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Friday, June 15

The Aircraft Plot

By Malka Margolin

Forty-two years ago today, on June 15, 1970, a group of Soviet dissidents gathered at Smolny Airport outside Leningrad. They had bought all the seats on a 12-passenger aircraft headed 240 miles northwest to Priozersk, near the Finnish border. Upon landing, they intended to hijack the plane, deposit the crew in a nearby forest, and fly to Sweden, where they would hold a press conference to call attention to the plight of Soviet Jewry. They would then immigrate to Israel.

Ten of them were Jews. One, 22-year-old Yosef Mendelevich, had applied for a visa to immigrate to Israel three times and been rejected three times. Another dissident, Sylva Zalmanson, later told the magazine *Novoe Russkoe Slovo* that the travelers were terrified by the prospect of punishment but felt almost possessed, as if beckoned by magical powers: They had made their decision against Soviet life, and attempting escape was the only course. Two of the dissidents were Christians. One of them, Yuri Fedorov, had already served three years in labor camps for circulating anti-regime literature.

But the *samoletchiki* ("airplane guys"), as they came to be known, never made it to the plane. Heading toward the tarmac, they were tackled, beaten, and arrested by KGB officers. They did not see each other for the next six months, as the KGB attempted to wear them down and extract confessions. In December 1970, they were all found guilty of treason for attempting to leave the country illegally.

Most of the group received sentences of four to 15 years. But Eduard Kuznetsov, the leader of the group, and Mark Dymshits, the intended pilot, were sentenced to death by firing squad. After world outcry, the death sentences were commuted to 15 years in the gulag.

The *samoletchiki* said they did not regret their actions. In the 2007 documentary *Refusenik*, Mendelevich described a moment of uncertainty after the arrest, asking himself, "You admit that it was a stupid thing to do? Now you are a prisoner. Everything is

lost!" But the moment was brief. He had been willing to sacrifice his life for the right to live in Israel. Now he knew his love for the country was real.

Another member of the group, Anatoli Altman, did not regret a day of the nine years he spent in a labor camp. Every morning he woke to the monotony and suffering of gulag life. But he knew that each time he let his guard down, the camp re-education system, designed to break him as an individual, would come one step closer to transforming him into another interchangeable Soviet chattel, *Homo sovieticus*. "I was put in a position," he remembered, "where I was forced to make choices. Would I keep my human dignity, my personal dignity? I discovered inner strengths I didn't know I had."

Still another of the group, Boris Penson, a 24-year-old graduate of the Academy of Arts in Riga, spent nine years in Soviet prison camps. His friends were able to smuggle some of his art to Israel. Thus, in 1972, while he was serving his term, New York's Jewish Museum showcased his work in an exhibit called "Art from a Soviet Prison." Reflecting on his ordeal, Penson affirmed that "freedom was worth it," especially for the people who were able to reach Israel because of him.

At the time of the aircraft arrests, Boris Gorbis, who later founded the America-Israel Museum in Los Angeles, was completing his last year at Odessa University. There were rumors about the hijacking, but the first official news of it appeared in *Izvestia* only in early 1971. After the trial, the KGB prepared for more arrests and interrogations. Memories of the 1952-1953 "Doctors' Plot," an anti-Semitic show trial, weighed heavily on the minds of Soviet Jews.

But as news of the prosecutions spread, the Soviet Union came under international scrutiny. Within a month of the trial, people started receiving permission to emigrate. In 1971, 13,000 exit visas were granted; in 1972 there were 32,000. The flow would prove temporary, but world opinion had forced the Soviets to make a show of granting exit visas. The invincible regime had been set back. In May, 1971, Gorbis began applying for permission to leave the Soviet Union.

In April, 1979, five of the *samoletchiki* finally arrived in Israel, greeted with a celebration at Ben Gurion Airport. Altman, by then 38, remembered the shock of arriving

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in Tel Aviv, still sporting his short prison haircut, and being received as a hero. When it was time for him to address the crowd, he was unable to speak. It suddenly dawned on him that he was standing at the doorstep to the land of Israel, from which his ancestors had been driven 2000 years ago. Now, he was returning; the circle was complete.

Dymshits and Kuznetsov were freed in May, 1979 as part of a U.S.-Soviet swap of five Soviet dissidents for two Soviet spies. Yuri Fedorov, the last to be released, spent a total of 18 years in prison camps; he arrived in the United States in 1988. He visited Russia in 1998 and discovered that thousands of former dissidents were suffering from poverty and disease. The Free World had forgotten the individuals who had sacrificed their lives and health to bring about the collapse of the Soviet Union. Fedorov returned to the United States and established the Gratitude Fund, which raises money to provide the former dissidents with medical and emergency assistance.

The *samoletchiki* awakened the world to the desperate plight of Soviet Jewry. No longer could the West attribute the absence of protest in the Soviet Union to satisfaction with the regime; here were individuals so desperate to escape that they were willing to undertake a mission in which capture was almost certain. They understood that there could be no Jewish life in the Soviet Union and pursued liberation knowing that their path might well lead them to the gulag. "Americans need to hear," Fedorov drew the lesson, "that in every country and in every nation, freedom is not free." The noise the *samoletchiki* made reverberated throughout the world, proclaiming that Soviet Jewry would neither be forgotten nor silenced until freedom was theirs.

Monday, June 18

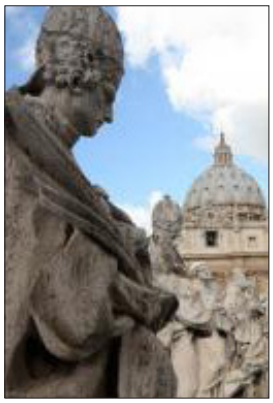
Catholics, Jews, and Jewish Catholics

By Daniel Johnson

Jews and Catholics in the English-speaking world have so much in common that they ought to make common cause more often than they actually do. The friction between them that sometimes catches fire is, as often as not, based on mutual ignorance and mistrust. On the Jewish side, the mistrust is hardly surprising. For nearly two thousand years, the Church preached anti-Judaism in theory and practice. Only after the Holocaust did a small group of Catholic thinkers—most of them converts from Judaism—have any success in persuading the Church to rethink its anti-Jewish doctrine.

It was a process that culminated in 1965's *Nostra Aetate* ("In Our Age"), the declaration of the Second Vatican Council that definitively repudiated the ancient accusation against the Jews of deicide. Further, the Council stated that God's covenant with the Jews remained valid, that they should not be presented as "rejected or accursed by God," and that the Church "decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed at the Jews at any time and by anyone." Breaking with the theology of supersession, *Nostra Aetate* reminded Catholics of their debt to the Jews, summed up in "the words of the Apostle [Paul] about his [Jewish] kinsmen: 'theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh.'" Thus the Church, which had always seen itself as the new Israel, at last gave the people of Israel its due place in the history of salvation: the duty of Catholics to "Abraham's sons" was not conversion but reconciliation.

This dramatic and disturbing story forms the subject of John Connelly's remarkable new book, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933-1965* (Harvard). Connelly, who teaches history at Berkeley, has mastered a vast and obscure literature, much of it hitherto unpublished and most of it in German, in order to establish the contours of what he aptly characterizes as a "revolution" in mid-20th-century Catholic thought.



Connelly's book is largely peopled with "border-crossers": Catholics who had converted or were in the process of converting from Judaism or Protestantism—which meant that they inhabited an uncomfortable no-man's-land, accepted neither by the faith they had adopted nor by the community they had left. Some, such as the later French Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, continued to see themselves as Jews, even when the chief rabbi of Paris Meyer Jays objected that he had turned his back on Judaism. "I was not running away from the Jewish condition," Lustiger wrote. "I have that from my parents and can never lose it. I have it from God and He will never let me lose it." Certainly these Catholic border-crossers were seen as Jews by the Nazis.

Perhaps the most important of these Jewish-Catholic border-crossers was John (formerly Johannes) Oesterreicher: having emigrated to the United States, and as the last survivor of the pre-war, he became an advisor to the Vatican Council and helped draft *Nostra Aetate*. Connelly relies heavily on Oesterreicher's vast correspondence with the rest of this vanguard to unearth the tensions and quarrels, agonies and ecstasies of the struggle for reform. Reflecting on the death of his Jewish parents at the hands of the Nazis, Oesterreicher rediscovered forgotten teachings of the Church, to the effect that all who lived good lives, Jews as well as Christians, could attain salvation, and that the guilt for Jesus's death was shared by all, not just the Jews. While fleeing the Gestapo via Marseilles, he had encountered and been deeply impressed by the French thinker Simone Weil: unbaptized Jews like her were surely saved, he believed. But he quarreled with his friend Karl Thieme, a Protestant convert, who wanted him to represent the Jewish point of view within the Church: "No and a thousand times no! I do what I can to act against the false beliefs about the Jews among Catholics . . . But I see in this real Christian point of view—and not simply a Jewish one." Oesterreicher was still justifying his own baptism.

Yet when it came to the crisis of the Vatican Council, when reactionaries tried to convince Pope Paul VI to temper the declaration on the Jews, Oesterreicher stood firm. At his suggestion, the bishops adopted a text based on words from the prophet Zephaniah: "The Church awaits the day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and 'serve Him shoulder to shoulder.'" Thus the mission to the Jews came to an end, almost 2,000 years after Paul had warned his newly converted Christians against exalting them-

selves above Jews: "Remember it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you."

Among other surprising discoveries, Connelly shows that several major Catholic opponents of anti-Semitism were women, at a time when religious controversy was still very much a male pursuit. Irene Harand founded *Gerechtigkeit* ("Justice"), a very successful anti-Nazi weekly based in Vienna, until it was suppressed by the Nazis after the *Anschluss* in 1938. Harand refused to print articles that offered baptism as the solution to anti-Semitism: a devout Catholic, she was ahead of her time in rejecting a program of conversion of the Jews. She escaped the Gestapo and died in New York.

One of the most remarkable of these women was Annie Kraus. A Viennese Jew who was not baptized until 1942, she argued in 1934 that Catholics were much closer to Judaism than Protestants. Catholicism was "resistant" to anti-Semitism because, unlike Protestantism, it refused to separate Old and New Testaments, Torah and Gospel. She claimed that Catholics immunized themselves from anti-Semitism by emphasizing good works, grace, and human freedom, in contrast to the Protestant stress on Original Sin (in German "inherited sin"), which morphed all too easily into racism. Kraus's view of the Church was idealistic, but it helped to inspire others to take the crucial step of rejecting not only anti-Semitism but also anti-Judaism. It was precisely those who had been through the painful process of conversion who led the way in persuading the Church to renounce the conversion of Jews: as Connelly puts it, "mission became ministry."

Connelly's is a tale full of such ironies. Not the least of them is the fact that even today Catholics are in denial about the extent to which leading figures in the Church absorbed the racial ideology that permeated European intellectual life between the wars, and which found expression in an embrace of eugenic pseudo-science and a theological justification of anti-Semitism. This was especially true in the German-speaking world, then still intellectually preeminent on the Continent. Connelly shows that it was not so much the German Church that rebuffed the Nazis as the other way round. Hitler was welcomed by Karl Adam, a theologian whose influence Pope Benedict XVI still acknowledges in his life of Jesus, and by many other Catholics who greeted the Third Reich as the fulfillment of the "salvation mission" of the Holy Roman Empire.

Connelly contrasts German Catholic prelates—marginalized by the Protestant majority for generations and in hock to fashionable racist and eugenicist ideology—with their American counterparts, who were confident enough to follow the logic of the Judeo-Christian belief that all human beings are created in God's image. Rabbi James Rudin reinforces this point in a short but illuminating study of three leading American Catholics: *Cushing, Spellman, O'Connor: The Surprising Story of How Three American Cardinals Transformed Catholic-Jewish Relations* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing). Rudin shows how the American cardinals influenced the Vatican Council to make sure that *Nostra Aetate* made a clean break with the anti-Judaism of the past. In a nation of immigrants such as the United States, Catholics and Jews were more likely to make common cause than in the Old World. Catholics, like others in mid-20th-century America, were not immune to anti-Semitism, but the Catholic hierarchy was determined to embrace an open, cosmopolitan society in which religious pluralism was taken for granted and discrimination was gradually outlawed. The Vatican initially treated "Americanism" as a dangerous heresy, but after the ordeal of Fascist, Nazi, or Communist rule, the American model, with its strict separation of church and state, grew more attractive to Catholics elsewhere. The influence of the American cardinals was mobilized for the Jewish cause after 1945 to considerable effect. Without their support, Rudin argues, neither Israel's election to the United Nations in 1949, nor *Nostra Aetate* in 1965, nor the breakthrough in diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Israel would have been possible. Thanks to pressure from John O'Connor, Pope John Paul II did not allow the then Austrian President Kurt Waldheim to accompany him on a high-profile visit to the site of Mauthausen concentration camp in 1987.

These interventions by Spellman, Cushing, and O'Connor took place at the level of international diplomacy, both secular and ecclesiastical. Princes of the Church, however, rarely operate at the level of deep thought where the evolution of doctrine takes place. It is this change in the theological climate that is Connelly's main subject. In *From Enemy to Brother*, however, he does not attempt to resolve the vexed question of Pope Pius XII's "silence" on the Holocaust.

This does not save Connelly from finding himself on the receiving end of an intemperate attack from another Catholic writer, Justus George Lawler. In *Were the Popes Against the Jews?* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing) Lawler goes out of his way to denounce Connelly for having signed a petition to the present Pope, Benedict XVI, appealing against the canonization of Pius XII. He then rehashes a somewhat arid disputation, conducted in the pages of the Catholic journal *Commonweal*, over whether or not Connelly "doctored" a quotation from Pius XII's first encyclical in order to accuse the pope of racism. The most that can be said is that Connelly took a single ambiguous papal utterance out of context. But this is as nothing compared to Lawler's dubious attempt to link Israel and its Catholic defenders with the historical question of Pius XII and the Church's conduct in the Holocaust. Lawler not only exonerates Pius ("the greatest pope in . . . four hundred years") of culpable silence and the Church of theological supersessionism (indeed he rejects the very term), but endorses the "commonsense goals . . . of such an organization as J Street" and accuses Israel of "the political ruination of its neighbors' home." Lawler comes close to accusing Israelis of treating Palestinians as badly as anti-Semites (including Christians) have treated Jews.

Such incongruous comparisons are of course all too common in public discourse today, but that does not make them any less odious. Lawler claims that it is not only permissible but incumbent on Catholics to denounce Israel, and that such denunciations do not lessen the obligation to accept responsibility for the Christian role in the Holocaust. Yet his own polemics give the lie to this claim: his sole concern is to vindicate the Church and its leaders, as if papal infallibility applied not merely to arcane decisions about doctrine, but to political decisions too.

We can never know what might have happened if Pius XII had spoken out more forcefully and acted more vigorously on behalf of the Jewish people. What Connelly's book shows is that the small network of Catholics who were actively seeking to change attitudes toward and teaching on the Jews, several of whom were themselves baptized Jews, at the time believed that Pius XII could and should have done more. They were acutely aware of the risk of inviting Nazi persecution of Jewish Catholics, of the kind that did take place in the Netherlands after the Dutch bishops spoke out, in which the great philosopher and saint Edith Stein was dragged from her convent and sent to die in Auschwitz. The

crude caricature of "Hitler's Pope" that had its origins in Soviet Cold War propaganda is as false as the uncritical dogmatism of those who want Pius XII canonized without a proper scrutiny of the evidence, still only partially open to scholars. Connelly's book, while it has no direct bearing on the papal controversy, hugely enriches its historical context. He shows that there were Catholics who held the Church to account while the Holocaust was taking place, demanded that it abandon the teaching of contempt, and eventually persuaded their coreligionists to adopt a new understanding of the Jewish role in history. Catholics and Jews alike should welcome such a scholarly reappraisal of the most painful chapter in the history of their relationship.

Tuesday, June 19

Brandeis and Zionism, In and Out of Love

By Evan Moffic

The Supreme Court is once again poised to define the role of government in American society; and Louis D. Brandeis, the first Jewish Supreme Court Justice, who served on the court from 1918 to 1938, would have recognized the terms of the debate. Brandeis helped shape many of the issues that occupy the 21st century Court, from theories of privacy to questions of the government's relationship to private corporations. He also helped shape the relationship of American Jews to Zionism.

During the 1910s and 1920s, Brandeis introduced an ideology focusing on the cohesion between American values and Zionist aspirations. He de-emphasized anti-Semitism and the need for aliyah in favor of the social idealism and progressive values he saw at the heart of the Zionist movement. By focusing on values such as national self-determination and democracy, Brandeis framed Zionism as a quintessentially American movement. During the critical days of the First World War, Brandeis served as chair of the Zionist executive council. He reorganized its finances and expanded its fundraising, and his stature lent legitimacy to the movement around the world.

There is, however, an untold story of Brandeis's Zionism. His earliest statements reflect the social ideals of the American Progressive movement. He envisioned the creation of a small state with publicly owned land and "employer-employee democracy." But what began as an expression of Jewish commitment rooted in social idealism eventually became a fervent political commitment to Jewish nationalism. In fact, three distinct stages can be traced in the evolution of Brandeis's American Zionist ideology. His first statements in 1905 decried any sort of "hyphenated Americans." His second phase, which encompassed the majority of his career, found its clearest expression in the intensely progressive Pittsburgh Program of 1918. And his third phase, beginning in the mid-1930s, focused on combating growing anti-Semitism and getting the necessary arms and settlers to Palestine.

Stage 1: Awakenings

Before 1910 Brandeis showed very little interest in Jewish affairs. He grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, in a home that celebrated Christmas. Even after he achieved enormous financial success in the 1880s, Brandeis gave very little to Jewish charities, and rarely expressed feelings of communal attachment to the Jewish people. He was rejected for membership by the American Jewish Committee in 1907 because "he has not identified himself with Jewish affairs." His wife, Alice, belonged to a Unitarian church.

Brandeis first spoke publicly about Jewish affairs in 1905. Invited to address a Boston-area celebration of the 250th anniversary of the first Jewish settlement in America, Brandeis warned against "hyphenated Americans" and argued that "habits of living, of thought which tend to keep alive differences of origin or to classify men according to their religious beliefs are inconsistent with the American idea of brotherhood and are disloyal." These sentiments echo the charge of dual loyalty that hindered the development of Zionism in America in the early twentieth century. Many American Jews saw supporting a Jewish state as inconsistent with their loyalty to America. This view persisted in many quarters until the creation of the state in 1948. In expressing his concern about dual loyalty, Brandeis fell well within the mainstream of American Jewry.

Stage 2: Hebraism and Zionism

Between 1905 and 1910, however, something changed. In a 1910 interview in the *American Hebrew*, a New York weekly, Brandeis noted his "great deal of sympathy with the Zionists. The movement is an exceedingly deserving one. These so-called dreamers are entitled to the respect of the entire Jewish people." This positive feeling strengthened further in 1912 and 1913. In 1912, Brandeis spent several hours with Jacob De Haas, who had come to visit him at the request of presidential candidate Woodrow Wilson. De Haas was a former secretary of Theodor Herzl and was then editing the Boston *Jewish Advocate*. De Haas, who was also active in the American Progressive movement, had an enormous effect on Brandeis. It was from De Haas that Brandeis first heard of the Zionist work of Brandeis's own uncle, Lewis Dembitz. (Brandeis would later change his middle name from David to Dembitz in his uncle's honor.)

Brandeis was also influenced in this period by the social philosopher Horace Kallen, who coined the term "cultural pluralism." Raised in an Orthodox home, Kallen rejected traditional Judaism in favor of what he called "Hebraism," which he defined as the Jewish approach to the world rooted in morality, democracy, and social justice. Hebraism needed a homeland that would exemplify its application to the real challenges of human life, and Kallen saw Palestine as that home. Only in a "functioning sovereign state" could the Jewish people achieve their purpose of serving as a model for and teacher of democracy and morality to the world.

In 1913 Kallen wrote a letter to Brandeis in which he outlined his Zionist philosophy. "In Palestine," he said, "we aim at a new state and a happier social order. But a state which from its very beginnings repeats the foreseeable and avoidable waste and misery throughout all the industrial forms and the injustice throughout human relations, is hardly worth aiming at." Moved by this vision, Brandeis replied that he had "great sympathy with your point of view." This

was the case to such an extent that one of Brandeis's biographers, Sarah Schmidt, said that Brandeis's speeches often read like a restatement of Kallen's writings. But Brandeis also valued Kallen's grasp of the social sciences, and during his leadership of the American Zionist movement between 1914 and 1921, Brandeis linked Progressive-era American social and political goals with his justification and vision for a Jewish state in Palestine.

Stage 3: *Takhlis*

In 1921, Brandeis lost a political battle with Chaim Weizmann, who saw Brandeis as an outsider and insufficiently committed to the Zionist dream of gathering the entire Jewish people in Palestine. This marked the end of Brandeis's formal role in American Zionism, though he remained an informal advisor to many of the movement's leaders and served as a liaison to government officials. But in the 1930s, his approach to and justification for creating a Jewish state began to shift.

Whereas anti-Semitism had rarely been a part of Brandeis's Zionist ideology in its formative years, it became much more prominent in that decade. He began to echo the arguments made by Herzl and other early Zionist leaders that only in Palestine could the Jewish people live in safety and freedom. Part of this shift was due to the rise of Nazism in Germany, and growing displays of popular anti-Semitism in the United States and Europe. Other factors contributed to Brandeis's concern. In 1939 Great Britain issued its White Paper on Palestine, which formalized several years of increasing restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine. At the same time, President Roosevelt declined to raise Jewish immigration quotas to the United States.

The early optimism of Brandeis's Zionist vision faded. His emphasis on universal values shifted to a focus on self-protection. He devoted significant philanthropic efforts to arms purchases so that Jewish settlers in Palestine could defend themselves against Arab attacks. Letters exchanged between Brandeis and Ben-Gurion convey his implicit support for the massive illegal immigration coordinated by the Revisionist Zionist Irgun. Here and elsewhere, Brandeis was notably at odds with the vast majority of American Zionists, including Brandeis's close friend and ally, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise. For Brandeis the critical imperatives were arms and people. Jewish survival demanded this pragmatic and nationalist focus. As he wrote his cousins who moved with their families to Palestine in 1935: "Our righteous cause must prevail."

Wednesday, June 20

Killing Rathenau

By Carole Fink

Walther Rathenau was neither a typical German Jew nor a traditional German statesman. Born into a wealthy industrialist family that had disowned its Jewish beliefs and practices and gaining political office late in life, Rathenau was the quintessential outsider. He was also a man of contradictions: outgoing and solitary, ambivalent about his Jewishness and German-ness, a technocrat who embraced spiritualism but advocated state regulation to achieve the common good.

Shulamit Volkov's biography of Rathenau, *Walther Rathenau: Weimar's Fallen Statesman* (Yale), is part of Yale University's Jewish Lives series. Volkov, a professor at Tel Aviv University and author of several important works on German and German-Jewish history, has drawn extensively on the recently published Rathenau papers retrieved from the archives of the former Soviet Union and on a vast amount of primary and secondary literature. She has constructed a vivid portrait of an extraordinary life.

Rathenau's privileged youth and education, although decidedly at the pinnacle of the social scale, were emblematic of Jewish advancement—and its limits—in imperial Germany. An admirer of Prussian aristocratic traditions, Rathenau deeply resented his "second-class" citizenship, which blocked him from a reserve officer's commission. In a complicating factor, Rathenau's bachelorhood denied him the social stability of his bourgeois peers and left him vulnerable to suspicions of homosexuality. Rathenau's first article, published at age 26, after he had dutifully embarked on a business career under his father's tutelage, was a cautiously Nietzschean meditation on morality. But four years later, in his essay "Hear, O Israel," Rathenau shocked his family and the public by attacking German Jewry as a "foreign organism" within the German nation and an "Asian horde" whose salvation required a "complete metamorphosis"—not through anti-defamation campaigns, baptism, or Zionism but via Rathenau's ambitious path to acceptance by the majority.

With his elegant demeanor and wide circle of friends, Rathenau became prominent in Germany's mixed cultural and intellectual elite society. He was also an avid traveler abroad. His decision not to convert to Christianity frustrated his political ambitions; but, as a highly successful businessman, he was a trusted consultant to leaders who valued his skills and overseas experience. On the eve of World War I, Rathenau turned to foreign policy. Faced with America's growing power, he urged Germany to take the lead in creating a European customs union.

Rathenau's life and thought changed greatly after 1914. He became chief organizer of the War Ministry's Raw Materials Department but, despite many accomplishments, resigned within eight months, deploring the bureaucratic morass and fearing the war's outcome. In 1915 his father died, freeing him from a difficult relationship. Rathenau returned to the world of business, journalism, and public speaking.

As the war dragged on, German Jews were charged with draft-dodging and war profiteering. Rathenau, accused of having exploited his government position, became a prime target of anti-Semitic attacks. Although he refused to join his Jewish compatriots' protests against the "Jewish census" and continued to be cold toward Zionism, Rathenau, by age 50, had transformed his Judaism from a disability into a positive creed compatible with political and cultural modernity, promoting high moral standards and an individualism free of institutional constraints.

Throughout the war Rathenau continued to seek official position; he worked closely with Germany's political and military leadership, including Hindenburg and Ludendorff. Concealing his doubts about the war, Rathenau was an outwardly enthusiastic patriot who supported annexations, submarine warfare, and a centrally controlled war economy, including the importation of Belgian laborers to increase Germany's military production. When America entered the conflict in 1917, Rathenau grew apprehensive but hid his fears. His best-selling book, *In Days to Come*, revived his favorite theme: the need for a collective economic order, a "people's state," and social solidarity. But German conservatives shrank from Rathenau's reform proposals, and liberals and socialists mocked what they saw as his eleventh-hour defense of the imperial order.

Until the war's end, Rathenau remained on the margins of power. He responded to Germany's military collapse in the fall of 1918 with a blistering attack on Ludendorff, opposing a cease-fire and calling for mass mobilization. This time Rathenau was not alone: German officers, government leaders, and parliamentarians also called for a last-ditch effort to save the Reich from defeat. But the government formed in 1918 did not invite Rathenau to lead the fight. Instead, it deposed the Kaiser, called elections for a National Assembly, and accepted the victors' armistice terms.

While Germany's first republic was being born, Rathenau remained politically isolated, despised by his fellow industrialists for his "socialist" leanings, distrusted by socialists for his bourgeois background, and vilified by Ludendorff and the emerging radical right for having contributed to the "stab in the back" suffered by Germany. The suggestion that he might be a candidate for president brought gales of laughter from the National Assembly meeting in Weimar. Rathenau took revenge with his pen, cataloguing the Germans' deficiencies and lauding the Jews, who, "in spite of their small number have produced more world-moving genius than all other nations put together." In a whirlwind of public speeches, he called for an "entirely new social order that would reach beyond individual needs toward collective ones, beyond human rights to social rights, beyond capitalism to an organic and communal economy."

Rathenau's ideas were less valued than his practical skills. As a prominent industrialist, fluent in several languages and enjoying international connections, he was summoned to advise the government on the difficult problem of reparations. Then, suddenly, the ostracized Rathenau acquired a key supporter: the Catholic Center leader Joseph Wirth, who became chancellor in May, 1921. Wirth appointed Rathenau to his first cabinet post, Minister of Reconstruction. The position was hazardous, exposing Rathenau to both the Allies' demands and ferocious attacks by the German right. He gladly vacated the job five months later but continued to conduct informal and formal negotiations, gaining a crucial short-term moratorium on German obligations and securing an invitation for Germany to the International Economic Conference in Genoa in April, 1922.

A grateful Wirth named Rathenau Minister of Foreign Affairs. But the appointment of a Jew to represent the German Reich, no matter how patriotic and accomplished he was, stunned the German public and frightened Germany's Jews. At Genoa Rathenau accomplished a coup, concluding the Rapallo Treaty with Soviet Russia; he thereby infuriated the Allies and provoked rage from the German Right. Yet, despite numerous threats against his life, Rathenau refused to take precautions. On his way to work on June 24, 1922, he was shot and killed by right-wing assassins. In death, Rathenau remained a polarizing figure, a martyr to the Weimar republic's supporters but reviled by the German anti-Semites who viewed him as a symbol of the national humiliation that they were determined to avenge.

Volkov deftly characterizes the man, the politics of his era, and the Jewish dimension of the Rathenau tragedy. When news of the assassination reached Prague, Kafka wrote to his friend, Max Brod, "Incredible that he lived as long as he did; already two months ago we heard rumors of his murder." In London, the *Spectator* called the assassination "as little a surprise as a murder can well be." Just as surely, the German descent into barbarism had begun.

Thursday, June 21

The Last Holy Rebel

By Yehudah Mirsky

Some years ago, a friend asked what I thought was the more impressive title: "Rabbi," "Doctor," or (the often unwittingly self-parodying) "Rabbi Dr." You know, I said, there's a man in Israel who's one of the most impressive *talmidei hakhamim* and moral authorities I've ever known—and he's not "Rabbi" or "Doctor," he doesn't go by Yoseph or even Yossi, but Yoske. And you're as likely to find him working in the kitchen of his kibbutz as in the *beit midrash*.

One of Judaism and Israel's most precious lights went out recently, with the death at age 79 of Yoske (Yoseph) Achituv. A longtime member of Kibbutz Ein Tzurim, Yoske was far from a household name. But he was revered by the moderate wing of Religious Zionism, and may have been its last great tribune. He was one of the last, perhaps the very last, veterans of the religious kibbutz movement (*ha-kibbutz ha-dati*), in whose presence one felt the *mered ha-kadosh*, that movement's vision of sacred rebellion.

Religious Zionism has, by and large, been shaped by two major currents: the Mizrachi/National Religious Party, historically statist, moderate and middle class; and the redemptive, Emuni stream, driven by its interpretation of the teachings of Rav Kook. But alongside them churned the Religious Workers Party and its companion movement of religious kibbutzim, which drew on different cultural and spiritual sources: the fiery individualism of Polish Hasidism and the moral pathos of the founder of German neo-Orthodoxy, Samson Rafael Hirsch. Kibbutz Ha-Dati struck its own course, creating communities aiming for social justice and religious renewal in the framework of Zionist settlement.

The founding ideologue was the firebrand Shmuel Haim Landau, known by his acronym "Shachal" ("young lion"). Landau, a descendant of the Kotzker Rebbe, inherited that figure's intensity and drive for authenticity, and his early death at age 36, in 1928, only added to his legend. He called for "sacred rebellion"

against bourgeois society and religion—coining the term "Torah va-Avodah," which synthesized the classic Rabbinic cadence of study with the new Zionist teaching of redemption through productive labor. He was joined by another Hasidic scion, Yeshayahu Shapira, a disciple of Rav Kook (and brother of Kalonymous Shapira, a rabbinic leader of the Warsaw Ghetto) who was known as the "Admor He-Halutz," the pioneering Rebbe.

The leading Kibbutz Ha-Dati thinkers in the following decades, Moshe Unna and Tzuriel Admanit, were more in the Hirschian mold, fusing individual moral growth and national renewal with religious community and, of course, socialism. They were followed by the American-born, neo-Maimonidean rationalist Eliezer Goldman, a careful scholar and original thinker, who brought to the passions of the kibbutz a decidedly analytic bent.

Yoske's writing and teaching contained echoes of all these thinkers along with his own ideas, which he delivered with an indelible mix of gentleness, humility, and courage, without ever raising his voice or drawing attention to himself.

Born in Germany in 1933, he came on aliyah as an infant with his family, and lived in poverty in Holon. After studying in an ultra-Orthodox yeshiva, he left for a religious Zionist school in Tel Aviv, and during his army service came in the early 1950s to Kibbutz Ein Tzurim near Ashkelon, where he stayed for the rest of his life. Aside from his work on the kibbutz he quickly emerged as a gifted educator, teacher and high school principal. Yoske was instrumental in the creation of Yeshivat Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Dati and the Herzog Center in Ein Tzurim, and was a fellow at the Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, to which he trekked once a week. He exemplified a distinctively Israeli type of educator, found particularly on the kibbutzim, whose moral authority derives as much from their life in community as from learning and ideas.

Yoske laid out his basic credo in the introduction to his volume of studies, *'Al G'vul Ha-Temurah* ("On the Cusp of Change"). Its elements: The aspiration to infuse the working life with spirituality and an ethos of labor; commitments to human equality, Jewish national identity, and traditional halakhah; and a critical stance towards all power structures, political and rabbinic. The dialogue here with Western culture is obvious; but in that same essay, he advocated genuine dialogue with ultra-Orthodoxy, especially on religious experience, and ethics. The bedrock for all these engagements was the mitzvah of Torah study, which, he wrote in that volume's preface, stamps the distinctive character of Jewishness on individuals and communities.

A key feature of Yoske's writing and teaching was that he saw Judaism, community building, and education in terms of one another. Judaism, he thought, was about creating dynamic communities that offer alternative spaces within society—fostering individual flourishing while countering atomization, alienation, and the cheap arousals of marketing. His commitment to the individual was also key to his commitments to tolerance and to humanistic education, as only a robust sense of community could give the individual the inner resources to withstand the easy comforts of dogmatic and simplistic thinking, and the material and sexual temptations of contemporary life: "The essence of community is its self-consciousness, the conversation it carries on with the soul of each and every individual with it," and with the surrounding society.

This dimension, which he preferred to characterize less as "collectivism" and more as "mutual responsibility," was also woven into the fabric of his religious ideas. The creation of religious community went hand-in-hand with his conception of theology: "Religious language does not presume at all to assert truths about the world . . . its essence is to create the human atmosphere befitting the ability to serve God and keep His mitzvot." Thus his critique of Conservative Judaism was precisely that its halakhic innovation did not emerge from the ongoing life of communities but was rather the product of meta-reflection by the movement's intellectuals, inorganically grafted onto the halakhic process.

A friendly critic of other movements, he was a steadfast internal critic of Religious Zionism. He rebuked his community in light of its own ideals, arguing that while Religious Zionism proclaims the historical uniqueness of the State as a matter of theology and even metaphysics, it hasn't integrated that awareness of this unprecedented historical moment into the halakhah in any but the most technical ways.

To be sure, much Religious Zionism reads current events through a metaphysical prism but that, for Yoske, was the problem. He considered the inevitable essentialism of abstract categories to be at odds with the acutely realistic, contextual, and morally attentive thinking that had characterized halakhah through the ages. In particular, he thought that the treatment of the people and land of Israel as metaphysical abstractions come to life, rather than as flesh and blood, frail and finite, redefines ethics as identification with absolutes, rather than care for people suffering in the here and now.

In recent years he became an outspoken critic of the mounting discourse around sexual modesty (*tzniut*), in Orthodoxy in general and Religious Zionism in particular. Here too, he saw the perils of metaphysics, with rabbis citing abstractions like "Jewish sanctity" alongside nationalist concepts to enjoin ordinary teenagers to assume the ascetic regimens of medieval pietists. But Yoske's critique of the new *tzniut* went deeper. For decades, he wrote, Kibbutz Ha-Dati had already been preaching *tzniut*, precisely as an alternative to consumerism, mindless and conspicuous consumption, and extravagantly extroverted religiosity—and now all these meanings were being swallowed up by the new obsession with sleeve-lengths and sinful thoughts.

As one of the contributors to the large volume published in his honor a decade ago noted, Yoske's thought was inseparable from his personality: the lucidity, gentleness, and humility with which he tried to reconcile seeming irreconcilables, the genuine good cheer and concern he easily bestowed on most everyone he spoke to—and the courage and compassion with which he met great personal tragedy and suffering.

Like most Israeli moderates, Yoske's nondogmatic stance and unwillingness to go on the attack were no match for the endless donnybrook of Israeli polemics and politics. Yet his moderation was not wishy-washyness, but the reflection of a deep conviction that found voice in powerful, lifelong commitments. Perhaps that kind of principled attempt to find the golden mean is, in an age wracked by the terrible certainties of dogmatism, and the equally terrible uncertainty of dime-store postmodernism, a holy rebellion all its own.