**Introduction**

The last rabbi of the city of Hamburg in northern Germany, who perished in the Holocaust, Joseph Zvi Carlebach (1883-1942), may his memory be a blessing, was a prominent representative of the Modern Orthodox Judaism that emerged in Germany from the time of Mendelssohn (1729-1786) until its tragic end. Rabbi Carlebach embodied in his personality, thought, and public activity the best elements of the unique blend that characterized Orthodox Judaism in Germany at the end of this period. Meir Seidler's book examines this "best" from various angles for the first time from a philosophical perspective. Carlebach, in addition to being a member of a prominent Orthodox rabbinical family committed to its heritage, was a skilled educator, intellectual, charismatic leader, prolific writer, researcher, and thinker. The crisis and fate that befell German Jewry during his lifetime left an imprint on his teachings and work, in retrospect, a mark he did not choose. Viewing Carlebach as a paradigm – albeit an especially prominent one, due to his personality and skills – allows us to shift our gaze from the specific individual towards the unique cultural milieu from which the last two generations of Orthodox Judaism in Germany grew. While the general Jewish existence in Germany between the two World Wars has been comprehensively studied, Orthodox Judaism in Germany during this period has been the subject of only limited scholarship. This book's contribution is that it brings it to center stage through the presentation of one of its prominent representatives.

The initial chapters of the book deal with the cultural background, Carlebach's biography, his confrontation with the challenges of modernity, primarily the issues of religion and science, and his attitude towards the Land of Israel and Zionism. In these, we encounter Carlebach the educator, the thinker, and the community leader, who knew how to integrate Jewish tradition with the best of the cultural, scientific, and political currents of his time. The issues are discussed in comparison to the cultural, rabbinical, and intellectual environment in which he operated.

The most intriguing chapters are undoubtedly those that describe the relationship between Orthodox German Jews in general, and Carlebach in particular, with their German homeland, from the establishment of the Nazi regime until their extermination in World War II. In this respect, the book before us, beyond being an intellectual biography that sheds light on the teachings and work of a well-known and influential personality, provides an important scholarly perspective on the unique struggle of Orthodox Jews in Germany with the Nazi regime. Four elements played a role in this struggle:

1. The Jewish-Orthodox commitment to tradition and readiness for sacrifice;

2. The deep identification with their German homeland, whose culture and language were an inseparable part of the self-identity of Orthodox German Jews;

3. Inherent and inevitable cognitive dissonance regarding their perception of reality. This dissonance resulted in the neutralization of the psychological ability to transition in a timely manner from a mode of denial ("we will manage") to a mode of life-saving in the face of existential threat.

4. The understanding of the persecution of Jews by the Nazis as "birth pangs of the Messiah," as a punishment for the "assimilation" of German Jews.

The struggle with the deteriorating situation during the Nazi era took place against the backdrop of daily hardships, in which the noose gradually tightened until the unimaginable of yesterday became the reality of today, and today's reality was idyllic compared to what was yet to come. Within this evolving situation, he lived, worked, raised a family, taught, delivered sermons, advised, published articles, and led his community as one of the most talented and charismatic rabbis in Germany.

As stated, the fourth and fifth chapters before us are the most dramatic. These are chapters of heroism on one hand, and chapters of failure on the other. In reading these chapters, the author leads us step by step to understand how the deep psychological identification with Germany - which Seidler (in language too extreme for my taste) calls "the original sin of German Jewry" - led to a fateful delay in understanding reality. Like other Orthodox Jewish leaders in Nazi Germany, Carlebach, after the initial shock and even amidst the deteriorating situation, continued to foster an inclusive approach and developed a strategy of maintaining routine.[[1]](#footnote-2) Such a strategy would have been admirable in itself, were it not for the fact that, in retrospect, it proved to be a strategy that prevented the saving of lives. The Orthodox Jews of Germany, like their Reform and secular brethren, continued to view the changing reality through the lens they had learned to assemble over the two generations preceding the rise of the Nazis to power: the lens of loyal German citizens to their German homeland, even though it was this very homeland that had turned against them. The Orthodox Jewish authorities also had another pair of glasses at their disposal, but these glasses too did not enable them to identify the danger: the glasses of Jewish theology throughout the generations, which can explain any situation based on precedents from past eras. The tragedy of Orthodox Judaism in Germany is therefore a double tragedy, as it encompasses both the existential blow, which was the lot of all European Jews during that period, and a moral-conscious blow, which fell solely on German Jewry. The author refers to this in his conclusion. Perhaps it would be best to start reading the book from her perspective.

George Kohler

# Introduction

The end of an action is first in thought. The beginning of this book was a conversation with a friend who emigrated from Germany. We discussed the decisive contribution of Orthodox rabbis in pre-Holocaust Germany (the "Rabbiner-Doktoren") to the creation of an intellectual discourse among Orthodox Jewry, and my friend suggested that I write a book on the teachings and work of Rabbi Dr. Joseph Tzvi Carlebach, may his memory be a blessing. At the beginning of my academic career, I worked for several years at the Carlebach Institute, under the leadership of the institute's founder, the late Prof. Miriam Gillis-Carlebach (1922-2020), Rabbi Carlebach's daughter. During this period, with the help of Mrs. Heleni Lipsky, the dedicated librarian of the Carlebach Institute, I was exposed to many materials from his writings. Thus, two generations removed, I became acquainted with the life, work, personality, and thought of one of the prominent leaders of Orthodox Judaism in Germany before and during the catastrophe that befell it.

Rabbi Joseph Tzvi Carlebach was born in Wilhelmine Germany, during the golden age of German Jewry – the Orthodox, the Reform, and also those who did not affiliate themselves with any religious movement. He was murdered by the Nazis in 1942, during the most horrific period ever experienced by European Jewry in general and German Jewry in particular. His life spanned, therefore, the most dramatic period in the life of the Jewish community in Germany, a community that in just one generation experienced a steep decline from the ignominy of a respectable Jewish existence in the center of European culture to the (literally) abomination of the shooting hole in Eastern Europe.

The book is written in the format of a case study, where the description of a specific case is intended to shed light on a broader issue, an entire generation, a certain mentality, a school of thought, and the like. In this case study format, I was required to broaden my perspective towards the historical and philosophical context, and towards other individuals whose actions or thoughts intersect with those of Carlebach. It can therefore be said that the personality, thought, and public activity of Rabbi Carlebach served as a prism for examining a unique rabbinical leadership of an intellectual nature, which, according to Baruch Kurzweil, constitutes "a kind of conclusion, a last and honorable chord in the mouth of a special layer in a certain period."[[2]](#footnote-3)

Three books have been dedicated to the figure of Carlebach so far. The first was written in English by his brother, Rabbi Naphtali Carlebach.[[3]](#footnote-4) The second book was also written in English by his son, Rabbi Shlomo (Peter) Carlebach of New York,[[4]](#footnote-5) who was also expelled "to the East" along with his father, mother, and three sisters, and was the sole survivor of the Holocaust. The third book was written in German by Dr. Andreas Bremer of the Institute for the History of German Jews in Hamburg,[[5]](#footnote-6) The city where Karlibach served as chief rabbi during the Nazi period until his deportation to the killing fields near Riga. These three books have a historical-biographical orientation and primarily narrate the life story of Carlebach. The first two books are, by nature of things – due to the familial proximity of their authors to their subject matter – distinctly personal in character, with a moderate tendency towards hagiography. The three books chronologically examine the life of Carlebach and contain a wealth of information (which largely overlaps in parts). In addition, two books have been published so far about Karlibach's educational teachings,[[6]](#footnote-7) as well as a number of articles (or chapters in books) dedicated to his educational concept as well as other aspects of his practice and doctrine.[[7]](#footnote-8)

Although the current book is not a biography, it includes a biographical summary and sections where it was necessary to elaborate on one biographical aspect or another. The first chapter deals with the cultural background and the sources of Rabbi Carlebach's upbringing. The second chapter traces his intellectual profile, through selected philosophical issues to which he was compelled to respond. Chapters 3-5 deal with his practical and spiritual confrontation with the changing reality in which he lived and worked: the meteoric rise of the Zionist movement, a part of which he experienced firsthand as a young man in Turkish Palestine, the German patriotic wave that swept over German Jewry and himself during World War I, and finally, the disintegration of Jewish life in Germany during the Nazi era.

In many chapters of the book, a comparison is made between Joseph Carlebach and his contemporary, Isaac Breuer (1883-1946). Breuer was a prominent public leader and intellectual figure among the thinkers of Orthodox Judaism in Germany, and Carlebach refers to him and his writings on many occasions. The comparison of the thoughts and actions of these two men came about unplanned: during my work on the book, issues kept arising where the comparison and confrontation between the two men on various topics seemed almost inevitable. As a result, the figure of Breuer is more prominently featured in this book than the other individuals mentioned in it, in one context or another.

In conclusion, I have offered a kind of second look at the legacy of Orthodox Judaism in Germany, which may point, I hope, to new directions in research.

At the end of the book, an appendix is included with the aim of introducing the reader directly to Carlebach's pedagogical thought. I have chosen to translate one of Carlebach's articles on education, specifically: on adult Jewish education. The article was chosen both because of the period in which it was written (after the rise of the Nazis to power), because of the unique ideas and insights it presents, and because it represents a central aspect of Carlebach's personality: his work as an educator. Since his educational philosophy has already been presented in several academic publications, I have limited myself to this translation and have not dedicated a separate chapter to Carlebach as an educator. The translated article attached illustrates Carlebach's educational approach in the face of a challenging audience during a difficult period.

The book would not have seen the light of day without the monumental efforts of the late Prof. Miriam Gillis-Carlebach, who, with financial assistance from the city of Hamburg and the support of Bar-Ilan University, established an academic memorial to her father in the form of the Joseph Carlebach Institute at Bar-Ilan University. Even though the Carlebach Institute today deals with many areas related to Jewish education in the Diaspora and other topics, it also contains an archive of Rabbi Carlebach's writings and provides convenient access to his publications. In addition, Gilles-Carlebach compiled an almost complete bibliography of all her father's writings, and over the years, she also published four volumes of selected works in German.[[8]](#footnote-9) These served as a comfortable foundation for my research into the work and teachings of Rabbi Joseph Tzvi Carlebach, may his memory be a blessing.

The translations appearing in the book, both from German and other languages, are my own, unless otherwise noted.

Meir Seidler

Givat Shmuel, 5782

1. It is not for nothing that Miriam Gillis-Carlebach, daughter of Rabbi Carlebach, titled the book she dedicated to her father's work in Germany from 1939 to 1941 with the title "Jewish Everyday Life as Human Resistance: 1939-1941" ( *Jüdischer Alltag als humaner Widerstand* ). She saw in the stubborn effort to maintain routine, amidst an increasingly severe existential threat, a form of resistance. This assessment is indeed accurate for the years 1941-1939, but it does not correspond to the management of routine in the early years of Nazi rule, during which the illusion of normalcy was a bane to the Jews of Germany. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Kurzweil, Broyer, p. 154. The statements were written about Yitzhak Breuer, but they are equally true in relation to Joseph Carlebach. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Source text: {קרליבך, יוסף קרליבך.}  
   Target text: {Carlebach, Joseph Carlebach.} [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Carlebach, a Jewish man. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Source text: {ברמר, יוסף קרליבך.}  
   Target text: {Bermer, Joseph Carlebach.} [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Gelis, Education and Faith; Yefrach, Korczak and Carlebach. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. The authors of the articles are Alfred Bodenheimer, Ruth Goodman, Miriam Gillis-Carlebach, Gillian Goldman, Uwe Gellner, Wolfgang Grünberg, Yissachar Jakobson, Gabriel Cohen, Günter Demling, Chaim Cohen, Emanuel Cohen, Frank Loewenberg, Yaakov Koller, Aharon Shear-Yashuv, and myself. Most of the articles were written in German for the Proceedings of the ten Carlebach conferences held at the Joseph Carlebach Institute at Bar-Ilan University between the years 1995-2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. A selection of Carlebach's writings will be briefly noted below CAS , specifying the volume number . For the bibliography see CAS, 3, pp. 526-513, and on the Joseph Carlebach Institute website: <http://www.jci.co.il/?cmd=carlebach.4> . [↑](#footnote-ref-9)