

# Remembering More Jewish Physicians

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As retirement approaches and we contemplate the future, a new freedom and unlimited leisure hours await us. Many, including medical practitioners, turn towards creativity. This “medico-artistic” phenomenon is reflected in physicians engaging in painting, sculpture, woodwork or pottery; the writing of novels, poetry or plays; music composition, theater staging or film production [1]. Or, they might delve into other areas of interest that they never pursued because of their demanding careers, such as literature or history. My own conversion from surgery to history was smooth, having obtained two arts degrees long after completing my medical studies.

The first physician to write on this topic, remembrance, in the Hebrew medical literature was the poet Shaul Tchernichovsky [2]. The list of physicians turned artists or students of the humanities, from all branches of medicine and at any stage in their career, is too long to enumerate but I would like to cite a few. In particular, I wish to recount those who left their mark on Jewish medical history and, who despite their significant contributions to humanity, were not spared persecution.

From the distant past, one should recall the Bueno medical dynasty. At the end of the 14th century this family was forced to flee Spain to Portugal, and soon after to southern France where Jewish physicians, including the members of this family, were forbidden from practicing unless they converted to Christianity. They eventually moved to the more welcoming Amsterdam where they could practice but with certain restrictions. Such was Ephraim Bueno, physician to Rembrandt, and Ephraim’s cousin, physician to the Dutch Regent [3].

Among the Jewish physicians to be remembered are the researchers of myasthenia gravis: Walter Feldberg, who escaped Germany to Britain [4] and Lazar Remen, who disappeared from Germany and was discovered much later practicing in Petah Tikva [4]. Not to be forgotten was the faculty of the clandestine medical school in the Warsaw Ghetto where more than half of the 27 members perished. Indeed, of

the thousands of Polish doctors registered in Poland before the war, some 2500 were exterminated [5-7].

One should recall the Norwegian psychiatrist Leo Eitinger, who studied late-onset psychological trauma (today known as post-traumatic stress disorder) [8]. Similarly, the victims of Theresienstadt, Abraham Bushke (for whom Bushke disease, or scleredema, is named); Karl Herxheimer (who discovered the paradoxical reaction to syphilis treatment); Ludwik Pick (Niemann-Pick disease); and the victims of the concentration camps Belzec in Poland (including the Polish neurologist Lucja Frey-Gotesman) and Vaivara in Estonia (the German neurologist Arthur Simons) [9]. One should also mention the German physician Friedrich Heinrich Lewy, the discoverer of “neurocentral bodies” in several degenerative neurological diseases, who succeeded in escaping to Britain [10].

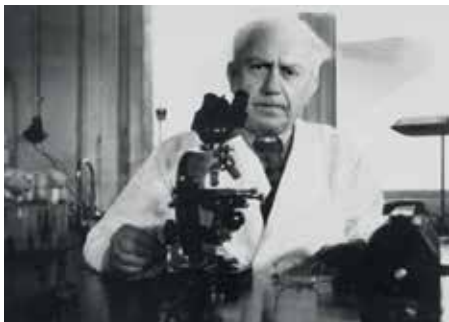
One should not forget the two Jewish physicians who treated the young Hitler and his family, Eduard Bloch and Karl Kroner. Both were allowed to emigrate (although the treating German physician, Dr. Edmund Foster, was murdered) [11].

Unlike these physicians, cancer researcher and Nobel laureate Otto Heinrich Warburg, whose parents were of mixed origin, remained in his position as Head of the Cell Research Institute in Berlin, supported by the highest hierarchy in the Reich. He was not harmed because of his important research in cancer. He was criticized by former colleagues, such as Krebs in the UK, for his contribution to German science during the Nazi regime, but was eventually accepted internationally [12].

There were those who attempted to combat typhus exanthematicus which was rife in the ghettos. Ludwik Fleck, in the Lwow Ghetto, developed an early preclinical diagnostic test and prepared a vaccine; and in the Warsaw Ghetto Jacob Penson was the first to describe the nephropathy in typhus [13].

Equally, one should recall the heroic fight of the physicians in the Lodz Ghetto against ravaging tuberculosis epidemics that would have totally exterminated the entire community within a few months [14]. Not to be forgotten is Albert Haas, who after his release from Dachau and Auschwitz remained in France to organize a rehabilitation center for survivors and later established the first pulmonary rehabilitation center, affiliated with Mount Sinai Hospital in New York [15].

I also wish to remember two people who, in addition to their contributions to medicine and science, made a substantial spiritual and philosophical impact.

**Figure 1.** Ludwik Hirszfelfd**Figure 2.** Edith Stein**Figure 3.** Memorial plaque to Saint Theresa (Edith Stein), Stella Maris Monastery, Haifa, Israel**LUDWIK HIRSZFELD (1884-1954)**

The life of Ludwik Hirszfelfd can be considered instructive in many ways [16-18]. Medically, he was an exceptional microbiologist and serologist. Born in Warsaw, he studied medicine in Wurzburg and Berlin. He embarked on cancer research in Heidelberg, and upon graduation moved to the University of Zurich to teach and further his research. He proposed that endemic hypothyroidism is due to the iodine deficiency in the region's water, a theory vigorously disputed but proven later to be correct. During World War I he volunteered to the Serbia/Macedonia region, assisting in the management of epidemics of various infectious diseases. There, he discovered *Salmonella typhi* C, which carries his name: *Salmonella hirszfeldi*. He also studied thousands of blood samples in various ethnic groups and was co-discoverer of the inheritance of blood groups that he renamed A, B, AB and O [Figure 1].

Hirszfelfd recognized the antigenicity between mother and embryo, confirmed later by the discovery of Rhesus antigen. Thus, he invented the paternity test. His syphilis serological test could not however replace the superior Wassermann test and was forgotten.

Hirszfelfd converted to Catholicism in 1920 after he returned to Poland. He claimed that he could not totally identify with the country if he did not accept its official religion. However, like all other Jewish converts during the Nazi occupation he was interned in the Warsaw Ghetto, although he lived separately in the Church presbytery. With the help of friends he managed to escape with his wife and daughter, hiding in the "Aryan" side of the country until liberation. After the war, he organized the resurgence of the Polish Academy of Sciences and contributed much. However, his spiritual belief suffered profound disillusionment during the war, and he never attended mass again.

Philosophically, Hirszfelfd stated in his autobiography: "Writing only about those who perished is not sufficient to expunge the guilt of those who live on." He also stated "...there is the need to describe the suffering of a man and of scientists who believed that science could render man better."

Hirszfelfd continued his work and participated in international collaborations of scientists. But his grief for his daughter,

whom he could not save from a pulmonary disease, probably contracted during their two years of incarceration in the ghetto, accompanied him for the rest of his life [17].

**EDITH STEIN (1891-1942)**

Edith Stein's life's story includes an interesting paramedical career [19-21]. The eleventh child of an observant Jewish family in Breslau, she was precocious for her age and left home at 16, becoming an atheist. She was no doubt one of the first Jewish women to be accepted into university. After wandering from one institute to another she settled in Freiburg in southwestern Germany, a strong center of philosophy. During the First World War she volunteered as a nurse and served for the duration of the war, working hard during the days and studying at night, laying the ground for her future intellectual contributions. Her devotion to the injured was no doubt the catalyst of her future theories.

Spiritually, during her night-time reading she was absorbing the life of Saint Theresa d'Avila, which evidently led to her decision to convert to Catholicism [Figure 2]. At university she studied General Philosophy, and her PhD thesis was on empathy, namely, the complete assimilation/integration/communication with another person. This led her eventually to enter a convent in Cologne where she took her vows; now a nun, she converted her younger sister. With the advent of Nazism, the sisters hid in a convent in Holland. The Gestapo found them (raising the question: were they betrayed?), and to paraphrase the survivor/writer Paul Clean, both sisters "found their graves in the clouds above Auschwitz" [22].

In 1933, early in the Nazi period, Edith, now Theresa, wrote a letter to the then-living sympathetic Pope Pius XI, asking for intervention on behalf of the Jewish people. It is possible that the Pope's reply was an apostolic encyclical, entitled "With Burning Heart," which was not published due to the Pontiff's illness and was intentionally shelved by his successor, the Germanophile Pius XII. In recognition of the tragic fate of this Carmelite nun, a commemorative plaque was erected at the Stella Maris Monastery in Haifa, Israel. Edith Stein was canonized in 1989 [Figure 3].

Philosophically, Edith Stein initiated a new chapter in phenomenology, a new branch in intellectuality. This was empathy, where an individual identifies with the other, feeling the other's feelings rather than simply feeling sympathy or pity for the other's misfortune. The thesis, in the form of a book, comprises over 200 pages of disputation and is highly intellectual. It would be the ideal concept in the doctor-patient relationship, demanding that the physician be empathically connected with his or her patient. If translated into clinical practice, this concept would lead to an intense psychological connection, enabling the total understanding of the other's experience.

### CONCLUSIONS

What is my message? None, other than commemorative. After their emancipation in the second half of the 19th century, Jews flooded the European universities – first as students and then as teachers. They brought a veritable revolution to science. For this they were sometimes honored, but often envied, persecuted, exiled and in some cases eliminated.

It is incumbent on us to preserve their memory.

### Correspondence

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