old. I see that there aren't any resources for stronger participation. And culturally there are some difficulties, of course. Particularly with the German Jews, and that's probably not something Jewish, but a *general German phenomenon*; they're constantly scared of being overpowered. The Russians don't want to dominate or suppress anyone, but the Germans, and not just the Jews, it's a German phenomenon in my view. They are always a little afraid of being taken over. And that's why they're so careful. The main thing is that there are no reasons for it. Before there was the language, and the German speakers got terribly upset when something was in *both* languages. They said why does it have to be in two languages? They should learn German! Some veterans forgot that they themselves

can't speak German well up to today. Some of them just suddenly forgot. But with the second and third generation that's no longer the case and it's the same with the Russians.

- *Does the community have a Rabbi as a permanent employee?*

Yes, we do, but it's not a full-time position.

- *And he speaks Russian?*

Yes, his Russian is just as broken as his German. It's not much better than his German. But he can make himself understood in both of these languages. It's an advantage.

- *Do you see a new pluralism in Jewish life in Germany? Alone in Hanover you mentioned the Liberals, the independent Bukharian, Chabad has come to Hanover.*

All of this exists, there's no doubt. Everything that you listed is here and they are all active. Some are more and some are less active, some are more and some are less successful. I'm a little careful in my assessment.

- *Don't worry, I'm not from the media.*

It doesn't matter where you're from. I will always give my opinion. In which way am I careful? Not in expressing my opinion, but in what the actual development offers. I think that it's a little bit too early to speak about a Jewish pluralism in Germany. That's my opinion.

I can tell you how it was when I worked in the Communities in *Mecklenburg-Vorpommern* and tried to revive them and build them up. Some Russian speaking immigrants came and wanted to know which way should we go, are we Orthodox, Liberal, Reform, or what? And I told them, let's do it the other way around. First, I'm trying to bring you a little closer to Judaism, as far as I'm able, as far as I'm capable to do so. Just something, so you'll understand what it's all about. And only then, when you think that you've more or less understood, then you can choose. The only thing I can tell you, this is what I said to them, if you choose Reform, I'll go. I personally will go and not stay. But, of course, you can do whatever you want. But to be able to choose the right way, you first need to understand what you're doing. And, by the way, liberalism in everyday life isn't the same thing as liberalism in religion. In my view these are two totally different things. In life, for example, if you ask Russian Jews if they're liberal, most of them will answer, of course; we're all tolerant, liberal. But if you would continue than to ask them whether they are liberal in *religious issues*, then I'm almost certain that you will mostly get a no as an answer.

- *Do you share this view?*

Yes, and I'll try to explain. Sometimes the argument is introduced that today we have the year 2009, and not 1512 or whatever. That's why we have to change and to go with the times. I absolutely disagree with this kind of thinking. For me, a G'd who can't give a testament once and forever, and set the rules once and for all, this G'd isn't interesting for me. If he has to develop something new every 200 or 300 or even every 1,000 years, I'm sorry, but that doesn't interest me at all. Then I'm almost a G'd. I'm also not so dumb, I'd say.

But I've also seen in the Community the most diverse, the widest spectrum of directions. And I'm not of the opinion that you've got to tell people which way they have to go, or what to get rid of or to suppress something, no. Life will show us. The future will show.

Here in Germany, it's a little more difficult. I don't know who developed it, but it was really a miracle, the model of the *United Community*. Everyone was able to find their place under this roof and everyone was

together. If they hadn't chosen this way, then they would not have survived during the last 50 or 60 years. And today some people think that the time has come for a new Jewish pluralism. As I said, I'm careful with this, and do not share this view. But everything does exist and I can only judge it for what it is. Is it good or bad? I've got to take it as it is.

● *Do you think that in the next 20-30 years, the significance of Israel in Community life - or for the identity of the members - will remain the same as it's been over the last 30-50 years?*

I think it will remain the same, yes. Maybe the emphasis will shift, because up to the 1980's, or maybe even later, the Jews living here in Germany, they saw Israel as where they'd be living in the near future. They all bought apartments there and saw their life here in Germany as something temporary, short-term. Now this has all changed. The majority assume that they'll stay here in Germany, or try to stay or want to stay. But Germany remains and is and will be their home. However, the spiritual, the religious-spiritual center will be in Israel. That's why I said that the emphasis will shift a bit, and is shifting already. The connection to Israel will remain. I don't want to compare, but it will be something like, Mecca for the Muslims. The center stays in Mecca.

● *If you don't have many employees here in the Community, you've got to make do with few material resources, but you still, I presume, offer a pretty wide range of educational programs, including Hebrew courses?*

Yes, we have all of that.

● *Would you say that this is readily accepted? Or would you say, there could be more interest?*

Some people who are interested are intensely interested, but that's not the big crowd. It's just like with attendance at religious services. Those who come are really interested, but that's just the *hard core group*. If you ask how many members are active in the Community, I can't say. There are people who only come to meetings, twice a year, they're interested in the meetings and want to organize them and so on. There are those who just come to the religious services and not to the meetings. And there are those who just come to the cultural programs, and that's also a mixed group. Not every cultural event is the same. There are, for example, dances and there are some people who just come to the dances. There are those who just come to readings, or to something else. But altogether very many people come to the Community, just not to everything. And maybe that's better, because we wouldn't be able to fit them all in the same room. I mean we have almost 4,000 members.

● *You haven't added on to the buildings since the 1990's?*

Not at all.

● *Let's speak about the youth center. Do you have a social worker? Or is everyone working on a volunteer basis?*

No, it's mainly volunteers and there are young people who rotate in the center to make sure it works. It's not completely volunteer work, but it's also not a real job, there's a small allowance for it, but nothing much.

● *You already mentioned a kindergarten project under construction. Could you say something about it? How big is the kindergarten?*

We're planning to open a kindergarten for 40 children. There's a baby group and the 3 and over group, until they go to school. And we have the kindergarten in the former youth center. We've rebuilt, and added on.



- *Another youth center?*

Our youth center, because now have the possibility to add onto it. It's a single story building. And that's where the youth center will be. I don't want to get into details, but the money to build the kindergarten has been promised, and about 90% is there. Not that only 90% was promised, it was 100% promised. But 90% of the costs are covered, and now things have somewhat come to a halt because there's just not enough money to finish the construction work.

- *The kindergarten doesn't exist yet?*

No.

- *You have the project, the people, the waiting list and the parents, but cannot start.*

Unfortunately we missed a step and now the parents have to find another place for their children, they can't wait forever. And that's very regrettable.

- *When is the construction scheduled to be finished?*

If the money would be there, I think, we could finish everything in six weeks.

- *A different question about volunteer commitment in the Community. How has volunteerism developed would you say? Is it difficult to find people? Or are they coming in droves?*

No, but you've just got to organize them in the right way. There are already quite a few, especially where we need them the most. I mean in social services. There are quite a few. Visits on people's birthdays, when they're sick or when they're in the hospital in any case or some who are lonely and can't get around very well on their own, they are also visited. This kind of work is only done on a volunteer basis and it's done really well.

- *And there's also a Chewra Kadischa?*

Yes. Unfortunately, on average we don't have less than one funeral a week. Not less than four-five a month.

- *You've been on the JC board for quite a long time and have had contact to government authorities and public offices. How is the cooperation with them?*

To put it very cautiously, it varies. Every city has its own situation, not talking about the state. Here in Hanover, I don't want to complain, but other Communities are out in front.

- *How is the German media covering the recent developments in organized Jewry in Germany?*

I can't give a general answer to this question. I know that there are many positive, really helpful articles that help in our work, but sometimes they're not competent. There are also others, where it's somehow directed from a central place which arranges something to happen; I have enough experience to feel that. I can see this by reading between the lines and the lines themselves. Here in the Community, excuse me, but some asshole slithered in here, really slithered in at someone's behest. If I were to tell you the whole story it'd take two hours, but in a renowned magazine, really with a good reputation. Whose, I still can't understand. He wrote an article which blackens the name of the entire Jewish Community in Germany.

- *Was it in the Spiegel?*

No, it wasn't the *Spiegel*, it was in the *Stern*. Under the name of a certain Herr Braun This guy came here and said to me he wanted to talk to someone who served in the victorious Soviet Army in WW II and survived the war. *There were also victims on our side. But there are veterans who are not victims. They are the victors, that's a completely different mentality.* "I'd like to meet one", said this journalist. Ok, I had a bad feeling but suddenly one of our veterans came in. And agreed to give his story. The journalist said, "Do you have any medals?" - "Yes, of course I have.", and brought them to his home and he put out a bottle of vodka immediately and just opened his mind. But you cannot imagine how the journalist then exploited him and his story. Firstly they took 30-40 photos of him to choose later the worst one, looking like a caricature. The way he stood with the medals, and his stomach hanging. They made such a mockery out of everything. When I see this journalist once again, when I were to come across him again, then I would let him have it. Many of us were very outraged. I have it here somewhere.

- *How do you see the development in Jewish media here in general?*

Sometimes I read the *Jüdische Allgemeine*, and regularly the *Evreyskaya Gazeta*. The *Evreyskaya Gazeta* is very professionally made. I actually know the people who work there. They were at the *Literaturnaya Gazeta* in Russia, the Soviet Union at that time. That still exists and was really well done. If you look at the paper it's obvious that it's well made.

- *Is there a growing number of JC community members in Hanover who feel as integral part of the German society, or just identify as Germans?*

Yes, there are some throughout the generations, but I would say not so many.

- *Most still have a reticence?*

Yes, they are not Russian or Ukrainian any more, but they're still not German.

## 17. JEWGENIJ SINGER

June 8, 2009, Frankfurt

- *Mr. Singer, please tell me about your personal and professional background.*

I'm 26 years old, I've been in Germany for 10 years, and I emigrated from Ukraine. I went to a college prep school here in Germany. I studied political science and now have my own business in business communications. I'm also going to law school. I'm active in several Jewish organizations. I'm the chair of the Jewish Student Union in Hesse; I'm a member of the [JC] Community board in Frankfurt, and I'm a member of the board of the Federal Union of Jewish Students in Germany [BJSD].

- *You have said that you belong to Orthodox Judaism. Is your family religious, or is this something you discovered for yourself?*

I come from a non-religious family. Among the FSU immigrants there were so few people who had anything to do with the traditions, and that's simply because it was forbidden by the state. You couldn't live it, it was illegal. That's why some people say that nothing like it even existed. That's not completely true. I know for a fact that there were such people, but very few. My family didn't have a lot to do with religion. My grandmother once told me that this is now a Jewish holiday, Pessach, and so on, but we didn't celebrate it. It was forbidden for many years. As soon as it became possible, as soon as there was a Jewish school in my hometown, or the town I'm from, in Lemberg, my parents sent me there. They did have a connection to Judaism, but couldn't express it there.

- *Would you say that Orthodox Judaism is still the dominant strain in the Jewish Communities across Germany? At least, the majority of German Rabbis are Orthodox.*

Yes, but my decision had already been made before. That didn't have anything to do with it.

- *You're active in many different networks. Where do you see the largest difficulties and challenges for organized Jewish life in Germany?*

Basically I think that now a very important, you could even say historic, time has come, where there's a change going on in many different organizations. Also due to the aging process, many Jewish immigrants are taking on leadership positions in the organizations and the problem is that, for example, now the youth groups all across Germany are having trouble attracting enough qualified people. The problem isn't that such people don't exist; they certainly do. They just need to be motivated in the right way because the Communities have failed to include people in Jewish life from an early age on or from the moment they came to Germany. There's now the problem of actively including people between 20-35 years old in Jewish life.

Many Communities have given up because they think they won't be successful anyway. I think that the problem is with the concepts. They need to change their concepts and change the motivations of people.

- *That means that there is a general trend that it's difficult to attract and keep young people that you can see in the Communities throughout Germany?*

Yes, and everyone is ready to admit this. Many Jewish organizations try out various concepts, but I think that what's missing is the closeness to, let's say, their clients. They can't offer the right concept, not the concept that would be attractive to people and interest them.

- *What do you personally think is missing in the Communities?*

That in every Community, or Jewish organization, but we're talking now about the Community, there should be a single person responsible for the people between 18-35-40 who is working and responsible for the young adults. Many Communities have adopted the practice of handing over this task to the youth leaders, which is a step in the right direction, but the problem is just that these people already have enough to do with children under 18 and these are two different worlds. You need one concept for the children between 6-18 and another completely different concept and approach for young adults. That every Community would have a person, or that every institution install someone specifically for this, that would already be a step in the right direction.

- *Would you say that there's something like a healthy pluralism developing in Germany?*

My honest opinion: We must differentiate between two things. My attitude towards the other congregations is very critical. This is due to the simple reason that the experience in America and other countries, also in Germany, has shown that this kind of development leads to assimilation. In America there was a study which showed that some congregations, which were too liberal, I would say, led to Jews assimilating. Many Jews, to put it bluntly, were lost because they became completely assimilated. That's the one thing. The other thing is if you want to offer things along with the religious events, I'm completely for this. You should just separate this. You can offer a get-together, you can offer a non-religious event as a religious Orthodox Community, you can separate that. But the Orthodox religion itself, the laws, should not be questioned. I personally am very critical of the Liberal denominations. Because of the question of assimilation mainly.

- *You see the danger of assimilation in Germany, too?*

Yes

- *How would you describe the relations between religious and secular Jews in Germany right now?*

If we're talking about all of Germany, that's difficult to form an opinion and express it in a few sentences. Fundamentally, I think that there is a culture of dialogue, there are also cases on both sides where it's dissolved into radicalism, but basically I would say that the Community leadership in Germany is very pragmatic. This is an advantage, because then you're open, you see that a podium is necessary for this. But this can also be a disadvantage, particularly for younger people, because there's no particular idea of values being imparted, because the situation is dealt with pragmatically in the Community. This is the flip side.

- *If you are a member of the Community board, that means that you support the model of the United Community on some level.*

If the question is what my opinion about this concept is, then you need to understand that I don't approve of everything that happens in Frankfurt. On the other hand, that is a very difficult, and in fact a very important question for the Jewish Community in Germany, how to deal with such questions in the future. There is the concept of the United Community and there are other concepts. Basically, I think that religious life should be religiously organized in the Community; religious in the sense of the Orthodox congregation. You can quibble about the terms, but you know what is meant here.

The other things, as I've said, can have a completely different focus. You can have a culture club; celebrate Victory Day on May 9<sup>th</sup>, that doesn't have to be directly connected to religion. You need to differentiate between different levels. Many say that they're a Liberal Community and have so many members. The question is are they members because they're convinced of the concept; if they understand this deep and

philosophical concept of Liberal Judaism? Or do they just find it more comfortable that you can speak German and not have to pray in Hebrew? I think you've got to make the distinction here exactly why they have these members. Not that I want to criticize the people who live this concept and carry it out. That's an important intellectual and philosophical concept that you should know if you are in a position of authority in the Jewish Community. I think that the Community should be integrated and united, but in the sense of Orthodox Judaism regarding religious matters. Everything else should be determined by democratic plurality.

● *Do you see any unsolved problems or tensions between the veterans and the immigrants? How would you characterize their relations today?*

It's difficult to say for all of Germany. Things are also partially segregated. There are completely different Communities with completely different approaches to the immigrants. When speaking of the Communities, the majority, you've got to face the truth that the majority of Jews in Germany are immigrants. From 105,000 Community members, the centrally organized Jewish Community in Germany, according to different estimates 85-90,000 are immigrants. Which conflicts should we talk about when the vast majority are immigrants? That there are political tensions, for example in Berlin, I admit. But if you want to get into the problems in Berlin, you need to also analyze which immigrants ran in the election, who won, who had to resign from office after a huge argument. You can't generalize. These are individuals. In the large Communities there are leaders, but the leadership still rests with the veterans. This will be a process, a political, a pluralistic, a democratic one, and at the end, I'm 100% convinced of this, it will end that the vast majority will also prevail in the leadership as well.

● *How far is Israel central to Jewish life in Germany? Do you think that in the next few years, the level of identification with Israel will remain the same, grow or decline?*

I personally would very much like to see the sense of identification with Israel grow, but something must be done for this to happen. Today we do have a completely different situation. Now everything is different and it's up to the organizations. They now must, maybe for the first time ever, deal with the fact that people are asking themselves why do I need to do something for Israel? This question wasn't raised earlier. Before, many people were sitting on their packed suitcases and everyone understood that everyone wanted to leave with these suitcases to this country, and somehow help this country. Now the circumstances are different and the organizations need to be active, proactive. They shouldn't react, they can't expect that this identification will grow by itself, because there is a completely different social structure in place now, for political reasons and so on. You can discuss this for a very long time. But what should be done? They should deal with this actively. They should convey the significance to the young people and explain it to them. I don't want to say that nothing has been done in this regard, but, for example, in Ukraine or in Russia much more has been done in this area than in Germany and now people need to change their minds here as well.

● *You personally don't see a danger that German Jewry or European Jewry could drift away from Israel due to political differences?*

No. You shouldn't confuse solidarity with identification. The feeling of solidarity is immense, everyone is aware of being Jewish and that Israel is a Jewish state, an outpost of democracy, a bastion of democracy. You feel solidarity with it, but if your interest in it will increase or decrease depends on the people who have the expectations, they need to become active. The feeling of solidarity in the sense of being ready to express your support and so on is one thing, but to identify with it, to say yes, it is also something of a home for me, that's a different phenomenon, I think.

- *That's more the political side. Do you see Israel continuing to be the religious, cultural and spiritual center for the Diaspora in the long run?*

I understand, but our long run isn't very positive. In the long run we're all dead.

- *Who said that?*

John Maynard Keynes. Now seriously, in the long run we will surely be dead, but the idea will live on. Israel itself, but most of all the idea of a Jewish state. Israel will live on. I think that should continue to play a role for the Communities. How large this role should be will be determined by the democratic process, that you can influence now and at every moment. I think that Israel should continue to play an important role. I think that we shouldn't just feel solidarity, but also identify with it, and it should also remain the center not only for Jewish philosophy, but for the further development of religious concepts within the Orthodox congregation. In the long run, it should remain the center of Judaism because you simply don't have the same creative possibilities anywhere else.

- *Let's talk about BJSD (Federal Union of Jewish Students in Germany). How long have you been in it?*

I have to distinguish between the Federal Union and the State Union here in Hesse. I was first a delegate from the Hessian Union four-five years ago and attended the national meetings.

- *Did you have a specific motivating factor?*

The important thing is that you do the work, regardless in what form, based on your convictions. My motivation was the fact that I wanted to represent the idea of Judaism and Jewish life eloquently because I knew that in the Soviet Union this would not have been possible. Here when you receive the opportunity to do so, it would almost be criminal not to take advantage of it. I would like to actively engage others. I wanted to make up for what has been lost and animate others, especially immigrants. I still want to animate them to become much more active in the Jewish Community.

- *Could you please say a few things about the current composition of the BJSD? Who are the most active, how many are veterans, how many new members? Programmatically speaking, are things getting better or worse?*

As I said, the economists would say that the market exists. There are people who are interested in these events, and not just in the BJSD, but in many organizations dealing with young people in Germany. I don't know what it's like in other countries, but I've heard that it's similar. That's why you need people with leadership qualities. You need leaders, people who create and form. The demand is there, the market is there, just there aren't enough leaders and this is because no one tries to engage such people or to hire them or mentor them. That's a large problem. There aren't enough suitable people, because on the one hand no one tried to engage those who are suitable and on the other hand because in many Communities and organizations there wasn't sufficient incentive to deal with this age group.

- *Sounds very contra-productive.*

**It is** contra-productive. This age group is not very interesting for the elections, when we want to really almost over-simplify. That's why people aren't concentrating their energies on them.

- *You mean in the Communities?*

For the Community board election, for the chair election, and so on. Most of all, this group is very mobile. They're in a certain city first, and then move on to go to university and so on. That's why they're not interesting, politically speaking. That's the problem. This group isn't politically interesting; but they have the intellectual potential to change things, they know the system well. They could also change something in the political structure, but they don't have the motivation. This motivation can only be generated through active work, but then you again need these leaders who can lead and organize the people. They need to be more intensively trained and engaged. The largest problem is that there aren't enough competent and motivated people in the next generations. A lot of people are competent, but no one is able to really motivate them.

- *How many members does the Federal Union currently have?*

As far as I know according to the last lists there are around 5,000 members. You also need to see that there are direct members, but there are also those in the State Unions and they are also automatically members. So there are over 5,000 now who also really can be reached. There are also many, many more which could potentially join. I can say that the Hessian Union has about 500 members. In the two years when I was chair of the board, we almost doubled the number of members, but this is still too low, because I know that in Hesse there are about 2,000 people in this age group. I ask myself where all the others are.

- *Why were you successful in doubling the membership in two years?*

First of all, we were more active and did more. The more that you do, the larger resonance you'll find. Like in advertising.

- *What did the content of work look like?*

Our content was different ideas. We had, let's say, three areas, although that might sound too ambitious. One area is the religious, we do Kabbalat Shabbat together, Kidduschim, we celebrate Jewish holidays together and so on. The second area is Israel, the actual political problems; we watch movies, discuss the political situation. The third area is just for fun. We have parties, go out for drinks, watch movies. This doesn't have anything to do with Israel or Judaism. We divided everything into these three parts and were willing to try anything. Although I have to say we consciously laid the main focus on the religious things and events, because I knew that that's where the largest deficit is. You can see movies in every theater. But Pessach, many don't celebrate it at home, so that's why we invited them to us.

- *Were all three areas successful?*

All three areas were successful.

- *It wasn't like people only came to parties or only to religious events, or only to lectures on Israel?*

No, everything was comparatively, you've got to see things in perspective, well attended. But maybe I'm taking credit for it because I pushed for it; many more people were interested in the religious events, maybe because it was something out of the ordinary, something necessary that the Jewish soul was thirsting for. I don't know, but the resonance was great.

- *Let's now talk about the Frankfurt Community. Was there here also a special motivation for you? Did someone approach you, or did you have a religious incentive?*

In the Community I can say I was approached. You need to see that in Frankfurt there is one group that appears as a fraction, they are the veterans, but then there wasn't really a representative for the needs of the

new immigrants. And that's the second incentive, why I ran for office. It's not that the others didn't try to champion on the immigrants' cause. I just think that because they themselves are not immigrants, maybe they aren't as able to see the situation as clearly as someone who is an immigrant themselves. That was the second motivation for me, but I was approached, and the main thing is that I was also very young. I was just 21 years old.

The political spread there is very clear, there is a fraction, and there are 17 seats [in the JC board of Frankfurt]. 15 seats are taken by the fraction; honestly, there isn't a lot of room for me to be active. That's a normal political process. I don't want to criticize the process in and of itself. We can have different opinions about politics, but the process itself is democratic, there were elections and many immigrants voted for the non-immigrants. It's a completely normal political process.

● *Do you have the impression that with your generation something is developing akin to a kind of patriotism for Germany?*

I understand the question. I'll give you a good, I don't know if good, but fitting example. I applied for German citizenship and was accepted, but I still haven't taken it. Pragmatically speaking there's no reason not to take on German citizenship. However, I'm still hesitating, and that's not only because dual citizenship [Ukrainian, German] will probably not work. But people that are just a bit younger than me, they handle it in a more relaxed way. For example, I also have a lot to do with younger people in our organization who are 18, 19, 20 years old. They aren't hung up on this. As soon as they turned 18, they took on German citizenship. It's a process that will work out over generations. Many former immigrants in the middle age group and also the elderly take German citizenship. But does German citizenship automatically imply a certain patriotism? That's another question. I think that the reservations towards Germany amongst the older generation, those over 50, will always remain. The younger you are, the less reservations you have, and therefore the more open you are to patriotism. But you also have to take into consideration that there's a huge sociological debate about how patriotic Germans are anyway. They also have problems with their own history. Then to demand from the Jews, that they are more patriotic than the Germans, it's too early for that.

● *Are the relations of the FSU immigrants becoming more intense to their former home?*

What do you mean with "home"?

● *The former country of residence.*

No.

● *There is also low motivation for re-migration or second migration, or living a transnational existence?*

The simplest answer to that question is when you have moved, this is simply the practical, the pragmatic answer; then it's very difficult to pack up and move again. I mean with acquiring a new language again, a new culture, population, mentalities and so on - unless you go to Austria, but there you've also to accept a different mentality. I can say for me and my friends that we might want to go out into the wider world, to America, South America, Asia, but very few of us will really move again. And "back to the roots" will also not happen, at least not on a large scale. There are always individual people who will come back from Israel or from Germany, but a global "back to the roots" won't happen.

● *What do you think about the future Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union to Germany? Will there be more?*



The social circumstances have improved in many areas of the former Soviet Union but have gotten worse in other areas. In Turkmenistan for example, and I could list many other examples. On the other hand, if you are well-situated in Moscow or St. Petersburg you will not immigrate to Germany. If you are somewhere in Glubinka, in the farthest area where there is no Community, there's no synagogue, they would really love to come to Germany.

- *Many Jews in Germany stay away from Jewish Community bodies. What are the main reasons for that?*

If you leave out youth work, that's the second very important question because we have integrated about 85,000 people in the Communities and there are about 85,000 others. Some of these are Halachic Jews who left the Community, some are Halachic who never joined as they had problems with the Community and so on.

- *So what should be done for the non-Halachic Jews?*

I don't have a pat answer, but I'm young and maybe maximalist. I think that they should convert if they want to belong. Otherwise there's the danger of things turning out like in America, where they eased conversion very much for years hoping that in this way there'd be more Jews. I'm putting things very simply right now; you mustn't misunderstand this, or take a quote out of context. But that's probably the most difficult question in Jewish life in Germany today. I'm asked this question about once a month on average. I still don't have a pat answer. That is closely connected to what I said earlier. What is Judaism? If it's a religion, and we have certain articles of faith, then we must believe that Judaism is passed down over the mother. I could get into the philosophical discussion in which way, with a second soul, but let's leave that for now. I'm also not an expert. But if we believe in it, then we believe in it. Everyone is Jewish or not Jewish accordingly. What to do with those who came to Germany as Jews, but can't live as Jews because they're not accepted by the United Communities? That's why there are these Liberal Communities who can accept anyone.

- *Just a moment! In the Liberal Communities in Germany it's not like in America.*

But there's an eased procedure. And the American example should warn us. They have a real problem now. They said we'll have more Jews, but they have fewer Jews. What sense does it make to make assimilation easier? Pragmatically, let's leave faith and philosophical questions out of it, you can argue about those. I've had many discussions about these with true intellectuals who've published many books about these things. You can debate this for a long time. We can talk about this later. But the actual question is why should we do this, if it only favors assimilation? What's the point? They will become assimilated anyway. They will encourage then others to assimilate, too - like in America. Many organizations [in the U.S.] have now recognized that it was a mistake and are now trying to backpedal and to introduce more stringent regulations.

- *What do you think about the model of associated membership for non-Halachic Jews?*

I have heard this from people who developed the concept. The simplified answer to this concept is what does it do for me, if it just encourages people to assimilate? Just what I said before. People have come, who aren't Jewish. The Rabbis, the Orthodox Rabbis have given their answer to this question. When Jews and non-Jews come together, then the children aren't Jewish and you assimilate further. That's the problem.

- *But let's take the problem from the other side, if there are interested people who have a Jewish father, or a Jewish grandparent.*

Yes, ok, then they should convert.

- *Sometimes it takes time to win them over.*

As I said, this is a difficult question.

- *This clientele, don't you see connecting links?*

No, I don't want to say. Not due to a false sense of political correctness, I don't want to say because I don't have a pat answer to this question. I know just that we should learn from the mistakes made in America, which they themselves also recognize. History is there to study and learn from, so that you can learn from mistakes. You need to learn something from it, otherwise it's meaningless. If people have had this experience in America, why should we repeat it in Germany? That's the biggest objection I have to it. As a matter of principle I also don't believe we should just give up on these people or reject them. There is an organization here, for example, for refugees in Frankfurt. There are very many there who aren't Jewish and many who are Jewish and together they work for refugees. It was set up 30 years ago and most of the people there are Russian speakers. I give a lecture there about once every two weeks about the current political situation. As you see, I don't reject this completely. The fact is there's the organization in Potsdam, here in Frankfurt I think that's completely ok. I even participate. This is the second prize question in Germany, how to solve this problem. I will tell you honestly, the first question interests me much more and I think it's more relevant and current. I'm dealing with the first problem, with the youth and connecting young people from the former Soviet Union to Jewish tradition and the relating questions.

- *Where do you see things missing in the educational programs of the Jewish Communities?*

I miss a consequent offer of programs directed at the needs of people between the ages of 18 and 35. I've got the answer from people from the administration and from the democratic representatives [of the JC Frankfurt] that they do host events, have readings and so on, but they're for everyone over 18. However, you've got to take care of this group *specifically*. You need to offer and develop concepts for them. That exists, to my mind, in only a small minority of Communities.

- *So leadership seminars are missing.*

Practically speaking, yes. The first important steps have been taken in some large Communities in Germany. They have someone specifically to take care of this age group's needs. Event manager, call it what you want. Someone who is in charge of taking care of this age group. They organize programs for them, leadership seminars, movie outings, gatherings.

- *If there's funding for it, then there should be one young adult supervisor in every Community?*

Yes, but someone just for this age group 18-35. A person who's professionally trained, paid accordingly, with a university degree, who's competent, who knows what they're talking about. Then the concept that's practically already been implemented, what functions, that's the first practical step.

- *What is your experience with non-Jewish German officials, politicians and groups?*

Well, from the perspective of the Frankfurt Community, I have to say that they really work well with each other. You get support if you need it. If the Community needs money for something, then they talk to you about it. I would say that the relationship in Frankfurt works very smoothly. But I can only say this about Frankfurt; I cannot judge how it is in other places in Germany.

- *What is your impression of the non-Jewish mainstream media coverage in Germany concerning Jewish topics?*

I can tell you a funny story. I spoke to a large newspaper as a student and got a trial subscription and I checked off that I read everything and it was good, but the Middle East coverage was miserable. The people from there called me and asked why did you cancel your subscription? And I said because the Middle East coverage was really bad. They asked what do you mean, subjective? I said yes. They hadn't really thought about it. That was the real reason that I cancelled my subscription, because I wanted more objectivity. On the other hand when I talk to Jewish representatives, I always say that you need observe the mood in a democratic process. The media isn't like that by coincidence. They just write what there's a demand for. That's something that you need to keep an eye on. There are many very good media, there are some not so good, but in general I'd like to see more objectivity. That's what I miss.

- *What about coverage of Jewish developments here? Is the German media interested in that?*

We're such a small group. We should realize that there's only 100,000 of us and there shouldn't be as much coverage about us as about 80 million Germans. That's normal. We have our own media, that's very good and that's enough. You can't demand that the others write about the Jewish Community every day.

- *How do you see the development of the Jewish media?*

The Russian language media or the German language media?

- *Let's start with the Russian language paper – the Evreyskaya Gazeta.*

I don't think that it's very good, or well made. They don't seem to check out and verify their reporting. As I said, I didn't study journalism, but I think they should check out their stories and make sure they're true. In general I think the more Jewish media, the better. Even from papers I don't like.

- *And the German language papers?*

I think it's good in itself that there's some competition on the market. I think it's a shame that one of the German language Jewish papers ["Jüdische Zeitung"] recently closed down, I read it a few times. Like I said in general I think the more Jewish media, the better.

- *Do you think things will improve with the Internet?*

Young people will try, and the lack of professionalism is due to the lack of interest in the large organizations and Communities. They could create a huge site and a huge Community. These ideas exist. They're in my desk and in the desks of young Jews in Germany. There are things you can do, you just need to want them. The contacts have been made.

## 18. TATYANA SMOLIANITSKI,

June 12, 2009, Düsseldorf

● *You have been very active in Jewish adult education for more than 15 years, especially for immigrants from the Former Soviet Union. At the beginning of the 1990's you yourself were a Jewish immigrant to Germany. Can you just say a few words about the period of your initial resettlement?*

I'm a professional historian, have a PhD and graduated from Moscow State University as a historian. I then worked as a teacher in a secondary school for five years in Moscow and also at the university in Moscow for a few years before we came to Germany. We came here because my husband Prof. Dr. -Ing. Habil Alexander Smolianitski was invited to work in a German academy of the university in Clausthal- Zellerfeld [near Hanover]. Thus, we began our life in Germany in Clausthal-Zellerfeld in 1991. We thought we were just coming for four months and then would go on to South Africa, but the project was extended and then with support of the Jewish community of Dortmund we were able to receive another extension for another four months. We did go on to South Africa as my husband had a lucrative job offer there.

The question then arose what should we do about Germany. Because we hadn't considered it before, but my husband said that this apartment is so small; we can actually just keep it. We don't know what will happen in South Africa, how long we'll stay there, what the situation will be there for us. But here we have an apartment, and then we have the possibility to return to Germany whenever we want, if something happens. Then there were the political changes from a white government to a black government in South Africa, and I was pregnant and we thought we should either stay in South Africa permanently or say, no, we'll return to Europe. That was a very difficult decision. In general, life in South Africa was fantastic. My husband had a good job, we had a house and a garden, and everything was good, his salary, everything was good. But with the baby, everything changed. Then we thought that now it's time for a stable environment. That's why we packed up and returned to Germany at the end of 1992. At the beginning of 1993, Alex was born in Dortmund.

● *And when and where were you born?*

I was born in Moscow, the former Soviet Union on February 23, 1963.

● *After you decided to return to Germany for good, did you want to work in your field? Your husband is a physicist and always had a lot of work, research, patents abroad and so on.*

I understand your question, but I have to answer with a clear no. Not at that time. To be honest, he was and is the love of my life. I didn't care which country we lived in. My husband is a great research physicist. I never thought I would have to work as well. I thought I'd be a housewife. I wasn't afraid, I didn't care, Germany or Canada. South Africa was a bit far away and then there was the problem with our parents when you think what will happen in the future and so on. With a baby, parents need to think about a future. I wasn't thinking about my career. I was happy as a housewife.

I never thought about it, not even when we left Germany for South Africa. We did end up missing out on the chance to take the famous German-for-academics-course at the Goethe Institute. That probably would have been great. We could have started our lives again as students. We lost this opportunity because we just disappeared to South Africa, and when we came back [to Germany] I was hugely pregnant and a crazy mother. I had no idea what to do with my baby in this foreign country without my family, my friends. For me that was a very difficult time when we came back to Germany.

While we were living in South Africa, I did a lot with my husband in English. I could help him a lot. But we were in a completely different position. We were top in society. We came here and I saw that people didn't

understand me in stores or doctors couldn't understand me. I was really frightened. What could I do with my child, how would he develop, how would he feel in this country? The main reason why am I so involved with all of these things and Jewish education is Alex. When he was born, I understood immediately that we are completely alone. That's not the future for my child, who was born here. Germany is also a foreign country. Naturally he should live here normally, fully integrated, but he should also feel completely at home somewhere. He needs to feel this is mine. That's why this child brings me back to my roots, to my life as an educator.

When Alex was one and a half, people [in the Jewish Community] realized that I'm a teacher and an historian. They asked if I'd like to give a lecture about famous Russian Jews, modern Jews in Russian culture. I said yes, of course I can try.

Once a woman called me and said I should do something; at the time I hadn't worked as a teacher or educator for about three years. I was to prepare something quickly. My choice was a little, not politically correct. I chose Alexander Men, he was Jewish, but converted to be a Russian Orthodox priest. He "converted" with his mom as a baby, when he was three months old. Alexander Men was a top Jewish figure, Jean-Marie Lustiger he knew him personally and visited him in Russia, everyone was speaking about him. I have a letter from Jean-Marie Lustiger to Men. We had contact with Yves Hamant and a publishing house in Brussels, which published books by Alexander Men in Russian. I also wrote to people who had known him through various channels. So I was very well prepared for a lecture about Alexander Men, but he was obviously the wrong figure for the Jewish Community, as you can imagine. A couple of days before the lecture, people from the Community came to me and asked why did you choose him?

- *You had chosen him yourself?*

Yes, I had chosen him myself because he was famous and Jewish and Russian and everything fit. They told me that I couldn't talk about him because he was a priest. I was so angry, and I went to the Rabbi. I didn't know him at all – Rabbi Dr. Henry G. Brandt. I came and told him that I've prepared all of this, but people have come and told me I can't give this lecture. Rabbi Brandt was very wise and told me, you know, *you're talking about the person*. You're not talking about his religious beliefs. You're talking about a man's fate. You can do that. So I did the lecture and it was a huge hit, there were many people and they were fascinated. After the lecture, it was an absolute success, the Rabbi invited me to see him and said that was good, but that's enough about converts. The best would be if you could talk about Judaism and Jewish history. And that's how I started my lecture series. The next was about King David and his times.

- *Where did you start the series?*

It started in Dortmund, in 1996, and I still give a lecture in the Community there once a month.

- *And what about the association Geshet – Integration through Culture and Education?*

That came later, when people came from different towns and asked me why are you giving lectures in Dortmund but not in Recklinghausen? And not in Münster? I began to receive invitations from different Communities. Then I started to offer the same courses, but in different locations.

- *Just like an itinerate lecturer.*

Yes.

- *Were you doing all of that on a volunteer basis?*

In some places I'm still doing it for free, I'm doing it out of respect for the people there. Usually now we have an agreement with the Community and I receive my fee as an educator.

- *How did it things continue with the educational work?*

After a few years we understood that the lectures weren't enough and then we came up with the idea together with many people we knew in Israel and in Russia to do a book presentation. A Jewish book presentation, right where I give lectures. There is a publishing house in Israel, run by Dr. Michael Greenberg, the Gishrei Tarbut Association, that's huge in Israel. Michael Greenberg got an invitation to the Frankfurt book fair and after talking to me personally, he invited us to work with them and to present the books he would bring. After the Frankfurt book fair, we did a small book presentation in five different Communities in Germany. That was the best 101 books in Russian about Judaism. Then we realized that we shouldn't just do this as private people, we should start an official association for integration, culture and education. And so we established Geshet - Integration through Culture and Education. This was in 1999. By the way Rabbi Henry Brandt supported us, and he is on the board till now. He lends his ideas, name and spiritual support. We'd like to be independent from the Community but work together. The Rabbi is our vice-chair and we came to the Community and were full of hope that they might let us use a room for the library, but we did not get it.

- *Have you received any support?*

No, absolutely nothing. No one has supported us up till now. It was an idealistic idea. The idea was to found a library with many books and that's why we needed an office. Later we had rented the office and for this office we've finally gotten some financial support from a friend who works for the Lauder Foundation in Germany.

- *Where did you wanted to found the library? In Dortmund?*

One idea was to have a place in Dortmund where we'd gather outside of the Community. We thought we'd do it in the Community, but the Community said no, so we said we'd do it outside somewhere else. We took an office four minutes away from the Community, in a parallel street. That was a three room office.

- *And was it funded by anyone?*

No, actually my family pays for it.

- *Excuse me, but you rented an apartment privately to found an educational center and a library?*

Yes, and no one supported us for the rent. What happened then was that I gave a lecture in Münster and met Ms. Liliana Furman. This was in 1999 or 2000. She is the director of the program JOINT in Germany. The JOINT was just beginning with its activities in Germany, and we made an appointment. She asked what I would like to do and I said I would like to found a library and continue giving lectures and so on. Then we'll try to establish a project. We'll do a project for Jewish librarians, for librarians in Jewish Communities. Then we'll start gathering and teaching the librarians, each time in a different Community.

- *So you could start this project in cooperation with the JOINT?*

Yes. The JOINT supports almost every small Community with a library. We've also been starting a network among the librarians, and hold seminars.

- *And the project is completely independent from the Jewish Communities?*

No, everyone who's interested works together. JOINT supports me directly. The Community lends space and food and "Geshet" [publishing house] brings the books. Until now we've held 50, or I think 51 seminars for

librarians all over Germany. Now we're in Berlin, we've been in many local Communities; in some of them more than once. We have a steady group of librarians, and they know each other. We can discuss which problems exist in my library, which books are important, what is new on the technical front. It has become a successful project. We usually hold four or five seminars here in North-Rhine Westphalia every year. The Communities pay traveling expenses for the librarians and for the seminars. Each seminar has its own guests and ideas.

● *Are you a member of the Community in Dortmund or in Duisburg?*

My family and I are the members of the Community in Dortmund.

A few years ago the Jewish Community of Duisburg hired me to work in adult education. Since 2000 I've been working for the Community Duisburg-Mühlheim-Oberhausen.

● *As an educational advisor?*

Now I'm responsible for everything that concerns family and adult education. This is a unique position in the Community, it doesn't exist in others local Communities, I think.

● *Just in Duisburg?*

We are the Community for three cities: Duisburg, Mühlheim, Oberhausen. It's not a full-time position, but Duisburg is where my office is, and where I have a permanent position. I love my work, and it's the right fit for me.

● *You combine education and family work?*

I give my lectures on history and literature, but we also do things for children, small children, for children between 6-12 and so on. It's a wide spectrum. As I said, yesterday, for example, we were with a group of adults and families in a course where we visited a Modigliani exhibit in Bonn. That's one part of my job for the Community; another is with Geshet and lectures in adult education, and the third part is the work with JOINT. There we are usually involved in three large projects; the project for librarians I was talking about, family seminars for families in different Communities in Germany, and the *Jewish Book Festival* once a year in Duisburg. This is a wide array, but everything I'm involved with is educational; partially with adults, partially with families and young people.

● *Is the idea behind all this to bring together several generations within one family through education?*

That sounds like a pedagogical concept. Take families for a day, or six hours and work with them together; the main thing we do is give the families a common experience within a Jewish framework. The format is that we usually have a group activity for the whole family and then different things for the adults and children and then we lean and play together, eat together, and do things together. And we are combining the topics as much as possible with related things in everyday life. We have one cycle about Jewish life, from Brit milah to Bar Mitzvah, from Bar Mitzvah to burial. At the time for chuppah, for example, then maybe we'll make one for the seminar. In Recklinghausen, for example, that was the first time in 15 years that there'd been a real chuppah in the synagogue. There was a big article in America about this seminar; the fact that there was a chuppah in Recklinghausen for the first time in 15 years as part of an educational seminar. That's why when people ask who I am; I say I'm a storyteller. Professionally. I envision one institution for informal family education, not just religious programs, it can be language courses, trips to Israel, a literature café, once a week discussing the Torah passage with a Rabbi, this can be different things. That's what's interesting for me. Independent from the Community but with the Communities. I think that's the future of education in this country. When I look and see; for example, what our Catholic colleagues are doing, they have these Catholic educational centers.

● *Does a particular age group seem to participate in your projects, lectures and seminars? Is one particular group in the obvious majority so that you can say you're reaching this group especially? Which literature or topics are they interested in the most?*

In principle, the seminars are absolutely open. When you experience a seminar, you experience something unique. Sometimes I think, oh, that went really well. Every week, 20-25 people, they're all friends with each other, and get along well and then two months later something happens and there's a huge argument in the seminar, six-ten people, then it's a chain reaction. Someone gets sick, someone dies, someone gets a new job, someone moves, has a baby. Then it's empty. Two months later a few more come, some more. In every Community there's a special rhythm. You can try to plan, but it's an organic development. Do you know what I mean? It doesn't depend on the quality of a lecture. We can have a fabulous lecture and the next time everyone will come and the next time they don't come and you think the day was so gray and horrible. I was so tired today, but next time everyone comes and everyone's satisfied. That's why each seminar has its own dynamic. Mostly adults are coming, but now there's a change in the generations in the Communities.

● *So people over 40 are more or less the main audience?*

40+, 50+, but in Bielefeld, for example, that's a liberal Community, there's a university in Bielefeld with a historical and political institute. Students from the university who are studying history come to me and so there's the students plus a few adults who are interested.

● *You probably even have non-Jews in your lectures.*

We have Jews and non-Halachic Jews. It's hard to say when their father is Jewish, the father of their mother is Jewish, but her mother isn't. I would never say that someone's not a member of the Community, no, of course not. The door is always open for whoever's interested. The topics started with the history, King Solomon and Jews in Spain, Jews in Russia, Jews in the Talmudic time. For people who aren't interested in the history, we have what happens in the Community, when people pray, why do we read these texts, why do we stand up here, the liturgy. Then we have about Jewish worldview, Jewish philosophy and worldview, a lot of people were also very interested in that. Right now many are interested in Hebrew.

● *How is the work financed? How are people paid? Or are they idealists and do everything on a volunteer basis?*

I work only with Jewish Communities. In our projects, we have three parts. JOINT, "Gesher" and Jewish Community, for example, or the state association. It's split among them. People in libraries, librarians, there's different basis for them. Some volunteer, some have a part-time "mini job", but that's not so ideal. Every Community has its own solution. That's not my business, how they organize it. Our idea is education. In this project with librarians it's being financed again and this year we're giving a summer school for librarians. That's going to be for two-three days, maybe in my Community, maybe with overnight stays for the librarians, because this project became well-known throughout the country.

● *Does the Gesher association have offices in other locations?*

No. After the first book fair; we have participated in various other exhibits. And last summer we were in Jerusalem, we met with Michael and Berta Greenberg and thought of what else we can do in the future.

● *The books they provide are mainly in Russian?*



Yes, and in Hebrew. That's one direction. The second direction, the lectures I give, is the main thing. My projects in adult education, overall, that's also very mixed. For example, now in Bochum we've been giving seminars for adults for eight years already. In Dortmund we've been holding seminars for adults for the last 13 years. It used to be once a month, but with 100 people, now every week we have a stable group of about 20 people. Some of former participants have died in the meantime unfortunately, but now there are fresh new participants coming. I was very pleased with the development. It used to be twice a month, and that was enough, but now for many people it's part of their lifestyle – so we meet here every Tuesday at 6:00.

- *Maybe you're using different literature than in a religious ceremony, but it's sounds like people are getting nourishment for their body and soul.*

Yes, it's like getting special nourishment, its part of the lifestyle for these people. I know who they were before and I tried to open them up to different directions. To Limmud.de, or to other seminars in the Community. To go on trips with them, or when we have the Jewish Book Festival in Duisburg then my students and their friends from different Communities go to Duisburg. I am sure Jewish life is not limited to a Community. The Jewish world is wide. At the same time, when we speak about our seminars for adults, I think it's also a kind of therapy for people when they come to me. I might have a hard day the next day, or be in pain but I'm coming anyway. Or people call from the hospital and say please save me a copy of the materials you're passing out tonight. That's symbolic. For example, a woman died a year ago. Her husband still attends and her name is still on the attendance list. Every time when her name comes up, he says she's still here with us in spirit. It's unbelievable. I hadn't thought it would be that significant for people, people who have families. That our attendance list is important for people.

- *You are that strongly involved in Jewish networks in Germany. What are your main motivations to do so?*

The Gesher association is an institution that offers the possibility to enter the Jewish world, not only for the participants, but also for me. I appreciate my group, the possibilities I have for self-realization. We've been in this country for 13 years, I've met many people. But as I said, the original impulse was the birth of Alex. Immediately I started to think where can he have a place to feel at home. Step by step I discovered Judaism and Jewish education. This was my idea, originally for Alex, and this changed everything.

- *Your son Alex is 16 years old, and also very interested in everything Jewish. He is well-known as the youngest member of the organizational team of Limmud Germany. However, do you share the impression that many Jews in Germany keep a distance from the Community, particularly the younger generation? And if so, what can be done about it?*

Of course that's a part, it's part of the work. People should think more about programs for young people and allot more money for programs, try out more things. Then, of course, it should be professional.

- *Is the difficulty of attracting young people and the consequences this has for future Jewish community life the main challenge of German Jewry today?*

I don't think that this is our biggest problem. Most Communities have a nice youth center. In principle young people can use these youth centers, they can attend

- *Which congregation inside present German Jewry do you belong to?*

You know, I don't belong to any party.

- *No preference at all?*

I would probably tend toward the conservative movement. Certainly not reform or liberal, but also not orthodox. That basically means conservative.

- *Do you still see any problems in the relations between Russian speaking immigrants and German speaking veterans inside the Jewish Communities that still need to be resolved?*

Yes, and we have to be careful that these problems between the groups don't spill over to the next generation. In Limmud.de, for example, there are lots of German Jews and there are problems with the children. Not many have attended a youth group as there were too many Russians there and they felt like outsiders. Russian Jewish mothers, on the other hand, say we don't go to other places, because there are too many Germans there. Our children feel like outsiders there. However, I think that young people have more possibilities to be flexible. Maybe the first step is to bring the children to religious courses and the adults should be role models. The parents should understand this is how children take on their religion. What will be expected of me, how do young people get married and so on.

I see a kind of lost generation of those between 30-35 till 40 or 50. The women are working, but they would normally like to belong to a group. I think that yesterday [in the seminar] there were six-seven women around 45-50, who are working as music teachers at the university in Düsseldorf, and at the university in Dortmund. This was a good thing, to go to Bonn together to see this Modigliani exhibit and then to go to a restaurant afterwards. People need this kind of networking. They wanted to see this and communicate with each other, but when do they come to the Community? They're not so young, but not as old as the retirees. I think that there isn't enough offered for these "normal" women. They are interested in appropriate, good, prestigious things. It doesn't matter in which language. For example, yesterday we had a tour in German. There were 33 people, in the museum, everyone understood it. No one asked why does it have to be in German; let's get a special tour guide.

But anyway, you need to understand, that these things should jibe with the identity of the Russian-speakers. Everything having to do with art and literature, travel, that's acceptable for people. Then people will slowly start coming to the Community. I think programs are needed that show full respect for their intellects, regardless of which language, with an intellectual orientation. That's why I think also the programs for families should be made modern and interesting.

- *When talking about identity, collective identity, or the future identity of the Jewish Community in Germany, do you think that Israel will continue to have the same meaning for the Communities?*

Yes, this covers different philosophical questions for every local Community. Some Communities say we're in a Jewish Community in Germany. We're not an intermediary sending people on to Israel; we should develop as a Jewish Community in Germany. The people themselves, especially those from Russia and the former Soviet Union have a great interest in Israel and I'm trying to organize a project where we study the history of Jerusalem and of Israel for a year, and then take a trip to Israel.

- *Have you ever done something like this before?*

We're planning it together with Rabbi Michael Kogan [JC Düsseldorf] and others. People want to see Israel through his eyes, or through my eyes. They have faith in us and want to make this program. They trust us that it won't be bad, but interesting. So we'll first have the history and then take this same group to Israel. I think that's very important, also for the middle generation.

- *What about travel programs for the whole family?*

When we were in Israel the last time we found out about a special program for trips for the whole family. This program is mostly used by Americans, but this could also be something for the future here. Each and every time my people come and ask me when are we going to Israel? I can't ever say, because I can only

organize that with the help of others, it's expensive to pay people. We're looking for a partnership. I'd like to do an educational trip, not just sightseeing, but study here, and then bring people there. As tourists, but also with an educational program. Then we're bringing work for people in Israel as well. We're bringing a group to Israel; they can learn something and have fun. That is very important. Of course there are Russian people who have a special relationship to Israel. Some groups ask me each time some one should provide a short report on what happened in Israel over the last week [at each weekly gathering]. It's always interesting and important for people.

- *When you were doing fundraising and looking for support, did you ever try to get support from non-Jewish institutions?*

No.

- *From the cities or regional governments?*

Many years ago we tried but it was unsuccessful.

## 19. JOSHUA SPINNER

**May 6, 2009, Berlin**

● *Mr. Spinner, this question might sound a bit strange, but what was your motivation to go to Germany of all places (in 1997)?*

It made a lot of sense already at that time to consider Germany. There was already a significant number of FSU immigrants in the country, but only very few, if any Rabbis and teachers who were Russian speakers. If I remember correctly there was at that time only one Russian speaking Rabbi in Germany, and this was Rabbi Marc Stern in Osnabrück who taught himself Russian, but the general Community had already received about 70,000 immigrants, so it really made sense.

● *Do you speak Russian?*

Yes, I do. I am even more comfortable in Russian than in German. Thus, the reason why I am in Germany is because I speak Russian. *(laughter)* No, seriously, I had no connections to Russia or the Russian language before. But when I went to Minsk, it seemed to me to be the right thing to do to learn Russian, thus becoming enabled to address the people in their own language

● *Is there a time limit on your stay in the Lauder community in Germany?*

No, there's not. When my wife and I came to Germany in 2000, we didn't expect to stay here for such a long time. Originally we planned to stay only for one or two years. But now there's no time table. Probably I will be here for a time that is too long for my enemies but too short for my friends.

● *What is the defining problem or, the greatest challenge for Jews in Germany today?*

I would say that the defining problem as a unique situation especially in Germany is that of centralized communal funding in an immature and undeveloped communal context. Because the number of Community members increased immensely [1991-2004, O.G.], there will be different people doing different things; and there will also be different organizations, different movements, different ideas which will enhance natural processes to engage, but also instrumentalize people. And the challenge will be to find out how it's possible to enable Jewish life in Germany to broaden itself, to stabilize itself and to establish an internal engine of viability, without creating political conflict and strife which automatically will aim to effect the funding directly. Seen from this perspective, the German situation is indeed very unique. On the one side there's huge state funding, on the other hand you have a very rapidly shifting and growing dynamic. So you have a very big pot, but structures of Jewish life that are not yet consolidated. The critical challenge is how is this process going to work? Will the forces of instrumentalization and of self-interest win, or will the broader perspective which is definitely good for Jewish life in Germany, irrespective of denomination or position, will that win?

● *Former empirical studies showed that the level of religiosity among the Russian Jews in Germany is distinctly weaker compared with the Jewish veterans, and it is expected to become very difficult to attract Jewish youth for Community commitment in general. How do you tackle these problems?*

These studies are wrong, because they measure religiosity or observance as snapshots; stagnant rather than dynamic. This is, of course, not at all how religiosity or observance works. Most of the immigrants when they arrived knew nothing, observed nothing, and believed nothing. This was not by choice, but by circumstance. The question then becomes what happens when opportunity knocks. In all probability, there

will be some immigrants who are deeply interested, some who are mildly interested, and some who are not at all interested. And those who are deeply interested will outpace the veterans you refer to in their observance, religiosity and any other quantifiable factors. Anyone who doubts this should visit our projects in Berlin or Leipzig, or go to synagogue in Frankfurt or Cologne and look for the observant-looking under 40 crowd. Veterans or immigrants?

As a starting point, you could also take the reverse perspective, just to realize that we are here now, and there will be Jewish life in Germany in the long run. Therefore an investment must be made to make sure that the Community structures are strong, successful, attractive, and viable. What we have now is a situation in which a lot of resources are spent to encourage people to participate in – nothing. Is it important to play chess or make sports outside or inside the Community, what does it mean for Jewish life?

I'd rather think we have to care for good schools, attractive and interesting, age-relevant education offerings, synagogue services with a wide range, open to people who don't know much about it, with other words, there has to be quality! And if you have quality, you can also attract people. That's the way we try to do it. The strategic model is to build up a young, engaged "Gemeinschaft" (=community) with no political pretensions.

- *No political pretensions – does this also mean no funding from outside?*

Well, funding from outside yes, but funding that is channeled through the [established] Jewish Community. Thus, last autumn [2008] we opened a Jewish primary school, and for this we get state funding [from the Berlin Senate]. But we do *not* get state funding because we went around and demanded it. We get it because we went to the (JC Berlin) Community leadership and asked them to support our project officially. In general, we don't ask for less than anybody else, but we don't make it a political issue at all. We don't want to have a special connection to the Rathaus [city hall. O.G.], we just want to have funding for our school.

- *Can you just say a few words about the beginning of the Lauder activities here in Berlin?*

We started in September, 2000, with nine students in a small yeshiva program in the front annex of the Rykestrasse Synagogue in the former East Berlin, and in the following year with a similar institution for women, a midrasha in Frankfurt am Main, that eventually moved here, and today we are in this neighborhood [Prenzlauer Berg, in central Berlin] with the yeshiva and midrasha. We have a core community of about 30 young, observant families; a kindergarten; a primary school which attracts kids from a much wider range, and that's my point, we can offer a highly qualitative Jewish experience, because there is a core of people who really want it. And from this base, we can tell people, look, this is a great school, and it's worth sending your kid to this school and not to a non-Jewish school. Why? Because it's a great school, and you get there what you get in other schools *plus a quality Jewish experience* and this is indeed an argument to go to the parents and to encourage them and say you should send your child to this Jewish school.

All in all we try to build a small community model with its own internal engine, positive and constructive. The intention is also that it should be influential beyond its numbers because what happens here can also have quite positive effects straight into the non-Jewish public. For example, there's a successful young person who studies in our yeshiva, and then goes to Charité Medical School [Charité the famous university hospital in the Eastern part of Berlin], becomes a doctor at the Charité, wears a yarmulke, and doesn't work on Shabbat in the Charité. That is transformative and has a great impact. First of all in the society itself because this guy is not walking around and demanding give me a job at the Charité because I am a Jew. No, the Jew is beside the point. He's saying he's a Jew, he's absolute clear in that point. But he's also saying he's a good doctor, and you should give him a job, even when he's wearing a yarmulke. Having a doctor like that, having a lawyer like that, having a professor like that; this says to any Jew in the country, you see, it's possible. You don't have to do it, but you can. Do not for one minute think that you cannot be an observant, educated Jew. If he or she can do that, then you can, too. So the purpose of our project is to create a cultural paradigm which fights against a negative mentality. This, in truth, is the crux of our outreach work. The special task as outreach workers is to take away the obstacles, the excuses and the difficulties which otherwise hamper a

person's mind in making a decision. So, if you say that you can't keep kosher, because there is no kosher food available, that's a problem, and we have to make it possible that everybody can buy kosher food. If anybody says *later* that they don't want to keep kosher, that's his or her business, but the opportunity, however, is given. And as we have to provide the right possibilities not only in material things, we also have to provide it conceptually. Whether the people are taking the opportunities or not, whether people want to study religion and tradition or not, we are going to make it possible for them.

- *Can you just give a short overview of the programs now offered by the Lauder yeshiva in Berlin?*

There's a wide ranging program now in the yeshiva, starting with beginners, attended mostly by high school pupils or university students, they study here in the evenings. There's also a full time program, usually for people who are post-high school and pre-university. They study full time, for one or two or three years. At the end of the third year we encourage the people to continue their education at a college or university except for those who intend to join the Rabbinical program.

Now there's something that is actually a new and independent institution, it's called the Rabbinerseminar zu Berlin, which is the historical name of the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary. This will be then a German-wide federal institution in the Brunnenstrasse, which is where the Lauder yeshiva is.

- *How many students are visiting now the Rabbinical program at the Rabbinerseminar zu Berlin?*

There are nine at the moment, including two who are about to be ordained.

- *How many of them do you think intend to work after ordination as Rabbis in Germany?*

I can't give a guarantee, but I guess all of them want to be Rabbis in Germany then.

- *Where do the participants come from?*

It's a very interesting mix. From the two graduates now, one is from Budapest, and the other one is a former immigrant from Russia. One will serve, in the future, as Rabbi in Leipzig, the other one will serve in Cologne. And the other students, one is an American who came here with a Fulbright scholarship, there's another native German Jew, and the rest are immigrants from the Former Soviet Union.

- *You mentioned that there was, at the very beginning, a midrasha in Frankfurt am Main, but then you moved it to Berlin? Why?*

We had several reasons to take this step. The first was an intention from the general project perspective. It means the sum of the parts is just greater *in one place*, or the effects are just stronger. It had also the effect that we had a lot of chuppot here in Berlin, alone in the first year 12 weddings!

Another reason was financial. We rented facilities in Frankfurt at great cost, and in Berlin, we had a much better infrastructure. Local support, for example, by Dr. Roman Skoblo [ an important Jewish donor in Berlin, O.G.], helped a lot.

- *Are there other projects in German towns which are supported by the Lauder Yeshurun community?*

Yes, Lauder Yeshurun is committed to projects in Leipzig and Hamburg, and separately, The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation supports the Lauder-Moriah-School in Cologne and the Lauder Kindergarten of the Jewish Community in Hamburg.

- *How many kids did you start with in the Lauder primary school in Berlin in 2008?*

We started with 17 kids, and I think it will grow year by year. The kindergarten is already attended by about 30 girls and boys now.

The kids in the kindergarten and school come at least from three different backgrounds. There's the group of children who stem from our core families; a second group is from Jewish families from the neighborhood, who probably would never have sent their kids to a Jewish kindergarten, if there wouldn't have been an option close to their own neighborhood. And the third group are Jewish families and parents from around Berlin who are not part of our group or from our neighborhood, who don't identify with orthodox Judaism at all, but who want the educational experience we provide.

- *What about children who just have a Jewish father? Can they also go to the Lauder primary school?*

Since we are a publicly recognized school with the status, of course there's the possibility for such children to join our school. On the other side, I think it's natural that we also have a kind of priority system, and this is threefold. Priority number one is for children who are affiliated with the sponsoring Community, i.e. the core community. Priority number two are children who are affiliated with the umbrella organization, i.e. children of parents who are members of the local Jewish Community of Berlin. Priority number three are children of parents who are eligible for membership in the Jewish Community, but for whatever reasons are not members of the community.

In priority group four there are children from parents who do not fit the first three groups, but theoretically it's possible that such kids attend our school as well. And indeed, we have children in our kindergarten and school now, whose parents are not Jewish according to the Halacha.

- *The Jewish population of Berlin is very heterogeneous now, not only by denomination but also by geographical background, duration of stay here and so on. If you take all the institutions that Lauder Yeshurun is running now in Berlin; the kindergarten, school, yeshiva, midrasha and family services, would you say that there is a certain subgroup which dominates? Let's say the Russian speakers, or the Israelis, or American Jews?*

No, not at all. It's a very diverse grouping, that's right. You can meet here four different groups; Israelis, somehow German-speakers, Russian-speakers and English-speakers. It's a mix of it all, and that has a kind of neutralizing effect. However, you have to be careful with all the subgroups. For example, we have sensed that if you succeed in identifying yourselves sufficiently as a non-Russian speaking environment, you can lose the Russians completely. The major issue is how to keep a neutral balance while still being sufficiently attractive for all groups, including the Russians. That's a challenge.

- *So you don't have all these cultural quarrels and fights which prevents a creative cooperation in many local Jewish Communities?*

When I first came here I really spent a lot of time mediating socio-cultural conflicts. As a person from the West I understood and identified with the local Community members, but as a Russian speaker I was also able to relate to the immigrants. Here we don't really have these problems. There are three reasons for this. First, we are so heterogeneous that there is little subgroup definition. Second, our Community is very young, and so a lot of cultural differences are softer and less pronounced. Third, and this is the most important, in this Community we have a defining authority. The defining authority is the Torah and Halacha. If the framework of Jewish experience is a traditional-religious one, and the questions that are raised are traditional and religious ones, then, in general, cultural differences can be handled more easily. Sometimes it's amusing to see that some cultural games are played, but it's not really threatening. And we have cross-cultural marriages of all thinkable constellations, thus Russian with German, American with German, Russian with Israeli. Creating an identity of shared values also makes it easier to develop a system of voluntary, shared activity which is, in general, less developed in the Jewish Communities.

● *How would you describe the current relations between religious and non-religious Jews in Germany? Do you think there is an insurmountable barrier between them?*

No, I think there are no more differences between religious and secular Jews in Germany than there are in any other part of the world.

● *How far will Israel remain a central element to Jewish life in Germany?*

My feeling is that the question of Israel is an important one, and this in individual but also in communal identities, as it should be. However, I don't believe that it's an important pedagogical, educational or identificational tool which will help to attract more people to the Communities. It's not the case that if we run Israel nights or Israel programs we will get more Jews involved. Trips to Israel work, but you know what? Trips to America would also work, to Australia, too. Let's not forget that the immigrants have already decided against Israel once, for whatever reason. This does not mean that Israel is not important to them, but it does mean that it is not all important. The support for Israel, I think, won't diminish in the coming years; it's a critical part of the identity of the Jewish Communities and of Jewish individuals. But I don't think this is such a crucial element that using it will help us to solve the problems here.

● *Do you think that the Jewish Communities here could develop a much more self-contained identity and become an independent center equal to Israel and the US?*

This idea is premised on such a hopeless optimism about the European Jewish condition, that it's almost laughable. To think for a minute that Europe and the Europeans are going to allow us Jews to become so comfortable here that we don't feel a need for identification with somewhere else – forget it! On the contrary, if Jews are feeling threatened in greater numbers here in European countries, that could cause more distance. And do not underestimate when politicians, and social groups, church groups and labor unions call for Israel boycotts. If you look carefully, you realize that these activities are not the issue itself, rather it serves their own interests, and this is not a basis for positive identification. Another thing that I do not see is a real common sense that would unify all European Jews in a specific, European Jewish identity.

● *Do you have the impression that a many Jews in your Community regret having chosen to live in Germany, the country responsible for the Holocaust?*

Not in our Community, no. There are a few reasons for this. One thing is prioritization of current life elements and of values. The most important question for many Jewish parents is if there is a good Jewish school for their children? Is there a minyan they can go to? Is there a store where they can buy kosher food? Many of our people do not deal too much with relations to German nation or German state. Instead they feel like a religious community which has good connections to other communities in Europe as well. For example, we worked hard on developing relationships with orthodox Jewish Communities in other places in Europe; in Antwerp, London, Vienna, and all of the feedback has been very positive. One part of this network is Berlin. People visit each other. Many times people go to Antwerp, or people from Vienna and London come here, just wondering how things work in the Community, in the yeshiva, in school, in life. There isn't a discussion like how could you choose to live in this country? There is very strong international support for this network of orthodox Communities throughout Europe, including Berlin.

● *What is your experience with non-Jewish German officials, politicians and general population?*

I have personal contact with non-Jewish Germans. With politicians, not at all, except some on a purely professional level; for example, with the educational department of the Berlin Senate when there is an issue concerning the school. In general, we always do all politics through the JC Berlin or through the Central Council. This also avoids inner-Jewish mistrust and concurrency.



- *What do you think about the general media coverage of Jewish life in Germany or in Berlin?*

I think that media has an important function in our context because it is important that people here in Berlin become familiar and comfortable with Jewish life in their neighborhood. Not because it's Jewish life, but because it's life. Some people will perceive it in one way, and some people in another, but the more public information, the more we lose our exotic image. We can also do something ourselves to encourage uncomplicated contacts. For example, at the Rykestrasse we recently had a block party which was deliberately non-political. It was only publicized in the neighborhood and we just sent out invitations to people in the area. Because we are neighbors it's important that *they* get familiar with the spaceship that landed in their midst, and it's not a political issue. It's important to be in touch with the people who shop in the same places, and buy the same tomatoes.

- *It sounds like a kind of grassroots activity.*

Yes, and it is. And as an American I would even say these kinds of grassroots activities build civil society, and they can help to make society more stable. And if this works the politicians will follow. But if we have political life in Germany supporting Jewish life only from above, without the grassroots support, then politics can easily change.

- *You have been running Lauder Yeshurun for about 10 years now. If you look back, what would you describe as the most complicated problems your center and its programs have had to face?*

Money, the single biggest problem is money. What does a lack of money mean in our work? You cannot hire the top people for the religious or educational programs. And we still need to bring rabbis, teachers, and outreach workers from outside. Therefore, we are competing against everywhere; there aren't many people with specifically German roots who want to be here. We again return to the difficult German situation. Compounding the problem is that in many places, the Jewish infrastructure is still rather weak, with poor educational offerings and the like. So you go into the international marketplace, without being able to target native sons and without an attractive communal infrastructure on offer in comparison to many other places, and you have a hard time recruiting top people. Unless you offer top, top salaries.

- *How many employees does the foundation have currently working in Germany?*

At the moment, we have 50 employees in Germany. Three in Leipzig, two in Hamburg and 45 in Berlin including Rabbis, office, kindergarten, school, kitchen, outreach, and office workers.

## 20. ADRIANA STERN

June 22, 2009, Cologne

- *Ms. Stern, could we just start with some information on your personal background?*

I was born in 1960, and from the time I was 10 on, I lived more in the Netherlands than in Germany. That had a big influence on me. Half of my family, or a bit less, are from the Netherlands. It's the Jewish part.

- *What is your educational background?*

I finished secondary school and then first studied architecture before changing to social work.

- *When did you first become interested in literature?*

When I was 12. The reason was that I couldn't talk about many of the questions I had at the time. So I wrote everything down. The paper was my conversation partner.

- *When did you become interested in individual Jewish institutions or activities? You've already listed a few.*

That's a good question and a difficult question. In my childhood it was taboo to say that we're Jewish. It was a secret and I only found out from my aunt, whom I'm named after, Adriana. She was in Bergen-Belsen and survived, but her entire family was murdered there. She became very withdrawn. I was more or less her godchild and she told me a lot about it. She also celebrated Shabbat with me when I was with her.

Unfortunately she died when I was 8. Then there was a break until I realized that my friends in school were all immigrants. We didn't call them migrants then, but they were. I had very few German friends. Then at some point it occurred to me, but it was later, I think I was 19 or so, that I also had Jewish friends. My mother is Jewish, but was christened as a Catholic, she was born in 1933. My grandmother converted to Catholicism in 1927. She married a Catholic, it was also clear that it wouldn't work the other way around. However, as she said on her deathbed, she never forgot that she was Jewish.

There were certain family traditions, and I think that that made it clear to me that we really had Jewish roots; for example, that we didn't go shopping on Saturday. We didn't eat pork and we lit two candles on Friday nights. It was also forbidden to argue within the family then. Looking back, Friday nights were always the most peaceful nights in the week. At some point I read the Diary of Anne Frank, I was maybe 12. I asked my mother, everything that she described also happened to our family. Are we Jewish? I think that I had buried everything my godmother had told me, and talking about it was taboo. She said that we shouldn't talk about it. She didn't say no and she didn't say yes, she just said we don't talk about it.

Then I left the church when I was 16, I couldn't do it earlier. This was the first step and then for a while the confrontation with this wasn't all that important to me. It became important when I was 24. That's when it began. I was living in Berlin at that time and went to the synagogue on the Fraenkelufer. I lived in Berlin for a long time. There I heard the music and most of all the Hebrew language. That made me remember my aunt. Then I started getting in to it. I realized that many of my friends were Jewish. You know how everyone says they don't know any Jews; I was always surprised. Why did I know them and other people at the university or at work didn't? That was a consolidation process that went on for a while outside of the synagogue, with the Jews that I knew. Then when I was 28-29 I began thinking about what it would be like if I were Jewish and I thought maybe I should convert. I thought about this for quite a while until a Rabbi told me that I can't convert; my mother is Jewish. He said that because I've been christened as a Catholic and my grandmother converted, he would call a Bet Din which would decide to be certain. So the Bet Din was called and after 10 minutes said that according to the Halacha, I'm Jewish. In 1927 there were already strong anti-Semitic voices

and the question exactly how voluntary my grandmother's decision to convert really had been could no longer be answered, particularly because she retained these traditions. So I was declared to be a Halachic Jew. My identity was finally clear and that was good.

● *Starting with the time that you began living consciously as a Jew, was it relatively clear for you which movement you felt the closest to?*

Yes, when I was 18, I saw the movie "Yentl". That made such an impression on me; having the possibility to explore Judaism, I wanted that, too. In Germany you can only have that in Liberal Judaism. That's just the way it is. Or in Conservative Judaism; equality between men and women is also part of Conservative Judaism, it's up to the Conservative Community to decide if they want that or not. I was lucky to end up in Oldenburg, when we had the first female Rabbi in Germany.

● *Rabbi Bea Wyler?*

Yes. I studied with Bea for five years. I learned just about everything, how to perform the religious service, leining the Torah, and that is what I still do here in Cologne and what I did in Oldenburg.

● *Is your Jewishness an important aspect in your literary work?*

Yes. One thing that shocks me is that there is for all practical purposes no youth literature about Jewish life in Germany. There is one book, thank God, "Prince William, Max Minsky and Me" Holly-Jane Rahlens<sup>13</sup>, but that's the one book for young people describing Jewish life in Germany today. Every other book ends with 1945, which I think is horrible. And I want to change this. In all of my following book the main figures will be Jewish.

● *And that's the direction you'd like your work to take?*

Yes, absolutely. With "Hannah and the Others" [one of Adriana Stern's recently published novels], the caretaker is Jewish, and that's the character I identify the most with. I also like Hannah a lot, that's for sure, but my work and my thoughts are directed to her caretaker, to Noa. There are different reasons for this. In 1994 people started talking about people with personality disorders. This was when it started being a big open topic and there were conferences held about it. I attended two and there were discussions about diagnosis based on what the therapists believed or not and it made me furious. When you work with girls who have enormous problems anyway to talk about themselves because everyone thinks they're crazy, then when they have to deal with the therapist, the person who should be helping them, the therapist might not believe them. I thought that's enough. That was the great thing for me, I wrote the first book for young people about multiple personality disorder. This was the first one in the world.

● *A novel?*

It's a novel and it was the first and only book on the topic. I'm still hoping that it will somehow someday be translated into English, so that it can become known in English speaking areas. That's what I have to work on, but that's why I'm writing more and more.

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<sup>13</sup> "This has also been made into a movie, "Max Minsky and Me", and it's really fantastic. It's by Holly-Jane Rahlens. She's a Jew from New York who lives in Berlin. Her daughter was born here and that's why it's relatively autobiographical. The book is about the daughter, and her bat mitzvah and how she doesn't have any time for it, because other things are more important for her. It's a great book, and then she's in love with Prince William."

- *How were the book reviews?*

If there were criticisms about the book, it was that it's a great book, but why did the caretaker have to be Jewish? I think you can encounter something like that only in Germany. That really made me mad.

- *Part of the abnormality in the present relations between non-Jews and Jews in Germany?*

Yes, but there are more difficulties. For example, if you aren't a member and don't go to a synagogue, then it's very difficult to meet other Jews in Germany. That's a problem. I think that's a reason why relatively many Jews go to the synagogue, or belong to a Community. Maybe they don't go to the synagogue, but they're members.

- *Do you think that there could be institutions or networks being on equal footing in importance with the synagogue? Do you think there are models for this?*

I could imagine something like that with all the Russian immigrants. I think that they would bring a completely different approach to Germany. The struggles the Russian immigrants have in the synagogues in Germany are really hard, and there is a kind of racism that I find horrible.

- *From the German side or from the Russian?*

From the German side. There's a strange air of dominance, the idea that the immigrants need to adapt and no one has looked to see what the immigrants are bringing with them, what they could contribute or what is important to them. It's assumed that they don't have anything to contribute; that they don't know anything about Judaism, we need to teach them everything and it reminds me a little of the time after the Berlin Wall fell. I was aware that this is history and there was a kind of colonialization from West German women, regarding the East German women's movement. Everything that had existed and was really good was completely ignored and even fought against. I think it's similar when I see the Russian immigrants. They're coming from the East. I haven't thought about it on a deeper level, but I've noticed that there's not much openness to what the people have to offer.

- *Is it really a problem in the small Liberal Communities?*

Of course. Most Liberal Communities have a lot of Russian immigrants. I've experienced it in Oldenburg first hand. There was the attempt, without glancing at what the people had to offer, to force them into the system as it existed. I think that the young people will emancipate themselves from this. That's my hope at least.

- *There is a discrepancy between the 200,000 Jews in Germany and the 100,000 in Communities, why is this?*

I think it has also something to do with cultural barriers. But you know, culture can just do the opposite and help to find mutual approaches. Culture meaning music, literature, things in this direction, and as a meeting place. When I see the young people today, there's Jung und Jüdisch, for example, and that's someplace where young people really feel comfortable. It has something to do with religion, but also mostly with the development of one's own identity and tradition. What could become important for us, to experiment with that, to spend weekends with each other? A lot is happening.

- *You are an active member of the Liberal Jewish Community Geshet le Massoret in Cologne. What do you think are the largest problems or challenges currently facing German Jewry?*

Opening to different movements. That's the greatest challenge. Orthodox, Liberal, Conservative, Progressive, that they can exist on equal footing in Germany. That's the greatest challenge.

- *And that's now not the case, I mean structurally speaking?*

Not at all. It's been fought actively. The Central Council doesn't look good here. It's so sad because it also frightens away many Jews.

- *The conflicts themselves?*

Yes.

- *But Jewish pluralism in Germany has a future?*

Yes, I could imagine. Leaving aside the possibility that things could take a turn for the worse in this country under times of very bad political and social turmoil, I think there is even a chance that Liberal Judaism could become much stronger than Orthodox here. That the tide could change. There are a lot of things supporting this idea. That's also why I think the resistance in the Central Council is so strong, because it can't be repressed. They're trying everything, but I think this is the way of the future.

- *Do you think that the connection or the sense of identifying with Israel will remain as strong over the next 20 years as it has been during the last decades?*

Yes, I think so. Absolutely.

- *Do you think that the Russian speaking immigrant members still have urgent issues that remain unresolved?*

Yes, but these urgent problems are connected to the status of the Jews from the former Soviet Union in this country. And there's a clear discrimination against the Jewish immigrants compared to the ethnic Germans who came from the former Soviet Union at the same time. The ethnic Germans were at some point considered German and have a completely different financial background from the Jewish immigrants. They receive a government stipend to cover their basic needs. The ethnic Germans receive pensions that are calculated as if they had always worked in Germany. For me that's a huge injustice. The Jewish immigrants aren't considered German, but the ethnic repatriates are. I don't know how many generations they've been living there [in the FSU], and they are considered German. I think this is one of the main reasons for the glaring racism in Germany. This affects the Jewish immigrants, they receive welfare and pensions, but these are basically restitution payments. Because they were persecuted as children by the Nazis, this is calculated as part of their welfare payments.

- *You speak about the elderly among the Russian Jewish immigrants?*

Yes. If they receive a Russian victim restitution payment, they also pay that, like here in Germany, there's a law here for that as well. In Germany this money cannot be counted as part of other income sources, but the Russian payments are counted. This leads to massive problems for the older Russian immigrants, because they are already living at the poverty line and haven't declared these payments and should now repay them.

- *So it's being taken out of their welfare here?*

Yes.

- *That's really brutal.*

We are fighting to have these payments separate, so they can no longer be counted. That's one problem, here in Cologne there are maybe 200 people affected by this and the Community here refuses to become involved, saying the German state will be correct. I said no, this can't be, it must be on equal footing. Regardless of where the restitution payments come from, they cannot be included. That's the case for the ethnic Germans and this must also hold for the Jewish immigrants. If there isn't going to be a completely equal status with the ethnic Germans, although that is where I think that would have been a fantastic political decision to say we are going to treat Jewish immigrants the same way we treat ethnic German repatriates. I think that would have been a great political decision, but it wasn't taken.

- *For a political decision they probably also said if we do that, we'll have to do it for other ethnic minorities.*

But German politics does have a special responsibility for Jewish immigrants. It's always said that about Israel, why shouldn't it be the case for Jews regardless of where they're from? You can see that they're just paying lip service.

- *To jump to another topic. Which Jewish groups are you active in other than Gesher la Massoret?*

In Yachad, that's a nationwide group for gay and lesbian Jews.

- *Are you also involved in political groups in Germany?*

I've tried several times to become active in a political group, but the problem is in leftist groups everything falls apart when it come to Israel.

- *You mean that anti-Semitism rears its ugly head?*

The leftist anti-Semitism is really horrible. When you go to a demonstration and you see all of the Palestinian scarves and the slogans against Israel, then I just can't take it.

- *Would you consider yourself to be a strongly religious person? And what are for you, personally, the most important elements of Jewishness?*

I am religious in the sense that I believe in God. I have found my own way how this expresses itself. Regarding religious services, there I would say that I'm the most conservative in Gescher la Massoret, because I still like religious services like they've been for a long time now. But I think every person needs to find their own way to God. The paths are as different as the people themselves. There's no one right way.

- *What was your specialty within the Cologne Community when you were on the board?*

Working with children and young people.

- *Where do you think are the largest gaps in the educational programs on offer? The question also includes materials—are there enough educational materials for preschools, are there materials in the necessary languages, are there good materials for adult educational programs? Where are the gaps in your Community itself, or also in Germany?*

In Germany as a whole I'd say there isn't enough for children and young people. In general work with children and young people isn't emphasized enough. I think that in Germany it's strange that children and

young people are always treated as if they were almost outsiders. In general, and also in Jewish institutions. I think that's extremely sad. Almost everything is missing for children and young people.

- *And when you think about Cologne? What would you organize first?*

Regarding materials, I think there's a lot missing in many areas. Books that are also interesting for children and young people, computer games. Dealing with Judaism age-appropriately, there aren't nearly enough materials for that. Places where children and young people can get together.

- *Do you have Hebrew courses for children and young people?*

Often, but it depends on how much money we have. Parents always ask about it, and then it just depends if we find someone. It's a catastrophe.

- *But that would be something where you could say if you had more material support, then you could hire a good freelance Hebrew teacher for children and teens?*

I always dream about something like a Sunday youth club, where they can go, meet up and do many different activities together, all within a Jewish framework. Just a meeting place, where it's not predetermined what they'll do, just an open group. That's missing for both children and young people.

- *How has your contact been with government officials in Cologne? I know you had difficulties at the beginning being recognized as equals, and won some legal battles, but how would you now describe the relationship to local politicians and authorities?*

The thing is, they say we need to sort that out amongst ourselves. Then you're left by yourself. When there are conflicts, they want to keep out of them because they're scared of making a mistake.

- *I mean unbureaucratic help. Something like we're planning on opening a kindergarten, or we're planning on opening a youth center, is there room for this, could you help support this?*

No, that would be very difficult. I'm thinking about what's really important for a Jewish Community, a Jewish cemetery. That's now something completely different, but there are huge problems with the city. We have our own cemetery, but there are problems securing it permanently. This is very difficult.

- *You had one?*

The city won't say you can have it for x years, they won't say you can have it forever, in principle they just are full of hot air and not doing anything.

- *What do you think of the non-Jewish mainstream media's coverage of developments within Jewish life in Germany?*

There is nearly nothing about Jewish life in TV or on the radio. Did I not understand the question here?

- *In Cologne, or in general?*

In general.

- *And what do you think about the coverage of Israel?*

I think it presents a very distorted picture. It's very unsophisticated, flat. There are some things, Arte, for example, Arte often has very good reports. It's worth watching Arte. It's very difficult to find a differentiated report; you can only find that in the Internet. Then you just leave the German media very quickly. There you're constantly running into the same prejudices, the same pictures. The leftist coverage, if there is left-wing media and right-wing media, then they use the exact same arguments. It's crude and shocking, and I think it's increasing.

- *The stereotype about a military state?*

That's one thing and then the idea that what the Jews are doing to the Palestinians is just as bad as what the Germans did to the Jews.

- *That's an old left-wing stereotype.*

Exactly. And it's repeated again and again.

- *And you experience this in the mainstream media?*

Yes. That's why I thought this statement from Angela Merkel was very impressive. The fact that she clearly took up the side of Israel in the last conflict, and this was held against her, also from members of her own party, from many people all over Germany, but she really showed backbone. I thought that was fantastic. Also this discussion about the pope's decision.

- *We corresponded about that.*

I thought she was fantastic there.

- *What do you think of the existing Jewish media in Germany?*

That's difficult. I'm sad that the Jüdische Zeitung closed. Although I had my problems with it. I subscribed, because it had a lot of information I wanted, but there were also articles where I thought, no, I can't get behind that.

- *In what section?*

Mostly the political section.

- *Middle East?*

Yes. I thought this was too one-dimensional and flat. I was annoyed, but I never wrote a letter to the editor. Wait, yes, once I did.

- *About the Middle East coverage?*

No, it was about the pope. They printed it as well.

- *What do you think about the future perspectives of Jewish media in Germany? Is there enough pluralism, and how could the structures even be optimized?*



I think what is really missing is the sufficient media that reflects present Liberal Jewish life and activities. There was a great start with the family magazine “Familienmentsch” a couple of years ago, but now they had already to reduce it to an online magazine. This is a sign that Liberal Jewish media in Germany is still on weak legs and need much more support in the future. I also would like to see a lot more Liberal contributions for kids on platforms like ha Galil.

## 21. LALA SÜSSKIND

May 6, 2009, Berlin

● *Mrs. Süsskind, what are the current problems and challenges facing Germany Jewry, and what are the perspectives for the next 10-15 years?*

I think it's very audacious to speak, nowadays, about a "German Jewry". What is Germany Jewry? I'd say that we have several groups of Jews here, who just decided to live in Germany. Admittedly, we have some offspring here from the old generation of the Jeckes, but I do not consider myself one of them. I was born in Poland, and came with my family to Germany. Most Jews living today in Germany have their roots abroad. Most of us consider ourselves to be Jews in Germany. And now, the overwhelming majority of registered Community members stem from the former USSR and the current CIS. Among the FSU immigrants, one group is very attached to religion, and another one – a big one – understands themselves as being ethnically Jewish and are not religious. This has caused some irritations in the Communities. Some of the veterans do not understand why people come to a synagogue if they are secular and non-believers. Community is important, in any case. I do not see insurmountable contradictions, the way some parts of the media present it. Sometimes problems are put on the agenda which are simply not real problems. But for me, a real criterion of good Community work is if you ask people whether they feel good in the Community, let's say on a scale between 0 and 10, and you get an overwhelming amount of 10s.

● *The Communities grew rapidly from 1991 until 2004. Now the Jewish age structure in Germany indicates that there will be a lack of younger people. How serious do you think this problem is?*

I don't like these horror visions about how there are less and less of us. We just had panel discussion on how to solve this problem, and people asked if we should make giyur easier. But I want to make it very clear that the procedures for giyur shall remain sacrosanct, and we are not a religion that proselytizes. I don't like the idea of trying to consolidate the Jewish Community by converting non-Jews. And I do not share the pessimism of some friends and colleagues. Just look back to history, including the 20<sup>th</sup> century! Even the Holocaust was not able to destroy the Jewish people, thank G'd! Why should the Jewish people die out now, in times of peace and democracy? And look at the general demographic numbers in Jewry, even in Europe! We have been more or less constant.

● *How would you assess the relations between the German speaking veterans and the Russian speaking immigrants in the community now?*

There's a different situation in every Community. But in general, I think the older generations do not have much in common, this is simply due to language barriers. I don't think this is such a tragedy. Older people want their familiar networks and cultures on both sides, and there isn't so much interaction between the veterans and the newcomers. If the immigrants prefer to be in their clubs of 'Odessites' and 'Moscovites', why not? However, I don't think that this is so important for the middle aged or younger generation, and here we hope for much more interaction and exchange between the two groups.

● *Are there any problems in the relations between observant and secular Jews in Germany?*

I don't see any problems in Berlin. Here we have pluralism. On the one hand you can find different denominations gathered within the *Einheitsgemeinde* [the United Jewish Community], on the other side there are movements and centers which are totally independent. The Lauder Yeshurun Center for example, the Chabad Center and here next door to us in the neighborhood there is also Adass Jisroel [an Orthodox

Community]. I don't see this plurality as a weakness, but rather as a strength. And still, if someone doesn't feel strong enough, they still can be backed by the *Einheitsgemeinde*.

- *There might be a considerable discrepancy between the number of Jews who are registered members and those who are not organized at all. What are the main reasons for this, and what is to be done about?*

Yes, there is a big gap between members and non-members, but so what? I don't see it as such a dilemma. There are huge numbers of 'Sabras' and of American Jews permanently living in Berlin, but so what? Of course, I would be happy if they would be members of the Community, but if they are loosely connected with the Community, that's also fine.

Admittedly, some have left the Community because they don't like having to pay Community taxes.

On the other hand, some Jews outside the Communities are just strong individualists who would feel it as a problem for themselves to be organized or registered anywhere. I have no problem to accept this, but of course I am also happy if some of them, especially if they are wealthy, find ways to donate to a Jewish project in the city.

- *Will Israel retain the same high level of importance in Community life as it has had?*

I think so, yes. For my generation, for example, I lived in a Kibbutz for a while during the end of the 1960's and the importance of Israel is unquestionable. Even if you don't live in Israel, it's a great feeling to know that there is a Jewish State which will host you in any situation. You will never be alone, and the times of being a marginalized, unprotected minority in the world are over. I think many Jews in the Diaspora have learned this lesson, and so have our children. I don't know how deep it will affect the awareness of our grandchildren, but there are programs in the Jewish schools and kindergartens which do a thorough job of dealing with Israeli topics.

- *To what extent do Jews feel a part of German society and the German nation?*

I think the times when Jews in this country were ashamed to live in Germany are over. There are a lot of developments now which indicate a certain kind of normalization. Many of us feel as an integral part of this society. However, I don't see that a majority of the Jews are on their way to become German patriots. I think many Jews rather are starting to become local patriots. For example, I very much enjoy identifying with my hometown, I really like being a *Berliner*.

On the national level; however, Jews are not so present in key positions, and therefore there is less identification or patriotism. Just one example, how many Jews are serving in the German army, I mean in the higher ranks? I know of one Jewish officer, but this is still very much the exception. I think it will take about one more generation before you can meet Jews in all thinkable positions, and *only then*, can we speak about real normality.

- *If you just consider the spectrum of programs and services offered by the Jewish Communities and organizations do you think there is something that still needs to be addressed?*

I think most of the community programs and services have grown on the basis of supply and demand. If there are things missing, people will express their wishes and demands, and if it's possible and we can finance it, the Community will develop an appropriate program. I think about 80 percent of the demands of our Community members have been fulfilled in special programs. But it's normal that the times are changing, and people are changing as well. Educational programs have to be modernized and to be varied. We have had a well organized, flourishing adult educational center in Berlin, and they're now trying to build up a new series of Jewish learning. However, you probably won't find any place in the world where Jewish educational programs have a 100 percent perfect profile.

- *Do you see any gaps in the curricula or a lack of teaching materials or personnel in Jewish school programs in Berlin and in Germany?*

As I said before, I think the basic needs in Jewish education are covered in Berlin; for kids, for the youth and also for adults. Of course you can raise the question of *how optimal* the programs are, and we try to undertake the necessary improvements. For example, I am personally very much in favor of upgrading the Hebrew teaching. Many of our students, young and old alike, are well qualified in *reading* Hebrew texts, but much less qualified in Hebrew *conversation*. And that's a pity for two reasons; on the one hand, public communication in Hebrew is missing. On the other hand, it's a pity when people do not succeed in praying parts of the liturgy in Hebrew. I mean, Hebrew is our language of prayer.

- *Are you satisfied with the level of volunteerism in the JC of Berlin?*

I would be happy if more *organized* volunteer work would be done in our JC. However, I think that another issue is quite underappreciated, but very much present; volunteering commitment without any organized framework. In Berlin, we have this even among Community employees who will offer a dance course or a seminar after work. I know a lot of people who do not join organized structures or groups but just help people in their direct environment, and this is very Jewish.

- *What do you think about the general media coverage of events that relate to the Jewish condition in Germany, the Jewish world and Israel?*

Obviously, the non-Jewish German interest in Jewish people and issues is nowadays disproportionately large, and this is reflected in the established media as well. It is my impression that TV and print media cover Jewish issues much more than they do in comparison with other minorities or religions. In general, I am not sad about this, at least not if there is a real, objective interest. But what makes me nervous sometimes are these kinds of subtle searches for sensationalism. If a Jew in Germany is convicted of a major crime, let's say robbery or bribery, then there's a huge big bang of coverage in the media. The media would not specifically report on a *Catholic* fraud or the *Protestant* Mafioso, so why do they do it with the Jews? That's something that seems strange to me.

I'm not saying that the majority of media reports are knitted using this pattern. There are also lots of articles and reports which have a very positive tone; for example, in radio contributions by the Deutsche Welle or Kulturradio. You can feel that the journalists are accompanying the new developments in Jewish life positively. These radio stations have to serve the interests of their hearers as well, and have to take care of their ratings. If they regularly send such profound, objective reports on Jewish life in Berlin or from other places in Germany, that's a good sign.

- *What do you think of the existing Jewish media in Germany?*

There is a small spectrum of nation-wide Jewish print media, with the weekly *Jüdische Allgemeine* on the top. To my knowledge, the readership is not that big, but the *Allgemeine* is also a good source of information for non-Jewish, interested people.

Besides this, most of the local Jewish Communities have their own journal so that the members have all the necessary information about what's going on in front of their door. Some of the Community journals also report on national or international issues, and I guess that's enough for many Jews in Germany, at least for the time being. In Berlin we have Babel TV, a Jewish station that broadcasts twice a week on a local Berlin TV channel. Compared with the Jewish media landscape in France or Great Britain, this is not much, but for the time being, I don't see it as a big problem. Some public broadcasts have special Jewish programs on Friday night, and those who are not satisfied with this, they still can listen to Kol Israel or watch Israeli TV which is now available via satellite. An attractive solution, of course, would be to have the Israeli programs here in German.

- *What are the principal Jewish structures in Germany today? How far does the synagogue hold the major role and how far are educational structures central institutions?*

Currently, in Germany we do not have the American model of JCCs where lots of additional activities and clubs are grouped around the synagogue. I used to call this synagogue plus. We don't have the synagogue plus here. There are many Jews in Germany who also want to conduct their own activities, Jewish activities or just among Jews, but not necessarily connected with the synagogue. They meet in forums and circles of like-minded friends, and this can be a Jewish chess club, a club of inventors, this can be a culture club.

## 22. LARISSA SYSSOEVA

June 4, 2009, Berlin

- *Mrs. Syssoeva, what do you consider the major challenges facing Jews in Germany today?*

I rather want to refer to the Russian Jews in Germany with whom I have the closest contacts. And for them, life in Germany is still not easy. There are a lot of problems concerning general integration, and also dissonances with the native, German Jews, and also a difficult relation with the Zentralrat [Central Council of Jews in Germany]. And especially the elderly among the Russian Jews in Germany they don't feel so well and see no betterment in the future. With the younger generation it might be different.

- *Where do you see the main reasons for such dissonance and pessimism?*

The Zentralrat has almost nobody on its board who has come from the former Soviet Union. They just have no idea what the real problems and difficulties for elderly immigrants are here. If there would be a few representatives from the Russian Jews, the problem would probably not be that severe. But now, the establishment is probably waiting until the elderly will have all died, and then there is no problem to deal with. I don't want to go in detail here, most of the problems [of the elderly] you can find in lots of articles in the press. But that has not turned to an improvement in their situation.

- *Do you see any unsolved problems that the RSJ immigrants are still facing here?*

I think all sides which are dealing with the immigration of the Russian Jews have made mistakes in the last years, and all of them carry a part of the responsibility that the integration was not so successful. The German policy transmitted responsibility more or less to the Central Council, and gave them the financial means. Besides this, German policy, in general, do not interfere much, and this can be quite comfortable. The German Jews, who still dominate the key positions [as in the Central Council], are not very interested in coming closer to the immigrants and their *Zorres*, but they can live quite well with the government subsidies. But we, the Russian Jews, are also partially responsible. We are passive. Many of us do not acquire sufficient German, many don't know enough about German rules and regulations, many do not have a German promotion.

All these mentioned factors, I guess, have contributed to the fact that the integration is stagnating.

- *Your colleague has already mentioned that the World Congress of Russian Jews is also doing a lot for young people. For example, there is the artist's competition "Golden Chanukah" each year; also for the last four years the WCRJ in Germany has been organizing an international youth camp in Germany. Could you say a few words about this?*

We will have a youth camp this summer, like in the years before. It's called "Art-Eck". About 50 kids will take part, about one third of them from Israel, others from Germany, and there is also one from the United States, and one from the Czech Republic. The boys and girls are between 10 and 15, and they gather here in a small town near Berlin, just like in a holiday camp. We offer them a wide program that includes sightseeing, traveling, visiting museums and historical places, art workshops, and shopping. This year we're fortunate that the camp will be financially supported by the German Foreign Office, and financial support is also coming from "ConAct", the German-Israeli Coordination Center for Youth Exchange. Without this support it would hardly be possible to organize the camp this year.

- *What would you say about the young adults? Do the Communities succeed in integrating and attracting them in Community life?*

At least for the moment, I would say, it's not working. As I've seen and heard, many young people have left the Jewish Communities recently, even my own son. Many of the younger people just do not see any reason to be part of the Communities. Of course they remain to gather, to be in some networks, but then they do it outside of the Communities. This is a serious problem.

- *Does this mean that the current programs on offer by the Jewish Communities are not attractive for young people?*

I'd rather say the package on offer is not that systematic. For example, in former years we had these kinds of [religious] Sunday schools. They don't exist anymore. Obviously, nobody needs it. Sporadic actions, yes. But probably that's it. Jewish education is important. But actually nobody seems to miss this.

- *What about Israeli programs like "Birthright Israel"?*

That's done by the Jewish Agency, by the Sochnut. We concentrate on other things, for example, the arts, culture, learning programs, political actions for Israel, public relations for Israel and the like. Anyway, our capacities are limited.

- *You know that many Jews in Germany keep their distance from Jewish Community bodies. What are, to your knowledge, the main reasons for that? What is to be done about this?*

If we speak about Berlin, then I would say the problem is that there are lots of politics and promises but not very much fulfillment. In the election campaigns so many things are promised to the members, but when a new representative assembly is elected they just start to think about their own interests. That's one of the main problems. Of course, there are also a lot of objective problems like refurbishment of buildings, or caring for cemeteries, but it seems to me that the people are without a real program.

- *You mean the current leaders [of the JC of Berlin] or the former?*

I mean the current leadership, and the leadership before, and also the leadership before. I've been a member of the JC Berlin for 20 years, and I've felt the same dilemma all of this time. I also don't know why. One of the difficulties might be a result of the different territories and mentalities where the Russian speaking Jewish immigrants come from; from Ukraine, the Baltic States, or Uzbekistan. They did not develop a sense of community by themselves, but rather remain on their own. That's a real difference compared with the veteran, German speaking Jews, despite the fact that they have come from Poland and other Eastern European countries as well. However, there is a certain kind of homogeneity, but *our* people seem to be just from quite different worlds. Obviously, part of them has real problems to orientate themselves in the triangle of Jewish culture, German culture and their own culture from Russia, Ukraine, or Middle Asia.

- *To what extent are Jews in Germany becoming a part of German society, and identifying with the German nation? I ask here especially with respect to the Russian Jews.*

Good questions. Many of us have already been here [in Germany] for about 17 or 20 years. At the beginning there was a trend of quickly learning German, declaring oneself German and adopting German culture. Meanwhile, our children have become adults, but now there's an obvious trend to go *back to the roots*. I see

it, for example, in my own son. He used to have no interest in Russian books, Russian TV or Russian concerts. Now they are looking back, and they look for their own, Russian friends' network. They also want to go back to their Jewish roots, but in our Community [Berlin] that's impossible. Their reinforced orientation toward Russian culture is obvious, and I hope the same will come with the Jewish culture. That's what we have to work on.

- *You're referring to the younger generation of the Russian-Jewish immigrants?*

Yes, that's what I said. They have managed to enter Germany society and culture, went to high school here, they studied here, learned their profession, but now they're asking themselves who they really are. Their family came from there and there, and they are Jewish, but who are they now?

- *What is your general feeling and experience with how non-Jewish German officials and politicians cooperate with the Jewish institutions today?*

Very positive, I would say. I'm not talking about the Zentralrat, but with the German politicians and officials it works. There is respect and understanding. They are kind and constructive. Personally I have had good experiences with the Foreign Office. For example, I wrote them that we already had been organizing this summer camp for Jewish children for three years, but that we need support in order to be able to continue with it. I also mentioned that we invited children from Israel, but that there are objective problems to continue, for several reasons. And then they arranged a date for me, with the Deputy Foreign Minister. I had enough time to explain that our small organization is, with such projects like the international Jewish summer camp, also improving the German image in general. And that's what he really understood.

Try to imagine, even the Israeli side was hesitant at the beginning. When we organized our first children's summer camp in Germany and invited children from Israel, there was a strong rejection. Israeli parents didn't want to send their children to a summer camp in Germany. Now, three or four years later, there is a waiting list for children from Israel, because we cannot provide enough places for the summer camp.

- *How many of the children come from Israel for the summer camp?*

About one third. I really think that good work was done over the last few years, and the summer camp is popular across borders now.

- *How do you perceive the non-Jewish media reports on Jewish life in Germany today?*

There's a lot of gossip all the time, sometimes good, sometimes bad. But you know what? If people have problems with Mr. Spiegel [head of the World Congress of Russian Speaking Jews in Moscow, O.G.] then they write bad things, if they like him, they write good things. That's the way it goes.

- *Do you mean the international press or German press?*

The foreign press. Concerning German media, they are rather quiet or just report in a neutral way. It used to be a problem, especially during election campaigns in the Jewish Community. Now they are quiet.

- *How do you see the Jewish media in Germany? Is there a kind of pluralism, and is it possible to further develop the Jewish media?*

I think there is not much future in the long run for the Jewish print media. A lot is switching over to the Internet now. Let's take, for example, the *Evreyskaya Gazeta* [Russian language Jewish monthly available



throughout Germany]. They come out once a month, and write old stuff. And who needs that? Just elderly people who do not have the Internet.

- *But it's a good forum to present quite different opinions.*

I think it's better to organize such forums in the Internet, as well.

- *Is there already a Jewish web portal like Ha Galil in Russian, maybe similar to such web portals in Israel?*

No, I think it's just a question of money, and people are not yet motivated to establish an actual Russian Jewish web portal here. By the way, the Russian web portals in Israel are distinctly *Russian* ones.

- *Do you see real gaps in the spectrum of educational programs as they are provided by the Jewish Communities and other Jewish organizations in Germany today?*

Not in the religious sector. There are very good programs and activities now, for example from Chabad and Lauder.

- *And what about pluralistic Jewish education?*

I think Limmud Germany is doing a very good job. During this year's Limmud-Festival there was also a large program in Russian, and this was coordinated by one of our colleagues from the Congress [World Congress of Russian Speaking Jews, office Berlin].

I also think that there should be more on offer in culture and the arts, especially for young people. That's also a possibility to attract them to Judaism. From our side, for example, we try this with annual international artist's competition "Golden Chanukah."

- *Can you just describe, in a short way, what kind of support the WCRJ is offering to immigrated Jews in Germany?*

We offer social counseling, legal counseling, psychological counseling, and aside from this there have been smaller Hebrew courses and other educational events. During the last years we tried to explicitly support Jewish immigrants who live in the Eastern part of Germany. We make no distinction between Jews from the mother's side and paternal Jews.

## 23. YEHUDA TEICHTAL

**June 10, 2009, Berlin**

- *Rabbi Teichtal, you work for the Jewish Community in Berlin?*

Correct. We have been working in Berlin for *13 years* and we have seen an enormous growth. I have two functions here, one as a Rabbi in the Jewish Community [the official United Community of Berlin], and one as the director chairman of Chabad in Berlin. And we also deal with many, many other cities around Berlin.

- *What do you think is the main challenge facing Jewish people in Germany today?*

The greatest challenge facing the Jewish people today in Germany is education. We have today over 200,000 people that are Jewish in Germany, although the official numbers are about 130,000. We are in a situation where we have to invest time, energy, efforts and resources into education. If we give our youth, our children, our students and even adults a proper education, then we are ensured a strong future for Judaism in Germany.

- *There is a significant discrepancy between the number of Jews who are members in the Jewish Communities and the total number of Jews living in Germany today. What do you think are the main reasons for this?*

Well there are two perspectives to this question. The first is the logistical one. The way the immigration has come over from Eastern Europe, and the way it has been organized, has caused many people to become involved as official members, but also caused many people *not* to become involved. However, there is a second perspective, and that is the spiritual, the effect which it has on the people. There are many people that are totally alienated and have very little knowledge, very little awareness, very little identity and connection with our heritage. Therefore, many of these people that are living in small cities over time, G'd forbid, they could become totally assimilated. We say integration is very important, but integration is not assimilation. Therefore, we have to invest our energies into giving these people the ability to have a Jewish identity and awareness.

- *Do you see the problem of increased assimilation, or even of having no connection to the Community or to the heritage in both the Russian Jewish immigrants and the German Jewish veterans?*

Absolutely, yes. Although, people who are here for a number of decades, we can't really call them German Jews, because many of them are from Poland and other places. They may have more of a general identity and people which come from the Eastern European countries have much less awareness; however, the threat of assimilation and the need for education is across the board. Even more so for people from Eastern Europe. But the general situation of urgency for Germany is across the board. I should add there is a third group today, not all over Germany, but in some places like in Berlin, and that is immigrants and people that have come recently from the United States, from Israel and from other Western countries, specifically in the last five years - and the needs of these people have to be addressed as well.

- *Do you have a number of how many have come from Israel and from the United States total?*

It's hard to give numbers, but it's definitely grown in the last five years by at least 200-300% compared to what it was earlier.

- *How would you describe the current relations between Russian speaking immigrants and German speaking veterans?*

There are some challenges of true acceptance of one another. However, the main challenge which I see is not in the fact that veterans should just say: ‘We accept someone which is from Russia or from Eastern Europe.’ Many of the immigrants who came from Eastern Europe [have already been] here for 20-30 years and have children and some of them have grandchildren that were born here. However, the challenge is to truly give the people what they need. Not to negate what they are, not to tell them that they’re different, they have to forget what they were and become new people. That will not work. We have to embrace them, we have to give them love and care and warmth and joy and celebration and understanding. By embracing them we have to truly accept them, every person for what they are. And not try to change people, but to accept people. And embrace people. By doing that it will create a true unity between people. In other words, many Communities in Germany, they accepted people which came from Eastern Europe, but they didn’t really embrace them. They accepted them officially, because, you know, in Germany many times people do things which are officially correct. But that’s not enough, it has to be true. People are smart. If you truly, authentically accept someone, embrace someone - that is the most important key and ingredient to making people trust each other and grow.

● *Is there a difference among the different age groups regarding how often they come to the Jewish Community? What is your impression?*

There is a clear progression of integration here. It is clear that it is more challenging to integrate people who are older as far as language is concerned, as far as mentality is concerned. People that are younger, which are born here have a totally different approach. It’s quite clear. Although also the people that are younger, many of them still keep a certain identity related to Russia or to Eastern Europe. So there’s definitely, definitely a very big difference; the younger the people get, the more integrated they feel. At the same time, the connection between them remains strong, and therefore, it’s important, as I mentioned before, to embrace them as a whole and to accept them for, each person for what each person is. As I said, for the elderly it’s harder to integrate. Therefore we should provide institutions and frameworks what allows them to learn about their Jewish heritage, even if it’s in Russian. Younger people show faster progress in learning about their Jewish heritage, so they hopefully learn it in German as well, and in Hebrew when they go deeper. Concerning the elderly, it’s very important to offer them practical help, to accompany them, also in steps of daily life. You know, it’s just like with the trees, a young tree can grow in very different directions, but a big tree can only be cared for.

● *My question was more concerning the numbers of people attending. Is there a significant difference between the elderly and the middle aged and the young?*

Particularly by us, we have a very strong growth and very strong connection with younger people. There are some synagogues in Berlin where the average age is over 60. Here the average age is well under 40. Maybe 30, well, between 30-40. There are many young people, and young families especially. One of the areas we’re very active in is with young families which are involved. So to answer your question directly, yes, definitely. Younger people are frequent visitors here and feel also responsible to create the future and to create as a partner and affect the future of Judaism here in Germany. But there are also a substantial number of elderly people who meet in clubs and gatherings here, and very many frequent the Shabbat Baguette Program in our center which makes it possible for them to receive kosher food for Shabbat.

● *Holocaust remembrance and solidarity with Israel have been very important elements of Jewish Community life in Germany for the last 60 years. Do you think that will continue in a similar vein over the next decades? How do you think it will develop?*

What do I think it will be, or what it *should be*?

- What *will* be...

I think as people settle down, both of these things which you mentioned will definitely continue. But unfortunately, you know, remembrance will become weaker when many of the survivors become older and pass away, and then the challenge will be much greater to keep this remembrance strong. And the same thing goes with Israel. People get involved in and integrated into society, many times people can become so involved in what they're doing, that they forget things that are around them that may be very important. However, one of the things we try to do here is *remembrance in an active way*. We say to remember and never to forget is one of the cardinal, most important things for people here in Germany - and generally in the world; Jewish people are required to, must do and always will do this. However, just remembering the past is not enough. It is not sufficient. We also have to remember the past by living an active Judaism. Not in spite of the fact that six million Jews were murdered here, but because of the fact. You have to remember, we are here in the land where the darkness and the evil of Hitler was planned and established and was the basis for the entire destruction, planned destruction, G'd forbid, of the Jewish people in Europe. Now today, here, every good deed which is done has a much, much stronger effect. Of course we're going to answer the Nazis, but not the way they had done, we will answer them with light. I believe that in Germany, and especially in Berlin, every good deed that is done, every child which receives a Jewish education, every person that becomes more involved in our heritage, every family that becomes more involved in our tradition, that is another answer to the evil of the past. We are here, we are rebuilding with light and Judaism has a strong, active role to play here.

- *Do you think that in the long run Jews in Germany will identify more with their country again? I don't mean being proud to be German, but just saying 'Yes, this is my country.'*

I don't know whether people would feel proud. Many people will feel as Europeans. I don't know about identifying with Germany. Maybe, I don't know, maybe some people will and some people won't. I would hope that the first identity which they feel is that they're Jewish.

- *You have to work a lot with German officials here in Berlin, and with German politicians. Have your experiences been mainly positive or negative?*

Here in Berlin we have a very positive relationship on a local, borough level, on a city level, on a national level. We have very good cooperation on all levels. Of course, it's individual, some German people will do it more as a moral responsibility, and others will do because they truly care. Sometimes you can see it on the people. It doesn't mean to say that there's always cooperation that works well. There are times when there are challenges and there are times when it's not simple. And there are times when we're not always satisfied. But generally speaking I can say, on the political level there's a general interest, a general preparation to work together and that's the way in Berlin. In many cities it's that way, but not in all cities. I think the way it is here, that all political parties and camps are committed to a functioning cooperation, is unique to Berlin.

- *You said cooperation is not that forthcoming in all cities?*

Not in all cities. In many cities it's this way, but not in all cities.

- *Have you ever experienced outright rejection or a lack of cooperation?*

Official rejection you will not have in Germany.

- *What is your impression of the non-Jewish mainstream media? How do they cover Jewish developments in Germany today? And how do they cover Israel and the Middle East?*

Unfortunately, the reporting about Israel is not objective at all. It is against Israel. Clearly.

- *You mean in German mainstream media?*

Well, there are exceptions. There are some media that are more positive, generally speaking, like Axel Springer [one of the leading publishing houses and located in Berlin]. But many times you read things in the media and you're surprised that it's presented. You know, we just recently had the war in Gaza and you can have the Kassam rocket that falls on Sderot and the reaction. But the report will be first the reaction and then – at the end - it will be, 'A Kassam rocket has been shot...' As I said, there are exceptions, but on a general level I think there's a need for improvement. That's as far as Israel is concerned. As far as Judaism in Germany is concerned, it's a lot mellower. In other words, sometimes I get the feeling when I'm speaking to journalists, even sometimes to politicians, that they are very officially, they're very like *pro-Jewish*, but they're anti-Israel. But when they speak about their anti-Israel opinions, they speak with such a fire in their eyes that I truly wonder to myself, are they also truly pro-Jewish? Or is it just more politically correct to present themselves this way. In other words, sometimes anti-Israelism could really be anti-Semitism.

- *I understand.*

It's not always like this. I think Israel is subject, like every other country in the world, to constructive criticism. There's no problem with that. I don't think Israel should be shielded, or anyone should be shielded to criticism. But I think on the other hand, one cannot constantly take a one-sided approach to a conflict.

- *What do you think about Jewish media in Germany? Do you think its development is sufficient, or do you think there could there be more?*

There's always a need, nobody's perfect, there's always need for improvement. I would have wished for more reporting of actual, positive things that go on. Without being specific about this newspaper or another one or this media, that media. Without going too much into detail, on a general level, I think people need to be able to share with others positive things that are going on. I think people are interested to experience positive growth. And media should always be very open and transparent, not from the top down. There should really be more people involved; more actual things that are happening should be taken actually in and should become part of the news. That is what's actually making the news today interesting and dominating: the news, the eye reports and the people that are filming with their cell phones and writing their own blogs. This is what makes it so authentic and this can probably be a positive development. Again, it's not a criticism; it's just a general comment.

- *Looking at all of the Jewish educational programs in Germany, do you think that there are still needs that are not being met in the long run? If so, what?*

Yes. Absolutely. There are two answers to this question. One is quality and one is quantity. Quantity speaking we have to; there's a great need to reach many, many more young people. You have to realize that although there are programs going on for youth and children, it's a drop in the ocean. There are so many more people that we are not being successful in reaching. We are trying to, but we have limited resources. I will give you three examples. We have hundreds of youth that we are in contact with in small towns. Just this past weekend we had about a hundred youths from all around Germany which were our guests for the weekend [in the Chabad Center celebrating Shabbat and getting to know the Center] We do it once a month. But we don't have the resources to reach all of them on a constant basis. Each one of these places [JCs in small towns] we could make youth centers, we could make Sunday schools, we could give an ability to grow. *Second example*, here in Berlin and in many other large cities across Germany, there's a great need to help these people, children and youth, to get a proper Jewish education. This is probably the greatest challenge. A

proper Jewish education means three things: 1) they should know how to read Hebrew 2) they should understand and know and be aware of the Jewish holidays, not only in an external way, but truthfully. Study Jewish holidays and customs and traditions; whether the people are religious or not; later on, that's their decision, or the decision of their parents, what to do with it. But we should at least give them the ability to know what it's about, to know what Judaism is, in a formal education. We have many, many children that are waiting to come to a traditional kindergarten and school. But we have limited resources. Right now, we have 140 children, we have limited resources. 3) is informal education. Here a lot could be done as well. Youth centers, Sunday school, camps, book clubs, youth clubs, learning about the holidays, helping children that are disabled. So many things that have to be done. The main ingredient that's missing is resources. We are working with G'd's help, in a great manner with many people who are helping us, much has been reached. However, it's only the beginning.

*The third example* where we put strong efforts is adult education. Today we have many hundreds of adult Jews in Germany learning about their heritage. But many of them are embarrassed to do it openly. They are embarrassed to stand or sit in a synagogue, for whatever reasons. We try to outreach these people as well. And even if they are not in the younger generation, I see it as important to provide them with Jewish educational programs appropriate to their interest and knowledge.

My last point is quality. There are a great number of Jewish people now in Germany who have acquired a basic knowledge of Jewish heritage, but it's currently not more than the basics. It is wonderful that people have begun to learn the basics of Judaism, but that's not enough. We have to help these people *to live* in their Judaism. We have to provide them with frameworks, to enable them to live a Jewish life here, in Germany. In the long run, it shouldn't be necessary to import Rabbis, teachers and other professionals from outside. We should sustain an active, growing Jewish life here, in the land where the Shoah was organized. When we remember all the victims of the Shoah, then it's the greatest legacy to establish a flourishing Jewish life here again.