
MEMORIAL FOUNDATION FOR JEWISH CULTURE

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I. Introduction

The Memorial Foundation For Jewish Culture was established in 1964 by Dr. Nahum Goldmann, who had negotiated reparations for the Jewish people at that time with the then Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr. Konrad Adenauer. In these negotiations, Dr. Goldmann successfully argued that the Nazis were responsible not only for the ruthless destruction of Jewish life and the wanton seizure of their properties, but also for the destruction of their communities, their religious institutions, their schools, their synagogues, their libraries, their museums, their academies of higher learning, and their diverse culture. Dr. Goldmann therefore argued that at least a portion of the funds to be received from the German Government should be set aside for symbolic restitution for the destruction of European Jewry's spiritual heritage.

A sum of \$10,400,000 was initially set aside via the Claims Conference for this purpose, subsequently supplemented by \$10,800,000 from the German Government. The corpus was kept intact; only the income was used for the Foundation's diverse grants and activities. Recognizing the dwindling purchasing power of the Foundation's funds, no less than the effectiveness of their activities, the German Government added an additional grant of \$5,900,000.

II. The Foundation's Mandate

The nature of these grants clearly delineates the mission of the Memorial Foundation - to preserve the remembrance of the decimated Jewish culture in all of its diversity, as well as to do everything possible to revive it by supporting research, and above all, by granting scholarships and fellowships to young people who will devote their lives to Jewish studies and rebuilding Jewish communities in areas of the world which are Jewishly disadvantaged.

The Memorial Foundation, whose trustees and leadership is composed of every geographic and ideological sector of contemporary Jewish life, was the vehicle created to accomplish the historic mission of reconstructing Jewish cultural life all around the world in the post-Holocaust era.



III. Governance

The Foundation is today the most fully representative body in Jewish life. Its membership spans the Jewish globe geographically with representatives from international, national, and regional cultural bodies from six continents. Every sector of the Jewish community's multitudinous ideological views are also represented, from the center of Jewish life in Israel and radiating out over our variegated Diaspora. Its leadership and trustees represent all segments of the Jewish community - the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Movements; the Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities; and fraternal and Zionist, religious and secular, communal and service, male and female organizations. It has no vested institutional or narrow parochial interest, but is committed to serve the entire Jewish people globally in fulfillment of its mandate.

Attached you will find a list of our member organizations, the members of our Executive Committee, and the members of our Board of Trustees.

What is most remarkable about the Memorial Foundation is that it operates in total harmony, with mutual respect and civility, despite the geographic, religious, and ideological diversity of its membership. This is no small accomplishment in the context of the increasing tensions and polarization within the Jewish people, and the growing strain in the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora.

The Foundation today truly serves as the cultural parliament for the Jewish people. It helps set the cultural agenda for the Jewish people internationally; sustains and supports Jewish cultural life around the world, and serves as the vehicle for the development of innovative programs to address new cultural needs and those not being fully addressed globally by other Jewish bodies.

IV. Programs

The programs of the Memorial Foundation, which cover Jewish culture in the broadest sense of the word, consists of three parts:

A) Institutional grants to Jewish academic, research and educational bodies

The Memorial Foundation has awarded more than \$41,000,000 in grants to research, academic and scholarly institutions in more than 30 countries for the creation, intensification, dissemination and enhancement of Jewish culture.

Among the institutions supported have been Hebrew University, Tel-Aviv University, Yad Vashem, Massua, Kibbutz Lochamei Haghetat, Beth Hatefutsoth, Oxford University, the Sorbonne, Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, Princeton University, and the Latvian, Hungarian and Russian Academies of Sciences.

A special focus of our work has been Eastern Europe, both in the pre- and post-Communist eras. Since 1965, we have helped maintain Jewish cultural life in Hungary, Rumania, Poland, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and in the former Soviet Union. After Glasnost, we have enlarged our work there with the aim of reviving and expanding Jewish life in the former Communist Bloc.

The Foundation has been responsible for the publication of almost 4,000 books on Jewish culture in more than 32 languages. The Foundation has assisted in the publication of a number of monumental works, including Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz's Talmud; the Encyclopedia Talmudit; the Hebrew University Bible Project; Hispania Judaica; Torah Shelemah; the Language Tradition's Project; the Documentary History of Italian Jewry, Otzar Haposkim; and other similar projects which will have an extraordinary and long range impact on Jewish cultural life.

We are especially proud of the almost 600 volumes we have supported in the Russian language for Russian Jewry. This pioneering project, which includes books for children and Jewish families, was initiated long before Glasnost and was intended to raise Jewish consciousness among Russian Jewry.

B) Scholarships and Fellowships

Since 1965, the Foundation has awarded \$27,500,000 in grants to approximately 13,000 Jewish scholars, educators, communal workers, artists, and researchers to replace the generation of Jewish intellectuals, academics, rabbis, and writers that were decimated in the Shoah. This is one of the Foundation's greatest achievements. In so doing, the Foundation has played a central role in the dynamic recovery and growth of the Jewish people in the post World War II period.

We currently support four Scholarship and Fellowship programs:

(1) International Fellowships In Jewish Studies to assist individuals to carry out independent scholarly, literary or art projects in the field of Jewish culture. The Ephraim E. Urbach Post-Doctoral Fellowships are intended to assist recent recipients of doctorates who have completed their dissertation with distinction to publish their first books, launch their scholarly careers, and do further research in the area of special interest.

(2) International Doctoral Scholarships to help train qualified individuals for careers in Jewish scholarship and research and to help Jewish educational, religious, and communal workers to obtain advanced training for leadership positions.

(3) International Community Service Scholarships to assist qualified individuals to train for the rabbinate, Jewish education, social work, and as religious functionaries (e.g. shochatim, mohalim) in Diaspora Jewish communities in need of such personnel.

(4) The Post-Rabbinic Scholarship Program assists qualified individuals to train for careers as judges in rabbinical courts, heads of religious, academic, and scholarly bodies, and research in Torah studies.

Listed below are some of those we have assisted who have assumed leadership positions in Jewish life: heads of important educational and scholarly institutions such as Dr. Ismar Schorsch, Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America; Dr. Norman Lamm, President of Yeshiva University; Professor Menachem Ben-Sasson, Rector, Hebrew University; Dr. David Patterson, Director, the Oxford Center of Post-graduate Studies, and Professor Yehuda Friedlander, Rector of Bar-Ilan University; distinguished scholars in a variety of fields, including the English historian Martin Gilbert and the late Professor Alexander Scheiber of Hungary; 29 winners of the Israel Prize, the most distinguished cultural award in Israel including Professors Menachem Elon, Haim Beinart, Eliezer Schweid; film-makers Dan Wolman and Yeshayahu Nir; creative personalities like the novelists Chaim Grade and Aharon Appelfeld; the poets T. Carmi and Shin-Shalom; and Steven Reich the American composer.

In addition, the Foundation has helped train individuals who have served in a variety of roles in Jewish communities around the world, such as Rene-Samuel Sirat, the former Chief Rabbi of France; Dr. Alfred Schoener, the Chief Rabbi of Hungary; Adolf Shayevich, the Chief Rabbi of Russia; Paul Eisenberg, the Chief Rabbi of Vienna; and the current Chief Rabbis of Israel, Israel Meir Lau and Eliahu Bakshi-Doron.

Even more revealing than these names are the results of the comprehensive review of these programs undertaken by the Foundation.

Eighty-one percent of the recipients of the International Community Service scholarships who completed their training were actively engaged in service to Jewish communities around the world, a remarkable figure. They range from early childhood and primary school teachers in Europe to rabbis serving the Jewish people throughout the Diaspora.

Over three-quarters of Doctoral Program Scholarship recipients are currently engaged in teaching and research at universities and academic bodies or are in Jewish communal work. Recipients of Doctoral grants have published an average of 12 scholarly articles.

Seventy percent of the recipients of Post-Rabbinic scholarships are serving the Jewish community as rabbis, educators, dayanim or are engaged in research, publication and other forms of community service.

It is clear that remarkable cultural creativity and service to the Jewish community have been generated by these Foundation programs.

C) New Directions

Under this program the Foundation is engaged in developing new programs to address cultural needs either unfulfilled or not fully addressed by the international Jewish community. These include:

(1) The Holocaust: The Foundation has played a major role in supporting programs connected with the research, education, documentation of education of the Holocaust. It has awarded more than 500 grants to help train a generation of scholars, educators, writers, and artists to engage in research and educational and artistic programs related to the Shoah. Among the preeminent scholars and researchers we have supported are: Professors Yehuda Bauer, Anita Shapira, Israel Gutman and Deborah Lipstadt.

It has awarded almost 450 institutional grants to establish the historical facts about the Shoah and commemorate the communities and way of life that was destroyed.

We have worked closely with Yad Vashem in producing the Pinkassei Ha-Kehillot, the history of all the Jewish communities destroyed in the Holocaust; published a monumental work of the History of Polish Jewry from its inception to the Holocaust, to commemorate the history of the great Jewish civilization annihilated in the Holocaust; and supported hundreds of other works covering all facets of the Shoah.

The Foundation has also identified lacunae in the research and education about the Shoah. Most recently we provided support for the development of programs for Holocaust education in the 21st Century, and initiated research about the Universe of the Jewish Child during the Shoah, about which almost no systematic research exists. In that connection, we have funded an exhibition about children during the Shoah at Yad Vashem, and commissioned a film about the children who perished in the Shoah.

We are currently engaged in organizing a conference on Faith after the Holocaust and producing a reader on Jewish theological and religious responses to the Shoah, another area which lacks systemic research.

(2) The Nahum Goldmann Fellowship: An international program to train young men and women for Jewish communal leadership all around the world. More than 350 young men and women have participated in this program from more than 30 countries on six continents.

(3) Dispersed Jewish Communities: A program to train communal professionals, rabbis, cantors, and educators for dispersed Jewish communities, geographically or socially disconnected from the major centers of Jewish life.

(4) New Technologies for the Advancement of Jewish Culture and Education: The Foundation has taken the leadership in providing computer-aided education to Jewish schools around the world, with special focus on Eastern Europe.

The Foundation has most recently established Mishpacha, a program on the Internet to reach marginally affiliated Jewish families who have little or no contact with Jewish life. It has also produced the Jewish Heritage Online Magazine, intended to bring serious Jewish learning in an attractive Internet format to Jews interested in learning more about the Jewish heritage. (Attached is the most recent issue of the Jewish Heritage Online Magazine and a reproduction of the website for the Mishpacha program.)

V. Administration of Grants

All grants -- individual and institutional -- awarded by the Foundation are wholly based on merit, following a rigorous evaluation by an international panel of experts. The panels recently enlarged under the supervision of Professor Menachem Elon, President of the World Union of Jewish Studies, and formerly Deputy President of the Supreme Court of Israel, and Professor of Law at Hebrew University; and Dr. Ismar Schorsch, Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, are composed of scholars of international repute from all areas of Jewish culture from around the world. It includes members of both the older and younger generations of intellectuals and researchers, and representatives of all streams and ideologies of Jewish life, so as to enable us to achieve fairness and objectivity in our decisions.

VI. Request

The leadership of the Memorial Foundation is requesting that a significant portion of the assets to be allocated from the new restitution funds established by Switzerland be provided to the Memorial Foundation to enable it to continue and enlarge its historic mandate, deal with the unfinished tasks of cultural reconstruction, as well as plan for the cultural challenges facing the Jewish people in the coming century.

We perceive the current effort to obtain restitution from Switzerland as part of the similar process initiated in 1965. We believe the Foundation is the most appropriate vehicle for supporting and developing the programs dealing with Jewish research, education, and commemoration of the Holocaust, while simultaneously fulfilling our historic mandate for the reconstruction of Jewish cultural life around the world after the Shoah.

The Memorial Foundation is intended to exist in perpetuity. The new restitution funds will enable the Memorial Foundation to continue its unique mission of service to the Jewish people into the next millennium.

LIST OF MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Academy of the Hebrew Language
Agudath Israel World Organization
Alliance Israélite Universelle
American Jewish Committee
American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
Anglo-Jewish Association
Anti-Defamation League
Beth Hatefutsoth,
The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora
B'nai B'rith International
Board of Deputies of British Jews
Brit Ivrit Olamit
CBF World Jewish Relief
Canadian Jewish Congress
Centre of Organization of Holocaust Survivors in Israel
Confederacao Israelita do Brasil (CONIB)
Conference of European Rabbis and Associated Religious Organisations
Consistoire Central
Coordinating Committee of Israeli Yeshiva Organizations
Council of Jews from Germany

Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture

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(1998-99)

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