

*At our times, enthusiasm is a rather rare thing and only a few manifest it for a longer while.  
Ernst Hemingway*

## **The Historical Coexistence of Jewish and Polish people and the Challenge of Reconciliation.**

I'll start from the end, which is, with the issue of reconciliation. Historical coexistence has been understood through the eyes of many interpretations – both in fiction and as documented facts, as well as through the lens of personal experience. Next, I'll present my own version, not quite conventional, in with a preference of outlining the past as deriving from the present and from the vision of the future.

In order to present here the definitions of Jews and Poles, it has to be emphasized that the Jews in Poland were at the same time Polish citizens. By using the definition “Jews” herein does not preclude the fact that they were Poles too, though we could use the alternative definition of “Jews of Polish origin” as well. As far as Christians of Polish origin are concerned, it might be simpler to define them as “Poles”. For this reason and in order to simplify the text, I will use the definition of Jews and Poles as above, leaving this issue open.



Several years ago I met my friend, Professor of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan. I expressed my admiration for the University of Morasko campus project, which could have easily been compared with any American campus. I asked him whether the Polish community had sought sponsorship around the world to help funding such a project. He replied that there had been not a big response. My next question was whether he had appealed to the Jewish Diaspora of Polish origin as well? The professor's answer was: “Oh, but they hate us”. His response puzzled me, and after some time I said that according to my knowledge and experience this was not true and I would rather say that the problem of the Jewish Diaspora could be defined by a well-known French term – “deception d'amour” (love disappointment). The real grief felt by the Jews, their parents or grandparents who left Poland, was that they were excluded from a life they loved and were attached to and which meant a lot to them. They felt part of the Polish history, culture, landscapes, climates, aromas, language, customs and many other specific characteristics and values with which they had become intimate for nearly a thousand years.

The main reason the Jews disappeared from Poland was the Holocaust. There were other reasons as well, including the post-war ones, which were well known. After the war, the Jews emigrated from Poland, leaving behind the ruins and ashes of their previous existence there. Those who remained in Poland, many of them were forced to leave by the communist regime. This process was accompanied by very strong Anti-Semitic atmosphere. For centuries the Jews were “different” and sometimes appeared not to belong to the nation over the Vistula River. Nevertheless, in fact, they were tied with Poland very strongly. Therefore, it is not surprising that they felt anguished by being abruptly excluded from Polish society physically, morally and intellectually.

The result of those happenings gave rise to a lot of reluctance, misunderstandings and prejudices which were reinforced by misinformation. I told my friend, the Professor, that if the Jewish Diaspora throughout the world could be approached in an open and sincere way and all grudges from the past frankly faced, then the prejudices could diminish and even disappear, after being explained and discussed. If an understanding in such a dialogue could be reached, it might be a start for the renewal of friendship. After all, both Poles and Jews belonged to one nation, as described by Władysław Bartoszewski in his publication: *He is from my fatherland*.

I am convinced that the reconciliation could happen. The goal is not to expect that the world Jews will support Polish ventures financially, but that they will be part of the reconciliation between the two nations. The mission of the reconciliation should be conducted tactfully, and in an intelligent and dignified way. A manifest of the reconciliation should concern any person who feels part of the Polish and Jewish common heritage, irrespective of his background, religion and current residence. The argument should not be who suffered more during the WW2. There can be no monopoly on the disasters which were the fate of both nations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

To illustrate Polish-Jewish relations, I'll present the following case: Every year thousands of Jewish youngsters from all around the world come to Israel. Among them many come from America. They spend one year in Israel, working and studying Hebrew in a kibbutz. To conclude their visit, together with their Israeli peers, they participate in the "March of the living" visiting Poland and the Nazi concentration camps. Some years ago, my cousin's son from Canada, with some of his friends, paid me a visit in Jerusalem. It was a few days before their leaving to Poland. I was surprised to find out that they had tinned sauerkraut and pickled cucumbers in their bags. I told them that it was not worth lugging that all the way long, since they could buy all those in Poland for pennies (the prices in Israel and in Poland still differed a lot then). The youngsters declared that they had been instructed to boycott Poland and the Poles. They were told to buy nothing from them, no contact and no talking to anybody there. They were informed that every Pole is an Anti-Semite and had collaborated with the Nazis to exterminate the Jews. Poland was described as the land of pogroms where the Jews had lived under terrible conditions, being persecuted and humiliated during centuries.

On listening to this, I suggested that my cousin's son and his friends should visit *Yad Vashem* ( the Jerusalem Memorial of the Holocaust) to see by themselves that the highest percentage of the *Righteous Among the Nations*, people who risked their lives to save Jews, came from among the Poles. I asked whether they knew that Poland was the only country under the Nazi yoke where there was a death penalty during the war for anybody (along with his family and even the neighbours), who helped Jews. Therefore, a true heroism was needed to help Jews, and there were many such heroes in Poland. The question is what would it be like if the situation was reversed and if the Jews were those to assist Poles under such enormous risk?

I informed the youngsters that the Poles were never employed by the Germans to exterminate the Jews in the ghettos and in the concentration camps. The Germans employed to take care of those murderous tasks, the Ukrainians, Belarusians, Latvians and Lithuanians. I had shown the young people the movie "*Holy Week*" by Andrzej Wajda, specifically about Jewish-Polish relations. There is a story of a young Jewish woman hiding in a house in Warsaw, where lived several Polish families. It was during the ghetto's liquidation and uprising, on Eastern 1943. In the film, various residents of that house are shown, as heroes, cowards, indifferent, traitors and blackmailers. Under such circumstances, similar people could be found at any time and everywhere over the world, including Israel.

I asked my young guests: "Do you think that the Jews were as stupid and as masochistic that most of them had chosen to establish in a country where they got the hardest human conditions?" Then, I acknowledged them that in Poland, over many centuries concentrated the largest Jewish agglomeration. From the early Middle Ages the Jews had been persecuted in most European countries, deprived of their estate, tortured and murdered. In effect, the only country where the Jews found shelter was Poland. There, the Jews felt secure and received special civil rights. As time went on they played a more and more important part in the life of the Polish society.

To my surprise, I realized how easily the young people can be convinced, to ponder over and to change their attitude towards Poland. I met many people in order to inform them about Poland, before their visit there as tourists or looking for family roots of their fathers, grandfather. Most of them accepted the reconciliation idea in good spirit.

I believe that Israeli prejudices about Poles are caused by their ignorance about them. There a lack of Polish presence in the Israeli (especially in Jerusalem) reality and everyday's life. The encounters in Israel of Poles and Israeli are sporadic and if any, they are on very selective occasions. The proper information, publicity and promotion of the real and true image of Poland do not reach the large public. It is perplexing that the fact about the millennium coexistence is conspicuously missing. At the same time, the young Jewish generation, is being fed on the wrong information from whoever chooses to inform them so.

There has been a real chasm post the war and through the era of Communist Poland, spanning about 50 years, a period when Israel and Jews did not really exist for the Poles and vice versa. What is strange is that even now, during more than three decades since Poland has recovered the democracy, its presence in Israel and in Polish-Jewish circles throughout the world is still minimized. To give to it a good example is the fact that there is no Polish Institute in Jerusalem and even no Polish tourist agency in Israel, while in most of the major countries and capitals there are such institutions. No wonder that the majority of the Israeli do not know any political, economic, social, historical and even tourist facts and miss basic information about Poland. They are generally interested in Poland, but unfortunately they have access to only the intentionally wrong information promoted by the local bodies which have the exclusivity about it and who are often ill motivated or ignorant in this matter.

There is yet another fact which has to be emphasized – Jews are still living in Poland, but most of them are unwilling to make an official display of their ethnic origin. The problem is not Anti-Semitism, which had almost become some kind of folklore. There is an ambivalent feeling towards the Jews, which may even be alarming. In Poland there is currently a lot of interest in Israeli and Jewish culture, traditions and history. It is demonstrated in many publications, exhibitions, theatre and film performances as well as in the institutions, associations and organizations.

On one occasion I gave a lecture about Polish-Jewish relations at the Olsztyn University. The audience consisted of about 200 students and the questions they had put forth were such that I could not refrain from asking the Rector, sitting by me: "May I ask, if in the audience there are any young people of Jewish origins?" The Rector's answer was that I definitely could not ask such question. Later he explained to me that if a student should raise his hand, admitting that he was Jewish, his friends would reproach him for not disclosing it to them earlier. On the other hand, if such a student would not have raised his hand, he would also be pointed out by those who knew that he had Jewish origins, as one who was scared to admit it. I think the Rector was right – it was an impossible situation. When talking with the students individually after the lecture, it turned out that some of them were actually of Jewish background. In 1990, there were said to be five thousand Jews remaining in Poland. Today the assessment is several hundred thousand.

The last example is about a Polish trainee in the Consulate of Poland in Jerusalem. During a meeting with some Israelis and talking about common origins and ancestors, the assembled reached a conclusion that the trainee and they were probably related. Later in private, the trainee, who was very favourable to the Jews and Israel, asked whether this meant that he was a Jew, because such fact might be shocking for his father who *did not like very much the Jews...*

All of the above demonstrates the existence of ambiguity in the mutual relations of both communities. Nevertheless, there exist large amounts of mutual interest, which can act as a basic stimulator for understanding each other. This procedure of positive reasoning may result in the acceptance of the reconciliation, which might be followed up by genuine friendship. This is a pragmatic approach to the reconciliation's operation. It should not result from occasional occurrences, meetings and talks. It can be accomplished by a well thought-out and effectively organized campaign, on a large front and addressed to the largest public that it might concern.

In December 2010, I was invited by President Bronisław Komorowski to join him on his visit in the White House. There is a friendship between us, with a background stemming from our fathers who were underground soldiers of Armia Krajowa in the Wilno region during WW2. Being in Washington, we visited the Holocaust Museum there. The President declared that the two of us will start the reconciliation operation between our two nations. We shall campaign for it by appealing to all Poles and Jews to share this challenge. The proposal attracted a lot of attention across the Polish, Israeli and American media and got a positive response and support by many organizations and people.

During the last 8 years I have managed to have many lectures and debates on this subject in various Polish and Jewish universities and institutions. It was done with the support of the establishment, but also without it. The content of this action reached media and hence, quite a wide audience, subsequently reviving a wide and positive critique, which means we are on track for the cause. If we manage to increase the outreach of “Reconciliation” project, getting through to the broadest Polish, Israeli and Jewish Diaspora public, we will elicit interest, curiosity and perhaps involvement, which is exactly what we need to achieve Polish-Jewish relations of a new quality.



To achieve the reconciliation, we talk about a massive support of people of good will is requested. However it will not be enough; this project must be endorsed and supported by the governmental, cultural, academic, religious and any other organizations and institutions. I am convinced that even if the promoting of reconciliation idea works only to some extent, still, it will be a great achievement.

On 1999 I was appointed as Honorary Consul of Poland in Jerusalem. I accepted that honour and duty, aware that my main challenge will be to achieve the reconciliation between our two nations and to struggle for abolishing all prejudice dividing us. Through all these years, I have been in touch with hundreds, it maybe even with thousands of people in Poland, in Israel and all over the world, concerning the above challenge. I made use of any circumstance, either coincidental or invoked in order to reach as many people as possible. I am enormously satisfied that the Polish-Jewish and especially the Israeli-Polish relations had become more open and friendly. This had happened thanks to the action of people from both our nations who devoted much of their time, energy and emotions towards achieving this goal. I am proud to be one of them. We are realistic and quite aware of the sensitivities on both sides. There were and will be ups and downs on our way, but we shall overcome them. There is a will, perseverance and all our strength, courage and wisdom to reach our goal, never sparing any bit of our enthusiasm!



On this occasion I have to mention over sixty trainees from Poland who came to Jerusalem in order to help voluntarily in our consular activities. Their presence in Israel and, moreover, the relationships and collaboration they have started here and continued after coming back to Poland, made them partners and ambassadors of good will for bringing the two nations closer, for enhancing the mutual understanding and finally achieving the true reconciliation.

*The team in Jerusalem and the young Polish apprentices 1999-2018*





Let us assume that the general facts concerning the historical coexistence of Polish Jews and the Poles are well-known to everybody. Therefore, it might be unnecessary to repeat them. Instead, I will attempt to relate to my personal perception on this subject, as accumulated during my fairly long and tempestuous life. I will try to present my observations and opinions in a matter-of-fact outlook and not as conclusions from scientific academic research. It might be a basis to engage in a dialogue between the interested and concerned parties.

There are a lot of facts, descriptions and personal experiences which are often omitted by the memory, history or literature and they do not reach a conclusive ending. The reason for it is that they are not always conventional. Thus, I will not try to favour, to adorn or to justify the past events and states of mind. To enable a clear understanding of Jewish and Polish relations and coexistence in Poland, nothing should be held back and as much as possible, stick to true facts.



*The decree of „Statut Kaliski” accorded to the Jewish in 1264 by the king Boleslaw the Pious.*



*The Decree of the king Kazimierz the Great in 1334, confirming the „Statut Kaliski”*

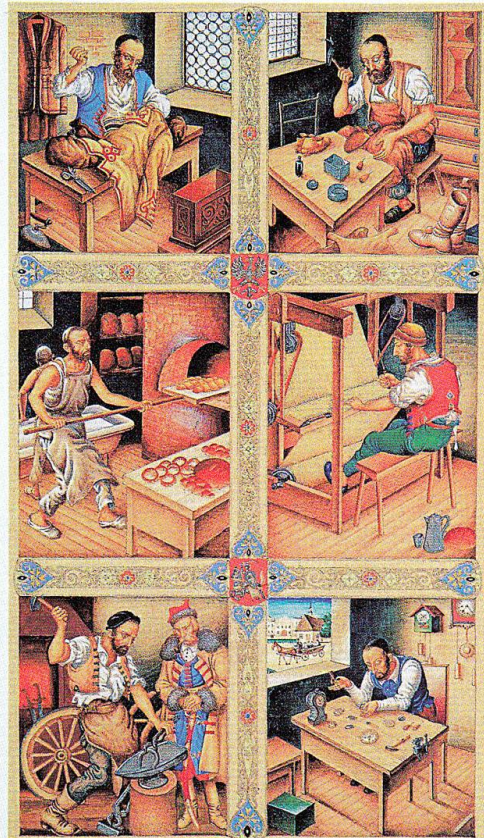




*Above: The Jewish merchants in Gdansk*

As it was mentioned earlier, the Jews started to arrive to Poland approximately one thousand years ago. The Jews were persecuted for centuries in the Middle Age in the majority of European countries. They didn't possess their own country already since the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, they searched for a place of shelter which will give them security, dignity and a better quality of life. All these, they found in Poland. During the reign of the kings Boleslaw the Pious (XIII century) and Kazimierz the Great (XIV century) a decree (Statut Kaliski) opened the gates of Poland to the Jews, giving them the guarantee of exerting their faith and traditional customs, the right to take part in the social and economic activities and insurance of their property and life. Those rulers understood that the Jews might be a very effective catalyst for the country economical, cultural and scientific growth.

As time went on, the Jewish society continuously growing up in Poland formed a special social group between the gentry and clergy, on the one hand and the peasantry and bourgeoisie on the other. The Jews thus became a dynamic economic and financial administration. They had gained mighty experience for such a role during their years of practice while migrating during centuries throughout the various countries. This area of activity was far from easy but profitable, so that quite soon some Jews became rich. They were strongly motivated, being aware that money could always create a strong base of living, and possibly a lifebelt should a disaster impend. On the other hand there were many occupations where the Jews were not indispensable, for example in agriculture or in some artisan crafts. In order to avoid them to compete with the Polish population, they were simply banned from such professions.



*On the right: Typical Jewish professions*



At the moment that the Jews “disappeared” from Poland, arose a sort of void in Polish society. This was of no significance during the war and at the time of the communist regime in Poland, but it had been very strongly felt, sometimes unconsciously, over the last three decades. This social group which, as mentioned before, bridged between the other social groups and created the welding and accomplishment of various processes in the country, was removed from the state machine. Again, it formed a special intermediary bond which caused and stimulated the switch from intent, planning and ideas to the specific production. This could be attributed either to the traditional resourcefulness or imagination of the Jews, or to the particular art of Jewish wheeling and dealing. The impact on the Polish society of the current absence of Jews in the chain of activities in various social, economic and other domains, I call “the Polish syndrome”. It does not mean that Poland is and will not be growing as best as possible, but certainly the presence of Polish Jews could contribute to a much more effective and dynamic development, growth and life quality in the new Poland’s independence. The disappearance of the Polish Jews conjures images of the children disappearing from Hamelin in the tale of the Pied Piper, led out from the town by the magician flutist.



Yet, while the abovementioned coexistence in the past was advantageous for everybody, the problem was that the Jews were “different”. The Jews had a vast historical, cultural and ethnic heritage originating almost entirely from their holy book, the Old Testament. The Bible defined history, law, literature as well as other conventional and moral recommendations in the life of the Jews. The Jewish faith constituted a solid wall always ready to be leant on; accordingly the Jews did not need to integrate with the nations they lived among. It made them self-sufficient. This Jewish oddness was also demonstrated by their customs, clothing, cult, language, right down to their way of thinking and consorting with other people. The idea in Judaism of a certain amount of exclusivity and their preference of not admitting strangers into their society and religion gave rise to a barrier between the Jewish and Christian societies; the later being more universal and believing in widely opening their gates to the neophytes and encouraging them to share their lifestyle.

The Church always ready to convert other nations to Christianity, even by force of arms, had difficulty in doing so with the Jews, because they were a people without permanent territory and constituted a tightly closed community. It could easily be persecuted or even destroyed. However, it was neither in the interest of the ruling class nor of the clergy itself, who were conscious of the necessity of the Jews within the state. Hence a situation arose whereby although coexistence with the Jews was needed, they had to be, at the same time, kept detached. In addition, they were to be viewed as an ideological hazard, a situation which itself exerted pressure on Jewish society and forced the Jews to have no choice but to meet various requirements of the authorities.

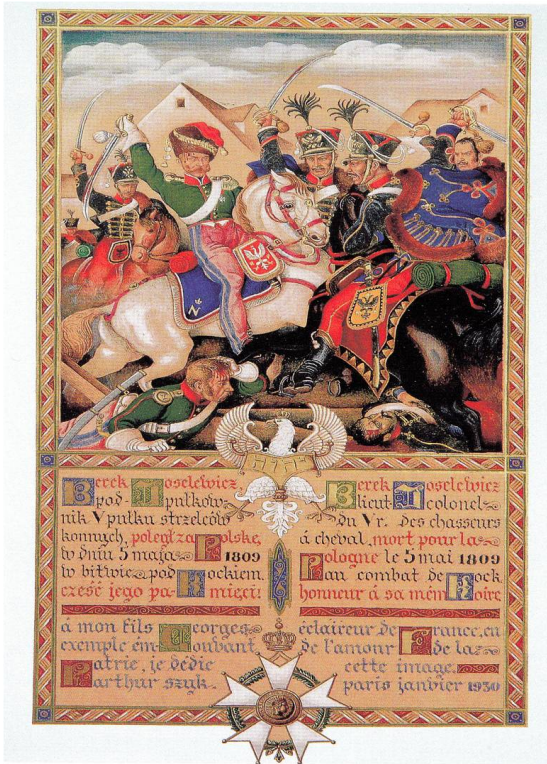
In their desire to upkeep the best possible living conditions, the Jews tried to meet the requirements, especially of those from whom they could expect to protect them most effectively. In order to maintain even a reasonable living standard, a Jew had to put in much more effort, to show more zeal and smartness; qualities which within centuries became his distinct features. Not every Jew was a wealthy man; there were poor Jews as well. Those laboured in very specific arts and crafts in the villages and the cities. Yet the image of Jewish society and the folkloric generalization of Jewish wealth, wisdom, power and arrogance gave rise to envy and aggression. Jewish customs were strange to the Poles, generating reluctance and hostility. However, there was always awareness that the Jewish presence in the Polish society was not only a fact but a necessity as well. One way or another, the Jews became a part of the Polish nation.

The Jewish adversity was especially troublesome during the time that Poland lost its independence during 200 years and was occupied by Germany, Austria and Russia. Primarily, the Russians instigated the local population to rise up against the Jewish minority in order to distract their attention from the real problems they had with the invaders. It was easy to guess that Jews were often the scapegoat when some internal or external national conflicts had to be resolved. However, Polish Jews always took the side of Poland in fighting their enemies and in other struggles for the freedom of Poland, since they knew that the Poles while maybe not being very fond of them were actually the most trustworthy option to protect them. However, in the joint Polish- Jewish history there had been very unpleasant moments, where the Jews standing between two fires had to declare sympathy and support for “the strong ones”. Those decisions did not necessarily favour the Poles’ interests and increased the Polish people distrust and dislike to the Jews. The best example is of many Jews joining the Bolshevik-Stalinist system, for which they were to pay a high price later. Of course, the issue cannot be generalized.

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In summary: the mission of reconciliation is extremely difficult and its achieving will request a lot of time and effort. However, it stands as a noble and honourable challenge, and the result may quite unexpectedly influence the improvement of Polish relations with the Jewish Diaspora, as well as the growth of the already existing Polish-Israeli alliance, particularly in these present historical stormy times. The approach to this challenge must be without any prejudices or pre-conditions. I recently received a letter from one of my ex-trainees complaining about the Jews taking any opportunity to raise grudges, prejudices and resentment towards Poland. The Poles responding defensively and trying to justify themselves too much, even increase the Jewish aggressiveness. This situation could eventually give rise to a new antagonism. I think the young man has a point. The Jews are still bearing, like the albatross on their backs a pretty big bundle of traumas, complexes and mistrust,. So many centuries of misery, humiliation and suffering! A lack of their own territory and wandering all over the hostile world for 2000 years ending with the Holocaust and a hundred years wars with their neighbours in

thenewly established Jewish State – Israel. No doubt that all this led the Jews to become suspicious, over sensitive by the harm which was done to them. The loss of physical roots and stabilization, without any doubt will delay by many years the normalization of their mind and trust to the other nations



The last battle of Colonel Berek Joselewicz 1809

The tragic history of Poland also had a mighty effect on the Polish mentality. However, the Polish nation never had to leave their soil; thus they can afford more understanding. The future of the historical relations and the reconciliation between the two nations depend on a gesture of generosity and frankness, without any prejudice from each side.

The Jews, in turn, have to assess the Poles from the angle of their own relationships to other nations and people. They have to give some thought to whether their attitude today, as a nation, is not similar to that which they would have expected from the other nations. As described in Wajda's movie recalled above, neither the Jews nor the Poles are a homogenous human community; the good and the evil, the noble and the mean can all be found amongst them. However, there is no general national trend in Poland which is aimed at discriminating or persecuting the Jews. It indicates that even the dark pages of the history of Polish acts toward the Jews must not be generalized in spite of the undeniable events and facts which previously anticipated disastrous results.

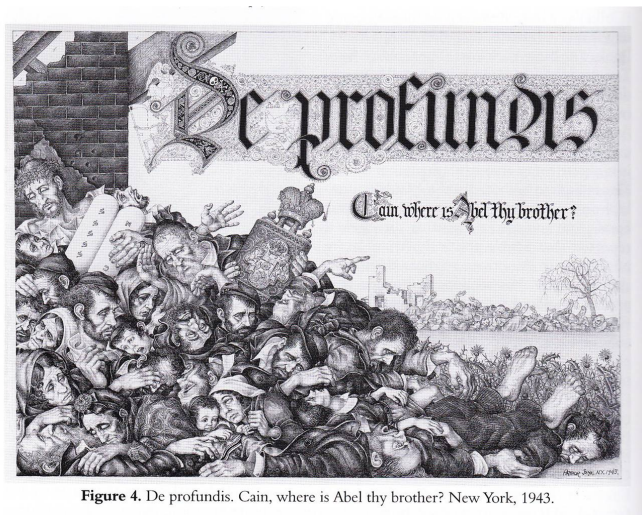


Figure 4. De profundis. Cain, where is Abel thy brother? New York, 1943.





The drum rambles to announce fulfilment of the destiny of Jerusalem.

Edith Piaf, "Jerusalem"

### Interlude: Is the destiny of the Jewish Nation fulfilled?

This reflection is of controversial nature. The Jews regained their country and became a nation just like other nations. The Old Testament, with all its importance and challenge is available and adapted by most of the world societies. It would seem that the destiny of the Jewish Nation was fulfilled. The Jews, "The Light for The Nations" transmitted to the world all that they were supposed to deliver, their genius, experience and faith. A question could be raised "Had the Jews eventually completed their obligations towards God, themselves and the other nations"? Is it the time that they will break off the chains of their destiny so that they could finally relax on being not "different" anymore? It may be that they are going to get rid at last of the monopoly of being admired, pitied, envied, hated and persecuted, just because they are Jews? They can still stick to their heritage, relics, traditions, customs and cult, but this time as a nation which got rid of its complexes, obsessions and delusions. The future of that nation would depend only on what it deserves.

In the storms striking the world, Israel and all the Jewish Diaspora, we encounter a kind of a demographical threat which will gradually diminish the authentic Jewish population and eventually make it disappear. The issue is not only about the mixed marriages or the never ending discussions *Who Is the Jew*, but also that the Jews will lose even more of their true vocation of being *the Eternal and Chosen Nation*. The Jews quite quickly adapt to the globalization and in the integrating process among the nations with which they share their living environment. Obviously, The Ultraorthodox Jews communities are not taken into this account. They are hermeneutically closed in their environment and way of life; They are unconscious of the times they live in. Suppose they move all together to another planet, they wouldn't probably be even aware of the change.

Referring more to the Jews living in Israel, they not only became completely 'normal' but very often they exceed the dimension of this normality; it shows in a very fast loss of the morality, motivation and faith. A close look at the relations of the Israelis among themselves and between them and their minorities are really thought-provoking. One can start to wonder if their behaviour is inspired by the words of the Holy Book, or if it is rather the opposite of it. If we look at it that way, we might wonder for whom the "Promised Land" was awaiting for two millenniums and who possess the privileges of "the Chosen Nation"? From its very beginning the State of Israel exists *de facto*, as a confederation in conflict with all the minorities present within its borders, driving them mad. *De Jure* this State is in a situation which could be called at least impossible.

However, all the facts stated above do not intent to generalize the whole Israeli society or the Jewish Diaspora people. In those communities could be found plenty of people able to lead towards considered, wise and righteous way of thinking and acting. That includes, as well, the topic of reconciliation with the Polish people.

The issue here discussed is a reflection in some way separated from the main topic of this text. Nevertheless, it constitutes the problem we should not overlook. We speak about "Reconciliation" of the Polish People with whom exactly? Who are the Jews of the XXI century and who they are soon going to become in the circumstances of the enormous changes that the whole human race experiences nowadays? And what will become of the Poles? Will they be the expected partners for the future reconciliation?



### **Afterword:**

What would be the reason to discuss at length the Polish-Jewish history and its issues? A thousand years of two nations' coexistence is not a trifle!

Why the reconciliation and Polish-Israeli relations are so important?

#### **For Poles:**

- a. In order to understand better its own history and to describe the historical self conscience through the common history with the Jews.
- b. In order to come to a final account with the anti-Semitism, this is a problem for the Poles, poisoning their atmosphere.

#### **For the Israeli:**

- a. Poland is the best friend and ally of Israel in Europe. For Israel, coping very often with antagonisms of the outside world, it is a very important issue.
- b. For Israel it is cardinal to tighten the relations with Poland as a friend of Israel in order to make them even more obvious. What is important for Israel, is also a priority for the world Jewry

There is a new reality and new expectations, but in order to formulate them properly, one has to look into the past frankly and boldly. Not everybody wants and not everybody is able to do so. But there are others as well and the reconciliation appeal is directed to them: Let us hope then, that thanks to the people who have durable enthusiasm and a lot of good will, will stimulate a little larger ray of sunlight to pierce through the clouds of the stormy sky of our joint history...

Illustrations – Arthur Szyk, approved by prof. Aleksander Skotnicki  
(Exhibition of Arthur Szyk in Cracow, 2012)

A lecture based on the above text was delivered in:  
The Warsaw University, the Politics Science Institute(18.04.2011)  
The Polish Institute in Bratislava (04.05.2011)  
University of Wroclaw, History Department (10.10.2011)  
University of Warsaw, Politic Science and Strategic Department (20.10.2011)  
University of Poznan (UAM), Politic Sciences Department (18.04.2012)  
University of Szczecin, International Relations Department (24.04.2012)  
Polish Institute in Paris in cooperation with the “Medem” Institute. October, 201n  
Institutions and schools in Israel (2010-2015).

*Ceux qui vivent, ce sont ceux qui luttent. Ce sont  
Ceux dont un dessein ferme emplit l'âme et le front.  
Ceux qui d'un haut destin gravissent l'âpre cime,  
Ceux qui marchent pensifs, épris d'un but sublime,  
Ayant devant les yeux, sans cesse, nuit et jour,  
Ou quelque grand labeur ou quelque grand amour*

*Victor Hugo*

## **Post Scriptum – June 2018**

I was woken up by the bells of midnight and by the quiet rustle of wings of the angels of history. It was an hour, when you most do not feel like getting up from your sleep. Nevertheless, like a zombie I jumped up from my bed and walked to my working desk. I set down and started to write.

Like lighting appeared the memories, the quotations and the ideas; “The vengeance for the blood shed of a little child, was not yet invented by the Satan” (*H.N.Bialik, national Jewish poet*). “Innocent blood will shout from the earth for seven generations” (*Jewish tradition*). Alas! At our time everything is going too fast, too hectic, without great emotions and reflexions. German volunteers arrive to “Yad Vashem” the Memorial of the Holocaust in Jerusalem, and they are received there in spite of the fact that their grandfathers could be the SS, slaughters of the Jews in the Nazi concentration camps on the Polish soil. The friendship between Poland and Israel blooms and evolves more and more. The young Poles meet Israelis of their age, who receive them warmly with open arms. Nobody asks them such questions if their grandfathers lived in Jedwabne or in Kielce...

The Polish honour was saved by the Polish “Just of the Nations of the World” Those who were recognized as such, those who were murdered by the Germans and those who were forgotten or remained unknown. Those, who during the worst time of crisis of the Humanity, Civilisation and Faith, were ready to help their fellow human beings, conscious that they sacrifice themselves risking their and their families’ life. Glory to them and to others from all the nations of the world, who during the many crisis of the history of mankind, accomplished such heroic, noble and “Beau Geste”!

The Jewish tradition says that “The one who saved a soul (life) is like having saved the whole world”... I hear the voice of Wladyslaw Bartoszewski who calls from his grave: “This one is from my Fatherland”! Nevertheless o this voice join another; that of Emile Zola, with big letters of blood which shout to the sky, he writes: “J’accuse”!!!

In what concerns the Jewish crowd, led like cattle to the slaughter house, their honor was saved by those who with a song on their lips, marched towards an inevitable death; the fighters of the uprising of the ghetto of Warsaw, the partisans and those who went by night through mountains and forests to open the road to Jerusalem under siege. The road where were lying in wait the deadly ambushes.



And then – boom!!! Somebody changed the idyll of the reconciliation, which evaluated slowly, but surely since the year of 1989. All the abominations started to emerge from the hogs of stupidity and hatred, in order to destroy in one moment the friendships, understandings and reconciliations. Where we short of some additional generations in order to heal the wounds rendered in the past? How can we expect that the next Jewish generations will forget about what happened to their fathers and grandfathers? To forget the persecutions, blackmails, rapes and murders, perpetuated by vile people? At those times there was a consensus that it is permitted to assassinate the Jews and to shed their blood is legal! People were denounced to a certain death, looking indifferently at those of their fatherland, at their misery, at their distress and at their desperate situation. Looking in the eyes of the mothers, whose babies were pulled from their arms and crushed against a wall! Looking at the children begging for a piece of stale bread!! Where vanished the Christian charity? What happened to the honor of the Polish people and that of other nations? We have the right to remember all that, of accusing, to talk, to write and to educate the next generations about it. There is no law which will change this issue!

While writing these lines I feel rising my revolt, my anger and my despair... My above manifest is a declaration of a private person; I assume the full responsibility for it. I feel to have the right to do so and deserve it in my two Fatherlands. I'll never permit somebody to plow on my parcel. Certainly I'll not permit it to the hoodlum, to the populists and to the politicians.

We can see the shade of the black clouds covering the time in which we actually live. All the evil of the earth celebrates. The evil seized the power and spreads like a black stain on the pages of our history and our patrimony. The evil makes strong itself with ill, but the waves of the history truth ocean, will wash all the dirt from our shores! We treat with contempt the official appeals, which demand to denunciate all those who dared to remind that there were Poles who assassinated Jews during the Nazi occupation. Certain paragraphs of this so called polish law, against the “enemies of the people” who dare to say the truth, specify that they will be accused, judged and deserve an imprisonment penalty. Luckily, that on the Israeli side, nobody thought of such absurd. Anyhow it should not be necessary, since the crimes of war are well documented in the institutions in Israel and abroad. Isn't it an irony of the historic destiny, that during the Nazi occupation, similar appeals were presented to the people, recommending kindly tracing the Jews and to denunciate them to the Gestapo, where they were doomed... Such instructions were rejected by wit despise by the righteous people, but they served as a password to the hordes of the blackmailers, the murderers and the avid hoodlum to turn and to act against the Jews.

I expected what finally happened in the Polish-Jewish relations; The Poles lost patience to constantly justify themselves toward the Jews and to the rest of the world, to the exaggerated Judo phyla and to an unclear situations. On the other hand the Jews stopped to whisper and spoke loudly about the Polish Anti-Semitism and about their criminal acts against the Jews during the Holocaust. You could find there truths, half truths and disinformation.

I believe the historical truth. I believe also in the words of Victor Hugo in the quotation which serve as the motto to this declaration. Alas, it probably is a too high doorstep to cross for many people in Poland, in Israel and in the whole world... Then, why do I take the trouble to make this declaration? Because I want to avoid a confrontation and a crisis between nations and people that I respect, admire and love! Those, who during a millennium shared their historical coexistence, their culture and their destiny. I and people like me have our rights and our merits. There are many of us and on our flag figure the words: Understanding, Reconciliation and Historical Truth. We are not afraid of petty politicians, bureaucrats and pseudo patriots! We believe in a clear and beautiful future of the Mankind. The forces of evil, of stupidity and of cruelty may destroy us, but they will never succeed to vanquish us. We were not created for the defeat!

All described above created disorientation on both sides, especially among the youth. The laboriously built reconciliation and friendship during the last years, could collapse like a castle of cards and change into distaste and antagonism. Is it what both sides wish to achieve? The answer is: Certainly not. Those who do not wish well to Poles and to Jews, only them will profit from this situation.

The worse is that the politics are interfering with the historical truth and with the moral issues. Certainly it is not what should be expected. I'll not repeat what I wrote in the above document some years ago. The only thing which remains to do in order to avoid a catastrophe is to start an open debate, in which, like two friends who quarrelled, try to put all the truths on the table in order to make good again and to save their friendship. We have to do it fast, not admitting to our dialogue any strange interests and especially avoid of involving in this debate the politicians, who, as usual, will spoil everything. Let us remember that the only condition to reach a mutual understanding is the truth, even if it is not always pleasant for both sides.

#### **Some remarks and answers suggested to the crucial following questions:**

1. Did Polish extermination camps exist? No, there were German Nazi extermination camps on the Polish land occupied by the Nazi hordes. The holocaust, the extermination of millions of Jews, was perpetrated and executed by Nazi Germany. The historic responsibility lies collectively on the German nation.
2. Did some Jews denunciate to the Nazi some Poles, Jews, Russian or other? Yes there were such Jews and the same applies to many Poles and other nations under the Nazi occupation.
3. Did some Poles contribute to the Holocaust of Jews? Yes, the shameful phenomena of many of the Polish citizens who enthusiastically helped the Nazi occupiers to kill the Jews dishonored the Polish nation. Events like the massacre in Jedwabne and the pogrom in Kielce (1946) are dark stains in the Polish history. There are enough living and memorial testimonies to prove it.

4. Did Poles help Jews and save their lives endangering their own? Yes. They were the largest number of Just among the Nations. There were also many others who were unknown, killed or forgotten, who belong to this group. This noble Polish people saved the honor of Poland and are a symbol of courage, justice and “beau geste” that their nation should be proud of.
5. Did the Jews save Poles during the Nazi occupation? Yes, but their possibilities were very limited.
6. Did other nations help Jews during the Nazi occupation of their countries? Yes, but in lower numbers than the Poles, in spite of the fact that they risked much less than the Poles. Poland was the only country under the Nazi occupation where a Pole who helped and saved the Jews, risked, he and his family, a death penalty.
7. Did Jews, Poles and other collaborate with the Germans during the Nazi occupation and kill each other? Yes, almost everywhere you could find such corrupted hoodlum, but nobody had a monopoly for it.
8. The 2018 attempts of the Polish and the Israeli politicians of changing the historical facts and truth should never be accepted. The moral and historical truth is the domain of scholars and historians, but the politicians should never be permitted of dealing and wheeling with it. It created a chaos of disinformation, suspicion and contributed in ruining of the reestablishment of good relations among Poles and Jews. Let us hope that the voices and acts of the righteous people will in both nations will overcome.

To many of such questions it is possible to answer frankly, with a hand on the heart. As a Pole and a Jew, child of the war, that Poles saved his and his family life during the Holocaust, I believe that I have the proper qualifications to answer to those questions. However, there are also other people and “*each person is like a whole world...*” (*Jewish tradition*)

*Zeev Baran,*

*General Honorary Consul of the Republic of Poland in Jerusalem*

*The above text was written on 2012 and then reviewed and enlarged on 2018.*



## Zeev Baran, architect – Biography

Zeev Baran is born in Wilno (Poland) on 1935. During the WW2, his father, Eliaz Baran, fought as a soldier in the Polish underground AK in the Wilno region, where he met his death. Post mortem, he was decorated with an Officer Cross by the President of the Republic of Poland. His wife and two sons survived the Holocaust thanks to the courage and the generosity of Bronislaw and Helena Krzyzanowski, who offered them support and shelter during the war. The saviors were recognized by the State of Israel as the “Righteous among the Nations”.



After the repatriation from Wilno to Lodz (1945-46) the family emigrated from Poland to France (1946-48). On 1948, the mother Guta and her sons Zeev and Eli reached the State of Israel during its struggle for independence. Zeev was educated in a kibbutz and in Tel Aviv. On 1953 he was mobilized to the Israeli army. He served in the army almost 5 years and then, another 30 years in the reserve army forces. He was discharged with a rank of major.

Zeev studied architecture and Town Planning in the “Technion” (Israel Institute of Technology) in Haifa (1958-63) and graduated with a Master degree. He obtained a scholarship for post graduate studies from the French Government and studied in “Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts” in Paris in the Atelier of Georges Candilis, parallel, he became his assistant and worked also in his office in Paris and Toulouse (1964-67). On 1967 he returned to Israel and worked in one of the biggest offices of architecture. On 1970 he established his own office of architecture and town planning. He works there till these days, employing multiethnic team and coping with selective projects, as well as planning for the developing countries and the national minorities.

On top of his professional responsibilities, architect Baran took upon himself educational challenges, teaching and lecturing in vocational centers and in academic institutions in Israel and abroad. During his multiple voyages throughout the world, he consolidated and multiplied his connections with institutions and private people. In this way he contributed a lot to the international co operations.

On 1999 Zeev Baran was nominated as honorary consul of the Republic of Poland in Jerusalem and on 2013 as a general honorary consul. Consul’s Baran priority was to promote Poland in Jerusalem, in Israel and in the world. He travels often to Poland where he lectures and creates international contacts. The consulate, his office and his home are under the same roof in Jerusalem. There are over sixty Polish youngsters who came to spend an internship in Zeev’s office and in the Polish consulate (1999-2018). They discovered the Israeli realities and returned to Poland as ambassadors of good will.

Zeev Baran continues to accumulate his initiatives in order to develop the dialogue and the cooperation between the people of Israel and Poland. Charged by the President of the Republic of Poland, Bronislaw Komorowski, he followed up this mission and he engaged into a cycle of conferences in Poland and in the world, on the subject of “historic coexistence of Jews and Poles and the challenge of reconciliation”. His numerous professional conferences in the academies and polytechnics of Poland continue till today. He also wrote 6 books, short stories and essays in a Polish language. He is a member of a Polish Association of Literates. His conference on the subject of the “Impact of the environment on the human perception” constitutes the title of his doctorate in Polytechnic of Wroclaw in Poland.

In 2004, the consul Zeev Baran was honored by the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Poland by a diploma for “Eminent merits of promoting Poland in the world”. In 2007, he was decorated by the President of Republic of Poland, Lech Kaczynski by the Cross of Knights. In 2013, he was decorated by the president, Bronislaw Komorski, by the Cross of Commanders of the Renaissance of Poland.