

FROM THE PAGES OF TRADITION

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R. LEOPOLD GREENWALD: TISH‘AH BE-AV AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEIPZIG

The anecdote within an anecdote presented here is taken from the memoirs of the late Rabbi Leopold (Yekutiel Yehudah) Greenwald (1889–1955). A distinguished rabbi and voluminous author, Greenwald left his native Hungary and settled in the United States in 1924. Despite thirty active years in the rabbinate at Columbus, Ohio, he managed to publish some thirty-five monographs and well over 300 essays on Jewish law, homiletics, and history. His interests ranged widely, as indicated by the following titles of several of his studies: *Kol Bo al Avelut (Laws of Mourning)*; *A History of the High Priests*; *Did the Editors of the Babylonian Talmud See the Jerusalem Talmud?*; *Rabbi Joseph Karo and His Times*; *Rabbi Jonathan Eibeschutz—A Biography*; *The Jewish Slaughterer and Slaughtering in Rabbinic Literature*; and *A Thousand Years of Jewish Life in Hungary*.¹ His bailiwick was the religious history of the various Jewish movements and communities in Hungary, and our passage is but one sample of his very rich contribution in this area. The passage involves Greenwald’s decision to leave his home town and enter the renowned Pressburg yeshiva, an event that occurred in 1910. The anecdote recalled in the passage took place at Leipzig shortly before or during 1870, the year Goldziher and Bacher (see below) earned their doctorates at the University of Leipzig. Only the cast of characters needs to be identified; the text speaks for itself.²

Ignaz (Isaac Judah) Goldziher (1850–1921) was a founder of modern Islamic studies. He taught at the University of Budapest and at the Rabbinical Seminary in Budapest, and was secretary of Budapest’s Neolog Jewish community.

Nahum Sokolow (1859–1936), Zionist leader and Hebrew author, was a contributor to, and editor of, *Ha-Zefirah*, *Ha-Asif*, and *Ha-‘Olam*. He served as general secretary and, later, as president of the World Zionist Organization.

Wilhelm (Benjamin Ze’ev) Bacher (1850–1913) taught at, and later became head of, the Rabbinical Seminary in Budapest. His staggering erudition and monumental contribution to Jewish studies—especially in the fields of Aggadah, Hebrew grammar, medieval Jewish exegesis, and Judaeo-Persian—mark him as one of the most productive and significant founders of *jüdische Wissenschaft*.

Franz Delitzsch (1813–1890) was a Protestant theologian and Bible scholar who taught at the University of Leipzig. An active missionary, he translated the New Testament into Hebrew. He vigorously opposed anti-Semitism in Germany and,

in that respect, contrasted sharply with his son Friedrich (d. 1922), the famed Assyriologist.

TISH'AH BE-AV AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LEIPZIG

After several quarrelsome days my father acquiesced to my decision to enter the Pressburg yeshiva. It was a bitter struggle to win his consent as it was not the custom to leave my town for Pressburg. The rabbi of our town used to say that Pressburg was fraught with more danger than was the Rabbinical Seminary in Budapest. But after repeatedly assuring my father that I would study Torah day and night, he finally consented. My delight was boundless, first, because I was about to study in the Pressburg yeshiva, and second, because I would visit Budapest—coming from my town, one had to pass through Budapest in order to reach Pressburg—where I could meet the greatest of Jewish scholars, Isaac Judah Goldziher, and other scholars as well.

I must confess, of course, that at that time I had not read a word of Goldziher, nor had I the foggiest notion about the nature or area of his expertise. His name was never mentioned in the yeshivot of Khust, Satmar, and Hunsdorf, because frankly, Goldziher never so much as proffered a single solution to a difficult passage in Maimonides' *Code*—what possible connection, then, could we have had with him? I never heard his name mentioned in the most popular synagogues and houses of study. Nevertheless, I greatly admired him, because Nahum Sokolow, then editor of *Ha-Zefirah* (which we used to read in the innermost recesses of our rooms), once wrote me asking: "Can you provide me with biographical data about Goldziher and Bacher?" Now Sokolow was a name we revered, and I thought to myself, if Sokolow is seeking biographical data about Goldziher, surely Goldziher must be an eminent scholar.

Mother filled my bag with physical sustenance; father filled it with spiritual sustenance—with the books that all men require. How else can a youngster find his way if not by means of the holy books which serve to guide him through life and indicate what is prohibited in This World, i.e., in the Vestibule that leads into the Banquet Hall? Outfitted in a new set of clothes, I took a seat on the train and recited the wayfarer's prayer. Aboard the train, I chanced upon a group of students readily identifiable as yeshiva students—they all spoke simultaneously and tumultuously. They struck up a conversation with me, asking who I was and where I was going. Upon learning that I, too, was a yeshiva student and that I was making my way to the Pressburg yeshiva, several of them cried out: "Shame on you!" Others shouted angrily, "Pressburg is the source of all impurity!" Still others thundered at the top of their voices: "He shall call

out Defiled! Defiled!” (Lev. 13:45). I left that car and went to the next one in which only Gentiles sat. There I remained the entire evening until daybreak, when I caught my first glimpse of the beautiful city of Budapest.

With my bag on my shoulder, I left the train station and began my search for Rombach Street, where relatives of mine resided. After much effort, I located my relatives, left my bag with them, and was about to depart.

“Where are you going?” they asked, “Why don’t you rinse your clothes and rest your weary body? Surely, you did not sleep last night at all?”

“No,” I replied, “I must go.”

The urge in me was so powerful that I was neither hungry nor thirsty but left immediately to seek Hollo Street. I located the street and actually envied it because it sees that great man several times a day. I arrived at number 4 and saw a nameplate. It read: “Goldziher, Ignaz—First Floor.” I walked up to the first floor, rang the bell and a young man (later I learned that he was a student at the Rabbinical Seminary) opened the door.

“Who do you want?” he asked.

“Goldziher,” I replied. He showed me into a room.

“Wait here, Goldziher will arrive shortly.”

The room was his study, a large room filled with several thousand books and hundreds of manuscripts that did not appear to be arranged in any systematic way. Some forty books, for example, large and small, rested on a stool. It was as though a whirlwind had transported me to a Jewish ghetto of several hundred years ago, where the Jew was isolated from the entire world and enjoyed no pleasures except for the four ells of halakhah. Only among his books was he at ease; there alone he found peace. Even the air there was clear of physical desires and pleasures. All was spiritual. I thought to myself, would that I could remain in this ethereal state for as long as I live! Would that I could reject all the vain pleasures and find joy and comfort among books alone! At that moment I was the happiest man in the world, for I was about to see—face to face—the greatest of Jewish scholars.

I was lost in my thoughts when suddenly the door opened. I do not exaggerate when I say that as the door opened my knees knocked against each other from trepidation. An elderly man approached me, grasped my hand, and said: “I am Goldziher and I am delighted to meet you.” I stumbled for words and finally blurted out: “I wish to get to know Your Honor personally.” A faint smile broke out on his face and remained there for as long as I sat before him.

“Doubtless you are on your way to a yeshiva?” he asked.

“Yes, to the Pressburg yeshiva.”

“I take delight even now,” continued the scholar, “whenever I recall my stay at the Leipzig yeshiva. What pleasant memories! Despite the

weariness I experienced there, despite the lack of food, despite it all, I take great delight whenever I recall those days. I was Bacher's companion at the University of Leipzig. We also studied Talmud and Codes at the yeshiva because we often had to debate the meaning of talmudic passages with the very learned Christian scholar, Professor Franz Delitzsch. Indeed, we studied with great diligence in order to be able to answer him. Professor Delitzsch would frequently visit our quarters carrying an oversized tome of the Talmud, sometimes several tomes. Often we simply had to laugh when we saw this Christian (as Goldziher spoke he pointed to a photograph of Delitzsch) struggling along with several volumes of the Talmud under his arm in order to engage us in debate. While a devout Christian, Delitzsch was also a philo-Semite in the fullest sense of the term. I learned much from him; I learned especially from him how to properly commemorate *Tish'ah be-Av*. I recall how once on *Tish'ah be-Av* I and my companion Bacher were in our rooms playing chess. We happened to glance through the window and noticed Delitzsch approaching us. We quickly hid the chess set under the bedcovers. Delitzsch meekly opened the door, a somber expression written all over his face. He did not greet us and spoke not a word; he merely gazed at us with a kind, sympathetic eye. Silence pervaded the room. Finally, he addressed us."

"'Friends: I share in your sorrow, but ask that you do not despair because of your tragic fate. Ultimately dawn will break and the sun will shine forth, and you too will experience happy days.' With utmost sincerity and seriousness he concluded: 'May the Lord comfort you together with the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem,' and left our flat."

"I thought to myself: This Christian actually believes that we Jews spend the entire day of *Tish'ah be-Av* in mourning! Let it be a lesson to us! Apparently Bacher arrived at the same conclusion, for we both sat down on the floor and studied the Kamza-Bar Kamza episode (see *Gittin* 55b) and the accounts of the fall of Jerusalem in tractate *Gittin*. We did not so much as touch the chess set for the remainder of the day. Since then, I take great pains each year to commemorate *Tish'ah be-Av* properly."

NOTES

1. These, as virtually all of Greenwald's studies, were written in either Hebrew, Yiddish, or Hungarian. For a listing of Greenwald's publications, see Hayyim Bloch's bibliographical essay appended to Greenwald's *Ha-Maharam Schick u-Zemano*, New York, 1948. Cf. A. Ben-Ezra's bibliographical essay appended to Greenwald's *Ha-Sho'et veba-Shehitah be-Sifrut ha-Rabbanut*, New York, 1955.
2. The text appeared originally in Hebrew in the Torah periodical *Appiryon* 2(1924-1925), pp. 20-22.