

Rosh Hashanah 5777 | Ma'ariv

Jewish Community of Karlovy Vary

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The wisest of kings, Solomon, decided to challenge one of his ministers, Benaya ben Yehoyada. He told him: *“Benaya, there is a ring I desire to have. I want you to bring it to me.”* Benaya said: *“My king, if there is such a ring, I will find it and bring it. But what makes this ring so special?”* Solomon answered: *“The ring has a very special power, because it can turn a happy person sad and a sad person happy.”* King Solomon doubted his minister would be able to find such a ring, but he wanted him to be humbler. The minister traveled the kingdom, but to no avail. Returning to Jerusalem, he found himself in a shabby neighborhood where there was a market. He noticed a man selling some odd pieces of jewelry spread out on an old and threadbare rug. The desperate minister asked him: *“Have you heard about a special ring which can make a happy person sad and a sad person happy?”* The old merchant smiled, and handed him a ring with an inscription. When Benaya looked at it, a wide smile appeared on his face. Benaya came to the king, who amusedly asked him, expecting his failure: *“Did you find the ring for which I sent you?”* Benaya gave the ring to the king. Solomon read the Hebrew inscription engraved on it: *“Gam zeh ya’avor”*. It means: *“This too shall pass.”* At this moment, the king realized that all his wisdom, wealth and power were only ephemeral things. The king made sure that the power of the ring was real. The ring makes a sad person

understand that his suffering is transient and it reminds a happy person of the transience of their happiness.

One of the most important rabbis of the prewar Jewish Community of Karlovy Vary was Dr. Ignác Ziegler. He was born in the town of Dolný Kubín, located in today's Slovakia, in 1861. He studied at the Budapest University of Jewish Studies. Immediately after getting his rabbinic ordination he became a rabbi in Karlovy Vary. Thanks to Ziegler's efforts, *the Kaiser Franz Josef Regierungs-Jubiläum Hospitz* opened in 1903. This institution was supposed intended to provide poor Jews coming to the city with shelter, food and medical care. Rabbi Ziegler was also the author of numerous books dealing with Midrash and Jewish history. One of his works is called *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Juden in Karlsbad* (Documents on the History of the Jews in Karlovy Vary). In this book, Ziegler writes: "A vital Jewish community came into being in Karlovy Vary during the last 44 years. May it flourish and prosper evermore! Not to remain idle, but to progress in internal development tirelessly, may this be a life-goal of future generations as well. And when the Jewish Community of Karlovy Vary celebrates its 100th birthday sometime in the future, on 31th October 1969, may it be allowed to appear before the judicial throne of Jewish history and cultural history with these humble but proud words: I have fulfilled my duty." (ZIEGLER, Ignaz: *Dokumente zur Geschichte der Juden in Karlsbad (1791–1869)*, Karlsbad 1913, p. 141)

The 31th October 1969 passed a long time ago, and the 150th birthday of the Jewish Community of Karlovy Vary is slowly approaching. Its history

developed differently than Rabbi Ignác Ziegler expected. His synagogue where he preached was destroyed during the Kristallnacht. Most of his friends and most members of his community were murdered during the Shoah. Rabbi Ziegler himself died in Israel in 1948.

Today, when we meet to celebrate our New Year, we wish each other *shanah tovah* in Hebrew, which means a “good year”. The word *shanah*, which means “year” has another meaning as well, from the verb *le-shanot*, which means “to change”. In other words, *shanah tovah*, a good year, is inevitably a year of change. Changes may always be for the better or for the worse. Therefore, Rosh Ha’Shana contains both an element of joy and an element of sadness. But as we read on the famous Solomon’s ring (*gam zeh ya’avor*), both of them are inevitably transient.

When we think of the tragic fate of our ancestors and predecessors here in Karlovy Vary, of all the men, women and children who visited the old synagogue, experienced joys and sorrows and one day disappeared to never return, the joy of our meeting inevitably turns to sadness. On the other hand, we, their descendants and successors are here. Mourning those whose lives were so cruelly and criminally ended, we are cheered up by the thought (like King Solomon by his ring) that this Rosh Hashanah in Karlovy Vary won’t pass without our voices in our synagogue. In spite of all injustices and misfortunes, we are here and are thinking of the future of this community. Today we are coming to honour the memory of our ancestors and to await our future and the future of our children.

At the very beginning of the year 5777 we are thinking of changes that are awaiting us. Maybe we are excited, cannot wait to see them and are absolutely sure that they will be only positive. Maybe we are numb with fear and are afraid of them. The inscription on Solomon's ring *gam zeh ya'avor*, "*this too shall pass*", teaches us to await all changes, both good and bad, with humility. As Psalm 149 says: "*For the Eternal takes delight in his people; He crowns the humble with victory.*"

Ken yehi ratzon. Ve'nomar: Amen.