



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RABBIS

אחוד הרבנים בין-לאומי

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Tracing my grandparents' fate.... 61 years after Ghetto Bochnia

Rabbi Suzanne Carter

Often in my practice I am asked why I have such a "goyische" surname, frankly the question makes me cringe, as it shows the ignorance of those who ask.

Ironically, not once in my 10 years in Israel was my surname ever questioned as to its origins, yet, here in the United States, I am questioned frequently.

The search begins....

In 1989, the Soviets released hundreds of thousands of records confiscated from the Nazi's after WW2. Up until that time, I had little or almost no documentation of any family members on both my maternal and paternal sides. I knew the "list" of immediate family members by heart and each of their stories, although they had all perished 10 years prior to my birth.

Both of my parents were immigrants to the US, my late mother and her parents fled Mannheim Germany in 1935, my father immigrated to the USA in 1948.

My dear father, was 18 in September 1939, when the Nazi's entered Poland.

His war years included being an escapee from Mauthausen in Austria, two years in a Russian Labor Camp in Vladivostok, and later in 1946 he joined the Polish Army, and served as a First Lt. under General Anders.

In 1948, while living in Prague, CZ, with the help of a cousin/brother in law- (Gustave Carter), two maternal uncles who had immigrated to the United States several years prior, and with the intervention of Senator Taft of Ohio, as well

as a change of his surname from Wasserberger to Carter, he received a visa to immigrate to the USA.

The Wasserberger name was never mentioned during our childhood, only upon making aliyah to Eretz Yisrael in 1971, I was told by a cousin that we were Wasserbergers, not "Carters"

I was shocked as well as angry that our father never discussed it., as we all know in those days, Shoah survivors very rarely spoke of their war experiences.

Upon the release of the Soviet documents, I filled out tracing forms via the American Red Cross, it took more than 4 years before I would begin to receive information of convoy numbers, transport lists and "death" certificates of family members.

Only two members, of my list still included me, my paternal grandparents, Szymon and Yetta Wasserberger.

The only tangible evidence I had were two photos, one of my grandfather Szymon in the Austrian Army 1915, and a photo of both grandparents perhaps circa 1930. An eyewitness account by an Israeli cousin who has since passed, saw my grandparents in a cattle car during a transport from Katowice.

My grandparents lived at the time of their transport (1942) in Zywiec, Poland currently known for a local brewery, prior to that, they had lived in Bytom (Beuthen) in Ober Silesia where my father was born in 1921.

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IFR Mission Statement

The IFR is a professional organization of rabbis united by a commitment to Jewish tradition and a desire to facilitate the Jewish spiritual growth and life cycle needs of all.

IFR provides a progressive, pluralistic forum, linking member rabbis in a spirit of friendship and a sense of community.

IFR provides support for members in their professional endeavors and offers continuing education. IFR encourages professional relationships with rabbis and other rabbinic organizations.

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Finally!



שימון בן דוד הישראלי

My grandfather, Szymon Wasserberger as a Colonel in the Austrian Army circa 1915

Rabbi Suzanne Carter is V.P. of the IFR in charge of communications and editor of the IFR newsletter.

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My father, Eddie Wasserberger,
General Anders Army (Polish) 1946



Paternal aunt, and grandparents, Anna Karter, Szymon & Yetta Wasserberger

The Real Tragedy of the Ninth of Av

By Rabbi Jeffrey Lipschultz

Temple Beth Shalom



The ninth of Av is a sad day in Jewish history but also a sad day period when we look at the failure of us as a culture to stop hatred. On this day we not only mourn the tragedy that has befallen the Jewish people but we also look at the world and its incompleteness and see that we have failed to bring unity and harmony in the world. The ninth of Av is a day we Jews look at our failure to stop senseless hatred and ask how did we get this way and how we can prevent such a disaster from happening again? This is why, when looking inward as a community, we look at our relationships as Jews and human beings and how these relationships are affected by are actions and words. We learn that one act of unkindness can destroy something very important that will affect many generations.

In the Talmud they relate a story on the real reason the temple was destroyed. In the story there is an idea which relates to how individuals behaving badly towards each other can create a disaster for all. The sages understood the causes of the destruction of the Temple and our expulsion into the Diaspora through the story of **Kamsa** and **Bar Kamsa**. The story of two Jews with senseless hatred. The Talmud states that because of Kamsa and Bar Kamsa, two different people, Jerusalem was destroyed. This sounds like a lot of responsibility but we see ourselves in these individuals.

There was a man who was very good friends with Kamsa and did not get along with another person with a similar name, Bar Kamsa. One time this man made a large banquet and told his servant to invite his friend Kamsa. The servant made a

mistake and invited Bar Kamsa.

When the man came to his banquet, he was surprised to see Bar Kamsa sitting there. Not wanting to see his enemy benefiting from his meal, he ordered him to leave. Bar Kamsa, not wanting to be embarrassed offered to pay for his portion of food. The man refused to accept compensation, and ordered Bar Kamsa to leave.

Bar Kamsa, still not wanting to be embarrassed, offered to pay for half of the expenses of the large banquet. Still the man refused and ordered Bar Kamsa to leave. Finally, Bar Kamsa offered to pay for the entire banquet. In anger, the man grabbed Bar Kamsa with his own hands and physically ejected Bar Kamsa from the banquet.

Bar Kamsa said that since there were many Rabbis at the meal and none of them objected to the outrageous behavior on the part of the host, it must be that the Rabbis agreed with this embarrassing episode. Bar Kamsa decided to fix them all. He went to speak with the Caesar (the king of Rome) and told him that the Jews are planning a rebellion against the Romans.

The Roman Caesar did not believe it. Bar Kamsa told him to send a sacrifice to the Temple in Jerusalem and see if the Jews will bring it on to the Altar. The Caesar agreed and sent an animal. On the way to Jerusalem, Bar Kamsa inflicted a minor wound into the lip (or eye) of the animal, so small that by almost all standards it would not be considered a blemish.

When the animal arrived in the Temple in Jerusalem, the Rabbis examined the animal and saw the tiny blemish. They didn't know what to do. Although according to Jewish law it was forbidden to offer such an animal on the Altar, they reasoned that not to offer it for such a minor reason could endanger themselves and cause a breach with the Caesar. Therefore they wanted to have the animal brought up upon the Altar.

Rabbi Zacharia ben Avkolus however disagreed fearing that people will learn from this those animals with blemishes may be brought upon the Altar. In the end no animal was offered and it sparked the end of our temple and the beginning of a long struggle for a return to our land and our faith.

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We learn here some very important points of service in worship and our relationships to our fellow Jews. The story ends badly because what the story tries to teach us is that its not the offering that was not accepted but the individuals around were not accepting of each other. What we understand from this tragic tale is that something important was missing when looking at all the religious dictums, the connection to other human beings. In the end all the ritual there failed because it placed a higher degree of ritual over the relationships of others in the community.

The story is clearly an allegory for what Judaism lacks than and now, a respect for difference and disagreement. We are told to stand strong and be proud of our faith but we also must counter this with our love and respect for others. The term "respectfully disagree" often many focus on the disagreement and not the respect. Judaism asks us to live by our faith but we must also live with others by it or the faith shall die.

On Tish B'Av often we turn inward with our pain and recognize our failures as Jews and human beings that led to this destruction of our temple. Let the story of **Kamsa** and **Bar Kamsa** be a clarion call for unity in the time of strife so we can build something

good out of the ashes of something bad.

We are told that senseless hatred destroyed the Beit HaMikdash. Let us recognize that all hatred that causes destruction is always senseless hatred and one cannot build when they use hatred to destroy. Tish B'Av teaches us that on the day of our temple's destruction the Messiah will be born. Let us view analogy to teach us that at a time of great destruction that love and compassion can be exhumed from the ashes of hatred. Let us turn from the ashes of our destruction to rebuild a better community and a stronger faith.

May we all learn from this chilling episode in our Jewish history, that our behavior is of extreme importance. May we, through the good will and cheerful help that we are able to give to another fellow Jew and all around us see the rebuilding of the Temple swiftly in our days.

Take this to heart that with connection to one person we begin the foundation for our temple and a renewal to the entire world.

Rabbi Jeffrey Lipschultz is the spiritual leader of Temple Beth Shalom in Chula Vista Ca, a conservative synagogue.

Oranim The Israel Birthright Program: Rabbi Marc Ben-Meir



"My son Jonathan, 18, is currently touring Israel with the Oranim, Birthright Israel program. It is my prayer that he gleans some of our history by walking where his ancestors did." (article on page 5)



IFR welcomes new members

Rabbi Cantor Gregory Groysman

Rabbi Leslie Keiter Tannenwald

Rabbi Gary M. Spero

Rabbi Howard W. Meridy, M.D.

Oranim-Birthright Israel

Rabbi Marc Ben Meir

Rebirth. As a rabbi and as a Jew it is wonderful to witness the spiritual rebirth of another Jew. My son, Jonathan, 18, falls into this category. Initially Jonathan was raised in a one parent family. His mother left and I was blessed with seeing to his welfare, giving him love and making sure he could function in the community. Joni grew up to be a fine young man. He has many friends, some Jewish, mostly Christian, and even a Moslem from Pakistan who he met at high school. Jonathan really fits in. But Jonathan didn't want to stand out. Religion to him was telling the evangelical Christians at school that he isn't interested. This was not because he was well grounded in Judaism, it was because he was totally apathetic towards all organized religion and just didn't want to be bothered. My more I pushed, the more he withdrew. He never had a bar mitzvah.

And now he goes to Israel and comes home. "Dad, I want to make aliyah" he says. "I want to serve in ZAHAL and serve my people." From the cold storage into the hot flames. So, what

do I do, Wait him out? See if he changes his mind? Remind him of college and responsibilities at home? Or cheer for him for finally finding something of value in his own spiritual makeup. I don't know. Maybe a combination of all of the above.

I am sure that the "wanna go to Israel to live" part of his dream will pass, but the seed has been planted and Jonathan has found his Jewish roots and he has one proud dad. Not if I could only get him to do the dishes.....

Rabbi Marc Ben Meir is an IFR rabbi in Texas.



To IFR Rabbi David and Lee Degani on their 25th Silver wedding anniversary on July 9, 2003.

Rabbi Suzanne Carter's youngest son, Aviel for his High School graduation. Aviel is in Recife, Brazil, learning Portuguese.

Rabbi Richard Allen reflects

It might be of interest that while I turned 70 in January of this year, I have been invited to sing the Yamim Noraim services at Sinai Temple in Toronto. Needless to say, I am very happy to be the Hazzan again.

I have been very busy with doing pro-bono work in many kinds of counseling, hospital visitations and still being called upon by members of my former congregation to officiate at weddings and funerals and b'nei mitzvah. You would think that since I retired in 1977, they would have forgotten me. In fact, I am co-officiating with my dear friend, Joel Alpert, who is a Reconstructionist Rabbi, formerly the Education Director of my former congregation. We are sharing the service with the exception of my singing all those things that can be sung.

Several years ago the Italian-Jewish composer,

Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, was commissioned by the Cantors' Assembly to write five pieces for a Jewish wedding. Any of our members who sing should buy the music of [V'erastich li](#). I will be singing it immediately after the exchange of rings. It is so well-written modally that no accompaniment is needed.

Presently I am in Los Angeles, visiting my beloved Hazzan, Samuel Kelemer. I began as a meshorer in his 3-voice Orthodox choir at the age of 7. I was his boy soprano. I had seen him two years ago and was dismayed to see the difficulty he had in walking. When I heard he had been moved to a 24-hour care nursing home, I just had to see him. We both cried to be together again. I found out that he is the eleventh generation from the Besht!!! He is a rabbi, ordained many years ago by his father. He was a wunderkind, having learned the Psalms by the age of three! His father told him, "I want you to be a hazzan, but I want you to know as much as a rabbi."

Rabbi Richard Allen reflects

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Since I have been studying the lives of Shneur Zalman of Liadi (CHaBaD) and Nahman of Bratzlav, I asked him many questions about them and Levi Yitzcvhok of Berdichev. He told me that of the three, Nahman was the greatest and then explained why. I am currently reading "Tormented Master - Nahman of Bratzlav."

His friends call him Shmulik or Shmilik. I call him by his boyhood name, "Reb Shmilik'l." He was a hazzan in Russia at the age of eight! He graduated from an accelerated program at Juilliard at 18 and came to Rochester, NY, for his first "stelle."

I was instrumental in getting a CD made of his singing, which just came out. He is so humble that he doesn't want to sell the CDs. His kind of hazzanut just doesn't exist any more.

When I had to write a paper for Rabbi Gelberman on why I wanted to become a "modern rabbi," I realized that I had wanted to be a rabbi since the age of eight. I am certain that Sam Kelemer was instrumental in that desire.

Seeing my hazzan at 86, his mind as sharp as a razor blade, but his body failing him was so emotionally wrenching to me, but I had to make this trip or I would never have forgiven myself if he should die before I could see him one more time. His wife told me I did a wonderful mitzvah for him, spending six days with him. I told her that I did a mitzvah for myself.

Rabbi Richard Allen is an IFR rabbi from Pa, he wrote us from Los Angeles.



The customs of Elul are meant to help us tune into the spirit of the times. and to attune ourselves.

Tekiat Shofar : The Shofar is blown every morning.

Shalom between Jews :Increasing friendship and Shalom is the work of the month of Elul.

The Way of Prayer :In Elul one prays in an entreating and tearful voice.

Travelling to See a Tzaddik : Being in the presence of Holy people is influential and inspiring.

Checking the Tefillin and Mezzuzot : The parchments need to be checked periodically for disqualifications.

Saying Psalms : It is customary to increase the recital of Psalms in Elul.

Saying Psalm No. 27 : This Psalm is added to the morning and afternoon services.

Learning Ethics (chassidut and mussar) : Improve your ways in preparation for the days of Awe.

Why I became a Rabbi

Rabbi Gregory Groysman

Most often those congregation members who interview rabbis are primarily concerned about their look rather than a simple, but the most important question, "Why did you become a Rabbi?" Based on my conviction that this question should always be asked, I will try to explain why I became a Rabbi and what kind of Rabbi I would like to be.

Since my earliest memories, I always felt that life without a mission has no meaning. Finding or recognizing this mission may be the most challenging task we face during our life. Only those who can find their mission can call themselves truly blessed. We live a relatively short time on this earth. What we do during our physical life makes us good or bad. What we do with our spiritual life makes us righteous or evil.

In simple terms I could compare our life to a campfire, where the wood is our physical and the flame is our spiritual life. Just as our life, the campfire has limited time; it cannot burn forever. If the flames are big, the light is bright. It warms us and helps us to find our way in the dark. Yes, it may not last long, but during its lifetime it will do lots of good. On the other hand, the flame can be diminished to smoke. Of course it will last longer, but it won't help people, and will not serve the purpose.

The role of the Rabbi is to provide this spiritual fire. The light of this fire will help people find their way to God and Torah. The warmth of this fire will help people feel love and care for the Creator. A hypocritical Rabbi, by lies and deception, turns people away

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Why I became a Rabbi

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from God by creating spiritual smoke. The smoke is dangerous and hazardous for anyone who seeks spirituality because it destroys the most precious part of our being, the soul. It makes us a cynical, selfish, and ignorant people. The hypocritical Rabbi commits a sin, "spiritual malpractice". In a way, spiritual malpractice is more dangerous than medical malpractice because if a doctor commits misconduct, it may affect only his patient. If clergy commits misconduct, it will affect generations.

The life of a Rabbi should be a personal example of spiritual life, leadership and dedication to people's needs. A genuine approach to a problem creates trust and faith. Without this foundation, the clergy has no chance for success.

I am a Rabbi, because I found my purpose and mission. My strong belief in God, genuine love for Judaism, and my life's experience, gives me unique perspective and opportunity. I see my purpose as a Rabbi to teach, to serve, and to inspire people in search of God and spirituality. My mission is to illuminate their life with the wisdom of the Torah.

Briefly, I would like to describe my experience as a spiritual leader of a small group of people, all of whom came to the United States from Russia approximately five to ten years ago. It's a wonderful group of senior citizens. They are all highly educated. Among them are teachers, medical workers, engineers, and scientists. None of them were ever exposed to Judaism and none of them speak English.

When you are 70 years or older under these circumstances you feel hopeless, as if your life has come to an end. I started working with this group. First, I taught them history of the Jewish people, and then introduced Bible. It has been an eye-opening experience. I saw excitement on their faces when we spoke about creation, about God, and Exodus. They immediately recognized the parallel between what happened to our people in Egypt and what happened to us in Russia.

The words: "Let my people go" touched their hearts. Many of them were crying.

The beauty of our holidays and traditions mesmerized this wonderful group. When they were repeating after me the words of the Commandments, I felt Divine presence in the classroom, as if God himself welcomed his lost children. Lessons about Israel had a deep impact on these people.

After one of these lessons, they came to me with money that they collected to help Israel. I was touched to tears. These people, whose lives depend on \$500 dollars and \$100 in food stamps a month, collected \$800 to help Israel, a rediscovered Home Land, of which they knew so little during most of their lives.

Recently we start studying the Hebrew alphabet, and I have no doubt that these people, persecuted and repressed, hated and despised in the country they were born, will find a new spiritual life. This discovery will help to realize their own purpose and mission of which they only could dream back in the Soviet Union.

This story would not be complete, if I didn't mention my parents and grandparents, people very special and dear to my heart. They did everything possible and sometimes impossible, that even under communist tyranny, we, as kids (my sister and I) grew as proud Jews. They were, they are, and they always will be my inspiration and my guidance, and an example of how, under any circumstances, one can maintain human dignity and admiration for God and people.

My grandfather, Aaron Groysman, was my first teacher. When I was only six years old I was diagnosed with pneumonia. The complications after pneumonia were severe. Doctors told my parents that I might not make it... but fresh air and good food could prolong my life. My parents decided to send me to a little village, to my grandparents.

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Why I became a Rabbi

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One never knows what is a curse and what is a blessing. Rather than feeling pity for me, my grandfather started teaching me Hebrew. "Only God knows" - he said: "when is our time (to die), but my obligation is to teach you" and he did. For the next six to seven months my life was totally under the control of my grandparents. Early in the morning, prayer (he taught me how to put t'fillin at age 6), breakfast, after breakfast Hebrew study, lunch, and after lunch Torah study, evening prayer and bedtime. My heart is filled with amazing warmth and appreciation for this wise man, my Rabbi, my grandfather, who gave me my first lesson in life, "Never give up."

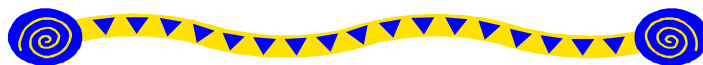
Day after day, and week after week, I was surrounded and nursed by loving and caring people. The population of this village was almost all Jewish, with some Ukrainians and gypsies living side-by-side, sharing the same hardships, and inhaling the cultural beauty and differences of their people. My childhood memories are filled with the pictures and sounds of this time. My grandparents' dinner table, outside their house, made from pieces of wood, was always surrounded by neighbors or whoever was passing by, to share the simple, but beautifully prepared food, mostly made from chicken, potatoes, pickles and vegetables. And songs, songs, songs. Hebrew, Yiddish, Ukrainian, Russian, Gypsy. And what beautiful voices these people had.

I don't know any other time in my life, when I was happier and more at peace. God, nature and people, all mixed in one. This mysterious combination gave birth to my dreams and inspirations. From this moment I knew that my life had changed forever. The search for my life's purpose and mission began. Six months later the doctors could not find even trace of my illness. From this moment I felt obligated to justify my life, which was saved so miraculously.

May God bless all his children and especially those who dedicate their lives to bring light and inspiration to all of us.

Rabbi Gregory Groysman recently received **smeicha** from the Rabbinical Seminary International, and is a new IFR member located in South Florida.

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