

# JewishGen HIGH HOLIDAY COMPANION



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*.

5783 | תשפ"ג



MUSEUM OF  
JEWISH HERITAGE  
A LIVING MEMORIAL  
TO THE HOLOCAUST



JewishGen  
מרכז עולמי לגנאלוגיה יהודית  
The Global Home for Jewish Genealogy

## About JewishGen

JewishGen, an affiliate of New York's Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, 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 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](http://www.JewishGen.org).



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# CONTENTS

- 5     **Introduction**
- 6     **The Fearsome Month of Elul**  
Sierpc, Poland
- 11    **The First Rosh Hashanah of the Survivors of the Holocaust**  
Navahrudak (Novogrudok), Belarus
- 15    ***Kol Nidre***  
Pidhaytsi (Podhajce), Ukraine
- 22    **About the JewishGen Yizkor Book Translation Project**





# INTRODUCTION

## HIGH HOLIDAY COMPANION 2022/5783

Dear Friends,

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.

Notably, our Museum premiered its critically-important and timely major exhibition – *The Holocaust: What Hate Can Do* – which describes Jewish life before, during and after the Holocaust. It challenges visitors to address how the Shoah developed, and what steps we must take to ensure it never happens again.

At the same time, JewishGen added more than one million records to its collection, ran successful educational classes and fellowship programs, assisted countless researchers through discussion groups, social media and online programs, and provided information and resources to contextualize the lives of our ancestors.

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 of 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 the JewishGen website. 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.

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

Avraham Groll  
*Executive Director*  
*JewishGen*



# THE FEARSOME MONTH OF ELUL

## Sierpc, Poland

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There once was a Jewish community in the ancient Polish town of Sierpc. Like hundreds of other Jewish communities in Poland, Jewish Sierpc is no more. On the eighth day of the Second World War, September 8, 1939, the Germans occupied Sierpc, burnt the synagogue, and remained until they were expelled by the Red Army in January, 1945.

Before the start of the Second World War and the Holocaust, Sierpc had a population of 10,051, more than 30% of which was Jewish. Sierpc was nestled in the valley and surrounded by mountains. Three rivers flowed within the boundaries of Sierpc; the river that was the namesake of the district, the Sierpianitza River, bisected the two parts of the town. The town was linked by four bridges; the bridge with the greatest traffic was on the Jewish Street. The surrounding countryside was known for its fertile fields and many orchards, as well as for its weaver establishments, breweries, tanneries, and vinegar factories.

In the Sierpc Memorial Book, the Jewish community is vividly brought to life by the first-hand social, historical and political accounts by its former residents and by the numerous photographs. In this excerpt, the author describes the anticipation for Rosh Hashanah, and experiencing the holiday itself.

Sierpc is located 71 mi NW of Warszawa. Alternate names for the town are: Sierpc [Polish], Sheps [Yiddish], Sherpts [Yiddish], Serptz [Russian], Scherps, Serepets, Serpec, Shepsk, Sherptz.

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**WHEN** the month of Elul arrived, the Sierpcers felt an extraordinary sense of awe. People felt a special sense of responsibility – the Day of Judgment was rapidly approaching, when one would make an accounting with G-d. Therefore, they were very serious and G-d fearing. They guarded themselves against carelessness, exaggeration, and excesses. They became more friendly one to the other, gave more charity, and the shopkeepers were extremely careful about exacting measures.

During that month, people also worshiped with greater devotion. They did not recite the prayers in haste, and added chapters of Psalms and other prayers to the daily services. They also recited Psalms publicly.

A week before Rosh Hashanah, they got up very early to recite Selichot [penitential prayers] prior to services. The Hassidim would recite the first Selichot at midnight after the Melave Malka. The Selichot of the eve of Rosh Hashanah, known as “Zechor Brit,” were also recited at midnight. In the half dark Jewish street, shadows appeared running to the beis midrash for Selichot. Soon, the weeping voice of the prayer leader could be heard on the silent streets, “The soul is Yours and the body is Yours, have mercy on your handiwork...”



Survivors standing in front of tombstones which had been uprooted by Germans during the Holocaust in order to pave streets. After the war, they were removed and placed in the cemetery.

## ROSH HASHANAH

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, everyone was occupied with the special preparations for the holiday. Aside from fish and meat, people



The main synagogue, which was destroyed by the Germans.

purchased honey, grapes, and pomegranates for Rosh Hashanah, as a portent for a sweet year. They would also purchase a new fruit for the *Shehechayanu* benediction. People also obtained new clothes.

As in all towns, people in Sierpc went to the cemeteries in order to visit the graves of friends to recite the “*Kel Maleh Rachamim*” for their souls. They would also visit the graves of tzadikim who were buried in the cemetery. The women wept over the graves and begged the souls of their dead to intercede in Heaven for them and their loved ones.

Later, people went to the mikvah, and then came home and dressed up in their festive clothing.

The sun began to set, and the *shamash* of the synagogue went through the Jewish streets, calling out with all his might, “Go to the synagogue!” The businesses closed, and the women lit the candles in the houses. The men went quickly to the synagogue... and they recited Mincha with the congregation.



The cantor began to recite the Maariv service with the special, lovely Rosh Hashanah melodies that were suffused with a mood of supplication. The entire congregation joined in. Soon, the silent *Shmone Esrei* was recited, which was recited silently an entire year, but recited out loud by the congregation on Rosh Hashanah night due to



the special prayers such as: “Remember us for life, inscribe us in the book of life, inscribe for a good life...”

The cantor concluded with Kiddush and sang the section “And You gave us with love this Day of Remembrance, a day of shofar sounding.” They sang *Anim Zmirot* and *Adon Olam*. After the services, everyone shook hands with each other and wished one another: “May you be written and sealed immediately for a good life.” On the way home from the synagogue, people stopped in to visit parents and older brothers and sisters to wish them a good year.

When the man came home, he would kiss his wife and children and wish them a good year. At home, the table was already covered with a fine tablecloth, and the lovely silver candelabrum was glowing with candles. He made kiddush, and then *Shehecheyanu* over a new fruit – grapes or pomegranates. They washed their hands and recited *Hamotzie* over a high challah, and then a blessing for a good and sweet year over an apple spread with honey. Then they ate the rest of the festival meal: fish, meat, and *tzimmes*. After the meal, the Grace After Meals would be recited, and a request for a good year would also be made during the grace.

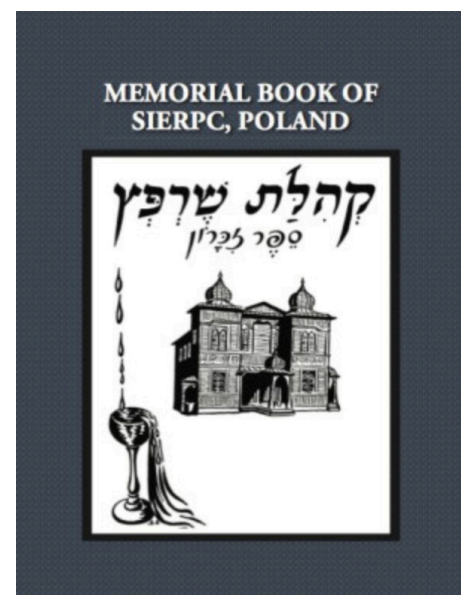
Thus was the custom of the Sierpc Jews year in and year out.

## SHACHARIT AND MUSAF ON ROSH HASHANAH

Still today, a religious tremble goes through my heart when I recall the Rosh Hashanah services in the Sierpc synagogue and houses of worship.

Everyone went to the synagogue early in the morning: men, women and children, for everyone had to hear the blowing of the shofar. Two prayer leaders conducted the services: one for *Shacharit* and the second one for *Musaf*.

The leader of the Shacharit services would go to the mikvah early in the morning, before ascending to the prayer leader’s podium dressed in a white kittel. He had a difficult task to sing the *yotzros*. Even though most of them were fine poems, designed as an alphabetic acrostic and ending with a rhyme, the *yotzros* had many words which were rarely used and were not understandable by many of the worshippers. Those non-understandable *yotzros*, however, fit very well to the fine tunes that the cantor sang, and everyone helped him. When the cantor began to recite the repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrei*, everyone sang along, especially the *kedusha*. When they came to the prayer “Our Father our King, open the gates of heaven to



Cover of the Yizkor Book

our prayers,” they became very serious, as they supplicated with their full heart.

Immediately after *Shacharit*, two Torah scrolls were taken out, and the important members were called up to the Torah reading: the rabbi, the cantor for *Shacharit*, the cantor for *Musaf*, and the Torah reader.

The shofar blower and the cantor for *Musaf* then went to the mikvah, returned all neatened up, and donned their white kittels. The *Shacharit* cantor and Torah reader took the Torah scrolls, and went around the podium together with the rabbi of the city and the shofar blower, all dressed in white kittels. After reciting the chapter *Lamnatzeach Livnei Korach Mizmor* seven times in a voice full of dread, and after reciting a silent prayer, came the shofar blasts, which the Sierpc worshippers received with a pious, holy shudder in their hearts. The congregation recited a prayer after every shofar blast, and called out to a specific angel that was appointed to each sound, asking that he bring the sounds to the Throne of Glory and beg for mercy for the people of Israel, and help drive away Satan.

The cantor for *Musaf*, dressed in his kittel, standing by the podium with the choir, began to sing *Yisgadal* with the tune of *Musaf*. Everyone sang along with the fine, melancholy melody that left a special imprint upon all.

After the silent *Shmoneh Esrei*, the cantor began to sing the repetition of the *Shemoneh Esrei* with the lovely, Rosh Hashanah melodies. The *Musaf* cantor reached the poetry and rhymes composed in alphabetic acrostic by the liturgical poets of Spain. At *Unetaneh Tokef Kedushat Hayom*, which the cantor recited with a heartrending voice, and at “Who shall live, and who shall die, who will become rich and who will become poor...” most of the worshippers wept. They reminded themselves of the dead, the ill, and the poor, and they comforted themselves with “Repentance, prayer, and charity remove the evil of the decree.”

After the services, when the congregation finished their Rosh Hashanah prayers, everyone went home calmly. Every Sierpc Jew was certain that he had supplicated for a good year and that he would be inscribed for the good.

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

<https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Sierpc>



# THE FIRST ROSH HASHANAH OF THE SURVIVORS OF THE HOLOCAUST

## Navahrudak (Novogrudok), Belarus

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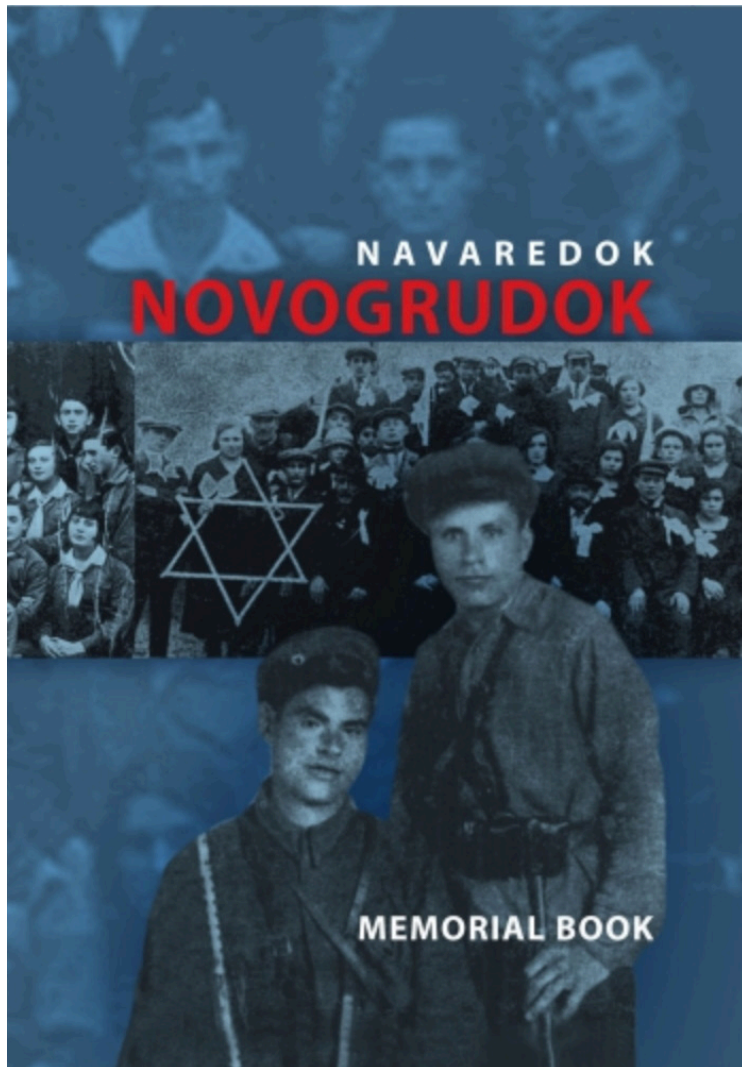
In 1897, there were nearly 9,000 Jews who lived in the town of Navahrudak (Novogrudok), Belarus, which would become well-known for its famous rabbis, the developments of a “*mussar*” (ethical) movement known as the “*Navahrudka Derech*” (the Navahrudka way), and for its association with the Bielski brothers who created a Jewish village in the forests of Belorussia of families of partisans.

The oldest synagogue in the town dated back to the 17th century, and was in continual operation until the Holocaust. In this excerpt, the author describes the feelings of despondency of survivors who return to their town after the war. “Slowly the sun set and the eve of Rosh Hashanah came. Our instinct called us to go to pray in a synagogue. Our hearts were full of pain and we needed to unload it. We hoped that praying would make things more bearable. But there was no synagogue, not a single house of prayer remained.”

Navahrudak, Belarus, is located 74 mi WSW of Minsk.

Alternate Names: Navahrudak [Bel], Novogrudok [Rus], Nowogródek [Pol], Navaredok [Yid], Naugardukas [Lith], Novaredok, Novogrudek, Novohorodok, Novradok, Nowogrudok, Nowogradek, Navharadak, Nawahradak

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We thought that after we had experienced such trouble and pain, our neighbor's conscience would be stirred and they would meet us in a friendly manner. But their faces were inscrutable and with a sly smile on their faces they asked 'are you still alive?' We also found out that our wish, which we had in the forests, that we would have a chance to witness punishment of those who participated in the demise of our families and plunder of our properties, turned out to be another unfulfilled wish. The authorities had warned us and hinted that we should keep quiet. All that was left to us was to remain silent, with our lips firmly pressed shut. Deep in our hearts, however, was a hatred which we throttled inside. We thought that one day we may come to a free country, among our fellow Jews, and then we would be able to tell it all for future generations to remember.

**IT** was 1945.

The war had finished. We had been freed. The long awaited salvation had come. We, the small numbers of survivors of the Holocaust – partisans and others who were in hiding, came back to our place of birth, Novogradok. We all rushed to our houses. Perhaps something, perhaps someone was saved. But we found only ruins and graves. Dejected, shamed we turned to our former neighbors, the Byelorussians. Have they seen anyone, any member of our family?

This is how we walked around the town and looked at the ruins. It was hard to believe that this was the place where an active Jewish community flourished. There was no sign left of the wonderful town. Oh, my beloved Novogradok, brilliant dreams of my youth. So many memories, so many dreams had disappeared together with our dear ones. Over the years in the forest, I was troubled by the thought: how will I be able to see and survive the sight of the ruin of my home? Now I was dragging my feet through the center of the town, the Marketplace,



from which streets and lanes are branching out through the devastation. Ruins were everywhere. Glassless windows of Jewish homes were covered with boards or filled with rags. From the distance one could see the hill where the cemetery was. It was bare. The Byelorussians had dragged away the grave stones [they used them as foundation stones for a forest of new garages for their newly acquired cars]. We came to the synagogue square, a place where tens of houses of prayer stood. The place was bombed and burned by the Germans. No synagogues were left. The square was overgrown by grass. In amongst the grass a few yellow flowers could be seen. There were also a few bushes on the edge of the square. In the middle of the paddock stood the south wall of the big synagogue. The bombs could not destroy it. There was no footpath leading to the wall. Not so long ago there were houses of prayer there and from them one could hear the voices of youngsters learning the Gomerah. Their voices were heard in the adjoining streets. We stood still as stones. [The current Belarus city management 'improved' things. The south wall of the big synagogue disappeared some time ago. The only structure in the square is now a large public lavatory block built in the center of the Synagogue square. When last seen, ill smelling effluent was oozing from the lavatories. It could not have been an oversight, it is an ultimate insult to the memory of the dead.] The sun was spreading warmth. I looked at the sky and could not see the sun, only a yellow object, which threw shadows on the ruined walls. If only the walls could speak they could tell the stories of all the horrors that were committed here. We walked aimlessly, moving as if in a nightmare.

Slowly the sun set and the eve of Rosh Hashanah

came. Our instinct called us to go to pray in a synagogue. Our hearts were full of pain and we needed to unload it. We hoped that praying would make things more bearable. But there was no synagogue, not a single house of prayer remained. We found a house, which used to be a tavern where the farmers would drink on market days. The house was in ruins with the windows broken and the walls wet from seepage. On the floor were broken bottles and pieces of glass. We found a broken table and covered it with a cloth. That had to serve as the bimah. There was no Torah to be found, just one prayer book. Of a community of 16,000 Jews, twenty eight of us were the only survivors, among them were a few people in Red army uniforms. [The Jewish population of Novogrudok was of the order of 6,000 when the Germans arrived. There were a few hundred survivors.] The people in the house felt alienated and constrained. A few candles were lit and prayers began. The candles were flickering and swaying up and down. Shadows moved on the walls. It seemed as if they were the shadows of the dead, which rose in the air and twisted as if they were complaining that their cries were not heard by all Israel. We were standing around the table. Chanan, the shoemaker, began praying. His voice kept failing and changing into crying. Suddenly tears began to roll. There was crying and whimpering. The crying reverberated in the empty tavern. At the table stood a Red army man, his head bowed. His eyes were in tears. He was a long way from home. He had received no letters from his family for the last two years. Who knew what fate befell them. A partisan was standing engrossed in his thoughts, his eyes were lowered, and he was looking into the prayer book. He looked at the letters in the book, but he

saw the faces of his children. But that could not be possible. He had seen his children tossed, like animals into a black truck. Next to him stood a Jew who was saved by chance. His face was as yellow as wax. He still did not know how he survived and he could not understand why he had survived. Who needs him, he thought. He looked into the prayer book, but he saw the pictures of the past. Whole families dressed for the festivity and in festive mood, fathers, grandfathers with their grandchildren were going to the synagogue to pray. And now—such a decline. The tears were blocking his throat. A young man stood alone on the side. His head was down and he was immersed in thoughts. He was in the forests for three years, he saw death before his eyes every day. He was waiting for the day of liberation. His heart was pounding. When he thought of the happy day of the end of the war he believed that life would improve. His bleeding wounds may heal. Peace had come. For some it brought happiness. But for him it was the beginning of new sufferings. Where should he go? Back to the gentile neighbors, who look at him as a ghost from another world? He could not imagine going back to the world of the gentiles who looked on with indifference at the bloody deeds of the German murderers and did not move a finger to stop the

horrors. They may have even been pleased that the Germans were conducting the annihilation. He had to live in this world and start to rebuild his existence from the beginning. He could not look at the murderers who were moving free and unimpaired with their heads high.

This is how the few Jews were standing immersed in their thoughts.

Chanan, the shoemaker, was reading from the prayer book and the others repeated each word after him. Outside was deep darkness. Only the candles flickered and danced, spreading a wild light as if they were saying: you must go on living, don't be disappointed. We went off slowly to our ruined lodgings.

We all thought:

How should we live among the graves?

Where could we put down our weary heads?

What will tomorrow bring?

Where could we go, what could we do?

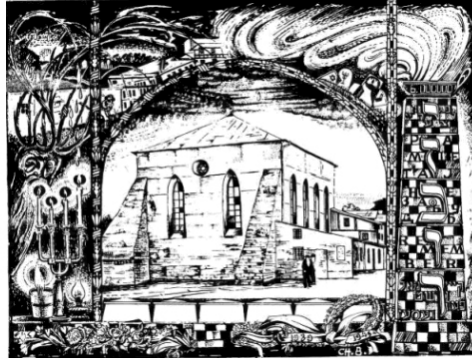
To learn more about **Navahrudak**, please visit:

<https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/novogradok/novogradok.html>



# KOL NIDRE

## Pidhaytsi (Podhajce), Ukraine



A drawing of the Great Synagogue of Podhajce with illustrations on the topic of the Holocaust.

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According to the census of 1764, there were 1,079 Jews in the community. During the 19th century, the Jewish population increased, and by 1910 numbered about 6,000. However, Podhajce's importance declined, and by 1939, 3,200 Jews remained out of a total population of 6,000. The Jews were the dynamic elements in the town's economic and cultural life.

When war broke out between Germany and the U.S.S.R. in 1941, Podhajce was occupied by the Germans, and the Jews immediately became victims of attacks by the Ukrainian population. They were forced to pay fines, their movements were restricted, and they were subjected to forced labor.

In 1942, on Yom Kippur, the Gestapo and the Ukrainian police sent about 1,000 Jewish men and women from Podhajce to the Belzec Death Camp. The remaining Jews were ordered into a small Ghetto, where many died of typhus. A month later, 1,500 more people were sent to Belzec. (At Belzec, more than 95% of the arrivals were killed either immediately or very soon after their arrival.) On June 6, 1943, the annihilation was completed when, with few exceptions, remaining members of the community were shot and dumped into mass graves on the outskirts of the town. (This was three days before Shavuot, on the third day of the month of Sivan.) Since there is no way of knowing when specific people perished, Yahrzeit for all of the Jews of Podhajce is observed on that day.

In this excerpt, the author describes the prayers, rituals and feelings associated with Yom Kippur.

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Members of the Zionist Youth Organization (1930)

**I**T was the late afternoon of the eve of Yom Kippur. The Jewish stores were closed and locked. The concluding meal had ended – this ritual meal consisted of stuffed fish, soup, crepes (*kreplach*) of the kappores chicken, and a main course. During the meal, the piece of chala was dipped in honey, and the *Shehecheyanu* blessing was recited over grapes from the Land of Israel. At the end of the meal, the streets of the city were filled with Jews, old men and youths, and even old and young women – each of them setting out to their own synagogue: some to the Meir Hirschorn Beis Midrash, some to the Great Synagogue, and some to the synagogue on the

Street of the Palace (Schloss-Gasse). During the latter era, my family and I worshiped there. We had seats that we had inherited (in Yiddish, “*A shtot*”). The seats were on a long bench, with a reading platform upon one which could place one’s machzor (festival prayer book) and other items. The synagogue was well lit. Aside from the regular lights, there were dozens of wax candles burning. These were the memorial candles for those who had departed from the land of the living.

A holy silence enveloped the synagogue. The cantor, wearing his white kittel and wrapped in his tallis, stood before the *teiva* (reader’s lectern)



surrounded by a choir. He read out the proclamation prior to *Kol Nidre*, that starts with “With the permission of G-d and the permission of the congregation,” in holiness and purity. The words emanating from the mouth of the cantor moved the hearts of the listeners. I glanced at the worshippers, looking for the “sinners” – however I saw before me only upright, honorable people of all classes, wearing white kittels and wrapped in tallises. My soul wandered about; it became clear to me, and I foresaw that that evening – the evening of penitence and forgiveness – the Judge of the Land would remove our harsh decrees, for the Jews of our city and also for the scattered Jews wherever they were.

When the time of *Kol Nidre* arrived, the congregation stood up in unison. Not even a low whisper was heard. Only from the women’s section could be heard the sounds of stifled weeping. Then the sweet voice of the cantor was heard, starting the singing of *Kol Nidre* in the ancient melody. It is impossible to describe the holy awe that enveloped the congregation during the *Kol Nidre* prayer, which the cantor repeated three times, one after the other, raising his voice each time. Even though the content of the prayer is merely the annulment of vows, the historical background of this prayer – for it served as the release from vows and oaths for the Spanish Marranos – imbued it with its importance and awakened the holy awe in our hearts. The melody of *Kol Nidre* contributed in no small manner to



The Great Synagogue

the creation of that special atmosphere that even influenced any gentiles and moved them to visit the synagogue on the night of Yom Kippur. This atmosphere fell upon the congregation immediately after the serious and splendid declaration of “With the permission of G-d and the permission of the congregation,” that served as a prelude to *Kol Nidre*. For who among Israel can say with a full heart that they are not among the sinners...

After *Kol Nidre*, the cantor intoned thrice “And the entire congregation of the Children of Israel will be forgiven, and the stranger that dwells in their midst, for the entire nation has stumbled,” and the congregation repeated after him. The tension rose once again at the time of the recitation of the “*Yaale*” hymn. The sound of stifled weeping, strengthening more and more, burst forth from the women’s section. The adage says “women come to tears easily,” and this was particularly felt during the services on the Days of Awe. During the night of Yom Kippur, there

were many fitting opportunities for the shedding of tears, especially during the recitation of the penitential prayers, during the recitation of the confessional “for the sin that we sinned,” etc. The common factor of all these prayers was the theme of repentance and the begging of forgiveness. Tears are appropriate for these themes. Thus it says explicitly, “May it be Thy will, You who hearken to the sound of weeping, that you put our tears in your flask for preservation...”

One of the prominent characteristics of the atmosphere of the synagogue on the night of *Kol Nidre* was the heavy air and stifling heat that emanated from the dozens and hundreds of

burning wax candles. At the end of the service, all of the worshippers went out to the fresh air of early autumn, with their faces aglow and their eyes sparkling, as they wished everyone “May you be sealed for the good” (*Gmar Chatima Tova*). Even after I left the synagogue to set out for home, the echoes of the melody of *Kol Nidre* accompanied me, that moved the hearts of millions of Jews throughout the earth in the midst of this day, and united them in prayers for the realization of the desires of our souls, along with wishes for a good sealing of fate for the entire Jewish people.



The Reb Meir Hirschorn Beis Midrash

## YOM KIPPUR IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF OUR CITY

Early in the morning of the day of Yom Kippur, the women prepared food for the entire day for their children, for most of them remained in the synagogue all day on this fast day, and only a few went home during the time of the Torah reading for the break. The men would remain in the synagogue all day wrapped in their tallises and wearing their white kittels, without shoes or with slippers. The girls would sit in the women's section and converse among themselves, while the adult women and old women would sit and peer into the book of *Techinot* (women's petitions) or one of the other books designed for women. The prayer leader, with his white, festive garb, would stand before the lectern near the Holy Ark, ready to begin the morning service, feeling the great sense of responsibility imposed upon him as the representative of the congregation on the Day of Judgement.

After the *Psukei Dezimra* service, the cantor and worshippers would move over to the main part of the *Shacharit* service. He would sing "The King Sitting on the high and loft throne" in the traditional chant, as the congregation and choir answered after him. The *Shacharit* service of Yom Kippur is very long, but the traditional melodies blow a spirit of life into the recitation of the prayers, and they are pleasant to the ear. Those who were musically inclined among the congregation would assist the cantor by responding at set times. The *Shmoneh Esrei* of *Shacharit* is punctuated by hymns and poems that are unique to that day. In these prayers, the early generations bequeathed to us a long litany of traditional melodies and tunes, transmitted to

us from generation to generation. Each year they sound as new, filled with the pleasantness and energy of youth.

After the *Shacharit* service, the Torah reading takes place from the portion of *Acharei Mot*, in which is mentioned the deaths of the two sons of Aaron the Priest, who were punished with the full measure of the law. The portion is read with the special melody for the Days of Awe. This melody is the cause of many debates among cantorial researchers who find in it remnants of centuries old Eastern motifs. Others disagree and say that this melody dates from the era of the First or Second Temple.

Of all the service of Yom Kippur, *Musaf* was dearest to us. We young people were interested with all the strands of our souls in the mysterious spirit that envelops this prayer, especially the wondrous segments of the *Avoda* section, which expresses the soulful embrace of the nation in its ancient glory at the time of the enactment of the holy service in the presence of large crowds and the glory of the King in the Holy Temple by the High Priest. The prostrations of *Aleinu* and the *Avoda* made a special impression upon us. The festive yet melancholy melodies penetrated the hearts, and the vision of the kneeling and prostration would move the thinnest strands of the heart, and instill fear and awe into it.

Prior to *Musaf*, after the Torah reading, the memorial service (*Yizkor*) was announced. It is the custom to pray for the souls of the dead and to pledge to charity in memory of their souls. In the *Av Harachamim* prayer, the souls of the holy martyrs who gave up their lives in Sanctification of the Divine Name, and the victims of the Holocaust are also mentioned. At the time

that *Yizkor* is recited, those whose parents are alive leave the synagogue, so as not to create an opening for Satan, and not to arouse the evil eye. During the *Yizkor* service, many women saw it as a propitious time to express their personal prayers. A middle-aged woman sat near me. Among her other petitions, she asked the Dweller On High to have mercy upon her daughter who had reached marriageable age, and send her match to her, so that she should not remain Heaven forbid as an old spinster. Another woman who sat near me asked the Dweller On High to grant her strength to sustain her orphaned children honorably, so that she would not Heaven Forbid require the assistance of flesh and blood. Heartrending cries were also heard from the old women, who pleaded with all the warmth of their souls, “Do not cast us away at the time of old age, as our strength fails, do not abandon us.” In general, during *Yizkor*, the crowding in the synagogue increased due to the presence of orphans and widows who came to recall the souls of their dear departed. People who were not seen in the synagogue all year would come to this service.

A certain disarray pervaded in the women’s section during *Yizkor* and thereafter. Not all of the women were familiar with the machzor, and many required the assistance of their neighbors who were more expert than they. There was no small number of women who also prepared appropriate equipment for the services: machzors, the *Korban Mincha Siddur*, chumashes with Yiddish translation, and also *Tzena Urena*. With all the trees, the forest could not be seen.

The *Unetane Tokef* prayer aroused a stormy spirit with the women. Its tragic content would

touch the hearts of all the worshippers, especially the hearts of the women. Fear and trepidation overtook the worshippers during the recitation of this hymn, which was recited by everyone with emotion, and at times with wailing. The weeping was great during the time of the recitation of the section, “On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on the fast day of Yom Kippur it is sealed, who shall live, and who shall die, for none merit before Your eyes in judgment.” On the other hand, the shepherd’s melody of “*Kevakarat*” (As a shepherd) was enchanting and refreshing. On more than one occasion, women fainted in the midst of this hymn from the great emotion, and the doctor or their relatives had to be summoned. This accentuated the serious spirit of the moment, but on the other hand, it disturbed the service and impinged on the holiness.

The *Avoda* section came toward the end of the *Musaf* service. This describes in a dramatic fashion the service of the High Priest on Yom Kippur during the time of the Temple. The congregation of worshippers, already tired from the fast and the long service, became alert once again during the *Avodah* service. The cantor sang “And the Priests and the people gathered in the courtyard,” in the traditional melody. As he arrived at, “They would kneel and bow down,” all of the worshippers would fall on their faces as during the days of yore in the Temple. The content of the *Avodah* service was filled with warmth, and it appeared as new in our eyes each year. With natural longing for the splendid life of days gone by, the worshippers sung the concluding stanza: “Indeed, how splendorous was the High Priest as he left the holy place in peace.”



With this, the Yom Kippur prayers with all their experiences were not over. After the *Mincha* service came the *Neila* service as a conclusion to the prayers of Yom Kippur. The day turned into twilight. The wax candles cast a gloomy light, and all the worshippers felt as if a new spirit entered into their beings, and new powers were granted to them. Since this service was the last of the services of the day, one says “and seal us” instead of “and inscribe us.” Here, we also take the Dweller On High to task, and complain to Him about the disgrace of his nation that has been pillaged and displaced, and the disgrace of His holy city of Jerusalem, “I recall G-d and am astonished, as I see every city built up on its base, and the city of G-d lies lowly to the pit.” The *Neila* service concludes with the recitation of

*Shma Yisrael*, the blowing of the shofar, and the declaration, “Next Year in Jerusalem!”

After the weekday evening service, the congregants disperse. The women and children hurry home, while the men remain next to the synagogue to recite the Sanctification of the Moon in groups.

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

<https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Podhajce/Podhajce.html/>

## 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](http://www.JewishGen.org/yizkor/translations)



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