



Ninth Meeting – Yaakov W. & [his mother] Frida (née Monat)

A few days after the programme, in the morning hours, the producer of Yaron Enosh's programme rang me and gave me the telephone number of a man named Yaakov W. who wished to speak with me.

I only rang [back] in the afternoon hours. A young girl with a soft and dainty voice answered and said simply, "Father is sleeping afternoon". This is not the common parlance of young people who speak correct Hebrew. I realised that I was talking to the daughter of an ultra-Orthodox family living in Bnei Brak.

I was very intrigued and I rang again in the evening. This time, Yaakov W. answered the phone and told me that his mother, Frida W., was a Holocaust survivor from the town of Krzepice, and that he was very interested in meeting me. For a long time, they had been looking for contact with those from the town and here it was now happening.

Before accepting the invitation, I explained that I was going to come with my wife and asked what the requirements regarding attire would be. As for me, he had no special requirement, but that I should come with my head covered. Zahava, my wife, could not meet the dress stipulations which Yaakov W. had set - mainly due to the presence of children of different ages, and his fear that they might be exposed to what they perceive as immodest attire. Zahava decided to forgo [the visit].

I reached Bnei Brak in the evening. I had a very hard time finding Yaakov W.'s address I therefore availed myself of a *yeshiva* lad who accompanied me. During the course of the journey, the young man lay before me his uncertainties regarding choosing his future wife - by way of the arranged marriage system, of course. He discussed with me, at length, his future as a *yeshiva* student, who is engaged in Talmud study day and night, and he was hoping that his wife would provide the household's necessities. Once we reached Yaakov W.'s house, I wished him success and we parted company.

Yaakov W. awaited me impatiently. He had brought the hour of his prayer forward in order to make time for our meeting. His mother Frida lives in his house, together with him and his family. His little granddaughter gambolled about around us holding a prayer-book, and saying in Yiddish, "*M'myz davnen*" (We need to pray). She was still in nappies, but was already versed in the laws of prayer.

On the table was placed a plate containing several pieces of cake, homemade pastries and soft drinks. Yaakov observed the precept of hospitality and he made the blessing. His wife joined us, once she had finished the housework.

Frida, Yaakov W.'s mother, who due to her extreme age was hard of hearing, turned out to be lucid. She remembered every detail. In her room, a computer was set up on which she wrote, summarising her life. One day, one of the grandchildren, or perhaps one of the great-grandchildren, would gather the memories she has written down and make sure that these would become the property of the whole extended family.

Frida W. was born, in Krzepice in 1920, to Bela and Abram Monat. Her mother Bela, *née* Fajwlowicz, was from the town of Złoczew. I instantly remembered a man named Arie Fajwlowicz, whom I had known in my childhood - a distant relative of my father. Arie Fajwlowicz and his family lived in the Shikun Vatikim neighbourhood of Kfar Saba.

As a child, I had visited them with my father and mother many times. I loved playing with their son Achaz and his sister whose name I do not recall.

After hearing Frida W.'s words about her family and her mother Bela's Fajwlowicz family, it occurred to me that there might be some kinship between her and the Fajwlowicz family I knew as a child, and in this way there may even be a distant kinship between them and my father Majer's part of my family. Sadly, I do not have the tools with which to test this possibility.

The W. family is an ultra-Orthodox one. Yaakov told me that they belong to the Bobow Chasidic group and that he is a teacher in one of their institutions. He sought to reduce the scope of his position to part-time, in order to have more time to take care of his mother Frida, who had moved in with him.

Yaakov noted that his mother embraces over one hundred great-grandchildren. Each of the great-grandchildren makes an effort to come to her at least once a year, in preparation for *Rosh Hashanah*, to receive her blessing and also to receive, from her, a modest holiday gift.

Arie [Lajb] Urbach, "Uncle Arie"

Here I wish to make a short pause and speak about my mother Miriam's cousin Arie Urbach, who was born in Wieruszów [on 30th January 1917]. My brother and I called him "Uncle Arie" and we adopted him as the only uncle we had.

"Uncle Arie" was a pleasant man and he took pride in his physical prowess - even though his body was relatively small in size. He engaged in construction work as a subcontractor and, in small projects, he worked as an independent contractor, together with his partner. Arie was a bachelor. As far as I know, we were his only relatives.

Arie tried to put up a tough front but, in the depths of his soul, he was very sensitive and he treated everyone around him warmly. We therefore loved him very much and awaited his visits, which we enjoyed very much.

Despite the closeness we felt to Uncle Arie, we did not know clearly what the family connection was between us. Nathan, my brother, on one occasion, asked our mother Miriam. She responded willingly and explained that Arie was her cousin - but said nothing further. My brother and I were disappointed that our mother mentioned only this and did not expand beyond that.

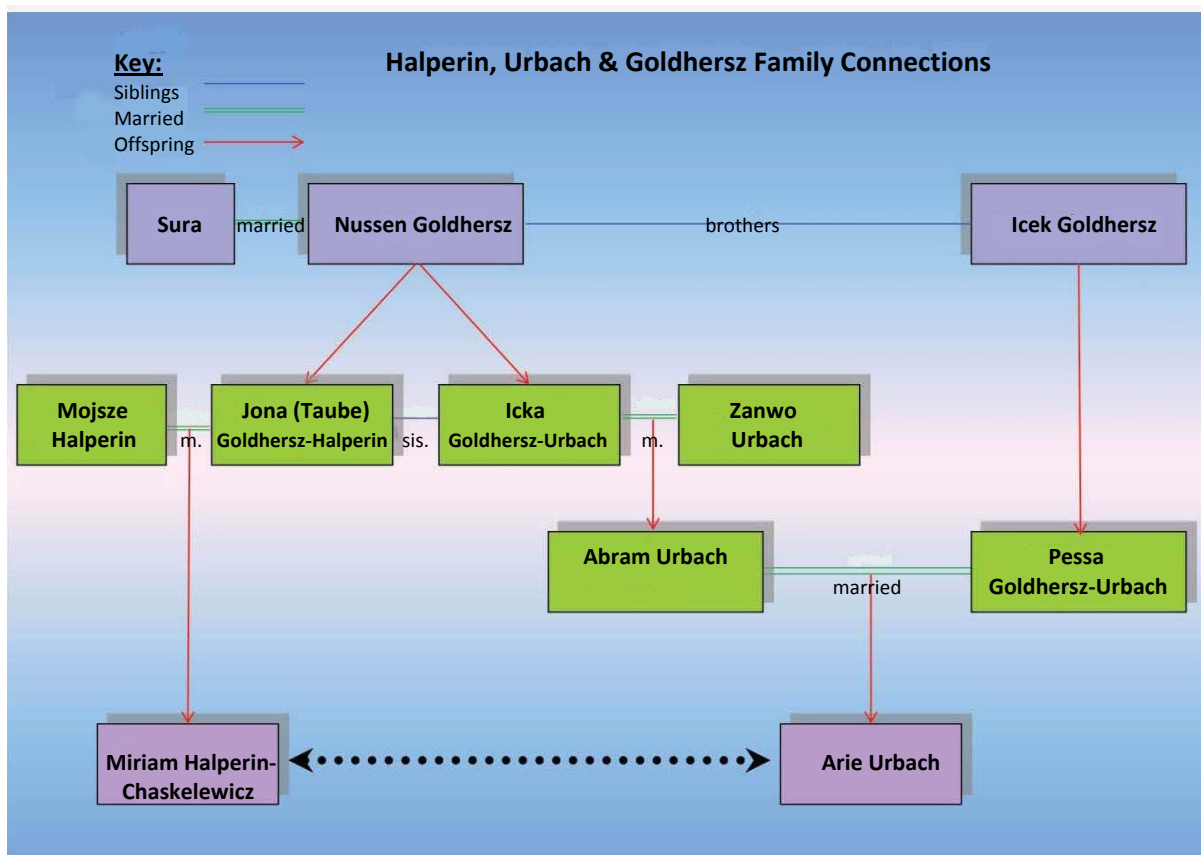
I bring here the details that my mother provided and the chart Natan and I built in order to understand, a little, the bonds which were formed between families which were united by marriage.

This is the chart¹ that was given to my brother Natan:

Icek and Nussen Goldhersz were brothers. Icek Goldhersz married (his wife's name is unknown) and had a daughter named Pessa. Pessa married Abram Urbach and they had a son named Arie [Lajb] Urbach - the very same "Uncle Arie."

¹ [TN: The chart itself is on the following page.]

Nussen Goldhersz married Sura, and they had two daughters: Icka [Itka or Iska?] and Jona².



Icka married Zanwo³ Urbach and they had a son named Abram Urbach. [This is the same] Abram who married Pessa, as mentioned above - they were “Uncle Arie’s” parents.

Jona (Icka’s sister) married Mojsze Halperin. Their daughter Miriam was my mother.

From this chart of family connections, we may observe a phenomenon which characterised Jewish families, especially in remote towns - marriages within the family, which brought about frequent family meetings and created close-knit and supportive families, even if they did not live in the same city or town.

Arie Urbach's family, according to a *Yizkor* Book, I have in my possession, lived in the town of Wieruszów, not far from Krzepice and Lututów - a triangle of towns that united three large families, most of whose sons and daughters found their deaths under the boots of the Nazi troopers.

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² [TN: See above, p.38, footnote 22.]

³ [TN: Probably nickname for Zanwel.]

It was the custom for my brother Natan and my sister-in-law Avivit (Vivi) to celebrate their children's birthday on one of the days of November - a joint celebration for their eldest son and their youngest daughter. They would invite the family to their home for a great reunion and an impressive culinary evening.

Uncle Arie always arrived a little late, whereupon he would hide in one of the corners and, when he was hidden from view, he wept with excitement. After composing himself, he would once more join the guests - happy and kind-hearted.

I once asked him to explain his behaviour. "You must understand", he replied. "I mourn the fate of our people. We, the Jews from European countries, after the Second World War, cannot put under one roof a family of four generations. You and your brother grew up not knowing who your grandparents were, where your uncles and cousins were [and] where your distant relatives were. Families have been cut short - and it will take a long time before we can embrace sons, grandsons and great-grandchildren. This pains me extensively – it pains everyone.



My mother Miriam with her first great-granddaughter, Shachar Dekel

“When I arrive at the house of your brother and sister-in-law, I meet a wonderful family (referring to Avivit's family), where great-grandparents embrace great-grandchildren. It is my wish to share in the future your mother's joy, when she cuddles her first great-granddaughter. Your mother, who has suffered so much, will [then] know that she, too, is among the triumphant. She, who has lost her entire family and her beloved only daughter, will also have had her share in the renewal and the rebirth.”

Uncle Arie said these things over thirty years ago. As a fighter in the Etzel [Irgun] Organisation, it was his desire that already, in his own day, the Jewish People be renewed and that it should flourish and sprout. “We shall not forget what the Nazis have done to us”, he used to say, “and our response to them and to the entire world – who did not aid us during the War – is in the revival of the Jewish People, its freedom, in its military prowess and in its capabilities in the scientific, cultural and spiritual realms.”



But let us return to the W. family. Frida had not been acquainted with my father or with his first wife. When I presented her with her photograph, she did not recognise her. However, when I told her that she had been a daughter of the Lachman family - proprietors of the large bakery in town - Frida was moved to tears and recounted that her parents had sent her, every day, to Pinches Lachman's bakery to fetch fresh buns. Frida looked agitated. She asked for a glass of water with which to revive herself.

Frida well remembered that bitter night when the Germans entered the town and launched a campaign of intimidation against the Jewish populace. “We were gathered around a huge bonfire and told that anyone, who violated the instructions or acted against the Germans, would be set on fire or find his death by a firing squad. The fear of the Germans was great.”

The majority of the Jews stayed in the town until the middle of 1942. In that year, most of them were sent to labour camps and others to concentration camps from which they did not return.

Frida W. was first transferred to the Ober-Altstadt labour camp, where she was employed, for six months, in a yarn-spinning and cloth-weaving factory. She was then transferred to a [transit] camp called Goglin, where she was ordered to peel potatoes. Six months later, she was sent from Goglin to the Peterswaldau labour camp.

The Jews, in this camp, were engaged in the production of armaments. They worked in a conveyor belt method. Each, according to his role, assembled the weapons that were supposedly delivered to the soldiers at the front. The weapons were, in fact, handed over to the guards at the camps, who utilised them to murder Jews. Frida W. mustered up courage and decided to stop working. Knowing that she might pay with her life for her breach of discipline, she decided that she would not continue to participate in the weapons manufacturing project and vehemently refused to disclose the reason to her supervisors and superiors. For this, she was severely punished. The Germans slammed her forcibly into one of the machines and she was severely wounded in the head and all over her body. Despite the severe injuries and fearing the worst, Frida continued her strike. Having no other choice, the overseers removed her from the labour force and she was brought back into the camp to treat her wounds.

Once she had recovered, she was put into the team which cleaned the machines. She was very glad that she would no longer be required to produce weapons aimed at her people. Frida had rebelled and she won.

At the end of eight months, Frida was transferred to the Sudetenland region (between Czechoslovakia and the German border). Frida did not continue to tell about the period in the camps and the work she had been required to carry out.

At the end of the War, she made her way, like many others, to her hometown and found that her home, where she had been born and raised, had been broken into. "The objects were missing - they had probably been moved to the homes of the Gentiles or destroyed by the German soldiers who occupied the place. I did not find anyone. I realised I had to abandon the site."

Frida travelled to Częstochowa to locate the *kehillah* building in order to obtain kosher food and to try to locate relatives and Jews who had survived the inferno. She did not find any of her family members there either.

On her way to procure some food, she met two locals and asked them where to find kosher food and what had happened to her Jewish brethren and whether they knew of any Jews who had returned. She learned that only a few had survived and they were subjected to harassment on part of the local antisemites.

Frida managed to procure some bread and milk. The meagre fare was of great value to her - far beyond the assets that had disappeared or been looted. She had to embark on a journey of rehabilitation - a twenty-six-year-old woman at the beginning of her new path who, with her fortitude of spirit and her faith, succeeded in starting a large family - generations of God-fearing folk, a symbol of renewal and resurrection.