

Geschichte meines Vaters, des Überlebenden

von Gideon Levy*

Der Autor, der fast täglich für „Haaretz“ aus den palästinensischen Gebieten berichtet, erinnert aus Anlass des Tages der Erinnerung an die Shoah – begangen am Beginn des Warschauer Aufstandes am 19. April 1943 – an seinen Vater, den „Landesgerichtsrat“ Dr. Heinz Loewy, der in Saaz im Sudetenland geboren wurde, nach Palästina fliehen musste, sich hier anfangs mit seiner Schwester als Verkäufer von Back- und Konditoreiwaren durchschlug und seine Fremdheit im Lande schwer überwinden konnte, nie arabisches Essen wie Humus und Tchina anrührte und „ein Yekke in jeder Beziehung“ blieb, wie sein Sohn schreibt. Seinen Geburtsort habe er nie wiedersehen wollen – aber mit seiner Frau fuhr er auf Urlaub nach Deutschland.

Dr. Heinz Loewy was not your classic Holocaust survivor. He did not go through any of the camps, and so did not have a number tattooed on his arm. He was a refugee, and he was my father. It seems to me that he lived most of his life as a refugee, even though he would have vehemently denied it. He lived in Israel for 60 years, but never arrived here, not really.

It's true that on Independence Day he made sure to take out the folded flag and hang it on the balcony. It's true that he had a good life here. But looking back, it seems to me that he never really found his place here. It wasn't that he was trying to relive the Europe he had left behind but it's doubtful that he found a replacement for it here. He stored his suits and ties in the closet, his Bermuda shorts replacing them in the hot summer. He also left behind the Latin he had learned, save for one proverb that he would repeat to us. Even his doctorate in law from the University of Prague was unused here.

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When he arrived here, alone, after being flung about at sea for a couple of long months on an illegal immigrant ship and being jailed in Beirut, he was forced to become a door-to-door salesman, going by bicycle from house to house in Herzliya, offering the Central European pastries that he made in the bakery he owned with his sister. He looked good, baked well, and had a doctorate to boot, but surely that life was not the life he'd dreamed of as a youth.

Today, as we remember the Holocaust, we must also remember those who may not have experienced all its horrors but still had their lives changed beyond recognition, or even destroyed. The Holocaust led to the establishment of the State of Israel and the ingathering of a great many survivors to it, but not all of them felt at home. They were doomed to a life of exile in their new homeland. My father was one of them.

My father was born in Saaz, in the Sudeten region, a Yekke in every way. He left Europe, his parents and his fiancée behind, along with a promising future as a district attorney, or "Landgerichtsrat", as he would write on the pension forms he received from Germany years after he came here.

From his parents' house he managed to salvage one Persian rug, which became tattered over the years, and an oil painting of a vase of flowers, which hangs in my home to this day.

Here they gave him the Hebrew name "Zvi," and after a few years of delivering cakes as well as newspapers, he became a clerk at Herut, a Histadrut labor federation-owned company, where he worked until retirement. There they called him "Dr. Levy," with a mixture of admiration, distance and a chuckle. All his colleagues were Eastern Europeans, with whom he had difficulty connecting.

After several years of poverty, the German reparations arrived, and our lives became relatively comfortable. At age 53, my father drove

his first car, which, naturally, was German-made, and he took care of it the way you take care of a child.

He never returned to his hometown. He absolutely refused to do so, which at the time I didn't understand. He always explained it by saying that nothing remained, and there was nothing and no one to go back to – the German town had become Czech. He didn't speak much about what he had left or what he went through, and I never asked. Today, when I so yearn to know (and I really know almost nothing), it's too late.

My father arrived here already pretty assimilated and he didn't connect much to Judaism in Israel, either. I doubt he knew the difference between Shavuot and Sukkot. He also never really connected with Israeliness. I doubt he knew the difference between hummus and tehina, since he never touched either. He even wrote his family name as "Loewy," differently than most. He read The Jerusalem Post, voted for Labor's forerunner, Mapai, and remained a foreigner. Once a year he would go off with my mother on vacation - to Germany, of course.

What's left in me of his foreignness? To what degree was I fashioned by his refugeeness, and how did being a refugee's son influence my worldview? That's material for a different article.

Today I will merely remember Dr. Heinz Loewy, who was my beloved father, and whose life was turned upside down by the Holocaust, or perhaps even utterly destroyed.
