

JewishGen HIGH HOLIDAY COMPANION



תשפ"ד | 5784



MUSEUM OF
JEWISH HERITAGE
A LIVING MEMORIAL
TO THE HOLOCAUST



JewishGen
מרכז עולמי לגנאלוגיה יהודית
The Global Home for Jewish Genealogy

About JewishGen

JewishGen is an affiliate of New York's Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. JewishGen serves as the global home for Jewish genealogy. Featuring unparalleled access to 30+ million records, it offers unique search tools, along with opportunities for researchers to connect with others who share similar interests.

Award winning resources such as the Family Finder, Discussion Groups, and ViewMate, are relied upon by thousands each day. In addition, JewishGen's extensive informational, educational and historical offerings, such as the Jewish Communities Database, Yizkor Book translations, InfoFiles, Family Tree of the Jewish People, and KehilaLinks, provide critical insights, first-hand accounts, and context about Jewish communal and familial life throughout the world.

Offered as a free resource, JewishGen.org has facilitated thousands of family connections and success stories, and is currently engaged in an intensive expansion effort that will bring many more records, tools, and resources to its collections.

For more information, and to get started with your research, please visit www.JewishGen.org.



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Shofar belonging to Rabbi Moses N. Friedman, who served several congregations in Delaware and Pennsylvania from 1919 to 1953. Collection of the Museum of Jewish Heritage, Gift of Ida Rosen. This shofar is currently on view in the new core exhibition, *The Holocaust: What Hate Can Do*.

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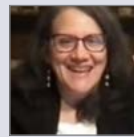
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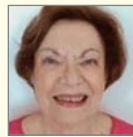


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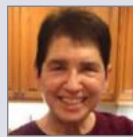
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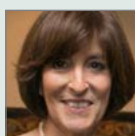


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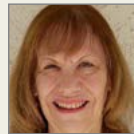


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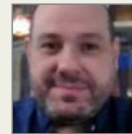
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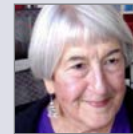


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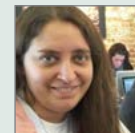


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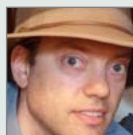


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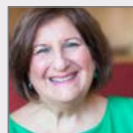
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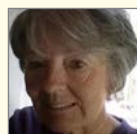
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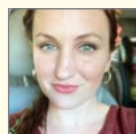
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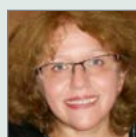
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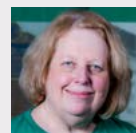


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CONTENTS

- 8 **Introduction**
- 10 **The High Holidays**
Narach (Kobylnik), Belarus
- 19 **Holidays and Ceremonies: Rosh Hashanah**
Rietavas, Lithuania
- 24 **The Old Shul: A Center for Jewish Life on Rosh Hashanah
and Yom Kippur**
Rokytne (Rokitno-Volin), Ukraine



INTRODUCTION

HIGH HOLIDAY COMPANION 2023/5784

Dear JewishGen Community,

As we approach the High Holidays, a period of time marked by self-reflection, introspection, and hope for the future, we are proud of our accomplishments over the past year.

Notable items include:

- **The imminent launch** of *Courage to Act: Rescue in Denmark*, our first exhibition for visitors aged 9 and above. The exhibition tells the remarkable story of the rescue of the Danish Jews during the Holocaust. Together, Jewish and non-Jewish neighbors of all ages mobilized to create one of the most effective – and exceptional – examples of mass resistance and escape in modern history.
- **Generations** – the first Jewish-themed genealogy television series which is being produced by the Museum, JewishGen and JLTv, with a launch date of later this fall.
- **The Peter and Mary Kalikow Jewish Genealogy Center** – leveraging the resources of JewishGen and other repositories, this will be the first time that visitors of the Museum can research their genealogy on site, and engage with experts. The center opens to the public on October 15th.
- **Collections** – More than 2.7 million records have been added to our databases, which include the Holocaust Database, Burial Registry, Memorial Plaques Database, Sephardic Database, and a host of country databases, including Austria, Bessaraba, Belarus, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Subcarpathia, Ukraine, USA, and more.
- **Partnerships** – New relationships were created with the Shapell Manuscript Foundation, and The Forward newspaper, which will allow researchers to find data in one central location.
- **Tools** – the development of a unique tool which allows records written in Hebrew to be searched using English search terms.
- **Education** – presented JewishGen at major conferences, offered more than a dozen classes, and ran two educational trips to Poland taking college students on our Fellowship program, and “adults out of school” on our Neshama program.
- And much more!

Unfortunately, our message from last year remains relevant as ever:

As we navigate an uncertain world, marked by rising anti-semitism, we hope that by providing researchers a greater understanding of their histories – both inside and outside the Jewish community – we will be able to create a safer, more harmonious, and inspirational future.

Thus we are pleased to present this High Holiday Companion, which features a selection of articles from Memorial (Yizkor) Books that have been translated by JewishGen. (See [JewishGen.org/yizkor/translations](https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/translations) for a full list of available books.) These volumes were created not only to memorialize victims, but also to remember and perpetuate the Jewish way life and culture which existed before the Shoah.

As we celebrate the High Holidays, please join us by visiting The Museum of Jewish Heritage in Battery Park, New York, and utilizing the tremendous resources on our free Jewish Genealogy website: [www.JewishGen.org](https://www.jewishgen.org).

We hope it will inspire you about our collective past, and motivate you to create a better future for us all.

Wishing all a Shana Tova, and a Ktiva V'chatima Tova,

Jack Kliger
President & CEO
Museum of Jewish Heritage –
A Living Memorial to the Holocaust

Avraham Groll
Executive Director
JewishGen



THE HIGH HOLIDAYS

Narach (Kobylnik), Belarus

Narach, formerly Koblunik, is a small town in Belarus about 80 miles from Minsk where about 600 Jews lived at the turn of the 20th century. It was named for its large lake in a region of lakes, marshes, and dense forests. In 1765, it had a Jewish population of five families. That number grew to 591 in 1897 as many young couples moved east from the Minsk region.

The chapter from its Yizkor book “Holidays and Festivals in Town,” begins with the arrival of the month Elul which ushers in the High Holidays. As Rosh Hashanah neared, the religious fervor increased as the sacred day drew closer. A sense of awe was felt everywhere. The number of people waking early to pray grew every day and the voice of people in prayer grew as well. Early in the morning on the first days of Elul, the town – which had been sleeping and snuggling against the calming serenity of the late summer – was alarmed by the sound of a Shofar blasting lengthily, like a cry, calling on people to repent.

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the prayer in the synagogue was longer than any other day. Inside the houses, housewives diligently prepared special foods for the holidays whose scent filled the air. Early the next day, as the fear of the judgment day became more tangible. Worshippers flocked to the synagogue for prayers of penance. When the hour for blowing the Shofar arrived, the solemnity and the heaviness of the occasion grew as its sounds pierced the awe-struck silence. The people prayed till noon and then returned to their homes for the lunch of the Rosh Hashanah. After gathering strength, they went before sundown to the river for the “Tashlikh” where they emptied their pockets for things to cast on the waters and recited the prayer, “And you will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.”

Between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the droning of prayer became the basic tone of these days. The sounds brought with them a sort of sadness to the heart, along with the sadness of the approaching days of autumn.

On the eve of Yom Kippur, Jews passed house-to-house to ask for forgiveness for offenses that had hurt somebody's dignity during the year. In the evening, the "Kol Nidre" prayer was recited. Bit by bit worshippers would go to the night's rest, to gather strength for the next day, the day of fasting and torment, the long day of prayer from morning till night. Early in the morning the synagogue would again be filled with people praying.

After the Minkah service, the marks of the fast were seen everywhere; signs of fatigue and paleness are on the faces, but also a sense of relief. While leaving the synagogue the worshippers quickly blessed the moon, and in tired steps the Jews went home to the meal after the fast. In everyone's heart there is a feeling of leaving a heavy burden behind.

YAMIM NORAIM – THE HIGH HOLIDAYS ARE AT HAND

The month of Elul in our town – as in all Jewish towns that have woven together the special Jewish way of life – moved the hearts of every Jew, young and old, man and woman. The hot summer sun, shining with all its might, brought peace to the entire universe. The wheat ripened; the fruit trees were heavy with fruit that ripened from day to day, and enjoyed the blessing of the sun from above and suckled the essence of life from the ground with their roots. From a distance echoed the doleful song of the harvesters – a song that heralded the approaching of the gloomy autumn days and the end of summer's glory. In the warm and delicate

air, a thousand thin threads were woven, like the webs of a spider, which the rays of the sun made silver with their light. These threads were called colloquially "a woman's summer."

It seemed as if this summer peace would never be disrupted. The heart envisioned it as everlasting, imperishable. But early in the morning on the first days of Elul, the town – which had been sleeping and snuggling against the calming serenity of the late summer – was alarmed by the sound of a Shofar blasting lengthily, like a cry, awakening the sleepy hearts and calling them to repent, the hearts submerged in their slumber and enjoying the bright light of this blessed world. This blast moved the heart of every Jew. It announced



Kobylnik during the era of WWI

that it is time for introspection; that the day of judgement is nigh. It cried to us to detach from the vanities of this world and to call for repentance, to face accusing Satan and to equip oneself, facing the Creator who gives life to every living being, with a sack of good deeds and acts of kindness.

And while the entire world is sleeping, and the night's chill of an approaching autumn covers the universe, doors would open and figures would slip away through them, with the sleep still clinging to their eyelids, and all their limbs still weary and craving rest. The warmth of their beds hasn't gone from them. And these figures would gather within the walls of the synagogue. The candles and the gas lamps were lit, and their light broke through the dark of the departing night. From afar rose the voices of children, begging to their Father in heaven: "Oh oh, merciful God, saving His grace unto thousands." In this refrain the voices rose and

spread throughout the town which was still asleep. These voices would wake me from my sleep since I was too young to take part in saying the penitential prayers, and perhaps my will was not strong enough in those days to give up the hours of sleep just before sunrise, which are so sweet. Morning came. Each man would return home, carrying the bag of tefillin and tallit under his arm, and in his heart the hope that the prayer sent indeed would reach its destination and would perform the mission it had. And from holiday to weekday – the working day returns. The shops open; everyone goes about their business, to sell and buy, to haggle and bargain. But each one had in his heart the secret of sanctity as well as the hope that the sacred overcomes the secular, good overcomes evil, the advocate of truth overcomes accusing Satan.

ROSH HASHANAH (NEW YEAR)

With the days of Elul approaching their end, the commotion in town grew towards the High Holidays. Their awe was felt everywhere. The number of people waking early to pray grew every day and the voice of people in prayer grew as well. The blast of the Shofar, which pierced the stillness of the universe before sunrise, increased the quivering of the heart and demonstrated more fiercely the approach of the deciding hours.

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah the prayer in the synagogue was longer than any other day. Inside the houses, the housewives diligently made their last preparations toward the holiday. The scent of the special food for the High Holidays was carried through the air. The ladder-shaped Challah bread was baked, for the prayers and wishes to ascend to heaven. Care was given to the bowls of honey, brought to the table to taste from, so that the year to come would be as sweet. A slice of watermelon was prepared, called “Kavineh,” which had seeds peeking out like black eyes. Everything was scrubbed and polished in silence and moderation, befitting the upcoming serious moments. And when evening came, everyone hurried to the synagogue, illuminated with many candles, in memory of the people gone, whose memory would be mentioned the next day during the “Yizkor” prayer.

And the people pray, wrapped in their white Kittels (robes) and their books of prayer on the prayer stand before them, ready for the signal given by the prayer leader. The prayer pours out in the special melody of the High Holidays, all of which is sadness and purification in

the face of the Creator – a melody of crying and supplication, momentarily changing into embellishment expressing joy of hope and security, ending with the blessings of “may you be written for a good year” and “so may you” – leaving the synagogue after the Arvit, after the “first knock” that was sent to the Gate of Mercy, and hurriedly returning to their homes to the festive and solemn dinner. They taste the honey and the special fruit and with an anxious yet hopeful heart they retreat to a night’s rest before the next day, toward more penitence with the Creator.

And the next day, early in the morning, again, they flow to the synagogue. After the Shaharit comes the solemn moment when the prayer recited is “The King,” and the fear of the King is felt all around; the fear of the judgment day becomes more tangible. And that fear rises and reaches its peak when the prayer is *Unetanneh Tokef* – “Let us speak of the awesomeness” – who for life and who for death, who by famine and who by thirst, who by sword and who by fire. Broken cries pierce through the wailing of the prayer leader; bitter sobbing of women comes from the ladies’ section in hearing the horrible words. And with a pronounced emphasis, the entire congregation’s voices follow the cantor, the words planting security in everybody’s hearts: “and prayer and penance and charity pass over the harsh fate.” And when the hour of blasting the Shofar is near, again the solemnity and the heaviness of the occasion grow. When everybody wraps their tallit around their heads and stand on their feet – the sounds of the Shofar pierce the awe-struck silence encompassing everything. Appeased and calm, everybody continues praying until noon. Jews

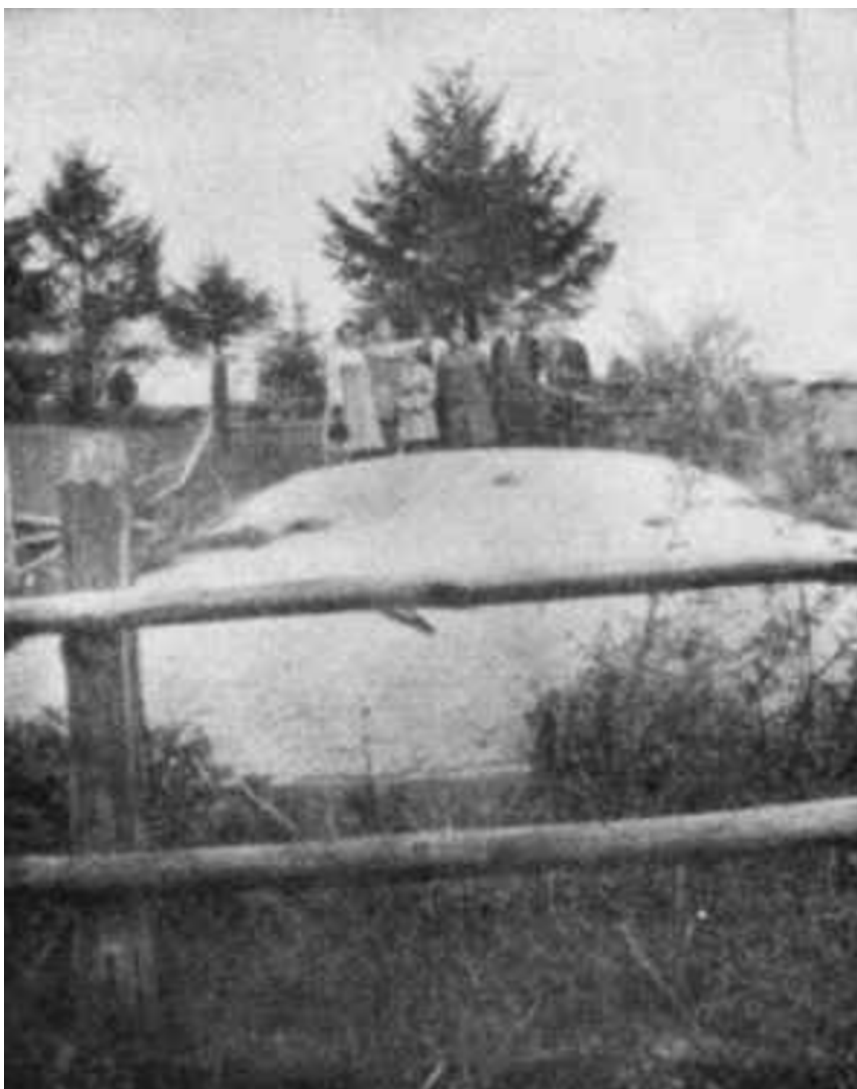
return to their homes with a recovered stride with a solemn countenance. With the blessing of “May you be inscribed for a good year,” they enter their homes for the lunch of the Rosh Hashanah.

After gathering strength, they would go before sundown to the river for the *Tashlikh*. While reciting the prayer “And you will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” they would shake the pockets of their garments to symbolize the shaking off of all sins and the tossing of all faults to the depths of the river, so that the current would carry them to unknown distances.

And again the *Arvit* arrives, and the next day would be the second day of the Rosh Hashanah, like the first day. The days of the Rosh Hashanah have ended, the two first days of the High Holidays, and the Ten Days of Repentance begin, leading up to the most awesome day of all – Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

THE TEN DAYS OF REPENTANCE AND YOM KIPPUR

And between the Rosh Hashanah and Yom



A visit in Kobylnik. Next to the mass grave, 1966

Kippur, between the new moon and the tenth day of the month, grows the air of repentance, prayer and charity. The droning of prayer becomes the basic tone of these days. Its voice is carried in the mornings through all the streets and yards near the synagogue, and these sounds bring with them a sort of sadness to the heart, along with the sadness of the days of autumn, boldly approaching.

And the days grow short. The doleful song of the harvesters at dusk joins the minor harmony, mantling the sadness. Women wearing headscarves and with eyes full of tears hurry beyond the bridge and disappear on the narrow path going between the yards of the gentiles – the Goyim – leading to the cemetery. There they stretch over the graves of their dear ones and call unto them with bitter sobbing or with quiet and broken weeping, to stand at their side at the deciding moments of the verdict. Their lips silently move, pouring out the wishes of their hearts, to come up before their Creator.

The hand opens generously, giving charity to every pauper and person in need. And on the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the Shabbat of Repentance, the Jews swarm to the synagogue after a short afternoon nap, to hear the sermon of the rabbi about the matter of the day, that is repentance and the fear of the days. And the rabbi would weave into his words sayings of the old sages and parables, along with legends from days of old and stories from more recent times – and all of them are directed at evoking thoughts of repentance and regret, since the modern time has led us astray.

And on the night before Yom Kippur comes the shrieking of roosters from every Jewish home, from the attics or from the alcoves of stoves, roosters which have been disturbed, taken out of their places and tied up for *Kapparot* – atonement. With a heart full of faith, Jews – old and young, men and women – swing the rooster above their heads and their lips move silently with deep intent: “Men dwelling in darkness and the shadow of death... this is my atonement, this will go to death and I will go to a long and good life, Amen.” And from the

yard of the Shochet –the butcher – echo the last chords of these poor birds, who are slaughtered for the atonement of the humans, and for the feast ending the tiresome exhausting fast.

At the eve of Yom Kippur, the town resembled a camp that was called for duty. Every deed and every step, the keeping of each and every detail in custom and tradition kept for generations, were directed into a single purpose – to take away the harsh fate, to add floor above floor to the building called Teshuva – repentance, a building which was started on the first day of the month of Elul. And again, the ladder shaped Challah bread was baked. And it was a custom to eat exceedingly before the fast, as it was a Mitzva to hold the fast. And special Jewish cuisines were brought to the table: bowls of soup with meat-filled dumplings and the ladder-shaped Challah. And again, a meal – and they would hurry to the public bath house to cleanse the body well before the day of judgement.

And from house to house the Jews would pass to ask for forgiveness for offences that had hurt somebody’s dignity during the year. Bitter rivals who would not exchange a word during the year would make peace on that day. With a serious countenance and an air of importance, the heads of the families would sit themselves at the table for the final meal before the fast, an early meal.

And when they finished eating the delicacies that were carefully prepared, all the members of the family would hurry to the synagogue for the Minha and the *Kol Nidre* prayer. The entire town, even though it was not wholly Jewish, wore the air of Yom Kippur. Even the Goyim felt that during this day, something serious

was taking place in the homes of the Jews and, especially, in the synagogue.

And the memorial candles would be brought to the synagogue to be lit. Jews would take off their shoes and would wrap themselves with their Kittles. At the entrance to the synagogue they would put up tables with bowls for charity with signs next to them. In recent years, the bowl of the Jewish National fund appeared next to the other bowls. Everybody saw a holy and exalted duty to donate to the different bowls of charity, each one according to his ability and perhaps above that. The floor of the synagogue was covered in dry hay, letting off its special scent, the scent of a field.

The beadle of the synagogue, the Shamash Rabbi Shaya-Yosef would walk around in a manner of dignity, wrapped in his white Kittle and carry a strap, which he used to administer the customary whips to whomever desired them. Jews would stretch themselves on the floor in front of him, kneeling, and he would count to forty minus one.

The dark would descend over the town. The candles and lamps would shine around. The congregation would hurry to its place. The set of prayers would begin, starting with a whispered *Be'Tfillah Zaka* – “in a pure prayer.”

The hour of *Kol Nidre* is approaching. At the entrance to the synagogue, by the door and in the entrance hall, some of the Christians gather up as well, to witness the “awes of this night.” Among the people gathering are the dignitaries of the town: the head of police, the head of council, important officials etc. and I remember the hearts of the children would be proud –

here, even the Goyim would honor us with visiting the synagogue on this day.

The Shamash would beat on the table of the platform. The *Kol Nidre* prayer is recited with its traditional melody in the breathless silence. The congregation joins the cantor. The Torah scrolls are taken out of the Torah Ark in awe and reverence. The words “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart” are heard and from this point the entire congregation would gradually take a more active part in the prayer. The voice of the cantor and of the entire congregation blend with each other. The doleful and pleasant melodies are sung by everyone. The *Yaalu Tachanuneinu* prayer, “May our supplications ascend at eventide; our pleas come in the morning,” purifies the heart and soothes; and the prayer approaches its end.

Some of the people praying stay in the synagogue to stand in their place – the place of connection with their Creator – during the entire night, and most of the congregation leaves. Sometimes a light rain, heralding the coming autumn, would start trickling. It seemed as though nature added its bleakness to the bleakness of the moment, accentuating the seriousness of those returning home from the prayer of Yom Kippur. And with total silence they would depart from each other with the blessing of *Le'Shana Tova Techatemu*, “For a good year you shall be confirmed,” and disappear into the darkly illuminated houses. Bit by bit they would go to the night's rest, to gather strength for the next day, the day of fasting and torment, the long day of prayer from morning till night.

And early in the morning the synagogue would again be filled with people praying. After the ordinary Shaharit, the people in front of the ark would be replaced. The intended cantor would take his place by the ark. “The King” is trilled by the cantor, and the congregation joins him with the traditional melody of the High Holidays. Bit by bit the words of the people pour out, the prayers are loudly recited – sitting down and standing up – and again the congregation is called up during the Musaf prayer when the cantor opens with *Unetanneh Tokef*. And with describing the tribulations expecting man, the crying is fiercer than that of Rosh Hashanah, all according to the will of the Almighty. Low and heartbreaking wails come from the ladies’ section. Children with their curious eyes search for their mothers to see

them by the narrow openings in the attic, where they pour their words to the Creator. Their wails grow with the mention of the dead. Some of the people hurry home after an additional Musaf prayer to rest a bit and gather strength.

After the Minha, the marks of the fast are seen everywhere; signs of fatigue and paleness are on the faces, but it seems that everybody is feeling relieved. A pleasant weariness is prevalent as well as the satisfaction of those who have done their work honestly. And maybe the emotion, like a child’s, that has been reconciled with his father filled the hearts of the congregation at that time. And in those moments of quiet everyone sits, rests and anticipates the song that has become a part of the tradition of Yom Kippur, like an intermezzo between the Minha



Cholutzim (Zionist Pioneers) – wood choppers

and the concluding prayer, the *Ne'ila*. In a deep and pleasant voice, Rabbi Eliezer, with the gray-streaked black beard, starts singing with a kind smile spreading over his face, and the congregation follows suit, from one melody to the other – the songs would flow heartily and slowly and even *Ha'Tikva* was in repertoire of recent years, if my memory does not mislead me.

The evening has settled. It's time for the *Ne'ila*. Again, a time of solemnity, but softer than in the commencing of the fast. With renewed energy and with a new hope, takes place the last charge on the Gate of Mercy: "Open a gate for us at the time of the locking of the gate," flows the pleasant voice of the cantor and the congregation. A last request is sent to heaven,

before the verdict is sealed. Everybody believes and hopes that the harsh fate is removed, that the prayer and everything done will bear the desired fruit.

And the blast of the Shofar is encouraging and brings hope: a hasty Arvit with "Next year in Jerusalem," the blessing of *Gmar Khtima Tova*, "May you be written and confirmed." While leaving the synagogue they quickly bless the moon, and in tired steps the Jews go home to the meal after the fast. In everyone's heart there is a feeling of leaving a heavy burden behind.

Project Coordinator: Anita Frishman Gabbay

To learn more about **Narach**, please visit:

<https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Kobylnik/Kob023.html#Page30>



HOLIDAYS AND CEREMONIES: ROSH HASHANAH

Rietavas, Lithuania

Rietavas is a small town situated on the coastal plain of north-western Lithuania. Its Jewish population in 1914 was around 2,000 but the numbers declined after Lithuania became an independent state. By the time of the Holocaust, the Jewish population had dropped to 800. Most of the Jewish community was exterminated in 1941.

The community prided itself as a center of learning and scholarship. They took their Torah studies seriously and many notable scholars were either born in Rietavas or lived there. “Holidays and Ceremonies,” from the Yizkor book of Rietavas, recalls Rosh Hashanah as a time of introspection for its people.

When the year neared its end, all thought about their own end. With the blowing of the shofar, every Jewish heart would awaken to self-examination. Challahs for the holiday were baked in the shape of ladders to symbolize that every person would either be sentenced to poverty or rewarded with riches. The common form of prayer was not enough to express the spirit of the people and so they added different lyrics. The lyrics were songs of praise to G-d and the ‘Slichah’ was the pouring out of one’s soul in confession and lamentation accompanied with supplication and hope.

As Yom Kippur approached, a widespread custom was ‘kapparot’: a chicken would be selected (a rooster for a man and a hen for a woman and one of each for a pregnant woman) and while verses from the Book of Psalms and Job were recited its head would be wrenched off. With this the following saying would be recited: ‘This is my replacement ...’

The most pleasant of customs was the reconciliation between friends and neighbors on the eve of the Day of Atonement. This was done because there

was no atonement for sins affecting the relationships between people. The entire day of Yom Kippur was spent in the synagogue. When the long day was done, the fast was forgotten, the fatigue overcome, and with the final chant of the cantor, 'Open for us the gates of mercy', the heart would melt and the devoutness would reach its pinnacle.

The final sound of the shofar and the words, 'Next year in Jerusalem' would end the service.

ROSH HASHANA

The modest quivering voice of the shofar could be heard. These were days of introspection. The Jews awoke early and hurried to the synagogue. The town stood to attention. When the year neared its end, all thought about their own end. With the blowing of the shofar, every Jewish heart would awaken to self-examination.

A week before Rosh Hashanah, the shammash would call everybody to 'Slichot' (prayers of forgiveness). The mood in Riteve was one filled with grace and charity.

The challahs for Rosh Hashana were baked in the shape of ladders to symbolize that every person would either be sentenced to poverty or rewarded with riches, to go up or to go down. Some baked their challahs in the shape of birds, symbolizing G-d's mercy – 'As birds hovering so will the Lord of Hosts protect Jerusalem' (Isaiah 31:5). Some also baked their challahs in the shape of crowns symbolizing the crown of

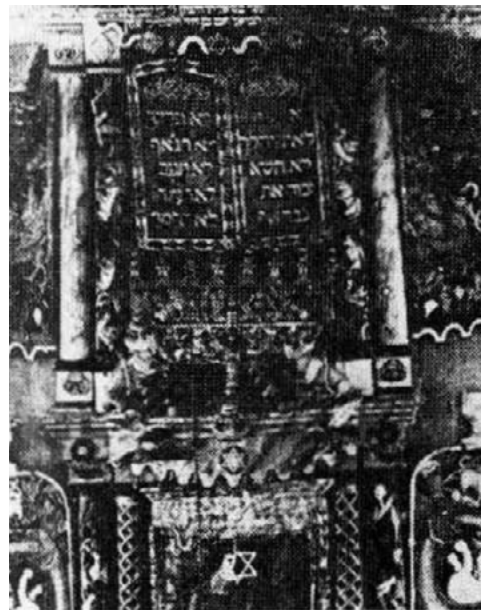
honor. A piece of challah from the 'Hamotzi' blessing (he who provides us with bread) or a sweet apple would be dipped in honey: 'It should be Your will that a new and sweet year will come to us.' People would go to 'Tashlich' to throw away their sins as if from their pockets to the bottom of the river.

The common form of prayer was not enough to express the spirit of the people and so they added different lyrics. The lyrics were songs of praise to G-d and the 'Slichah' was the pouring out of one's soul in confession and lamentation accompanied with supplication and hope.

Nothing could compare to the depth of thought and the elevation of the spirit during Rosh Hashanah in Riteve.

YOM KIPPUR – THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

If the Days of Awe resembled a tall ladder with many rungs for reconsideration, repentance,



The synagogue and the shul (Beit Midrash) at Riteve and the Holy Ark with its artistic decorations.

introspection and censure of deeds between man and his G-d and between man and man, then the Day of Atonement resembled the highest rung in that ladder, the epitome of sanctity and purity. Before the Day of Atonement were the Ten Penitentiary Days when Slichot were recited.

A widespread custom at the time was 'kapparat': a chicken would be selected (a rooster for a man and a hen for a woman and one of each for a pregnant woman) and while verses from the Book of Psalms and Job were recited its head would be wrenched off. With this the following saying would be recited: "This is my replacement ..."

The Torah commands that we eat heartily during the evening meal of the Day of

Atonement. Overeating would balance the fast of the following day. The food consisted of kreplach, fish and honey cake. The custom of lashing was also followed by which every Jew would prostrate himself on the floor of the synagogue as the shammas lashed him 40 times minus one. Another custom was the 'bowl' or 'plate' in which contributions were collected to support the synagogue. In later years, this system was used by the Zionists for their fundraising.

The most pleasant of customs was the reconciliation between friends and neighbors on the eve of the Day of Atonement. This was done because there was no atonement for sins affecting the relationships between people. Before leaving home for the synagogue, mothers would prolong their blessing over the candles



The monument to the martyrs of Riteve that was unveiled on Mount Zion in 1965. The design in the center is a reproduction from the photograph of the old synagogue in Riteve.

with bitter crying. This was followed with the blessing of the children. It was also customary to pay visits to homes of relatives and neighbors and greet them with: 'May you be inscribed and sealed with happiness.'

Most memorable was the 'Kol Nidre' prayer. The sad melody would envelope the congregation casting its spell over every Jew. Its force and beauty were heart-rending. Twenty-five hours would follow – hours filled with the splendor of holiness, and the excitement of sharing the

ancient traditions.

The entire day would be spent in the synagogue. It was not surprising that this day is deeply etched in one's memory. Suffocating heat, light, memorial candles on every table and in every window, fainting in the women's gallery – all memories. Finally, with the concluding prayer of 'Neilah' the people would give a last vent to their emotions. The fast was forgotten, the

fatigue overcame and with the final chant of the cantor, 'Open for us the gates of mercy', the heart would melt and the devoutness would reach us pinnacle. The final sound of the shofar and the words, 'Next year in Jerusalem' would end the service.

Our sincere appreciation to Prof. Milton Shain and Romi Kaplan of the Kaplan-Kushlick Foundation for permission to place this material on JewishGen.

To learn more about **Rietavas**, please visit:

<https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Rietavas/rie128.html>



Before Yad Vashem was established, a commemorative site to honor victims of the Holocaust was established on Mount Zion, Jerusalem, the many memorial tablets being placed under the colonnade seen above. Israelis and others with Riteve origins or connections are seen in front of this in 1965 after the unveiling of the tablet to the martyrs of Riteve. The main focus of the site, however, is in the basement of the nearby old building on Mount Zion, referred to in the original book as the Holocaust basement on Mount Zion, Jerusalem.



THE OLD SHUL: A CENTER FOR JEWISH LIFE ON ROSH HASHANAH AND YOM KIPPUR

Rokytno (Rokitno-Volin), Ukraine

Jews settled in Rokitno in the second half of the 19th Century. In 1897, 105 people lived there but that grew to 663 in 1921 and stood at 800 just before the Holocaust. One chapter from its Yizkor book, describes the town's Jews as devout and loyal. They educated their children in the Jewish spirit and celebrated all the holidays. "The Old Shul," another chapter from the book, describes the Magen Avraham synagogue as the center of life for the Jews of Rokitno. The synagogue was busy and noisy every day of the year. At daybreak, the doors were opened to the worshippers in the first minyan and subsequent minyans. In the afternoons, they would gather for Mincha and Maariv. On Rosh Hashanah the atmosphere of the approaching day of judgment enveloped everyone. Even Jews who all year did not come to pray, suddenly awoke to tradition and came to the synagogue. During the ten days of repentance, days of prayer and apology, the tension increased as Yom Kippur came closer. On Yom Kippur, the synagogue felt different. An air of mystery hovered everywhere. All the worshippers were filled with awe and fear. The countless memorial candles added to the aura of trepidation. Outside the synagogue, the town was empty. There was no sign of life on the streets, as if the world was frozen.



Youth Group at the rear of the synagogue. In the background one can see the Hekdesh building (preparation of bodies for burial)

The Magen Avraham synagogue was the center of life for the Jews of Rokitno. The synagogue was busy and noisy every day of the year.

At daybreak, the doors were opened to the worshippers in the first minyan and subsequent minyans. In the afternoons, they would gather for mincha and maariv. Those who wished to learn sat late at night and studied Mishnah and Gemara with annotations.

The synagogue was also used for discussions and decisions in matters of kashrut and non-kashrut, debates about inheritance and finances, and relations between people. All aspects of the life of the Jews in Rokitno were decided inside the walls of this old and sacred synagogue. The Rabbi officiated at marriages and bar mitzvahs

in the synagogue. The members were always served liquor and the famous honey cake prepared by the celebrating family.

The synagogue had a festive aura on Shabbat and holidays, depending on the particular holiday. In the month of Elul, the spiritual preparation for the High Holy Days began. This month announced the beginning of autumn and was the month of shofar blowing. At the end of prayers, the shofar was blown every day. These shofar blowings attracted us, the children. We found many ways of practicing the blowing of the shofar. At night, in the cool nights of Elul, before daybreak, Yankel the sexton passed from house to house, knocked on the windows and called in a hoarse voice: "Jews, get up for



Funeral of the Torah Scroll Remnants

Before leaving the town in 1945, survivors held a burial for the remnants of the Torah scrolls, which had been strewn everywhere. “They were torn and dirty. We brought them to the cemetery and we buried them among the graves. It was our last visit to the cemetery.”

selichot!” Mother and father arose from bed, careful not to wake up the children, dressed quietly and rushed to the synagogue for selichot prayers. This was repeated every Elul.

On Rosh Hashanah the atmosphere of the approaching day of judgment enveloped everyone. Even Jews who all year did not come to pray, suddenly awoke to tradition and came to the synagogue. During the ten days of repentance, days of prayer and apology, the tension increased as Yom Kippur came closer.

Early in the morning on the eve of Yom Kippur, after a quick shaharit prayer, came the custom of releasing promises between man and G-d and the forgiving of wrongs between people. Jews made peace on this day, to be clean and worthy of a positive judgment.

An unforgettable event etched in my memory was the ceremony of the punishment by lashing – forty less one. This was an ancient custom for those who repent. I watched with great interest as my father took off his shoes, lay

down on a straw mattress and received his lashes willingly and with love.

On the eve of Yom Kippur, representatives of different organization and institutions, JNF and Keren Hayesod, Burial Society, Bikur Holim, etc. appeared in the synagogue. They sat at tables, each one with his cause, to encourage the large audience to donate. At that time people were most generous.

It was time to eat the meal before the fast. Everyone hurried home. A few people remained to prepare the sand boxes for the memorial candles. These were large wax candles that every family prepared and lit in memory of their dear departed ones. At nightfall, the houses emptied and all the Jews streamed to the synagogue for Kol Nidrei.

The synagogue even looked different. An air of mystery hovered everywhere. All the worshippers were filled with awe and fear. The countless memorial candles added to the aura of trepidation.

The spiritual leader of Rokitno, Rabbi Aharon Shames, an aristocratic-looking man, touched

our hearts with his Kol Nidrei. His praying was pure and entered our hearts. The synagogue was packed and filled with devotion, sanctity and an outpouring of souls. Everyone identified with the merciful G-d. The town was very quiet, as if the world was frozen.

On Yom Kippur, the town was empty. There was no sign of life on the streets. Everyone was in the synagogue. It was a long and great day of fasting and prayer. It began with the praying of shaharit by R. Betzalel Kokel and continued with the musaf of Rabbi Aharon. He was outstanding in his praying and he touched the hearts of the worshippers. The crowd reached a pinnacle of emotion during “Unetane Tokef” composed with blood and suffering by the saintly and tortured R. Amnon of Magentza. Mincha was led by R. Moshe Lifshitz. Many of the worshippers suffered a weakening of the senses. Neila was led by the Rabbi. The prayers ended with the blowing of the shofar. All wished each other a Gmar Hatima Tova (a good final judgment), went home and blessed the new moon.

Project Coordinator: Lora Metelits

To learn more about **Rokytne**, please visit:

<https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/rokitnoye/rok179.html>

NESHAMA TRIP TO POLAND:
This program was incredibly successful - please
view the photos on our blog! Information about
next year's program will be announced in Fall 2023.



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JEWISH HERITAGE
A LIVING MEMORIAL
TO THE HOLOCAUST

JewishGen Neshama Travel & Preservation Program

Join us for an unforgettable trip to Poland whereby you can learn about Polish Jewish life, clean-up a cemetery that has been largely neglected over the past 80 years, and help preserve - with your own hands - our collective Jewish familyhistory and heritage for future generations.

JULY 11 - JULY 20, 2023

Led by highly experienced staff, this 10 day travel and study trip will allow participants to explore Jewish heritage sites in Poland, and help clear-up a long neglected cemetery. Along the way, we will learn from rabbis, scholars, dignitaries, and community leaders, who will offer first-hand insights regarding the imperative (and challenges) of cleaning-up cemeteries in accordance with Jewish law. And we will discuss how local Polish communities view Jewish cemeteries in their towns, the need to preserve Jewish memory, and more.

◆ PROGRAM COST ◆

\$3,099 USD of which \$1,375 USD is eligible for tax-deductions for those eligible for charitable contributions. Reserve your space with a \$1,000 deposit. A Note: Cost is per-person, double occupancy with an option for a single supplement. Airfare is not included.

◆ WHO SHOULD APPLY ◆

Adults over the age of 18 are welcomed. Children 15 and up must be accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.



WE WILL VISIT A NUMBER OF PLACES/SITES, INCLUDING:

Warsaw, Łódź, Kraków (where we will spend Shabbat), Auschwitz-Birkenau, Oświęcim, Tarnów, Markuszów and Lublin.

LEARN MORE, AND APPLY AT: WWW.JEWISHGEN.ORG/NESHAMA

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

Friends of
Jewish Heritage in Poland

THE MATZEVAH
FOUNDATION
REMEMBERING. RESTORING. RECONCILING

FUTURE SCHOLARS:
This program was incredibly successful – please
view the photos on our blog! Information about
next year's program will be announced in Fall 2023.

JewishGen Future Scholars Fellowship Program

Travel to Poland, and help preserve our Jewish family
history and heritage for future generations

JUNE 20 - JUNE 29, 2023

PROGRAM COST

Fully subsidized (including r/t air from NYC)
except for a \$400 registration fee

WHO CAN APPLY?

Rising second-fourth year undergraduate
students in accredited colleges or universities

This 10-day immersive program focuses on the role of Jewish cemeteries today in preserving the memory and legacy of former Jewish communities. Participants will help clean-up a cemetery, learn about symbols on tombstones, the general state of Jewish cemeteries in Poland after the Holocaust, efforts to preserve them from both a communal, political, and Halachic perspective, and consider the lessons which can be gleaned to inform our own life choices today.



WE WILL VISIT A NUMBER OF PLACES/SITES, INCLUDING:

Warsaw, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Lublin and Krakow

LEARN MORE, AND APPLY AT: WWW.JEWISHGEN.ORG/FELLOWSHIP

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

About the JewishGen Yizkor Book Translation Project



Yizkor Books (Memorial Books) were traditionally written to memorialize the names of departed family and martyrs during holiday services in the synagogue (a practice that still exists in many synagogues today).

Over the centuries, as a result of countless persecutions and horrific atrocities committed against the

Jews, Yizkor Books (*Sifre Zikaron* in

Hebrew) were expanded to include more historical information, such as biographical sketches of famous personalities and descriptions of daily town life.

Following the Holocaust, the idea of remembrance and learning took on an urgent and crucial importance. Survivors of the Holocaust sought out other surviving residents of their former towns to memorialize and document the names and way of life of those who were ruthlessly murdered by the Nazis.

These remembrances were documented in Yizkor Books, hundreds of which were published in the first decades after the Holocaust. Most of these books were published privately, or through *landsmanshaftn* (social organizations comprised of members originating from the same European town or region) that still existed, and were often distributed free of charge.

Sadly, the languages used to document these crucial histories and links to our past, Yiddish and Hebrew, are no longer commonly understood by a significant percentage of Jews today. It is our hope that the translation of these books into English (and other languages) will assist the countless Jewish family researchers who are so desperately seeking to forge a connection with their heritage.

Thank you to Lance Ackerfeld for overseeing the Yizkor Book Translation project, and Joel Alpert for overseeing the JewishGen Press.



Lance Ackerfeld was born in Australia and settled on Kibbutz Yiftah, Israel in 1977 where he has lived with his family since then. By day, he is presently a senior database and BI expert in the global “Netafim” company and after work, devotes time to the Yizkor Book Project in which he has been involved in various capacities since 1999 and has led the project for more than 10 years.



Joel Alpert is a retired electrical engineer, who worked for MIT, Raytheon, the Israeli Armaments Authority and Bell Laboratories. He was born and educated in Wisconsin, lived in Israel, Boston and Tucson. He created the Yizkor-Books-In-Print project in 2012 and is now the coordinator of the project.

At the end of each week, we have been distributing “A Window into our Treasured Past” emails, which feature timely excerpts from Yizkor books in JewishGen’s archive. In choosing the weekly excerpts, JewishGen volunteer Bruce Drake tries to balance selections that recall the suffering of the Holocaust with chapters that paint pictures of what daily life was like in the communities of Europe, such as market days, how Jews made their living, the joys and sadnesses of every day life and portraits of memorable characters. Bruce has also overseen the completed translation of the Kover Yizkorbook and created Kehilalinks sites for Kovel and Wojnilow, now known as Voynilov in Ukraine. He spent most of his career in journalism at the New York Daily News, NPR and Congressional Quarterly, and until recently, was a senior editor at the Pew Research Center.

To learn more, and to access
the translations at no cost, please visit:
www.JewishGen.org/yizkor/translations



To purchase hard copies of Yizkor Books that
JewishGen has translated, please visit:
www.JewishGen.org/press



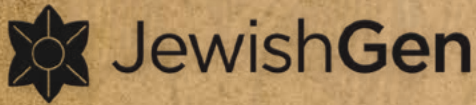
The KehilaLinks project is managed by Susana Leistner Bloch, and until her recent and untimely passing in February, Barbara Ellman, z”l. Barbara began volunteering for JewishGen nearly two decades ago, and oversaw the creation of dozens of KehilaLinks pages which have helped so many thousands of people research their roots. Her work was very much “behind the scenes,” engaging with dozens of project coordinators and technical volunteers to provide support for the development and maintenance of KehilaLinks websites. However, she also traveled to conferences whereby she would make presentations, recruit potential volunteers, and speak passionately about how KehilaLinks served as a critical component of JewishGen’s suite of resources. Barbara will be deeply missed by everyone who knew her, and we continue this project in her memory. For more information, and to get involved, please visit: www.KehilaLinks.JewishGen.org.

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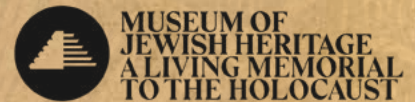
On *Generations*, we will unravel centuries-old family histories, leveraging the digital resources of JewishGen, the historical resources of the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, and the production resources of JLTV. We will not only uncover the many branches of our celebrities' family trees, but we will delve deeply into the places that their ancestors lived, revealing artifacts and objects, documents and photographs that will bring their *shtetls* to life.



JewishGen, a division of the Museum of Jewish Heritage, serves as the largest digital repository of Jewish family history materials in the world, with over 30+ million records, including Yizkor Books (offering expanded historical information about daily life and notable residents from 1,200+ towns), a sizable database of detailed Holocaust records, and a searchable database of 4+ million Jewish burials in 140+ countries.



Jewish Life Television/JLTV is North America's premier 24-7 Jewish-themed, English language television network, providing high-quality, Jewish-inspired programming for audiences of all faiths who share an interest in the Jewish experience in North America, in Israel and around the entire World. More cultural than religious, JLTV is available in over 50 million homes through the largest video providers on the continent, including Bell, Charter, Comcast, Cox, DirecTV and more.



Located in New York City, the Museum maintains a collection of 40,000 artifacts, photographs, films and testimonies. The Museum recently opened the Peter & Mary Kalikow Jewish Genealogy Research Center, and offers special exhibition galleries, memorial art installation, 375-seat theater, and resource center for educators. *Generations* will rely heavily on the Museum's historical assets and the Kalikow Center during series' production.



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