

# 'SURVIVING REMNANT'

Jewish publishing in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust

By Jonathan Fishburn

In memory of Admor, Adonenu, Morenu v'Rabenu Rav Shalom (may his memory be blessed), son of Moshe Lazar, who died a martyr's death for the sanctification of God's name in Auschwitz camp, 8th day of the month of Cheshvan, 1943

And my mother, Freida Mindle, may she rest in peace, daughter of Itamar Goldblum, who died a martyr's death for the sanctification of God's name in Auschwitz camp 20th Kislev, 1943

To the memory of my brother-in-law, Abraham, son of Gavriel Yosef Shechter who died a martyr's death for the sanctification of God's name in Kopiering camp 11th Adar, 1945

And my sister-in-law, Rachel Perel, daughter of Dov Orenshtein, who died a martyr's death for the sanctification of God's name in Auschwitz camp 14th Sivan, 1944

Reprinted by a young man, Nissan Lazar from Brygel, currently in Bergen-Belsen, Block 52

Some time between the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen camp in 1945 and 1951, when the last DPs left the area, Nissan Lazar from Brygel managed to print a slim volume of *midrash* called *Tanna de-vei Eliyahu* in Block 52. He dedicated this edition to members of his family who had died in Auschwitz and Kopiering (the relevant page is reproduced below). The *midrash* deals with the reason for divine precepts and the importance of knowledge of Torah, prayer and repentance. The author is especially concerned with the ethical and religious values which are enshrined in the Bible and in the trials and lives of the patriarchs. It's impossible to know why Nissan Lazar chose this book to reprint – maybe it was the only one available, maybe it was a book his father was particularly fond of, or maybe Nissan felt that he too had just lived through a trial of biblical proportions.

The transformation of Bergen-Belsen from wartime camp to printing press is hard to imagine. (In fact, the Displaced Persons Camp was established in a defunct German army camp close to the former concentration camp that had been burned as a health precaution.) After the war, thousands of Jewish survivors gathered in displaced persons' (DP) camps, where they began the slow process of

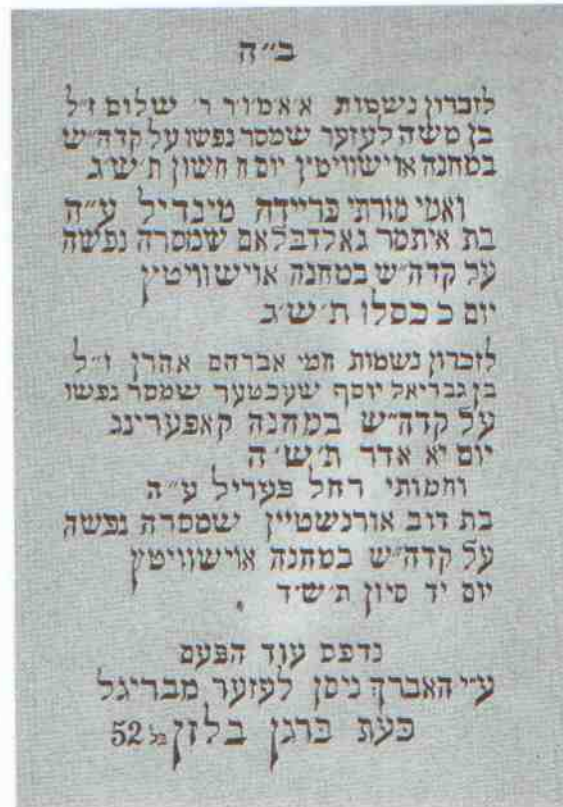
rehabilitation and reconstruction of their shattered lives.

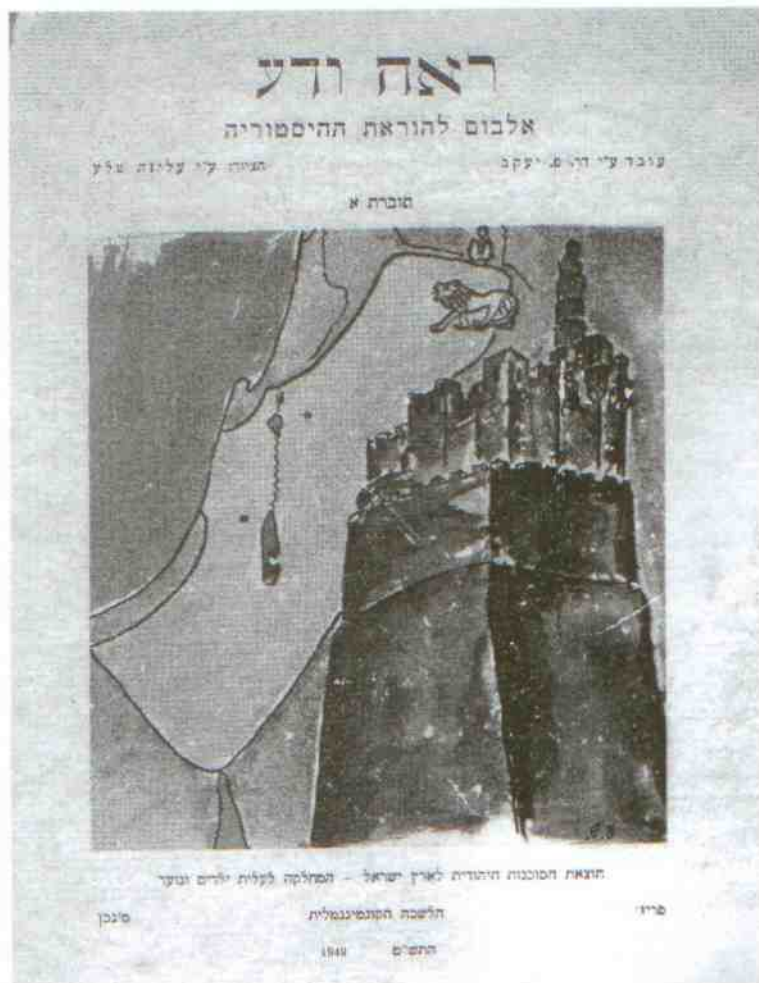
These displaced persons called themselves the *she'erit ha-peletah*, a Hebrew term of biblical origin, meaning 'surviving remnant' (used to refer to a remnant of Israel which survived the calamities that befell the Jewish people in Micah 2:12 and Jeremiah 23:3). The term gained popular currency through the efforts of a Jewish chaplain in the American Army named Abraham Klausner. In June 1945, he compiled the first list of survivors and chose *she'erit ha-peletah* as its title. As the 25,000-name list expanded into a six-volume registry of Jewish DPs, the name gained wide acceptance. When elected delegations of survivors met in Munich in February 1946, they identified themselves as the Congress of the She'erit ha-Pletah.

Education was one of the major activities in the camps. Primary and secondary schools as well as

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This is the first in a series of articles dealing with unusual aspects of the history of Jewish books and publishing.





Cover of a Jewish history book for child survivors, issued by the Jewish Agency (Paris and Munich, 1949)

*yeshivot* for religious studies were established. However, the Nazi book burnings and confiscation of Jewish property meant that there were limited numbers of religious texts available for use. This led to a fascinating chapter in the history of Jewish books.

To start with, the *she'erit ha-peletah* needed copies of the Talmud. Most famous was the edition published by the United States Army in Heidelberg between 1948 and 1950, in response to requests by Jewish community representatives, including Rabbi Samuel Jakob Rose, a survivor of Dachau, and US Army rabbi chaplains, on behalf of the *she'erit ha-peletah*. President Harry S. Truman called caring for the Jewish survivors America's 'particular responsibility' and asked General Dwight D. Eisenhower to assure that the survivors' material and spiritual needs were met. Publishing the 19-volume *Survivors' Talmud* exemplified this caring. The dedication on the first page, its only English words, reads as follows:

This edition of the Talmud is dedicated to the United States Army. The army played a major role in the rescue of the

Jewish people from total annihilation and after the defeat of Hitler bore the major burden of sustaining the DPs of the Jewish faith. This special edition of the Talmud published in the very land where, but a short time ago, everything Jewish and of Jewish inspiration was anathema, will remain a symbol of the indestructibility of the Torah. The Jewish DPs will never forget the generous impulses and the unprecedented humanitarianism of the American forces, to whom they owe so much.

The role of the Vaad Hatzala (Rescue Committee of United States Orthodox Rabbis) was also crucial in distributing religious texts. This was established in November 1939 by the Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States to save the rabbis and yeshiva students who had escaped from Poland to Lithuania following the outbreak of war.

After the war it played an active role in rehabilitating survivors, which included the printing and distribution of religious texts. To meet the demand for copies of the Talmud, the Vaad printed and distributed 10,000 conveniently sized pocket editions. By the end of 1947, the Vaad had published some 240,000 copies of religious texts, including the Bible, prayer books, Psalms, Hagaddahs, *Megilat Esther*, *Pirkei Avos* (Ethics of the Fathers), *Mesillat Yeshorim* (Path of the Just), *Kitzur Shulchon Orech* (Code of Jewish Law) and *Taharas Hamishpocho* (Family Purity Laws).

There are several ways to identify these books, now themselves commonly referred to as *she'erit ha-peletah*. They were all published between 1945 and, at the latest, 1950. In some books, a front page was inserted with a message specifically for the *she'erit ha-peletah*. For example, in a copy of the *Mesillat Yeshorim* it is written:

a gift to the Sherith Hapleita [sic] from Vaad Hatzala. It is our prayer and hope that this volume may serve to instill faith and courage in the heart of our people. Dedicated to one of the outstanding and devoted workers in the field of Torah and Hatzala, Mr Manashe Stein.

It is signed Rabbi Nathan Baruch, Director, Vaad Hatzala, Germany.

In a 1946 Haggadah from England, there is a poignant message in Yiddish on the front cover:

The Chief Rabbi's Committee wishes our brothers and sisters from Shearet HaPleth a good Yom Tov and next year in the Land of Israel a free people.

In some books, there was a letter from a survivor who may have initiated the reprint. For example, a copy of the Rambam's (Maimonides) *Sefer Mada* (published in Munich, 1947) has a letter printed at

Opposite: Front cover of the *Nezach Israel* magazine, for survivors in Germany (Munich, 1948)



# תוצרת ישראל

מחלקה לחינוך  
וחינוך הדת

מאגאזין ניו איסגאנצ  
פון ונד דהזצלה

פאר שארית-הפליטה איז גזות דייטשלאנד

München, Mai 1948

Nr. 1

ג'ה מינגן, אייר תש"ח



## ניווקדש

# תורה

כי הם חיינו ואורך ימינו . . .



the beginning by Rabbi Yitschok Meir Zemba, who gives thanks for surviving Treblinka and Auschwitz. The last page is in memory of those that died in the Holocaust, including an extensive list of the members of his own family.

Some books were specifically dedicated to prominent people who helped the survivors. A 1947 Bible published by the Munich Vaad Hatzala was dedicated to Harry Truman, and has a letter with the US flag in colour imposed upon it.

In addition to the books that were gifts from organizations to the *she'erit ha-peletah*, many DP camps had their own newspapers. In Bergen-Belsen, the first issue of the *Unzer Sztim* appeared two months after the end of the war, on 12 July 1945. It was written by hand, with the word 'Yizkor' (Remember) on the front page, for those who perished in the Holocaust. On 15 April 1946, a year after the liberation of the camp by the American Army, the paper published a printed edition with a front page in colour, which was exceptional in the conditions of the time.

There was an active printing press in Fochrenwald, where a weekly newspaper entitled *Bamidbar* (The Desert) was published. In September 1947, the *Bamidbar* staff published a 100-page almanac, documenting many aspects of the camp's life. In the Bad Reichenhall DP camp life centred around the daily newspaper, *Der Morgen* (The Morning); and in Feldafing, several newspapers were published, including *Dos Freje Wort* (The Free Word) and *Dos Jiddische Wort* (The Jewish Word) as well as supplements like the *Feldafinger Magazin*. Copies of these magazines are extremely rare.

The documents of the *she'erit ha-peletah* – both those written for them and, perhaps even more, those they produced themselves – are a moving testimony to the resilience of the survivors who, despite the fact they had lost all their worldly possessions as well as their families and homes, never lost sight of their intellectual needs and cultural heritage. ♦

For extensive information about all the DP camps, see the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website, [www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/dp](http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/dp). The 2002 exhibition, 'A Particular Responsibility: The Making of the U.S. Army Talmud', at the Center for Jewish History in New York, told the story of the involvement of the Army in the printing of the *Survivors' Talmud*; see [www.cjh.org/about/news/view\\_news.cfm?newsid=44](http://www.cjh.org/about/news/view_news.cfm?newsid=44).

## From the last extermination

Periodical for the History of Jewish People during the Nazi Regime.  
Editor: ISRAEL KAPLAN.

### CONTENTS

1. Our Proof	
2. Greeting	DE. P. FRIEDMANN
3. Why do we need a Historical Commission?	SI. J. FEIGENBAUM
4. After the Liberation	CHAPLAIN ABRAHAM I. KLAUZNER
5. Ghetto in the Ghetto of Bile	I. KAPLAN
6. The Hero, Melamed of Bialystok	RABBI A. BURESHIN
7. The Tragedy of Chelmno	I. WALDMAN
8. The first Concert in the Ghetto of Wilna	I. SEGAL
9. Kaddish (reports of witnesses)	I. RIGER
10. Jewish Folklore during the Nazi Time	I. KAPLAN
11. Ghetto Songs	
"Ma'atza", "Our Life"	A. ZIPKIN
"Blockade"	H. JOACHNOWICZ
12. Two Nazi Documents	
13. Pictures out of the Nazi Period	
14. List of Articles concerning Jewish Life during the Nazi Regime in the Press of SHABET HAPLATAH	
15. Activity Report	
16. Chronicle	

Published by the Central Historical Commission of the CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF LIBERATED JEWS in the American Zone of Occupation in Germany, Munich, September, 1946

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MUNICH, August 1946

Top: Front cover of the Yiddish magazine *Fun Lezten Churban* (The Last Extermination), published in the American Zone of Occupation in Germany, 1946

Below: English title page of the same magazine