

What is important to me

D.K.: I'll tell you why I went into mathematics.

My father was a Holocaust survivor.

I did it so I wouldn't go out of my mind, to do something that had absolutely nothing to do with it, and where there is only wrong or right.

A.G.: It's important to me to do educational work.

Maybe I'm starting in on that again because I believe that education is a most relevant factor in changing society, and I would really like for society to change, more now than ever before, because I have the feeling that the development of things has never been particularly good, but in my eyes has gone more and more backwards. Away from cosmopolitan attitudes and progress, in my eyes, away from a caring society.

H.L.: If you want to reach children or adolescents, you have to do something authentic with authentic people. And then I was here, the "live" Jew in person. (laughs)

S. G.: Then they took me along to the Communist Youth Organisation, and lo and behold, there were people who were five and ten years older than me and interested in me. They wanted to know who I was, what I did. And because they were interested in me, when they asked me if I was going to the assembly. I said yes, and that same evening, I became a member of the Communist Youth Organisation. That was in August 1944.

K. G.: All my life, I've concentrated on the struggle against Nazis, because I knew what a danger they represented.

M. M.: There's WIZO, that's Israel-centric, and there's the League of Jewish Women, from all over the world, which is actually more political... actually. The League of Jewish Women did have, except in Germany, a touch of feminism about it. Of course also in the past in Germany, before the War. But not much after the War.

R. R.: At some point, the task force of the Jewish Social Democrats was founded as a bridging function between the Jewish community and the SPD, and I got involved at the Berliner level.

M.M.: My mother got involved with the Jewish congregation, there was a lot to do there. Among other things, the Jewish Women's Group was founded anew; it attended to the GDR Jewish refugees of 1953. There was at one time an influx of families who came to West Berlin. There you knew we once again had something to do.

O. B.-A.: There are many refugees everywhere; there are refugees in the Middle East, since the war in Syria, there are even more refugees; since the founding of Israel, there are nowadays still millions of refugees. In Lebanon, in Syria, Jordan, and other corners of the world. And there are also quite a few Israelis. 10% of Israelis don't live in Israel. That's almost a million people.

L. K.: I believe that this is indeed a challenge, this refugee situation. I prefer not to call it a problem, that always has such a negative connotation. From the Jewish community as well as from others, not necessarily specifically here but also among us it should and will be recognised that it's quite a positive thing that Germany has possibilities and the capacity to help people who are fleeing war and persecution. This is something that the majority of the Jewish community supports, according to my conversations.

D. K.: Now, for a year's time, we have had two "welcoming classes" open. And regarding the "welcome students", who by now come from ten different countries, they aren't only Syrians, but also Eritreans, Ethiopians, Guineans, Pakistanis, Afghans – three also live here in the boarding school. So, also there we've taken in three people, who live here and not only go to school here.

N. P.: As far as our work as volunteers in the refugee shelter in Wilmsdorf is concerned, we started that quite deliberately as a group from Fraenkelufer, so, as a Jewish group.

For this reason, we got together with two other organisations, a youth centre here in Neukölln, Morus 14, and a Jewish-American organisation, JDC.

G. B.: We invited them at Hanukkah, together with the members of a mosque that we work with. They said in amazement, "Is this normal in Germany?" Then our Muslim friends told them: "Yes, that's normal."

H. L.: That was very strange for many children, they had heard so much about Jews, but they knew nothing. Many knew they hated Israel, they hated Jews, but they didn't know where Israel was, what you can find in Israel. Is Judaism a country or a religion? What is that actually? That Arabic is an official language in Israel, that I can also speak some Arabic, all of this was quite new to them.

And I have also often heard the sentence: "Are you sure that you're a Jew? Because you're so nice."

D. K.: How much goes without saying for the students, to deal with it in a quite normal way and not make a big thing out of it. "There's a Jewish teacher!" Or: "There's a teacher who's living with a man." "There's a teacher who's rough around the edges." These are things that are known and for some don't go without saying, but by my making them natural and giving a living example of them, they become more natural through me as a person.

H. L.: For me, the most important thing is that they can differentiate between Israel, Jews, Hagar. And that you can also have legitimate criticism, but can nevertheless be friends with these people. And that we can have a lot in common although we're so different.

E. D.: I find criticism is permissible, Criticism has to exist. There are a couple of little problems that we have there. But I find it good when you stay objective in the discussion. And don't get personal, as I've also experienced it.

B. S.: I know people who don't get active in any causes. Not for the dead in Africa, not for their brothers in Syria, they don't get active in anything at all; they don't take to the streets.

But as soon as it has something to do with Israel, if it's about Israelis and Palestinians, from that point, such energy develops in them. Then all of a sudden, they're peace activists par excellence. And they go to every demonstration.

There, I ask myself, Where does this energy come from? From being a peace activist or simply because it's about Jews and Israel?

E. D.: Here, there were very clear things that were directed at documenting, maybe also with a certain sense of humour, or also partially seriously, that this insanity down there is simply madness, and that it helps no one.

R. R.: Naturally, Israel is a topic for us as a task force. But we're not the Israeli Embassy.

S. G.: In the Communist Party, we learnt that we don't need Israel, because when we have Socialism, Antisemitism ceases to be.

L. K.: People who say we don't need Israel, I find that so... It's just 70, 80 years ago that we could well have needed Israel.

B. A.: The further development of intercultural competence, this is also important. Here it helps to get your teeth not only into one religion, but to get to know several religions, customs and traditions.

S. N.: I established the college at the behest of Dr. Lander, who was at that time President of Touro College in New York. All courses were taught in English. We started with 18 students. And that was also well received by the students.

A: G.: Our experience has been, when we deal with the topic of National Socialism, there is in fact a very high level of empathy for the victims of National Socialism. Where that's concerned, it's completely independent of the pupils' background.

It's important to me to say that, because it's not portrayed that way in public.

S. T.-K.: It always has to be possible to have an understanding between things.

V. A.: Since 2004, "Nonviolent Communication", the book, has been translated into Turkish. That motivated me quite a bit. If that's been translated into Turkish, I can also pass along nonviolent communication in Turkey.

N. B.: What connects us all is that we all long for a change and feel like taking things into our own hands and breaking loose a bit from what's already out there. In any case, I really enjoy working with children. Here, there are also many adolescents; it's also fun with them. Mondays, I always have my project, that I work on with them.

S. T.: Bubales is the Jewish puppet theatre in Berlin. And it is, as far as I know, the only Jewish puppet theatre in the Federal Republic of Germany and in German-speaking Europe. The Jewish puppet theatre is not only meant for Jewish children, as one might think, but for all.

S. B.: I actually did it only for my father and his friends, to give them pleasure. I sing a few songs there, jazzed-up German chansons, jazz standards and also quite a few Yiddish traditionals, that we also presented in a different form. I don't do anything new, nor do I have any aspirations to. I only shine a light on what has disappeared.

E. D.: I always wanted to be an actress.

Very early on, I saw my father and found it impressive. Then at some point, I started. I had these old LPs of Hamlet. That was with Maximilian Schell; My father had given them to me.

W.B.: Just two days ago, we celebrated the 70-year anniversary of CCC Film. I was in the studios there, and was telling how many years I had spent there. I worked there as a production manager.

R. A.: I teach viola at the UdK. And I also play a lot of viola d'amore, this Baroque instrument.

T. A.: I run the first Hebrew-language magazine published in Germany since the time of the Nazis.

D.K.: I started doing art because I wanted to free myself. Having painted so many corpses, or created so many with burnt tar, having almost burnt myself to death three times, you don't need a psychiatrist to ask what that means.

B. R.: They asked me, "Why don't you make music? Why do you work in an arcade, why are you looking for a job in a cemetery? Wouldn't music be better?" Yes, but who here needs musicians?

"But you haven't tried! Try it!"

I've been making music all my life. I always wanted to be a musician, although my mother was a doctor.

And she wanted her son to become a doctor. My father was a career officer; he wouldn't have had anything against my becoming an officer. I wanted to become a musician, and like any pubescent boy I wanted to do something other than what my parents told me to do.

By now, I'm known for this: I've played at a Vietnamese wedding, I've played at several weddings. I'm going to play at an Arabian wedding in the near future.

M. M.: Then I came to getting involved myself, next to that which interested me so much, I was in feminist groups. Then there was the Sabbath circle; as a Jewish-feminist aggregation, this is very important in the debate among women themselves.

E. K.: Already in Stuttgart, I absolutely loved the idea of learning, for example, learning to read the Torah. I think that also comes from this. I think the real connection to transcribing the Torah comes from reading the Torah. It was enormously liberating to determine that there were in fact women who had started doing

this. And that there was also the possibility to train for it. I'm writing yet another megillah. I write one megillah after another. The advantage is that it's without the divine name; this way, you can correct it better; you can correct it in the first place.

L. G.: The idea of becoming a mashgiach didn't come from me. I used to be a music teacher, and one day, the rabbi came to me and said: "You've learnt so much, do you want to be my mashgiach? But you have to decide now." OK, 15 years a music teacher and now I should totally give that up. That's really the way it was... First, I called my pupils and then I said: "Yes, no problem; I'll do it!"

D. K.: A good friend of mine said this is my anti-Auschwitz programme.

M. M.: The Foundation "Zurückgeben" ("Restitution") quasi came about this way, from these Sabbath circle contacts, precisely because it was feminists who got together with one or two politically active German women who said, "We would like to do something with our inheritance, not make money out of it, because we don't to have anything to do with the heritage of our parents."

D. K.: Anyway, I believe that it's of utmost importance to have dreams, that it's essential to have dreams, and to actually try to realise those dreams. And also to believe in your dreams.

S. T.-K.: If we could solve everything, what a fine world this would be!

Home (Heimat)

L. K.: That would be a super-long story, to be honest. Roughly speaking, you can say that, in an indirect way via France. The family established itself here in Berlin in the mid- to late 50s.

E. K.: After graduating high school, I came straight to Berlin because I wanted to study a combination of things that you couldn't in Tübingen, in South Germany. I think I also needed a lot of distance from my parents, especially from my mother.

A. G.: I was born in Dresden, but it's not in fact my hometown. My hometown is Berlin. After all, I've been living in Berlin longer by now than I lived in Dresden. In the past, I used to go to Dresden relatively often. Now, it's become seldom. My parents still live there.

B. A.: My mother came to Berlin at the age of 19; she was, then, finished with school. My father comes from Khan Yunis in Gaza.

S. N.: I was born in India. Pure coincidence, but yes.

N. P.: As far as Germany is concerned, I come from the end of the world, from Swabia.

E. K.: I basically grew up in Stuttgart, in my first few years. Both my parents are musicians – my mother worked closely with an ensemble in Cologne, with WDR (West German Radio), with the Cappella Coloniensis. In my pre-school days, I more or less grew up in Cologne und Bielefeld, because that's where all the recordings were done.

R. A.: I grew up in Freiburg and studied for a bit in the USA and here in Berlin. Also at the UdK (University of the Arts); that's why it's a funny feeling to come back now.

D. Km.: I came here in 2001 and came originally from a backwater near Göttingen, Bad Gandersheim, a really placid little town.

S.G.: My big sister was born near Budapest, my middle sister was born in Krakau, I was born in Berlin, because my parents were looking for someplace that wasn't as anti-Semitic as Poland in 1928.

I. M.: Afterwards, I was the only Jewish girl in the school and then my teacher, entering the room, said: "Inge, we're not allowed to have any Jewish kids in the school anymore." I of course packed up my case and my folder and cried.

K. G.: Then I had the possibility to come to Great Britain by Kindertransport. And there, I was put into the same orphanage as my brother, which actually could have been fortunate but he was a bit of a bully.

I. M.: In '39, I would have graduated from high school. And subsequently, I went to England. All alone. There was this Kindertransport, but I was already too old. That only went to the age of 16 and I was already 17.

M. M.: Later, my brothers were born in Paris, because my father emigrated to France and then Switzerland, and then back to France; my mother went to London. And then from England right into the wedding. So, with the intention of marrying my father, she came in 1947 from England to France.

S. G.: Then I went back to Germany, looking for a homeland, because I didn't feel at home in Australia. I wanted for once to live with a people to whom I belonged. After all, I was born in Berlin, maybe I'll manage it there, I thought to myself, especially when, with the Australian delegation, I travelled to the World Festival of Youth and Students in 1951. And to the GDR, to East Berlin, after all, I was already a young communist.

G. B.: It must have been in '56 or '57 when I came to Berlin for the first time, completely free of illusions: What will it be like? A Four-Sector City? I know that from Vienna. A heavily war-damaged city? I know that from Munich. A big city? I know that from Vienna. And it was all quite different. And I have to say, it was love at first sight. I had to get away quickly, so it wouldn't be too difficult. And I said, "How would it be if I came to Berlin now?" After they said to me, "I couldn't imagine anything better", I said, "OK, done!" And that's why I've been in Berlin since 1967, at the right time.

S. B.: When you stop to think that he was born in Lodz in 1923, survived the War with his siblings and his parents by always having the right impulse at the right moment; one of the five children and two adults always had the impulse: "Now it's time to go, let's take off out of here quick."

Y. T.: When we were thinking about coming to Germany, that wasn't our own inspiration, we never thought we'd be living in Germany one day. It was the inspiration of the Chabad-Lubavitsch Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who said: "Don't ignore Germany! Go there, help with the reconstruction, there's a huge demand to work together on the reconstruction with the people." And that brought us here. I approached my grandfather, telling him that I was thinking about going to Germany. In the beginning, he was reluctant; then he said: "Go! That's the answer: Where there is darkness, bring light! 'Bring light to the place where there is darkness.'"

B. S.: Here, more "darkness" comes in than it's possible to bring light.

A. K.: Alexander, Julia's husband, found a great job in Berlin, at Siemens. And of course, Julia's family moved to Berlin. We were once again alone in Bremen. (laughs) And again, it was decided we would move to Berlin, then the whole family could be together.

M. M.: Each of my children had been abroad for over a year, but I had never managed to be away from Berlin for more than three or four months. In my entire life – that's pretty crazy when you compare it to what other people do. For all of that, I often changed locations within Berlin itself, but the districts remained those south of Kantstrasse, Wilmersdorf and Zehlendorf.

S. T.: Then we came to West Berlin, and applied for political asylum, because the Turkish Communist Party was banned in Turkey. My parents were active as Turkish Communists, after all. So, we had a right to political asylum in Germany. With a falsified French passport we crossed the border and came here. Then came the absolute killer, namely that the immigration authorities wanted to deport me. I had just turned 18 and had come of age.

B. S.: There's no difference at all between me and a Turkish, Lebanese or Italian immigrant; in this country, we've all gone through the same thing, more or less. Germany wasn't the land of "everyone's-welcome-here".

H. L.: Until 2012, Germany was nothing but the Shoah to me. Just the Shoah, just what I'd learned in Israel. Only what I'd heard through my family. In 2011/2012, in Israel we started to hear a lot of other things about Germany. There were many more tourists coming to Berlin.

B. S.: "Why Germany? How can you let your son go to Germany?" What can you say to that? The Germany of old is not the Germany of today. The people of today aren't the people of back then.

L. K.: In Germany, you could see the possibility of living a pleasant life. Maybe it sounded partly cynical, but my grandmother explained to me, anti-Semitism is always around, everywhere. Antisemites are constantly around anyway. Most of them are antisemites, in one or another way. But the Germans went so berserk with their anti-Semitism that it's highly improbable that it will happen here soon again.

K. G.: But right after that, I went to Berlin, because I had acquaintances in Berlin; I didn't have any relatives left. All who'd remained in Germany had been killed.

S. G.: I fought for nine years to get into the GDR. In May of 1963, they finally let me in. But that was then via the Stasi.

D. K.: In '68, when the Russians came, we came to Germany, because my father was afraid that the Communists would take action against him again. We came to Germany and made a life for ourselves here. My mother had studied Medicine at Charles University, then worked as a dentist. And my father was a buyer for (the firm) Quelle until '78, I think.

L. G.: And that's how we stayed. My mother went around to all the kindergartens. She couldn't speak a word of German; still, they all loved her. They conversed in gestures and hand signals, my mother always told us – yes, unbelievable!

B. R.: We decided to leave the Soviet Union. In retrospect, I've determined that it was the right decision.

A. K.: We lived in Central Asia, in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. It was a quite normal life there, we worked and celebrated together with the Tajiks. Everything was absolutely OK, and then, all of a sudden, overnight – it wasn't a civil war yet; nevertheless, there were irregularities; it was so strict. Tajiks versus "Russians". Russians were all nationalities who spoke Russian. "Russians go home!"

O. B.-A.: It wasn't for any financial reason that I came to Berlin. The chief reason was that Berlin had a lot of art to offer. Secondly, I had already been here in Germany, in the 90s. I had studied here; German isn't a foreign language for me.

V. A.: Language shapes us, and Turkish is the language in which - I left in '72 - after 40, 45 years, I can still express myself best, most explicitly and freely.

T. A.: The decision to come to Germany wasn't so easy for me on a professional level. Language has always been my strong suit. And very quickly, I knew that I'd never be able to work in my profession with my German.

B. S.: I was put in the kindergarten, and the kids there spoke another language. I couldn't communicate with anybody, and I said to my mother: "What's wrong with the children; they don't understand me."

A. K.: And that's why I started to work with German-speaking people. With gestures and hand signals. (laughs) But what a relief for both sides. If they didn't understand something I said, we could depict it, that was the language.

R. R.: Like many Jews my age, after graduating high school, I attended a two-month language course in Israel. And I saw for myself that I was too German for Israel. We are really quite German; that's our homeland. And I never considered emigration.

V. A. Israel was never an option for me. I was far too zeitgeist oriented. Not religiously oriented. As I said, my home is Istanbul. And if I want to go out into the world, then really out into the world.

H. L.: For me, family, friends, the language, the weather and the food are very important. I really miss the people and the weather.

S. T.: When I take a look at Kreuzberg, Kreuzberg here in Berlin, I've recently noticed for the first time that I have a sense of home. A kind of local patriotism. That is to say, that I'm really a proud Kreuzberger.

T. A.: A good mixture of Germany and our homeland.

D. Km.: Naturally, it's my homeland and my home because I feel most comfortable here, and whenever I leave it, I notice very soon that I miss it. And I also notice what I miss because the lifestyle here, the international character, the mentality of the people is something that I like a lot.

S- T.-K.: If it were up to me, since my memories stretch over an incredibly long timespan, I haven't decided yet which city or which place has appealed to me most. There are far too many, and they're all so different.

D. Km.: I'm sometimes inwardly torn and try to reconcile it. But maybe that's a part of being Jewish. That being inwardly torn between different worlds, different ways of life. I think that characterises it also.

Intro

V. A.: How did I come to Berlin?

I'll really have to think about that. (laughs)

Wow, it's so long ago that I came to Berlin. Yes, I came to Berlin in '75.

S. T.-K.: With my brother; he's the reason I came to Berlin. He didn't like Vienna.

O. B.-A.: I've been living in Berlin since 2010.

A. K.: Since 2010.

N. B.: I was born in Berlin.

S. N.: I've been in Berlin since 1978.

G. B.: And so I've been in Berlin since 1967.

S. G.: I've been living in Berlin continuously since 1958.

A. G.: I've now lived in Berlin longer than I lived in Dresden.

L. K.: But at some point, you find yourself in Berlin, where I was then born and grew up.

R. R.: I'm one of the very few really German Jews. My family comes from Germany.

D. K.: I visited Berlin for the first time when I was 13. For the Love Parade. (laughs) Hello cliché!

J. T.: We came to Berlin in January 1996. With a one-way ticket, and we never looked back.

R. Y.: Then came the congregation from Berlin, they wanted to have a shochet.

S. T.: Then I was born here, in West Berlin. And was at first your typical Turkish child of immigrant workers.

B. A.: Two years later, I was born.

T. A.: Along with my husband and our two boys, I came to Berlin in the summer of 2009.

W. B.: I visited the place often with my parents, but came from the East to West Berlin in '45. We lived near Alexanderplatz. And so we stayed.

S. B.: I grew up in Uhlandstrasse, as did my sisters.

E. D.: With my father; you know, he quasi grew up here.

B. S.: So I was first here for a visit along with my parents in 1981. Then they decided to stay here.

L. G.: Thus, we came to Germany – I was 8.

E. K.: Actually, I came to Berlin right after my high school graduation.

K. G.: In May of '48.

H. L.: I've been in Berlin since the end of 2012.

I. M.: I went to school in Steglitz.

M. M.: I was born in Berlin,
and in truth, I've never left here for more than four months at a time. If I remember properly.

N. P.: I came to Berlin in 2004.

B. R.: We came to Berlin in 1990.

R. A.: I could always imagine
living in Berlin.

D. K.: Then I ended up staying here
in Berlin.

My Judaism

H. L.: I'm not so devout. For me, Judaism is more a culture and community and tradition. Through me, many families have seen this diversity. To them, they were all Orthodox and had sidelocks.

N. B.: I personally don't believe in the Great God.

S. B.: Knowledge has always interested me more than faith. Faith proceeds speculatively in your own mind.

S. T.-K.: Through this, I think I have a much stronger faith in humanity and good than the divisions you might get through faith.

S. B.: The Jewish aspect in my life is in any case also a part of my roots. I'd say it's rather more also Berlin and my family. A portion of the roots is in any case Judaism. You can dispute to a great degree after all to understand just such things, that generalisations make absolutely no sense.

A. G.: Our parents, I have another brother, when I was 13, 14 years old, my brother is two years younger, let us decide from that point pretty much for ourselves whether we wanted to become members of the Jewish Community. We weren't registered from birth. We were allowed to choose for ourselves.

L. G.: At 23, I woke up one morning and thought, something's missing. It can't be that this is all there is. Then I started to get interested in this: Where do the Jews come from? But actually, Judaism wasn't so important to me. It was your own thing; that's always less interesting anyway. Then I tried to find something in Islam at some point. I went to the mosque, I can also do the prayer and everything. And there was no logical explanation for it. With the Christians, you only ever heard that only those who are baptised get into heaven. What about the others? That was also nothing for me

A. K.: When I was 52 years old, I had for the first time in my life a religious book in my hands. That was the Torah in Russian.

D. K.: There, I found out for the first time what eternity means. When I had read the five books of Moses for the first time, I asked: And what do we read next? Then my religion teacher looked at me and said: "We'll start from the beginning again!" That was inconceivable to me. Then it became clear to me for the first time that they read it over and over.

E. K.: Like probably everyone after '45, I grew up in an Orthodox community that was fairly East European. That probably has something to do with the question as to why I didn't necessarily take this direction right away. And although I do it today, it's with great restraint.

R. A.: With Judaism, it was like this: My mother lived this Yiddishness a lot when I was younger.

E. D.: It was always there somehow; it was also always there in my childhood. Also through my grandma.

N. P.: I grew up in a pretty unreligious environment, and also not Jewish. I come from a Christian setting, actually. But I'm not baptised and I wasn't in the church as a child. I discovered my interest in Judaism myself, and it interested and inspired me. Then a kind of a process began; I talked to the rabbi, then it took another 2 or 3 years, but at some point, I concluded the process in Berlin.

L. G.: Then I met our rabbi. And he didn't try to convince me of Jewish existence. He said, "My Rebbe taught me....", he never said: "This is how it is, and we do it this way." He never tried to force his doctrine on me. "I only tell you that one can do it this way; you can decide for yourself." He allowed me complete freedom.

M. M.: We say we want to raise our children Jewish. We're not at all able to, because we don't have the knowledge.

We have to educate ourselves, then. And we've created something that's really phenomenal, namely this Limmud Learning Festival. It's set up something like a summer university.

S. T.: I find I had to fight hard for my Jewish identity.

Naturally, I was born into a Jewish home, but learning everything, going to Israel, investigating your roots for yourself, learning Hebrew, learning all the commandments, learning prayers, really immersing yourself in history, you don't come out of it anymore. Once you've really immersed yourself, I don't know anyone who really ever came back out. The thing is, in practice, things look a little different. I'd say I'm kosher-style!

R. A.: Now, I picture it this way, now that I'm a little involved, if that were my only point of reference, I think it simply wouldn't work. But then you'd be another person, after all. I mean, one is always a little schizophrenic. If I want to hang on to my childhood dream, then I'll go around in flowing robes, quite "tzniusdig", no problem. After all, I have a good salary from the UdK (University of the Arts), to buy the things with. But now namely the UdK comes into the game. When the semester starts up again, I have to on the one hand go around here so tzniusdig. But then I have to go teach. When my colleagues see me that way, then they'll think, Frau Adler must be crackers.

V. A.: After the journey, I came back to Istanbul, I can remember it very well. An acquaintance asked me, "How was it, did you like it?" I said to the acquaintance, "I got rid of my God in Israel. Now, I'm an atheist."

S. G.: It didn't occur to us that being Jewish was just a religion. They were mostly also atheists, after all. They weren't devout at all. Just like my mother.

For me, being a Jew always meant having a particular culture, living in a distinct culture.

B. A.: What constitutes Judaism for me, it's the tradition of Judaism. The tradition of Judaism characterised by celebrating together, praying together. The tradition of Judaism is also characterised by people sticking together.

W. B.: Sure, tradition was always strong at our house. OK, we didn't eat kosher, but no pork. Every Friday was celebrated at our house. Every Friday evening, regardless, war or not. My mother was also very, when we came there (unintelligible), there were quite a lot of parties for young people; 2000 people came. There were a lot of young people who had no parents. She invited many to have lunch at our place. For them it was like somebody was suddenly taking care of them. We made a special point of being humanitarian and living by tradition. We lived that way up until the end.

B. S.: I regard my being Jewish as membership in an ethnic group.

Even if people naturally now know that Jews are naturally not just one ethnicity, some would even disagree that Jews are an ethnicity. But for me it is indeed an ethnicity, it's a religion, a people, a nation. It's all of that together, somehow, tradition, a collective ordeal.

R. R.: If you ask the average Christian, they'll say I'm very religious. If you ask an Orthodoxen Jew, then more likely not. I don't comply with kosher rules, but I don't eat pork, or shellfish; that also isn't done at my home. On every door, up to and including the bathroom, I have a mezuzah hanging. I fast at Yom Kippur. I go to the synagogue on all the Jewish holidays. For me, Judaism is not only culture, but also religion.

B. R.: For my wife, it's very important to observe the Sabbath. She's very pleased when, on this occasion, the family is together on Friday evening.

L.K.: Religion as religion doesn't play a particular roll in my life. There are certain traditions that are observed. I don't eat kosher, for example, but also no pork. I don't observe the Sabbath; nevertheless, we try in the family to come together on Friday evening as often as possible. To make a Kiddusch there, to light candles, you name it. It has rather more a traditional than a religious component.

A. G.: What's clear is that we don't eat kosher. But we're capable of cooking kosher, when people come to visit for whom it's important to eat kosher.

S. T.-K.: In a wonderful hotel, there was a Jewish woman who wanted to eat only kosher. They brought the best kosher food to the hotel. (laughs)
You can't believe how far they go with that.

G. B.: If someone demanded Emunah of me, faith, then I'd have great difficulties. I'm a Marxist, I stand by that, I don't have to back off from anything. I'm a rational person, but when it's a matter of tradition, I can identify with it completely. And wanted to identify; that was my shortcoming.
To me it was clear that that's all different in Israel. In Israel, you can be a secular Jew, put two candles on the table on the Sabbath, say "Shabbat shalom" and have a nice Sabbath. Here, you live it either in the family and in the synagogue or you don't live it.

S. G.: And then in 1986, Socialism slipped away from under my feet, and there am I sitting in the Jewish Community in East Berlin, and on the way home, I thought, what is your notion of God, actually? And then it became clear to me it was of an old man with a white beard sitting on a cloud. Then I thought, that's really quite childish. That's a child's notion.
And then I started to ask myself, is there a God? And I started on an approximately ten-year journey of interest in the Jewish religion. I found things that I liked a lot and I found things that were truly the opium of the people.
And what I found, it is in fact a way, I don't know how I can express it, a notion, there's a consciousness, something that has created everything around us.

S. N.: In my life, there was also a time when I didn't go to the synagogue for ten years. I thought, why, you can pray yourself. I don't need a synagogue or a setting to present my faith in.
My faith is personal to me.

D. Km.: Until I moved to Berlin, my Judaism mainly existed contingent on outside attributes. Whenever people made me out as such, then I was. And that changed slowly for the first time here in Berlin, when it became clear to me what Judaism can be.

D. K.: I live my Judaism not in the sense that that I regularly go to services. But now I have a growing number of Jewish friends.

D. Km.: Also to an increasing extent in that I met my domestic partner, and it was clear that as a simple matter of course, I was given space to somehow include my being Jewish.

T. A.: So Judaism is also a big question for me, because, on the one hand, I'm an atheist, or at least secular, I'd say. But Judaism as my history and my culture is also quite important. Sometimes it's quite clear to me what I should say to my children or pass on to them, and sometimes, it's quite difficult.

E. D.: So I am when it suits me. (laughs) I celebrate Hanukkah; this time, it's at a quite convenient time, no? This year, it's at Christmukkah, after all. At our place, we also had more of a Christmukkah.

V. A.: My son's father is from South Germany. Father Catholic, mother Protestant, I think. In the beginning, when we were still together, we went to South Germany to the extended family on all the festive holidays. Christmas, I have learnt to celebrate Christmas. Easter was important, all sorts of Christian holidays. I said, something's going wrong. It's being thrown off balance. With so much Christianity, there must be some equality somewhere. And then I started celebrating Hanukkah.

I. M.: We observed all the holidays, because of the children. But we weren't terribly devout.

R. A.: I don't know what I am. Recently, I almost wanted to buy a sheitel. I had four to choose from, but then I returned them all.

D. K.: Also an indicator of being a Jew, it also means being in constant dissent with oneself, with religion and with the world. So, on the one hand, on the other hand.

Minority

R. R.: The majority of Germans here don't know any Jews, or think they don't know any. After all, it's not the first thing you say when meeting someone, "I'm a Jew."

A. G.: When you say you're Jewish, people have a picture of what that is and isn't. Secondly, regardless of whether it's about Jews or not, it's offensive that strangers think they can define my identity – or that they have to.

D. Km.: Either you assimilate, there, that means you become a member of the fire brigade, the gun club. And I was a member of the swimming club; I was captain of the water polo team. I was in fact champion in the 100 m breaststroke in Lower Saxony. That doesn't help me at all at the moment it becomes clear that you are different. I was the little Jew-boy, the "Yiddling", take your pick. Fairy, pansy, nance.

S. G.: They didn't accept me because I was an exotic creature in their eyes.

A. G.: I do think that has also left its mark on me, where you come from, why you were persecuted. Naturally, that burrows into you. I think that also leaves its mark, subconsciously, certain things, how you view the world. But it doesn't necessarily mean that I have to follow rules.

W. B.: Strangely enough, and what I'm saying is true, after the war, the Holocaust problem wasn't a matter of discussion at all. People didn't talk about it at all, not in the least. And I myself, I have to say, I've never sensed antisemitism. Everyone knew that I was Jewish, in the Lette Association or at work.

E. D.: My father, like many others, kept much hidden, or didn't tell much. He wanted also to suppress a great deal. It was connected with much pain, as with the loss of his father. He himself had this fear; that did in fact play a role, that is indeed a part of life. It's something that leaves its mark, also certain fears. Also with my father, who came back and lived here. But I had experiences with my father where he also laid it on the line for me, that you mustn't trust Germans so completely.

D. K.: It's hard when you think about your identity. You always find signs showing it's not possible here. If you're honest, as a Jew. If you have a business here and you reject your Jewish identity, then things can go pretty well here. Germans are basically not antisemites, per se.

B. S. I grew up in a Germany where old ladies crossed the street just because I had dark hair. I say in one of the passages on my album, which people can already buy, "For his teachers, he was just some dago, because this Jonathan just looked like a Mohammed."

S. T.: The question that I've often asked myself is, What kind of person would I have become if I had been born and raised in Turkey? But I think just about every German-Turk asks himself this question.

S. G.: Something that always set Jews apart for me was problems with their names.

V. A.: My grandfather's name is Mishon Levy. He wanted to register his name with the Muhtar. The Muhtar said: "Mishon Effendi, the first Levy has already been here. It cannot be permitted that, from the same district, the name is assigned more than once." That explains why there are so many variations of Türk: Türkmen, Öztürk, etc.

And then the Muhtar said: "Then we'll make you A-Levy."

S. T.: Until I was six or seven, I really couldn't speak any Turkish. Then I was sent to school and as I was seen as the child of Turkish immigrant workers, I'd have to go to an integration class. So, in the first grade, I was stuck in an integration class where there were only Turkish children, where we only spoke Turkish among ourselves. The result was that, after half a year, I started speaking Turkish, and my German got worse and worse. So much for the topic of integration.

T. A.: At home, we only speak Hebrew. It was obvious to me that the children they'll learn German well, through the nursery school, and afterwards at school. It was very important to me that they speak Hebrew, as well as reading and writing it.

B. R.: Although I approached my Mom and Dad a couple of times about teaching us Yiddish. They said yes, but they weren't in fact so active. And I remember my mother often saying, "Thank God! Oh, my God!" And my father always said: "What are you talking about? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? The child might also say that outside." Therefore, the topic of Judaism was practically taboo.

B. S.: I intentionally chose my stage name Ben Salomo because, in this rap game, in this rap scene, I wanted to show my ancestry. That had something to do with the fact that I grew up with the notion, I was always told, or I was forced to experience again and again that in Germany, or here in Berlin, where I grew up in districts like Schöneberg, Kreuzberg, Wedding, Charlottenburg, which is to say, in all the inner city areas, it's better not to advertise your Jewish ancestry.

R. R.: I very openly wear the Star of David.

As a teenager, I also did youth work. There were always T-shirts for this or that summer camp, for the youth centre, where the name was printed in big Hebrew letters, also that of the State of Israel. I've always done so, and continue to do so. These days, I don't wear the Star of David every day; It depends on the outfit. But up until now, there hasn't been a place of work or a friend where it wasn't known, or who didn't know that I'm Jewish.

R. A.: For example, I can usually observe the Shabbat here. Actually, always. I can make plans as I please. And even when the pupils have an evening recital, I can listen in, after all. Mind you, I have to walk there.

D. K.: In my job, I have nothing to do with Jews. Now and then, you meet some, at the theatre. "Ah, you're one, too!" Or something like that. Then you don't exactly fall into each other's arms, thinking, isn't it great that you're around? You make note of it.

M. M.: I grew up Jewish as such a matter of course, which is surely seldom the case for most people of my age.

My parents are also Berliners; although they were away for some time, but they're also Berliners; so that it was never alien to them here.

I went to a regular kindergarten here; there wasn't a Jewish kindergarten yet. In any event, it had just been founded. And for my parents, it was out of the question for me to make a special trip into town, with us living with a garden and go to a kindergarten, and I emphasise the "garden" part of the word. Then I went to a normal district primary school, later to the French high school like all my brothers and sisters. There, I was no longer the only Jewish kid in the class. Sometimes there were three, sometimes four. And the crazy thing about it was we all lived our Judaism in different ways.

T. A.: My identity isn't fully formulated yet, but it's already there. I would always feel like an Israeli, even if I lived 30 or 40 years in Germany.

O. B.-A.: I grew up with German culture. With German culture, I mean musical culture.

I grew up with classical music by German composers, in particular by Brahms, Bach, Beethoven, Mahler, Wagner. Yes, Strauss and Wagner were also part of it. I was always fascinated by the German language and German music. That's not an issue at all for me.

T. A.: Many Israelis here search for, possibly, another version of identity. Or culture. They want this base of Hebrew and Israeli culture to continue. But maybe they just want to see if it's possible to extract certain aspects from it.

H. L.: In the beginning, so many people asked questions about the Holocaust, about my family. I didn't want to stand before people all the time as just the Jewish woman, her family. I didn't want to be like that, I also wanted to be Hagar.

I think that's the best method of dealing with these issues. To really talk about them. And that's happening in Berlin and in Germany.

L. K.: The aggression and the potential for aggression and the inhibition threshold to voice antisemitism, has sunk. And namely since the Pro-Gaza/ Anti-Israel demonstrations of 2014.

There have always been anti-Israel demonstrations, where disgusting things have often been said against Israel. But that people would say things like, "Jew, Jew, lazy swine come on out and fight alone!", and it didn't even appear as though a distinction was being made between Israel and Jews, but rather that these were being equated with each other. And that at an anti-Israel demonstration, antisemitic things were said, that was something new in 2014.

R. R.: There isn't a Jew in Germany who hasn't experienced something like that.

K. G.: Five years ago, at my new address, someone wrote "Jewish swine" in the snow on my car. I reported it to the police, but nothing more than that.

N. B.: So we merged our camp and drank a beer together, and then one of the guys began cranking out conspiracy theories: Jews control the world, they control everything – the media, the money, they do it all. They're spying on us, etc. Then I got pretty angry, (laughs) I left camp.

B. S.: I often think, how do I picture Germany for my children? Should they also be in hiding? Shouldn't they have a mezuzah on their door? Or wear a Star of David, if they want?

T. A.: I would like my children to be citizens of the world, raised as open and liberal citizens.

H. L.: In the beginning, everyone asked me "Why do you have such an accent, where do you come from?" In the beginning, I was always the Jew or the Israeli.

When the pupils come to our activities once a week, you really see this process. After a couple of weeks or a couple of months, I'm Hagar. Then it's no longer an issue. Then we don't talk about Israel or Judaism anymore. Now and then, when there's a holiday, or they've heard something on the news. But I try to create a sense of normalcy. so that we can work in one room, although we're so different. That's not an issue.

S. B.: When you look at my family, a big one, mind you, there are so many of us, and all from a Jewish family, there isn't one who is like another.

When someone talked about "Jews", I never knew who they really meant. My sister? Me?

One's punctual, the other isn't. One is tidy, the other isn't.

In reality, that's all so daft; the pigeonholes we people need.

Mishpoche – Family

N. N.: Family is very important in Judaism. Every Jew will tell you that, whether he's a believer or not.

S. T.-K.: Then I had a brother, only the brother happened to have another father. And the father was terrible, he was terrible. That's the honest truth, but it's not his fault. He was always berating me, and that didn't bother me a bit. He was a stateless Rumanian my mother had picked up.

M. M.: My parents had known each other all along, from Berlin. Because my grandparents were distantly related, but lived three kilometres from each other in Berlin. My grandmother, who had already been in Berlin for several generations, a born Bentheim, and the Bentheims have ancestors in Magdeburg... or Halle? No, in Magdeburg.

A. G.: My mother is the chairwoman of the Jewish Community in Dresden.

S. N.: I have two children; one is a rabbi in Dresden and the other is a lawyer in Berlin.

W. B.: My father was a timber trader, so, a merchant and had a lot to do with German companies.

E. D.: My grandpa had, another classic picture, a business, 'Girdles und Knitwear'. A haberdashery and knitwear business. He originally came from Poland. Interestingly enough, I just found this out a short time ago.

A. G.: My mother was born in Berlin, but moved to Dresden at the age of two and was raised there and is a true Dresdener; my father comes from Spremberg.

L. K.: It's mainly a Polish background. It often changed owners, so to speak, depending on which government was in power. But it's mainly East and Central Europe. And then they came to Germany via different routes.

S. T.: This is how it is with my family: as far as I can look back, in any case, three generations back, there have been three migrations. My grandparents on both sides come from the Balkan Peninsula, most of them from the city of Thessaloniki, fleeing to Turkey during the Nazis period. My parents were then both born in Istanbul.

T. A.: My family had no direct connection to Germany. But my parents' ancestories are from Poland. And naturally on both sides of the family the majority were killed in the Holocaust, is that how people say it?

Y. T.: My family, the Teichtal family, had been documented for over 600 years in Germany. And at the beginning of the last century, some went to Poland, my great-grandfather was the chief rabbi of a town in Czechoslovakia, Piestany.

Many great Torah scholars came from there, and many well-known personalities, He wrote many books. And from there he was deported to Auschwitz in 1944. 63 members of the Teichtal family, were murdered in the Holocaust. But his son, my grandpa, Chaim Menachem Teichtal, survived.

R. R.: My grandparents and my uncle were hidden away. His parents were deported. My grandmother's brother was able to emigrate to the USA. How many more relatives died, no one knows.

G. B.: My childhood actually ended when I was six, when we had to hide my uncle.

W. B.: At that time, it was the end of October, the beginning of November, my father didn't want to go, my mother comes from Tiraspol and from Odessa. Back then during the War, they got married, in Russia. Then they came to Poland. She said, "Come on, let's go to Russia, my brother's there." My father said, "No, I won't go, not now in wintertime with the children; where should we go? I know how Germans are, they'll give us wagons, then we'll go over in spring." But after what happened with the Gestapo, we packed our things on Monday at 8:00 in the morning, got on the train at Kalisz Station in Lodz and went to Warsaw.

When we arrived in Warsaw, everything was destroyed. Only fireplaces remained standing; Warsaw didn't exist anymore. And from there, we rode to the border.

L. G.: My grandmother was in Treblinka, but only for three days. She came out because she could speak German well and she always maintained that she was German. From her appearance, I wonder how she managed that. If you looked her in the face, her Ponim was really so... everything! It doesn't get more Jewish than that.

B. R.: My maternal grandparents were buried alive in a little Ukrainian shtetl. And my paternal ones disappeared.

K. G.: Back then, I was told that they died in Auschwitz. But that wasn't the case. They died in Sobibor.

D.K.: People didn't dare talk about it in front of children. Then I always noticed, I always saw his number, 5566B.

D. Km.: Sh'erit ha-Pletah, the surviving remnant so then, by chance. They were prisoners in Buchenwald, some of them. Others in a subcamp; they were sent on death marches, and on a death march, they took off into the woods, and were lucky enough not to be shot. As simple as that.

S. G.: This middle sister was very angry with me for returning to the land of the murderers. She didn't understand that at all. Then she broke off contact with me for about 15 years. And my big sister, she was 16 years older, would never have set foot on German soil.

E. K.: What defined my early childhood up until her death, though, was this experience from the Shoah and also the conflict in being here, having landed here and not getting away. She made an attempt to emigrate to Israel in the 50s and that failed due to the fact that she was a violinist.

D. K.: It's no picnic with a Holocaust survivor, having one as a father.

V. A.: I come from a Jewish community in Istanbul. We didn't incorporate the subject of the Holocaust into everyday life. People knew about it, to be sure, but that was distant history. There was no individual concernment, as regards the Holocaust. I come from a Liberal Jewish family; there also wasn't any anti-German sentiment.

E. D.: It wasn't just the problem that you were playing for old Nazis, but also that you had old Nazis as your peers. And my father also got badly scandalised a couple of times, where there were also arguments.

M. M.: As an adolescent of 14, so at the beginning of the 70s, I was with the French Jewish youth tour on Machaneh, and it was terrible! - Yes. Yes, I had an Israeli madricha, Jael. She said: "What, you live in Germany, how can that be?" And held me responsible for my parents living in Germany.

N. B.: I don't know exactly what the reaction within the family was, that my grandma then moved to Germany.

T. A.: My husband's name is Olaf Kühnemann, and through that, you can already hear that he has German roots. More than roots; both his parents were Germans. And also not Jews. When he was four years old, his mother fell in love with an Israeli man and then married him, and they all moved to Israel.

S. T.: My father came to Germany, straight into the 60s, into the West Berlin left-wing hippie movement, and became a communist. My mother on the other hand comes from an impoverished shochet family, five children, six, in fact; I think one died. She came to Berlin as typical immigrant worker and worked at Telefunken on the treadmill as a worker drone with other Turkish women, and also lived with them in the workers' residence. And also got caught up in this left-wing movement. And both parents became members of the Turkish Communist Party.

A. G.: I would say the Jewish background played less of a role at that time. More important was that the family background had always been an anti-fascist one. My grandfather was a communist and survived Sachsenhausen.

E. K.: I come from a strange family. My father comes from a very devout Catholic family. That's the really religious part.

R. A.: My mother isn't religious at all, to be sure, but, she denies this now, she always glorified this world of the shtetl, when I was a child. Or that's the way I've understood it; it's give and take, after all. In any case, when we were in Paris, my mother said: "That's the old Ashkenazic bakery tradition!" And then as a child, I always thought: great, great!

B. R.: My father went through revolutions, all the wars. My mother too, but she was afraid of religion. As far as I remember. My parents' mother tongue was Yiddish. My mother only spoke Yiddish and Ukrainian until she was 14.

A. K.: My grandma was a devout woman. And when I asked from time to time as a child, "Babushka, grandma, can you show me the Hebrew letters?", because in Yiddish you also write with Hebrew letters, she said: "Go away!" Over and over, the same reaction: "Go away!" When I was grown up, I could understand why she reacted that way. She was afraid.

G. B.: The worst thing that could happen: the boy learns Yiddish. Judaism was always a very ambivalent thing for her.

W. B.: Yiddish with the parents, with the children among ourselves, Polish. Until today, which is to say, however's still there, whoever can talk, naturally.

S. G.: In Berlin, we spoke German. And in Melbourne, my mother never really learnt English. I never stopped speaking German. But at the age of 20, I had the vocabulary of a 12-year-old.

R. Y.: My parents are in Israel. Although that was a very good life in Uzbekistan. We were always waiting for the doors to open to leave the then Soviet Union to go to Israel.

B. R.: The family is totally scattered, unfortunately. My nephew, my sister's son, lives in New Zealand. He's a professor there. My sister lives in Israel; we're a small family.

B. S.: My father is also Israeli; he was born in Israel. His parents come from Rumania. My mother's parents come from the Soviet Union, today the Ukraine, from the city of Odessa on the Black Sea. And they came to Israel in the early 70s.

H. L.: My mother's family comes from Iraq. She understands Arabic. My mother and I can make small talk and understand a lot. But naturally, no complicated discussions. But that's already something.

B. A.: My father grew up Muslim, namely. His father was Muslim, but his mother was Jewish. My grandmother, a Jew, voluntarily moved to the Gaza Strip, to her husband, but that never bothered her. Religion was absolutely no problem in those days. My grandmother lived in the Gaza Strip until 2009. She died of old age there; she lived to be 106.

L. G.: She had this tic, a kind of twitch. And she never told what she had seen; she said: "You don't need that in the least; live your life, let's be merry. Life goes on; remember one thing, if you want to be happy: Nothing remains as it was in life. Everything changes! If you don't realise that, you'll never be happy. Simche (gladness) always!" Grandma was always our underpinning of happiness and mirth.

S. G.: My mother always had the attitude, her children always have to do what they feel is right.

Religion

S. N.: What's good about Judaism: everyone decides for themselves what they want to do, or not, and how they want to do it.

R. R.: My mother is Jewish, my father isn't. With us, it's determined according to the mother: that means I'm Jewish.

D. K.: That's a club you can't quit.

R. Y.: There are two different orientations; one orientation is the Ashkenazic, that's the one-time Jews of Europe, France, Germany and Poland. These Jews are called Ashkenazic Jews. Today, all European Jews are called Ashkenazic Jews. Then there are the Jews who were once in Spain. These are the Sephardic Jews, because Spain is called "Sepharad" in Hebrew. And Germany is called "Ashkenas" in Hebrew.

N. P.: The community means for me also that, when travelling, in many places in the world, you can always find a Jewish community where you can always go.

R. Y.: The Ashkenazic Torah looks like a roll. That's the Ashkenazic one. It looks like a roll, as you see here, from two sides. A beautiful cloak is placed on it, and there's also a silver crown. That's a kind of box, it's made of gold and silver. We see: golden Jerusalem, the twelve tribes of the people of Israel and the entire roll is inside.

Y. T.: I have a double function. On the one hand, I'm a rabbi of the Jewish Community of Berlin. Until a short time ago, there was still a rabbi here, who has retired. Of the Ashkenazic Jews, I am now the only Orthodox rabbi of the Jewish Community of Berlin. There's also a Sephardic rabbi; we're in close contact. Nevertheless, Chabad was established here 20 years ago. At the Jewish Community's invitation, to establish Jewish life. We especially place value on the joyful, active, open, transparent nature of Judaism. What does Chabad mean? Chabad comes from three words Chochma, Bina and Daat, meaning: concept, understanding, alliance. The idea is to always understand what we're doing. We say we're not Orthodox, not Liberal; we are only people. But people want to have categories. So now, are they partly Orthodox or even Liberal? The rabbis themselves are traditional, Orthodox, but open. Orthodox circles are frequently closed. You have to have a certain elevation to take part, you have to practise at a certain level. If not, there's no place for you. With Chabad, that's not the case. Anyone can take part, anyone can come. Every person is respected. Let's take as an example: someone who is homosexual. He has just as much a place in the synagogue as anyone else. That doesn't mean that the Bible or tradition or religion accepts it, but it means everyone is respected. First as a person; we are all people. We will respect all for what we are.

B. R.: Many people ask me which synagogue I attend. I say, I attend an Orthodox synagogue. Luckily, we have various synagogues in Berlin for every taste. People marvel and say, "But you don't look like an Orthodox Jew." I'm not Orthodox, but I'm grateful to the Orthodox because, this is my firm belief, thanks to them, we have our Judaism. Until today.

R. Y.: We don't say they should do things that way. We try to have it so that everyone prays according to his ritual. With the synagogue, it's exactly as it is with food. You can't force people to eat what they don't want.

M. M.: We were regulars at Pestalozzistrasse, so, quite important. Pestalozzistrasse was like a second home to me. But much worse than that, it was actually my castle. Because Estrongo Nachama, every time, when I went Friday evenings to drink kiddush wine, climbing the three steps, to the bimah, he, so to speak lifted me up and said: "My empress!" If you do that often enough with a girl over two to four years, then it sticks in your memory. There are also observant therapists who say, "Yes, you've retained something from that; every now and then, you feel like an empress."

S. T.: The development in the Berlin Community is very interesting and exciting. But that was difficult back then, practising here in the mid-90s. Now it's different, but then it was really very hard. It was hard to find a Jewish husband at that time. The practice was hard, there weren't any kosher businesses, etc.

B. R.: The new generation has come, new, young people. I have the possibility of comparing the congregation: 1990 and 2016, it's like night and day.

E. K.: Berlin was interesting for many reasons in those days, as a result of having more than one congregation. There were the very beginnings of people wanting something else. These egalitarian, so to speak emancipated attempts, in which girls or women are allowed to read from the Torah or perform a part of the service, which slowly came into being in the early 90s.

R. R.: You never know about a thing like that in Berlin. In Cologne, people go to the unitary congregation, where I grew up.

N. P.: We have a rabbi, who comes regularly. He's not there every Friday. He comes to us because he's Orthodox, and our synagogue is Orthodox-compatible. We are a conservative synagogue; men and women sit separately from one another. That's rather more Orthodox. But we don't have a partition between them. That would be really Orthodox. So, they sit within eyeshot; they can wave at one another. Partners can almost sit side by side, with an aisle between them. But we only have men on the bimah, the stage where the Torah lies. Only men are called to the Torah. Cantors are exclusively men, and the rabbi can also only be a man.

S. T.: I readily call this synagogue a hybrid synagogue. Because it doesn't allow itself to be so pinned down, as far as the orientation it belongs to, Reform, Orthodox, Conservadox, Reformox, I've no idea. And that's the good thing about this synagogue.

G. B.: And then my late wife and others wanted to finally be seen in their dignity as women in the synagogue. And we began an egalitarian minyan. Once a month in the congregational hall, always under the roof of the large congregation, never veering from this.

S. G.: One year later the New Synagogue was once again inaugurated, after being actually built as a museum, but in fact it had a prayer room on the third floor. And it was my dream for us to get that. By then, I had heard that in Fasanenstrasse in the West part of the city an egalitarian minyan had been founded, so that over the course of only a few weeks, the minyan-in-training became one under the direction of Miryam Rosengarten; because she had grown up in an Orthodox family in Israel, she was better-versed than anyone else.

E. K.: That there have been educated Jewish women, and that they were also educated in a halakhic way, there's no question about that.

G. B.: We were thought of as the synagogue of gays and lesbians, because some people of that ilk were among our numbers. We are not a gay and lesbian synagogue, but with us, everyone, regardless of their sexual orientation, has a place, without being scrutinised. And where women can mess about with the Torah. That was the way people thought of us in the community at that times. Then Avital came as a cantor and got a great contract.

V. A.: I can remember that my grandparents were much more devout than my parents. I know that there were grandparents who made sure that meat and dairy products stayed separate. I've already heard that there's such a separation. There was kosher meat. My mother always bought kosher meat when she wanted quality. It was clear: the best meat was from the kosher butcher. And she bought kosher meat for the festive season. Or else kosher chicken, that was the best farmer's chicken. Our relationship with kosher was more quality than religiosity. That's what I mean by Liberal.

L. G.: The word "Mashgiach" comes from Hebrew: Hashgacha, the supervision. He's the representative of the rabbi. The rabbi is actually supposed to be here, but as he can't be everywhere, he has various people

who he deploys where he's supposed to be. In the rabbi's name, this person awards a stamp, the hechsher – that's the name of the stamp which symbolises that certain things, also inspected with my assistance, are kosher. And the Mashgiach is always appointed by the rabbi. The rabbi determines who is the Mashgiach. That means if he gave me a call at the hotel and said, "He's no longer my Mashgiach, I'll send a new one," then I'd have to cancel the contract.

G. B.: In contrast with parts of Orthodoxy, you have to be careful: As much as strict rules in the synagogal space are naturally mandatory for us all, so little would anyone look into someone else's pot or bed.

R. A.: If you obey just one mitzvah on Shabbat, that doesn't mean you have to obey them all. And that if you know that you won't manage to obey all of them, that you don't obey any. So you can go ahead and light candles and then do your laundry afterwards.

N.B.: We even celebrated Shabbat every Friday.

E. D.: We were having the Shabbat meal; then I had to light the candles. I haven't done that for a long time now. I had to think about that for a second, (laughs) how the prayer, the brakhah, goes.

L. K.: I find Passover makes sense, that's why I like Passover quite a lot, because it's a historical holiday in principle. Underlaid with religion and religious practices, admittedly, but in principle, you celebrate the exodus from Egypt and thereby a historically important event. That's why I like it so much and therefore it makes sense, in order to remember everything that happened in connection with that, not to eat leavened bread for eight days. What that has to do with my basically not chewing gum that could have a flour derivative on it, and that, if I were strictly obeying Orthodox rules, I wouldn't be able to chew this gum, this I find, with all due respect, bonkers. Thus, I chew gum but don't eat leavened bread, because for me, it makes sense, it's simply logical. You should remember it and change something accordingly in your everyday life to maintain this memory; that makes sense. If you don't strictly obey Orthodox rules, you can play around with it a bit and see your own sense.

E. K.: The Megillah is what is read out at Purim. And there's a peculiarity with the Megillah, this being that it does indeed belong to the canon, but at the same time, unlike all other works, it doesn't mention God's name even once.

L. G.: Judaism is so real; a living religion in this world. We want to be happy here, and try to understand what's going on here. We're not living here to ask what comes after death...?

Together

S. A.: Two and a half years ago I came to Germany with my family. When we arrived in Germany, we lived in a dormitory in Marienfelde. When we came here, we didn't have any idea where we would be able to live or stay. But my aunt explained, took care of and prepared everything. We came from the airport and our flat was ready for us; reserved, in fact. I live there because it's the first place I was ever at. And also the first flat. Although it's a small flat, I like it quite a lot. It's the first place I ever lived here in Germany.

B.R.: He said, "Yes, there's a contingent of refugees, you can stay here." But how should we stay? He said, "Listen up, I'll pick you up tomorrow. And I'll bring you to the compound", at that time in the American zone in Marienfelde.

G. B.: The security there is excellent. It's basically Palestinians and Arabs who live in Berlin. And they are also very strict; but as soon as there's a conflict, they go at it in a conciliatory way. And the Palestinian security man, when we come in, he hugs the rabbi. (laughs) I had no idea what was going on.

T. A.: Our children went to Heinrich Zille Primary School. More than 50 % of the children there are Muslim. And we found that quite nice, really great, because in Israel it's not possible that easily to work together and to live together.

R. S.: I can't say that the Palestinians are against the Jews. That doesn't make sense; I'm half Palestinian. My parents are Christians. My parents are against Israel, not against the Jews. And these points were difficult for me in the beginning. And I wanted to change something in these words when we translate them into Arabic. When we organise a project for young people, they have to know that there's a difference between Israel and the Jews. And between Palestine, the Palestinians and Islam. Not all Palestinians are Muslims, and not all Israelis are right-wing.

S. A.: When our neighbour was at our place, this Israeli man, we wanted to take a photo with him, but my mother didn't want that. And I asked, "Why don't you want to? He's quite nice." "Yes, I know he's quite nice; he helped us. But I don't want my relatives, my family, my friends to see these pictures on Facebook."

A. G.: Today it's more the case that most people don't know any Jews. That's a total blackbox to them. And if they hear the word "Jewish", then they think: Israel. Because that's the only thing in their heads that a perceptibly Jewish actor is.

S. T.: Another time, I had a performance in a school, in a primary school in Kreuzberg where it felt like 99% of the kids were of Palestinian extraction. In the beginning, you could feel a slight sense of reserve. On top of that, in the play, a pig by the name of Babette was also performing, and the reaction in the beginning, that was interesting, with the Palestinian children it was exactly the same reaction as with the Jewish kids in an Orthodox primary school, namely: "Eeehhh, yuck, a pig, yuck!" But with both groups at the end of the show, with the Palestinian as well as with the Orthodox Jewish children, it was the same thing: they all wanted to stroke the pig.

N. B.-P.: This is the way it was, actually: I'm not unfamiliar with this music because on the one hand, even here where I grew up, in Pankow, again and again on Rias Berlin I heard the broadcast of the Shabbat celebration. I was also knew the music from home, we had it on records, a few things that had also been recorded in Czechoslovakia. And we also had, which wasn't often the case among the few Jewish Berliners who lived there, Jewish families in our circle of friends and in our surroundings, who, like so many in the East, weren't very strict in the practice, often having even more of an ideological background that was close to that of the System, but who were always very much aware of being Jewish. Our family were, for example, also close friends of Anna Seghers. For her, over her entire life, that was a subject that she was always dealing with, also in advancing age. Both she and her husband. In this respect, it basically wasn't alien. Secondly, such is the case that, especially as a result of my work in the association, I was, because the founding president belonged to the Jewish community, inevitably also often invited to family celebrations, bar mizvahs, bat mizvahs, etc., also to the feast days. And very quickly, especially as a result of my visits to the Pestalozzistraße synagogue, I experienced this music as, and found it to be – now also hearing it live in

the synagogue – something special, without being able to understand it, as far as the words were concerned. But everyone who hears this synagogal music, something happens to him as a rule, and he senses that something sacred is occurring, even if he can't explain it. Then I learned for the first time what a distinctive feature this is, also that the Nazis almost managed to wipe out this music this liturgic tradition, if you can put it that way, more efficiently than the Jews themselves. In Germany, there is only one synagogue, which still celebrates this tradition to the full extent as was customarily the case in all synagogues. The fact that our history is absolutely inconceivable as anything but a German-Jewish history, is something I was made to know early on. By the way, also at the much-maligned school in the East. These issues always had a strong presence for me.

M. R.: For a long time, we were in the district Mitte, in Anklamer Strasse. And so we come to the issue, in principle. We had our business there, and pretty soon women also came in who wanted to have their wigs reconditioned and styled. And in this way, I came into contact with Orthodox Judaism. Up until that moment, I wasn't at all aware that many Orthodox women wear wigs. I simply didn't know that and needed some time before I realised what the issue with the wigs is. Or why someone looking in from outside saw that I was alone in the shop and then left, I only understood that later, that it might be better, if a female employee were there, to have her do it rather than me. If you're not socialised that way, how should you know how you should deal with someone of Orthodox faith? s a man, how do I behave correctly with a woman? Or how is she allowed to act towards me? What's right, and what's wrong? Where are you supposed to get this information? Nobody teaches you that; there's no Internet site called "How To Act Right" or something like that. As such, I found it nice that Lizzy or others felt free to tell me, it looks like this or that. With my parents, everything was totally on an equal footing. When you're confronted with a situation where the husband has a say in whether the wife's fringe is to the right or the left, whether the ends point in or out, hat was quite a new experience for me.

E. D.: Especially as I find, I'll just be heretical and say it, that there are also things to criticise in our religion as with every other religion. Let's take for example the status of women. We all know what that is. As far as that aspect is concerned, I'm not close to any religion.

H. B.: The women of this culture, I find that to be an example. As far as Jewish culture goes, everyone says that it's very conservative. I haven't found it to be that way. I know a lot of women who have a lot of children. A really good family, nevertheless a good career, good work. I find that's very good, when you have a chance of having both. We live in modern times; this also goes for women.

M. R.: I've also noticed that the greatest criticism of Orthodox Judaism comes from liberal Jews and not from the Christians or other people, who take the view that they should do as they please.

H. B.: My three children go to Heinz Galinski School, a Jewish private school. Our children aren't the only Kurdish children; there had also been a few Kurdish children before. Now there are three or four families, half Jews, half Kurds. It's not only Kurds; there are also Germans, Catholic Germans. I find that it's a very liberal and open school. The Jewish culture is not so alien to me because our village and the Jewish village are neighbours. Our grandparents have good contact to many Jewish families. There have been friendships up to now. That's why the culture is also close to me and not so alien. I myself don't ascribe to such a faith, but I want my children to grow up with a culture. I'm a Kurd, but I don't have any religious rituals. We don't have anything like that at all; we only celebrate Newroz once a year.

L. G.: Back then, there was a youth club called "Anne Frank". I don't know if people know that. All kinds of people met there: Afghans, Lebanese, Turks, all kinds. And they knew who I was; we got on with each other wonderfully. I grew up with the various mentalities. That means, when I'm confronted by a certain mentality, then I know how I should behave. But I don't do so because I feel forced to. Rather, because I know that peace between us all only comes about via communication. When I say what I am, then that's what I am! And if my counterpart doesn't accept it, then I don't want to have anything to do with him; that only brings discord to the world.

N. P.: We speak Hebrew on the street when we're out and about with Israeli friends; I like that, that we can do this without getting worried. And many of us who wouldn't necessarily wear a kippah in everyday life go to and from the synagogue with a kippah.

R. Y.: And here, where we work with Muslims. we get on very well; we visit the mosque or the people from the mosque visit us. Or from the other religions.

N. B.-P: These are very moving moments for us also motivating for the choir: the Synagogal Ensemble is after all mostly not made up of Jewish singers, but rather, lo and behold, simply of good singers who happen to sing perfectly in this ensemble and who are given attention to ensure that their Ashkenazic pronunciation is so good that after concerts in Israel, they regularly wanted to and should get drawn into conversations by the customers and guests, who were all completely bewildered, and came to Regina and said: "They can't respond!" No, after all, that's a Russian, a Belorussian, a woman from Croatia, and some from Cottbus.

S. N.: There was already a Muslim student among them. That actually made me proud that the Muslim students also come here. He was from Lebanon and I asked him: "You know that we're in a Jewish university? We have required courses like the Holocaust and Jewish History." And he said, "I've got no problem with that at all. Jewish History is also my history. And the Holocaust is part of German history, I know that."

D. H.: There were several key events that brought me to these matters, where I had the feeling that such an encounter strengthens and supports me somewhat in my way of thinking. One person is a former schoolteacher of mine, Mr. Günter Kaminski. Later, it was in particular the encounter with Shlomit, which I believe will be featured here, that was highly relevant. For she was a person that I could exchange views with, with whom I could very candidly lay my lack of knowledge on the table.

I'm a passionate football player and spectator I'm a fan of the Turkish football club Fenerbahce and myself play football in Berlin in my spare time with TuS Maccabi. I'm a striker, and in the last season, I shot more goals than the rest of the team put together. By now, we've become – the term has gone out of style – a multiculti team. The first match was an away game; everything was going well. The second match of the season that we had as a team was a home game against Meteor, and in the 60th minute, it came to a fist fight between one of the opponents and one of our spectators. I've been playing football in Berlin all my life. On and off, naturally also with extended intervals. I've often experienced something like that; I don't want to downplay it at all, what we've experienced as Maccabi – in some cases, really ugly stories, involving attacks, knives being pulled, fist fights – someone lost his teeth. I haven't experienced anything in this extreme form in the past – last season, it was quite extreme. But unfortunately, you still witness racism, anti-Turkish sentiments or also antisemitism very often in football in Berlin.

O. B.-A.: Among artists, we get on so well with others from Turkey, from Palestine, from Syria, from Lebanon. It's politics that unfortunately spoils everything.

B. S.: Ultimately, we're all one when it comes to hip-hop culture. And that was a milieu and a philosophy that welcomed me; the first one that welcomes me and many others and says "You're a Jew; that's OK, and he's an Arab, and that's OK. You both dance, and you both rap – why don't you do it together?"

R. R.: When you look at online media: it's quite common and acceptable to bash minorities and whoever else.

Y. T.: In a society, it's very important that we know that we all have a responsibility. We're not just here to exist and to acquire things. The first and foremost responsibility that we have, especially now in Europe, where so many things are unsteady, especially now, it's of great importance that every person in this society knows „I'm not an outsider“.

H. L.: But sometimes we can only think collectively. Why are things the way they are, and what do we actually want? Is it the case that all Jews want this? And that all Muslims want this? Is that really the case, or is there diversity?

S. T.-K.: I hope you're enjoying this; it's untold fun to me. In a time when one can ask, 'Where is the nature of mankind headed?', my kind of stories gives hope. (laughs)