

Gabor Bartos

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STIGMATA OF AUSCHWITZ

# **The Tree of life ©**

Two beautiful trees have been planted next to each other  
Some decades ago, in the middle of the field so carefully, well planed  
A hawthorn tree and one oak tree; they were magnificent looking creations  
I am the hawthorn, and you are the oak tree  
With many broken missing branches  
Torn, beaten by the rough weather, but still proudly standing  
In every summer sheltered travellers, who rest under its rich thick leafage  
Giving shelter and protection for their nests to all the birds from the burning heat  
All the songbirds repaid the tree welcoming with their choral singing  
The hawthorn whispered with the wind some love poems to the oak tree  
The oak tree leaves blushed hearing the love poems from its neighbour  
The two trees' crowns grow close to each other  
Their branches reached and danced to the rhythm of the gentle breeze  
When the autumn came, they took off their clothes and drifted into sleep  
Dreaming of their beautiful memories they have spent together  
In the morning of the next spring they wake up by the singing choir of the birds  
And both dressed up in the most colourful clothes again, ready for the coming  
year  
These are the trees of life which have been planted by the good gardener, the  
Creator  
But one day an evil people came along with axes and fire  
They looked at these magnificent living gifts for all of us  
In sheer hatred they killed the two trees along with the forests of millions  
After the mindless killings, they set all of these magnificent creations on fire  
They burned all the wood but in their sheer hatred, they could not destroy them  
In the next spring these trees' roots brought shoots of new life again to grow up  
Serve, and please us and make the ultimate perfection enjoyed by all  
No one can destroy what the Creator planted.©

By Gabor Bartos

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Genesis: Chapter 12, verses 2 and 3

*2: I will make you into a great nation,  
and I will bless you;*

*I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.*

*3: I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you.*

## **Celtic horoscope**

*Gabriel; Hawthorn – The Illusionist*

*May 13-June 9*

*Hawthorn signs in Celtic tree astrology are not at all what they appear to be. Outwardly, they appear to be a certain persona, while on the inside, Hawthorns are quite different. They put the term “never judge a book by its cover” to the test. They live seemingly average lives while on the inside, they carry fiery passions and an inexhaustible creative flame.*

*Rebekah; Oak – The Stabiliser*

*June 10-July 7*

*Those born under the Celtic tree astrology sign of the Oak have a special gift of strength. They are protective people and often become a champion for those who do not have a voice. In other words, the Oak is the crusader and the spokesperson for the underdog—nurturing, generous and helpful.*

*Gabika; Holly – The Ruler*

*July 8-August 4*

*Among the Celtic tree astrology signs, Holly is one of regal status. Noble and high-minded, those born during the Holly era easily take on positions of leadership and power.*

## Chapter 1

### Call from the Rabbi to Go to Munkács to Teach

In the early spring of 1938, Rabbi Simon Hevesi called me aside after the Sabbath services at the Budapest *Dohány utca* (Street) Main Synagogue. He invited me for lunch at the nearby Kosher restaurant on *Dohány utca*. The restaurant owner, Mr Reisz, was well known for his specialities of Cholet and clear chicken soup with gnocchi. Not to forget his poppyseed, honey and crushed walnut cakes. (Hevesi Simon and Chief Rabbi Immanuel Löw)

I was curious what such a great and well-respected scholar could want from me; he was the editor of *Magyar Zsidó Szemle* (Hungarian Jewish Review). We had known each other as I had been doing some work for the Synagogue but nothing more to it as we had met in the Synagogue and some years ago, he had lectured in my semester. He was a well-known person worldwide with his studies which he posted regularly in his magazine. I was just one of the irregular members of the Synagogue.

As we were walking down *Dohány utca* before we got to the restaurant, we were just discussing art and music and what was happening in the theatres or what musical recital had been on recently in Budapest and what would I recommend to him at the present.

A short distance to the restaurant from the Synagogue and we were welcomed by the owner, Mr Reisz, who led us to Rabbi Hevesi's favourite table. We placed our order with Mr Reisz, and when the food arrived, it looked appetising and the taste was truly delicious and plentiful. Washing it down with a lovely *Hárslevelű* (Chardonnay), Rabbi Hevesi told me about the history of how the Jewish people got to Hungary.

'You know, my boy, for almost as long as the Jewish nation has existed, it has been persecuted and forced to wander from land to land around the world to find a home on the promised land: since they have left Shinar (Mesopotamia)

and Canaan with the leadership of Abraham. Later, they ended up in slavery in Egypt where they lived for many generations till their Exodus under the leadership of Moses.

‘You know, Gabriel, we’ve been called the “Wandering Jews”—while searching for our homeland, Moses needed 40 years to make the 720 km (450 miles) journey from Egypt to the Promised Land.

‘After the Jewish Bar Kokhba revolt against the Romans, the depopulation of Jewish communities had begun, barred them from Jerusalem and many Jews scattered, exiled, and escaped to freedom among other nations. The captives that were not sold as slaves were deported to Gaza, Egypt and elsewhere, greatly adding to the Jewish diaspora to the destruction of both Temples in Jerusalem, till the Crusades.

‘However, there was always a glimmer of hope, as the Jewish people began to adapt to their new surroundings. The Jews began to flourish everywhere as they were setting up communities, building synagogues and ritual baths and establishing “Yeshiva” schools and higher education *Gimnázium* (Gymnasium). The secret of the success for the Jewish people was in education and strong family traditions and faith in the true God: Yahweh.

‘Jews arrived and settled in the capital of Buda after the Tatar invasion of the country in 1235, but it was King Béla IV (*IV. Béla*) who granted a charter of freedom to the Jews; the right to live under the protection of King Béla IV himself and he made a Jewish financier Henuk the Count of the Royal Chamber. He dealt with all the king’s commerce and trade offers. This important post has been fulfilled by Jewish financiers ever since under the successive kings of Hungary. The first Jewish Quoter was established at the West End of Castle Hill, then later a second Jewish Quoter was founded in *Óbuda* (Old Buda) North outside the castle of the Castle Hill of Buda.

‘As the Jewish community grew in the 1700s, they established a new business quarter in Pest at *Király utca* in *Erzsébetváros* (Elisabeth Town), the 7<sup>th</sup> District of Budapest. And here we are, in the late 1930s and we are still fulfilling this very important position in the area of trade and commerce, and this is the result of Jewish educational traditions.’

After lunch, he suggested that we should walk up to the *New York Kávéház* (coffeehouse), walking off the heavy dinner we had at Mr Reisz’s restaurant.

While we were walking towards the coffeehouse, he said, ‘You know, my boy, I cannot trust anybody with what I am telling you now, I don’t want

somebody else to hear it or maybe someone is just spying on us. You know some dangerous times are coming towards us, to Jewish people.'

I was very surprised to hear what he was telling me. You just don't read this in the press.

'The Hungarian Educational Authority are going to send teachers to reform the school's curriculums at Munkács and Ungvár, basically in the Transcarpathian, Ruthenian region in the next months or so. They want to force all the Jewish Gymnasiums' teachers to teach pupils in Hungarian and not Yiddish or Hebrew. As you know, there are many very well-established Jewish schools and universities all around in that region.

'I know your qualification, Gabriel, and your high standard of teaching and lecturing. I have done some investigation on you. You speak several languages, you even work for the Synagogue to translate important and secretive documents and I am satisfied with your standard; you would be the best person to carry out this work for us in this mission. Furthermore, you are Jewish so you would not upset the Jewish community or the authority with your qualification. As you know, a large number of Jews have emigrated to Transcarpathia from the mid-1600s, and particularly 42% of the population of Munkács are Jewish and they are very influential in the areas of trade and commerce.'

'You know, Rabbi Hevesi, I don't do politics and I am not even a member of this new Zionist or other organisation; they don't pay my bills. I know they are doing tremendous, good work, but I do what I believe, and I should stick to things which nobody can object to or criticise. So, I stick with art, poetry and music and projects for the common good. For example, there is a beautiful building which has been built and completed in 1913 just right opposite the Synagogue. It's the First Army Insurance Company who commissioned it.

'I know the architect, Mr Guido Hoepfner, he visited the Synagogue from time to time, mainly for the Jewish Holiday celebrations. He told me there is a cellar in the lower part of the building big enough to build a small theatre in it with a good-sized stage and space for an audience of 560.

'I have been involved with the moving pictures industry for some time and we could have the opportunity to turn this cellar into a *Barlang Mozi* (Cave cinema) where we could play Hungarian-made films with Hungarian artists or some old silent movies. Or we could call it the *Filmmúzeum* (Cinema Museum). Just look at the tremendous success of all those great Jewish Hungarians who made Hollywood as great as it is now: the Korda Brothers, Michael Curtiz, Adolf

Zukor, William Fox, and many, many more. We only need some wealthy businessmen to invest in our project.

‘You know so many industrialists and bankers, Rabbi Hevesi. Do you think you could introduce us to them to arrange a business meeting so we can present our project? Our team is full of real professionals in their fields like the well-known architect, Mr Ferenc Domány who has the design plan for the theatre.

‘You know, Mr Árpád Ódry is a good friend of mine, the actor and director of the National Theatre. I was part of that group of enthusiasts with Mr Ódry, who believed we could build a small repertory theatre somewhere in Budapest where we could perform Hungarian writers’ materials. We don’t want Austrian or German musicals or light operas, as they do at other major, financially well-supported theatres. Hungary has many great talents, most of them just hanging out at the *New York Kávéház*, hoping to be able to sell their original materials, so we should give them a chance to have their plays/music/opera performed in Hungarian to Hungarian audiences.

‘Finally, we have set up this little independent repertory theatre in the 8th district of Budapest, on 2/c. *Vas utca*, just off *Rákóczi út* (Avenue). The plays and the performers; actors and actresses are all young, very talented, some of them have never played in any theatrical production. Some of the talented ones have later been given parts in big theatres in Budapest or in other major towns in Hungary or in Transylvania. Mr Ódry later founded a Theatrical Academy where he teaches the secret of acting and performing. Later, he became the managing director of this Academy.’

‘Gabriel, I promise I will investigate what I can do for this movie theatre project.’ Rabbi Hevesi nodded. ‘But, back to my project...Look, Gabriel, we believe in you because you are not married, and your existential situation is not very promising at present. We know about your little flat on 31 *Király utca*; a three-room flat is not good enough to raise a family. If you accept the offer, we, the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the OMZSA (*Országos Magyar Zsidó Segítő Akció*—National Hungarian Jewish Help Action) would be very grateful and would meet with all your expenses.’

The New York Kávéház building became visible to both of us and as we stopped to cross *Erzsébet körút* (the Grand Boulevard of Elisabeth), we admired the architectural beauty of this magnificent “feminist” looking design. The doorman, *Józsi*, saluted us on our arrival and welcomed us by calling our names and instructing a young waiter, ‘*Marci*, table for two on the balcony...’

The true beauty of this building exceeded all expectations of anything it could compare with. The room inside sparkled like a jewellery box. There were twisted marble columns, and crystal chandeliers were hanging from the richly decorated painted ceiling, marble stairways and balconies of the upper floor; beautifully designed and finished with polished brasswork everywhere. There was no surface left bare on the wall and on the ceiling without being covered by gold leaf or paintings. A gipsy band was playing on the first floor.

No wonder this coffeehouse was the home of all Hungarian poets, novelists and composers, journalists, hoping to pick up fresh gossip from the floor which they can report to various leading magazines. Some of them were genuine talents who worked on their books or poems while they earned a day to day living as journalists. Basically, all the elite of the Hungarian art world and those who were still hoping to be discovered with their work met up here.

We had the best table in the house on the balcony, from where we were able to oversee the whole coffeehouse and its guests, who's who as they worked. Some of them nodded and waved at us on our arrival and confirmed they approved of our presence with a smile. My friend, poet Miklós Radnóti, walked past our table and greeted us in a familiar manner, 'How is your yellow canapé, Gabriel?' with a cheeky smile and a wink in his eye.

I felt a bit embarrassed at his question which Rabbi Hevesi picked on and reacted with a smile. 'Well, well, I thought I knew a lot about you. Never mind it, back to business again.

'Would you be able to accept our offer and move into Munkács? We will take care of all your expenses here in Budapest and in your new post in Munkács. You won't regret it, Gabriel!'

'I am really flattered, Rabbi Hevesi, Yes, of course, I will take up this offer of this new position knowing who is backing the project and more importantly, it's coming from the Hungarian Education Authority. Enjoying both "worlds" support from authority and from my faith without any prejudice. I am considering this offer not as a proposal but a privilege that you have chosen me. Thank you!'

The rest of the conversation was mainly on Rabbi Simon Hevesi's academic publications and the opportunities that we all had for the coming years. Also, he had an invitation from USA for a lecture tour in some major American universities.



Later on, he was discussing some more social-political issues like this new right-wing political movement called the Nazi Party was formed in Munich, they put unfair pressure on the Jewish community all over in Germany.

Rabbi Hevesi mentioned that his friend in Vienna told him that there was some kind of conspiracy going on between the corrupt government officials and the Nazi Party to create a “Greater German Fatherland”. We were all hopeful that we wouldn’t be affected with this development.

It was late on that Saturday evening, and I got a kind of headache from the cups of strong coffee and the cigar-smoke-filled room. Rabbi Hevesi called for a taxi, and he offered me a lift to my little flat. I thanked him but declined his kind offer, I needed a walk to get my head clear from the smoke. Walking all the way to my apartment to 31 *Király utca*, all my thoughts were trying to work out the day’s developments, full of excitement. And what an important task I signed up for!

That night, I just turned in my bed and couldn’t get to sleep at all, my only comfort was the familiar smell of perfume left in the bedding and the memories on the “Yellow Canapé”. I tried to recreate these events which eventually drifted me into sleep.