

# DEATH OF A ZIONIST



Yehudah ben haGalut  
Child of the Galut  
Essays

Judah A. Kessler

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*To Rabbi Judith Lewis (Rabbi Emerita at Riverdale Temple, New York) with-out whose stoicism, guidance, encouragement and infinite wisdom, patience and guidance I would never, undoubtedly, have had the strength to endure, persevere and continue through a time of darkness, dread and utter futility, to rise up, out of and away from it all to live a fuller, stronger, more fulfilling and rewarding life.*

## Foreword

Don't be discouraged! There are a lot of Hebrew and Yiddish words, terms and expressions in this text because, well, it's about Jews and many (not all, of course) Jews use them. Why? Well, for many of us, we just do. We grow up hearing them and they're as common to us as, let's say, the expression "Voila!" or "Deja vu" and a multitude of other expressions that English-speakers use and never actually think about.

But, at the end of it all, there is, for your further reading enjoyment (?) an "Appendix-Glossary" with definitions of many if not all of the terminologies used. (So, I might guess that you could use this book as a "Foreign Language Guide" as well as being informative on the topic alone. Two books for the price of one! Such a deal! - You'll forgive me for saying.)

I've often said that, in a general sense, being Jewish is automatically being "bi-lingual" at least: we grow up speaking our native language, "Mother tongue", AND a bit of Hebrew as well. Learning any more languages just becomes part of the routine if, when and where we're able.

In any event, I hope this all helps to better explain much of the political side of Jews and the relationship with a much misaligned and misused term these days: "Zionism". It wasn't originally a negative ideology. But as with much, humanity seems to have made it so... all too often.

## **21 Elul 5767 (4 September 2007)**

When I approached the “Beth Din”, I was most perplexed. Never before in my life had I ever needed to “prove” that I am a Jew. Although my childhood was predominantly secular, my mother assured that she was a Jew and by matrilineal law, all of her children were Jews as well.

“I cannot tell you what religion you must choose to follow. God is something only your heart can tell you. You’re free to explore other religions, other beliefs, and when you find the one that your heart says is right, you may follow that. But know that no matter what religion you settle into, you will never stop being a Jew.” My mother firmly believed that Jews are a “People” and we are inextricably bound to that People, its history, heritage and traditions. In my entire lifetime, I never even remotely doubted the word of my mother. Concurrently, I never had to prove that I was, I am, a Jew. Being a Jew was not a collection of papers, documents, records. Being a Jew was having been created from the flesh of my mother, who was a Jew, whose mother was a Jew, whose ancestors were Jews. I lived as a Jew. I thought as a Jew. I learned as a Jew. I existed as a Jew. When asked, I proudly stated “I am a Jew”.

That was proof that I am a Jew. I never doubted it. I never denied it. I never knew myself to be anything other.

When I approached the “Beth Din”, requesting some enigmatic piece of documentation providing some perplexingly tangible evidence of my existence as a Jew, not for one fleeting moment was I ever even slightly uncertain that I would be provided with some silly little “ID” substantiating my history, heritage, tradition, ancestry. I found the very idea of “proof” to be quite insane, however. Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Judah, Rachel, Leah, Isaac, Aaron... Did they carry some form of “Identity Card” with them? I’d never heard of such a thing. Yet, if it was demanded of 21st Century Jews to do so, as my ancestors of Nazi Europe proudly wore their yellow “Magen David”, so too would I proudly carry my “papers” proving my existence as a Jew.

When, after several weeks of waiting for word from the “Beth Din” that my application had been “approved” I instead received a cold, impersonal e-mail informing me that, in the opinion of the members of the “Beth Din” I am not, in fact, a Jew. I was devastated! Not only had my own existence been abolished, but my entire ancestry, history and heritage as well. Not by stroke of pen, but by click of computer, this menagerie of men who knew nothing of my lifetime and who never took the time to learn the intricacies of my existence, unilaterally eliminated not only my present, but my blood-line and my connection to everything I’d ever known to be stable and indestructible!

In essence, by their decree: I ceased to exist!

They, that “Beit Din”, void of all humanity, declared that, if I wished to “BE” a Jew, I would have to “convert”.

Convert? What? How? One cannot “convert” from what one has always been to that which one has only known. One does not “become” something which one already “is”. One cannot “convert” from “White” to “Black” nor even the converse. It was not merely improbable, it was impossible!

When, like a rushing ball of Hell’s fire I was struck by the ultimate consequence of such folly, I felt my soul crushed: At the moment of my “conversion”, I would officially declare the denouncement of my mother, would officially declare her removal from what was her People, would negate her existence as a Jew, and would throw her other children off into something much more horrible than the “Galut”... I, single-handedly, would publicly and officially declare my entire family to be “Goyim”! Just as this “Beth Din” disposed of me, I would be equally guilty of throwing the souls of the Jews who are my ancestral foundation into a void, an abyss, larger and deeper than “sheol”!

I actually wanted my next breath to be my last. I could NOT even imagine doing what was instructed and I could NOT accept the reality of the situation.



I turned to the only solace I knew, or had ever known: synagogue. A “Reform” temple, but, nonetheless, a place of gathering and worship of Jews... the only “mishpacha” (family) I’d ever truly known.

With head covered by my kippa, I sat, front row, as close to the Ark as possible, hoping that “God” would hear me better, considering my proximity to His Torah scroll. I sobbed. I trembled. I pleaded. I needed explanation, direction, comfort, protection, solace. I needed assurance that “God” still held me as His child, a generation of Abraham, a child of my mother who revered Him, a Jew. I had, at that moment, no one else to turn to and no where else to go.

Even at that moment, I found myself, formerly a Traditional Conservative, in the house of Reform worship. I pleaded to God as a Conservative Jew in the “temple” of Reform Jews all the while bombarded by the words of a “Beth Din” who declared that I had no right to either.

Now I wondered: Did God hear me? Was God listening? Or was God, like that “Beit Din”, looking for ways to sweep me out, denouncing, denying, disposing of me? Was I where I didn’t belong? Was I in a place, amongst a People, “posing”? Did God think me an “intruder”? I’d gone beyond devastation. I was beyond “Galut”. In my despair, I began to cease to exist. Even my soul lost all traces.

Even today, as I compose these thoughts, I'm uncertain where I found the strength to persevere. But I grew defiant, indignant, independent. I had the courage and fortitude of my mother and I would NEVER allow a bungling bunch of inhuman and inhumane strangers to eliminate the great existence of the great, caring, loving, compassionate, intelligent Jew who was my mother! They would never do this. I would never allow them to.

I left that sanctuary that day, angry, embittered, but defiant and determined. I would not only disprove them, that "Beth Din", but I would perpetuate, somehow, my mother's honour. For the moment, they may well have taken me off-guard, but they would never, not now, not ever, eradicate my mother!

What followed in the weeks after was the answer to each and every one of my questions. Yes, assuredly, God DID see me, and God DID hear me, and God DID provide me with comfort, support, consolation and solace.

In the words of the Rabbi at that Temple was all that my battered soul required for strength and recovery. In the assuring tones of a learned, knowledgeable, intelligent, compassionate and astounding wisdom-filled voice was the essential, integral "chuppah" under which I could rest, recuperate and heal.

“I have no doubt that you are a Jew.”

“You have no doubt that you are a Jew.”

“You probably know more about being a Jew than most typical Jews today.”

“You’ve obviously lived your life as a Jew.”

And then came the most decisive, most important statement:

“Don’t let them do this to you.”

There was the crux of all of it. I was letting them do this to me. Worse yet, I was letting them do this to my mother! I was allowing them to erase and eradicate everything! I was permitting them to dictate the sentence of my elimination!

At that very moment, it all came to a spiritually palpable and violent halt.

Here was the Truth. Here was the fact. Here was the assurance that God not only heard me, listened to me, felt my pain, empathized with my agony, but gave me the answers, the solution that only God could give.

Today, it’s almost a year later. I’ve moved on-ward from my days in that Reform congregation and returned not only to my Traditional Conservative life but have gone deeper into the wonders and magnificent embrace of what was, and is, MY ancestry, tradition, heritage and identity as a Jew. I daven, I shuckle, I don’t merely attend but participate in shacharit, mincha and ma'ariv. I

recite brachot. I've rejoiced at Simchat Torah and I've wept at Yom Kippur. I live mitzvot. I know that out of 613, I can truly follow only some 463 and must work on 28. I am not "perfect". But there is one thing that I am... again... undeniably, incontrovertibly and assuredly... I am a Jew!

I still don't have an ID card, suitable for wallet. I do have a "Teudat Gerut", presented to me by that Rabbi who saved a "Jewish Soul" from destruction. It symbolises not a "conversion" into Judaism, but a "conversion" from intellectual void and darkness into an enlightenment and the knowledge that my identity and existence as a Jew can NEVER be eradicated and that the "proof" is in my spirit... just as it was in the spirit of my ancestors: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, et al... including... my Mother, of most blessed memory.

## Prologue

These essays do not, in any manner, espouse the dissolution of either the Chief Rabbinate of Israel nor the Beth Din. To be without either or both would certainly diminish the particular uniqueness of the Jewish People.

However, a point in fact, worthy of much attention, is the current absence of a Sanhedrin without which, Jews have managed to survive, continue to exist and remain Jews. If Jews are strong enough to thrive without a Temple and Sanhedrin, why couldn't we survive without a Chief Rabbinate and/or Beth Din? In fact, many Jews have never approached a Sanhedrin, Chief Rabbi or Beth Din and have other-wise successfully survived as Jews.

It is not for the purpose of suggesting the elimination of these governing positions that these essays appear. Rather, it is, most definitely, to make particularly clear, a sorely necessary move into the global 21<sup>st</sup> Century on the parts of both, the Chief Rabbinate and the Beth Din.

When the Chief Rabbi of Israel, currently Sephardic, can manage to strip away the Halachic authorities of the Ashkenazic representative in the Chief Rabbinate, this surely presents a grave situation which requires immediate rectification and repair. When the affiliation of one is allowed to

trump another, all Jews, eventually suffer from a blatant imbalance of government authority and intelligence. When a 59-year old immigrant to Israel is allowed to over-throw the authority of a 54-year old Sabra, (born and raised in Israel), this calls for particular scrutiny ,investigation, rectification. And when the aforementioned is allowed to unilaterally nullify Jews world-wide – to suddenly declare some conversions non-Kasher and void – to deny ANY Jew a rightful place in a state supported in great part by Jews world-wide, Jews of ALL affiliations/denominations – this can only be viewed as another atrocity committed against all Jews – another Holocaust. And, as with previous atrocities, this must cease, and cease immediately before more Jews are disenfranchised and sent to death in exile (Galut) with no identity.

When a Beth Din, governed by the dictates of a Chief Rabbi such as the aforementioned, can, in a matter of mere seconds, destroy and erase entire Jewish generations by mere decision, can expel Jews into the realms of non-Jews with no regard of human dignity, a cry must be heard, an abomination must be put right.

In these days of this common 21<sup>st</sup> Century, there are Jews who have survived onslaughts, attacks, genocides. There exists today, generations of those Jews who possess their ancient identities only through oral records of family histories. Today, there are Jews who have, in spite of odds, managed

to nurture, with-in their heart and soul, that which provided the strength, the courage, the endurance, the survival of the ancestors without the formality and privilege of documentation. As of this moment in time, there are Jews whose whole written history fell prey to and was destroyed by those who sought to destroy all Jews, every-where, through-out history. For the most part, it is this faction of world Jewry that finds itself the victim of methodical elimination. Additionally, there are those who have, perhaps for lengths of years and generations, known themselves to be Jews who are finding that, based upon whim and wont of archaic unilateral decision, are systematically being rejected, their conversion being nullified, that they are no longer "Jews"!

The ramifications are endless. Nullify a Jew today and entire families become null and void within the "Family" of Jews, histories are eliminated.

It is in response to this atrocity that these essays have been written. The time to cease the abomination must now be at hand.

## Book I – The New Jew

Many years ago, the common calendar brought us into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and more recently, the Jewish calendar brought us into the year 5767.

Technologies have continued to change, political views and alliances have shifted, national borders have been drawn and re-drawn, new nations have been born, old nations have died. Through all of this change, this passing of time, we, the Jewish People have succeeded in surviving... in one way or another. The People of the kingdom of Judah thrive, mostly in the Diaspora, as the People of the original kingdom of Israel have been long-ago relegated to the history of our Torah scrolls. We recall, we remember, we never forget... or do we?

The “People of Israel”, the “Israelites” of our ancestry, suddenly ceased to “be” in our ancient history. Amalgamated and assimilated into the land of Judah, the once autonomous tribe relinquished their identity to become Judean. Those Judeans, comprised of disparate elements, became, over time, “Jews”. They did not become “Israelites” any more than all Jews became “Israelis”. But the nation that survived and evolved, retained not only the basic concepts and content of a common religion, but maintained and developed rich traditions that identify us, the Jews, as a distinct People among the nations of our world.



In very recent times, claims have been made by those who previously would not likely be viewed as “Jewish”, to some direct lineage to “newly discovered” tribes of Judean ancestry. From India to Ethiopia, “New Jews” are sprouting like desert flowers after a sudden and unexpected rain. Yet, from whence come the claimed lost tribes, many established Jews know not. The tribal kings are not part of common Jewish nomenclature, but somehow, someone manages to tie the ancient to the contemporary and much like the ill-begotten child in a nunnery, the “New Jew” is nurtured, grows and becomes a “Jew”. Whether the established Jew of global proportions accepts the “New Jew” or not is irrelevant and immaterial. What is of titanic and tantamount import is the fact that, for purposes of contemporary Israeli law of “Return”, that legislature which warmly welcomes those in the Diaspora “back to their Home-land” (Israel), the “New Jew” is afforded all the assistance and provided all the comforts and luxuries the coffers of the Knesset can dole out. Transport, housing, health care, employment, language studies, financial subsidies – the package and parcel – all neatly placed in the open arms of theses who have just recently discovered some long-elusive, or perhaps magically manufactured direct link to the ancient “People-Judean”. In the 60-plus years of the existence of our “New Israel” – not to be confused with that kingdom, tribe, land of Torah in which resided the “Israelites” and not the “Israeli” – the complexion of the “Israeli” has changed. Like the

colour, shade and hue of desert flowers, so too number the diversities of the faces of the State of today's Israel.

On the surface, this acceptance of the "New Jew" can easily be looked-upon as a politically correct and divinely inspired application of the ancient decree: "Let the stranger in your midst be to you as the native for you were strangers in the land of Egypt". Israel warmly accepts the arrival of the "New Jew" and indeed, bestows upon each, those gifts and blessings of the "native"... native Israeli, native "Jew". With astounding immediacy, the "New Jew" becomes the Jew of ancient history, is absorbed into Jewish culture and society and becomes... Jew.

Knesset, Chief Rabbinate, Beth Din... across the board and gamut, the "New Jew" received acceptance and a resounding "Baruch Haba" – Welcome Home!

Meanwhile, in less obscure reaches of humanity, the established "Old World Jew" is, under cover of ignorance and lack of press, being pushed down, squeezed out, dejected, ejected, and rejected. The surviving generations of predominantly Ashkenazic Jews are increasingly being regarded as some waste product of Jewish history. The contemporary generations who are the products of survivors of the Nazi Holocaust, the reigns of Soviet terror, those who have kept the traditions, the beliefs, the

core values of Jews alive in spite of the attempts at annihilation and, as it was in the times of our nomadic ancestors as recorded now in our Torah, by means no greater than “Oral Tradition”, these stoic souls are being brought to the precarious brink of extinction. These Jews are being punished for being survivors, for, perhaps, being reminders of an atrocious past. Worst of all, the punishments now being meted out are coming not from familiar anti-Semites, but from Jews! Jews of political positions of clout and power. These old generations, these survivors, are being scrutinized to death by the “Ultra-Orthodoxy” and the “Chief Rabbinate” of Israel. These “survivors of survivors” are being shifted from a Diaspora, off into a full “Galut”! As if our observances of our traditions, our religion and the fact that we have managed, against all odds, to hold fast to those values which make us Jews is of no consequence, those who hold themselves in greater esteem and import, are brutally negating not only a right to a place with-in global Jewry, but are, unilaterally, abolishing our existence completely. Sadder still is the fact that there is no voice being raised to halt this atrocity. Like silent lambs to the slaughter, like our ancestors to the Holocaust, the majority of Jews are being stripped of our identity, removed from our very Jewish existence and relegated into some obscurity.

It has been estimated that what is classified as the “Orthodoxy” in global Jewry constitutes a mere ten per-cent of all Jews. The vast majority of this

relative minority is far removed from the realities that are contemporary society – secular and religious. These “Orthodox” Jews and those factions of which the “Orthodoxy” is comprised exist apart from general society and, in great part, refuse to participate in Creation as a whole. They create ghettos – much like those that were forced upon many of our ancestors, against which many rebelled – in which they dwell and often work. They notoriously neither invite the out-side world in nor accept invitations to participate with the world outside their own. In short, their sense and concepts of a “reality” is almost (if not actually) completely of their own fabrication. In order to maintain their own, their reality, their world and their existence, they dwell, marry, procreate, exist only with-in. Of frightening certainty, it is from this faction of Jewry that the Jewish law courts and Israeli government come. This is the body-politic which controls issues regarding “halacha”, the ultimate point of reference for all matter of Jewish life – in fact, Jewish existence.

Enigmatically, these are the very same who rule to accept the “New Jew” by perhaps manipulating “halachic” references or simply on their own terms. It is the decisions and decrees of these that have changed not only the faces of Israeli society but have changed the face of Israel over the years. Yet, these are those who will, simultaneously by stroke of pen or utterance of word, eradicate the identity and entire Jewish history of the “Old World Jew”

who has, perhaps for generations, other-wise managed to preserve a rich tradition, founded firmly in true Jewish culture, carried in heart and soul and passed through time, from time almost unmemorable.

Today's Jew, child of the children of survivors of onslaughts, recorded and some unrecorded, precariously teeters on the very brink of complete obscurity. As the words and teachings of matrilineal heritage are inconsiderately nullified due to the lack or absence of some visible, palpable record of one's incontrovertible connection to or with an ancestor of Biblical proportions, some matter, pleasing to the archaic minority which has mystifyingly taken control of all words officially Jewish, an ever-increasing number of Jews, mostly Ashkenazic and considerably of the Conservative and Reform denominations become, in essence, invalidated, vitiated, annihilated, obliterated. Those who do not, have not and will not appease the minorities – not unlike as with the pagan gods of ancient mankind – in all manners possible, those who will not placate the aggressive tyrants who hold destinies in their clenched fists will, with no doubt, one day find themselves no longer even remotely associated with the comforts, the consolations, the essence of “being” which had been the maternal endowment of one's Jewish soul.

Like a soldier court-martialed, a traitor exiled... fail to provide that which is demanded, fail to possess

that which is accepted and fail to continue existing. Of mystic proportion is the fact that, in a flash, someone who has never been suspected of having or expected to have ever had any connection to anything even remotely Jewish can somehow sway today's Sephardic Chief Rabbinate into believing (or permitting to be believed) that a "claim" to Jewish ancestry is valid and sufficient to make one worthy of the inheritance of Israel. These "New Jews" continue to astound those of a rational sensibility with their abilities to create Jews where previously there were none, whilst ensuring that multi-generational Jews are programmatically abrogated.

If these "New Jews" do maintain an Orthodoxy with-in the traditional realm of life-Judaic, time alone will prove their good testaments and testimonies. Should they fail, or their motives be ulterior, the best that can be hoped for is that the light of a truth sad as this may shine long before the current tyranny has put all other Jews so far into obscurity that tracing and reviving what is, today an Ashkenazic beauty, is completely removed and lost in an abysmal eternity.

## Book II.1

It was pre-dawn, that one moment when the earth and sky are all the same deep blue-black, one indistinguishable from the other. Off in the great distance, a fine thread of orange-red snapped a horizontal line – it alone worked the wonder, re-created the production of God, separated the earth from the heavens above. It was a sight of beauty. It was the commencement of a new day, a day as fresh as the very first.

While Opa prepared himself and home for the necessities of this day to come, the sun rose slowly, widening the thread of light on the dark horizon. Earth below, the band of crimson broadened, the heavens distinguished themselves, the sky blazed and the house filled with light, flooded with a red glow that poured relentlessly through every window.

Although this particular day was new, the routine was old. The dawn was fresh, but the duties, the chores were old, familiar, comfortable, common. The machinations rolled along as usual, as they had on so many new days before this one. There was no indication, no way of knowing that this was to be the last of such days. There was no indication, no clue, no warning of the changes to life that lurked in the long, dark cast shadows on the earth outside and through the house within.