



One is everything, everything is one



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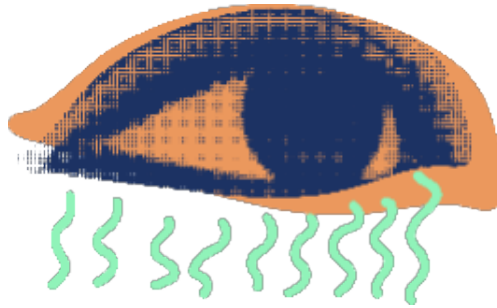
Writing language: **Czech**

At first, I was cautious about being open about my Jewish identity, however, it became difficult not to talk about it. Eventually, I opened up to my classmates and was met with absolute respect – I even took some of them to a synagogue. When we studied Judaism in class, I became sort of a guarantee of the information' correctness.



When I was about five, I traveled with my mom from Liberec to Žatec, where we lived until I was ten. On our way, we always passed a sign near Litoměřice indicating the Small Fortress in Terezín, where we later used to go for memorial services. Once, I asked what exactly that Small Fortress was. And so, my journey to search for my Jewish identity probably began. I can't recall exactly what my mom said at that time, but it was probably explained in a way that my five-year-old ears could handle. I know that the topic interested me a lot, especially with regard to my family's connection to the Shoah.

It even went so far, that I told to my five-year-old friend about what happened in concentration camps, which led her parents to complain to my mom about it.



Apart from car rides with my mom, Christmas was also my favorite time. I loved the smell of Christmas sweets and the mystery of Santa (in Czech Ježíšek) bringing gifts. My mom grew up at the time of communism, when religion faced obstacles in Czechoslovakia and other countries affected by communism as well.

Although my mom had Jewish roots from my grandfather's side, she wasn't deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition since she couldn't practice it at home or attend the synagogue either. That's also maybe why we ended up celebrating Christmas and often attended even a Midnight Mass in church.



It's important to mention that my dad isn't Jewish; he found his philosophy in the East, leaning towards Buddhism and Vedas. My grandfather married a non-Jewish woman, my grandmother. And so I often heard the term "one-fourth Jewish" referring to my person from my great-grandfather. From that, I interpreted for myself, that I wasn't really Jewish or that I would never be even entitled to that label according to Orthodox Halacha anyway.

However, the opposite turned out to be true when, in the fall of 2020, together with my mom and sisters, I successfully underwent the process of recognizing my Jewish status before the Berlin Beit Din. It's a step similar to conversion but takes into account the mentioned Jewish heritage. One has to learn as much as possible about the functioning of the Jewish calendar and demonstrate a connection to Judaism to be able to answer the questions posed by the Beit Din. The Mikveh was also part of the process – what a beautiful ritual!

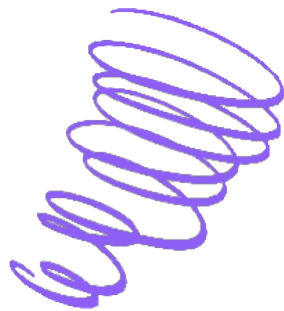
But now, let's get back to what preceded this significant change, turning the "one-fourth Jewish" into a whole one. Even though we lived in Žatec, we would visit Liberec once a month. Usually, we attended the Kabbalat Shabbat service in the local synagogue. I remember this from the age of nine, but it's possible we went there even before. Neither I nor my mom understood much of the singing and prayers – after all, we weren't brought up in the Jewish tradition. Sometimes my grandfather led the service, as he was already the chairman of our congregation. I knew that the hour-long service always felt so much longer, and I looked forward to Kiddush or going straight home for my grandmother's delicious pancakes.



That same year, my mom received information from the secretary of the Liberec Jewish congregation about the regularly held international Jewish summer camp in Szarvas, Hungary. While driving back from Liberec, we stopped at a red light of a crossroad in Prague, and my mom explained that the camp was two weeks long and located near the town of Szarvas in Hungary. It sounded adventurous, and I had already some experience with summer camps. So, it didn't take long, and that summer I went by bus with other participants to this unusual event.

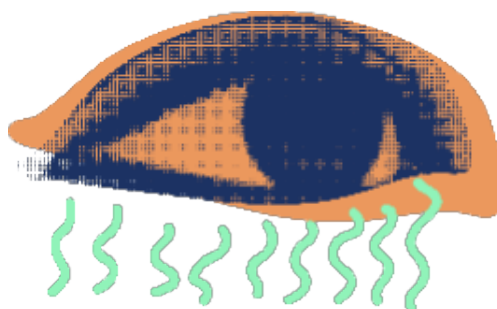
The camp offered countless activities, from "peulot" (education of Judaism and its values) to sports – swimming, canoeing, Krav Maga, wall climbing, and dancing – as well as singing, art, trips, outdoor games and much more. I remember there was a synagogue on the premises where we sometimes had classes. We talked about the objects and books we saw in the synagogue and had the opportunity to have a chat with the local rabbi. Every morning, we gathered in the large courtyard, and each group – representing a country – greeted the others in their language. Then we said the "Shema" and the "Modeh Ani" prayer before having breakfast. We also celebrated Shabbat, and I couldn't understand why all the speakers had to be turned off on such day and why we were given food packages and couldn't eat in the dining hall as usual.

In retrospect, I realize that I didn't have as much knowledge as some of the children my age who were involved in Jewish life in Prague's communities or Jewish kindergartens and schools. However, back then, it didn't bother me, and I enjoyed being in sync with the time and space there. I attended this camp for about six years in a row, during which I was meeting the same group of peers, some of whom became my friends, and I'm still in touch with some of them to this day.

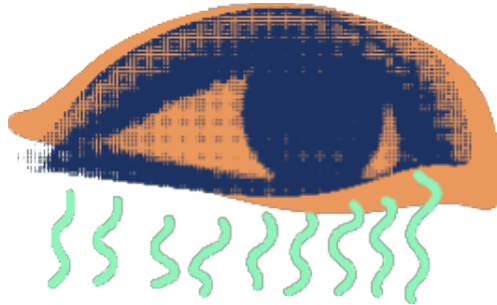


In the meantime, I also became a "shamash" (helper) in the Liberec community, which was already facing the problem of having only a few members. So, when I applied for the position, there wasn't much of competition. I helped with the operation of the storage and recorded its movements in a chart. During congregational events, such as Hanukkah, Purim, or Passover, I also got involved in organizing activities, like selling matzot or providing catering. I prepared the prayer room for services, had the opportunity to show the synagogue around to visitors, and during membership meetings, I listened to the issues the community was facing. This four-year experience within the heart of our beautiful synagogue opened the doors for me to absorb more of the atmosphere of Judaism.

In the classroom at the gymnasium in Liberec, where we moved later, I had a classmate with Jewish roots who didn't want to share this information. At first, I was also cautious about being open about my Jewish identity, and I didn't share much about my Jewish background. However, as Judaism gradually, without pressure, became a bigger part of my life, it became difficult not to talk about it. Especially with all the summer camp experiences, Shabbat celebrations every Friday, and my role as a "shamash." Eventually, I opened up to my classmates and met with absolute respect and tolerance from them – I even took some of them to a service. When we studied Judaism in religion class, all heads were turned in my direction – I became sort of a guarantee of the information's correctness.



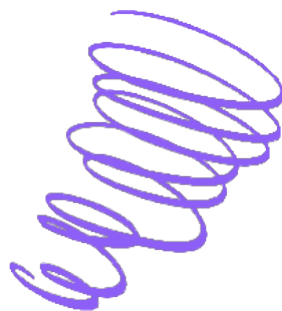
At that time, I also attended Hebrew lessons with Karel Hrdlička, who regularly commuted to our synagogue. It was part of my preparation for my Bat Mitzvah, which my mom and I later celebrated together. We were guided by Rabbi Tomáš Kučera, who now serves in Munich, and David Maxa, who is now a rabbi in Liberec and in his own community in Prague. I learned to chant from the Torah, write a drasha (speech), and read and write in Hebrew. For this occasion, my mom and I bought a tallit (prayer shawl). I was seventeen, and my mom was forty-five.



Thanks to our open community, which welcomed many foreign visitors and cooperations, I had the opportunity to meet some rabbis from the USA and representatives of WUPJ and other organizations.

One of our guests jokingly told me that I should try to become a rabbi because it's the best profession that exists. I laughed it off and didn't think much of it.

Then the coronavirus pandemic came, and our synagogue became emptier than ever before. We had to "stream" the services online. Halacha was adapted for these conditions, allowing online attendance to be counted for minyan. I had already had my Bat Mitzvah, and with the rabbi, I was preparing to lead the Shabbat service correctly. And when there was a need and no one else could, I ended up leading the service. Gradually, I became more confident in it, and I saw that people from various parts of the Czech Republic (and the world) liked the online services. Every time I stood at the bimah and served as a mediator of some sort of light and strength for the community, I gained strength myself. I felt it came from my heart. And so, I began to realize that when I carefully analyzed the work of a rabbi, it seemed meaningful to me – both for society and for my own path.



I still longed to know more about where I really belonged and what it meant to be a Jew. With the idea of becoming a rabbi as a possible future profession, I began to flirt more. In the fourth year of high school, I wrote my graduation thesis on the topic: "Formation of the Jewish community in Liberec." I reflected on our community in historical, geographical, cultural, religious, and current contexts, asking some members what Jewish identity meant to them. "Some of the interviewed members of the community outlined that being Jewish is a feeling deeply rooted within them, which is hard to describe. To clarify, they mention terms such as a sense of responsibility to the whole, the need for continuity in connection with their family Jewish history and tradition, and, last but not least, a set of values improving their lifestyle." This question simply wouldn't let me sleep because I had a strong feeling that I was part of something that needed to be discovered.

Even though I didn't have any deep education in Judaism like children from Jewish schools and kindergartens in Prague and had minimal contact with the Jewish community there, something inside me told me that I had to try this path of becoming a rabbi and subject Judaism to more extensive examination than I had practiced until then. It's true that if I hadn't tried it, I would have regretted it greatly. And so, somehow miraculously, I managed to get to the Abraham Geiger Kolleg in Potsdam, for which I am very grateful to Rabbi David Maxa.

The summer after that, my friend and I embarked on a journey to Israel, where we volunteered in the Israeli army through the Sar-El program. We were part of a camp where we prepared first aid medical kits. Although, I had already been to Israel at the age of five, it was only now that I realized the feeling of home and belonging that Israel represents for every Jew.

In the fall of last year (2022), I started my rabbinical journey. This year has probably been one of the most challenging ones in my life – so many changes! At the beginning, I wasn't on a clear path, and I also had to complete a certificate in German to be able to study Jewish theology at the university alongside the rabbinical training. I didn't even know who I was anymore. I was overwhelmed with feelings of immense gratitude because at the Kolleg, I met people who saw the world through the same lens as I did. I encountered an environment where I belonged. I discovered Jewish life in Berlin, which, compared to what I experienced in my small Liberec community, was a contrast in dimensions. I met countless people from various parts of the world and from Orthodox, Conservative, and Liberal Judaism.

I felt like I could finally breathe. I no longer had to feel strange when I felt a connection to God (which is rare in atheist Czechia) and when I wanted things in life to have a greater meaning. I move among my people, and I don't have to explain what a yarmulke is, or a synagogue, or why I go there every Friday. These are things that my non-Jewish friends cannot fully understand because they don't live this lifestyle – I don't hold it against them, and I appreciate their tolerance for my culture. On this account, I wrote this poem:

You, gentle well, in whom the power of light resides,
You whose imprint is woven into the space-time,
You who sail through a ship of generations,
You, on whom we never forget, even when Fear steps over the threshold,
You, who bring warm intimacy beyond the limits of anticipation,
You, who smile when otherness enters,
You whose independence trembles in the firm coat of faith,
You with a nature of infinite measure,
to you I turn,
when the world seems divided,
when doubts blow in,
when stability is determined by wobbliness,
when morality boards to the ferryman of falsehood,
there, where you wave to me,
there, I walk towards you in the middle,
for there is nothing more,
than to be a little closer to you,
to you, as of yet not wholly capturable,
paradisiacal,
Edentity



I regret a bit that I didn't get to show this poem to my great-grandfather, who unfortunately passed away in April of this year at the age of 97. He was a Shoah survivor, which greatly influenced my curiosity about seeking my Jewish self. Although he was an open atheist, he couldn't deny his Jewish heritage. The fact that he organized annual family gatherings already hints at something. "Hitler's plan failed with our family," he rightly said, being a great-grandfather to 16 great-grandchildren. Sometimes I visited him during vacations, and he was a great role-model for me. He invented a construction for a sliding microwave in his small kitchen, and he even made a sliding bar for the TV so his wife could enjoy the view while cooking. When we had chicken for lunch and I couldn't finish it, he looked at me disapprovingly and said (just like my grandfather): "This chicken laid its life for you!" He was always tinkering and rode his bike until an old age. He had a refined taste in music and was very gifted in writing. His optimism, warmth, and efforts to understand everyone are what I, as one-sixteenth of his great-grandchildren package, carry with me into my life.

Great-grandpa was surprised and initially strongly questioned my choice to become a rabbi. In our last conversations, however, I read between the lines that his attitude had changed. "So when you someday preach to someone, mention me somewhere there." He said. Perhaps he realized that Jewish identity was preserved even in that original "one-fourth" of me, and he very much wished that

something of him would imprint onto this world further.



With the move to Germany, my values began to take shape more intensely. I also slowly begin to address what being a female rabbi practically entails. I know that I won't be accepted in Orthodox congregations. I'm not inclined towards Orthodoxy at the moment, but I realize that even though I study at a liberal rabbinical seminary, my approach to Judaism and my views on many of its elements may change at any time. I'm thinking about whether I even want to work as a communal rabbi - there are so many other possibilities. Teaching somewhere, being part of a major Jewish organization, or writing, and so on. Returning to the Czech Republic is also a complicated question because the Jewish base there is small.

I also consider the possibility of working in Israel, even though the competition there would be much higher than in Europe. I also have to take into account safety concerns as extremism is unfortunately on the rise now. After the first year of the six years of my studies, it is still difficult to see something very concrete. Nevertheless, faint outlines are already beginning to appear. What I know for sure is that I wish to have a happy family and pass on Jewish values and wisdom.

For now, I follow Rabbi Nachman's motto: