The Shoah, Pfizer, And The Vaccine That Protects And Saves Millions In Israel

THE BOURLA FAMILY

“Bourla” (also spelled “Burla”) is the surname of a famous Sephardic family from Spain. After the expulsion in 1492 we find this family in Salonika (Thessaloniki), Greece, and in Smyrna, Turkey. Over time, part of the Bourla family migrated to Erets Israel, where they lived for centuries. Some examples: Rabbi Israel Burla (d. 1798) was one of Jerusalem’s leading scholars at that time. He is famous for his mission in Europe to enlist the help of European Jews for the benefit of Jerusalem by creating a special voluntary tax. Among his books are “Mekor Yisrael.” His son was Rabbi Yehuda Burla, author of Nachalat Yehuda. The son of Yehuda was the celebrated Rabbi Yosef Nissim Burla (1828-1903) who participated in the construction and settled in Mishkenot Shaannim, the first Jewish neighborhood outside the walls of Jerusalem. He was the author of Leqet Yosef, a collection of Halachot arranged alphabetically; Va-Yeshev Yosef, Rabbinical Responsible; Od Yosef Chai, Olat Shabat and others. Yehoshua ben Bekhor Burla (1852–1939), was a bookbinder by trade, and was in charge of Qeber Rachel in Bet Lechem and the grave of Shimon ha-Tsadiq in Jerusalem. He was the father of one of the most famous Israeli writers, Yehuda Burla (1886 – 1969), who wrote on Sephardic history and culture and especially on Yehuda Halevi. Yehuda Burla was awarded the PRAS ISRAEl (Israel Prize), the most prestigious award given by the State of Israel.

SALONIKA and AUSCHWITZ

Yesterday I mentioned that Thessaloniki was probably the largest Sephardic community in the early 20th century (see

here). After the 1917 fire, the Jewish population decreased. Many Jews left the city, and fortunately many of them emigrated to Israel. At the beginning of World War II there were approximately 60,000 Jews in Thessaloniki. When the Nazis arrived in Thessaloniki, many tragic events occurred: a possible act of betrayal by a prominent member of the community (it is not easy to judge what actually happened in those times from our post-Holocaust perspective, so we better leave it there…). The Jews of Thessaloniki, practically the entire community, were deported to concentration camps in March 1943. The Bourla family and all their sons and daughters also boarded the terrible cattle cars that led to Auschwitz. Ninety-five percent of the Jews in Thessaloniki, 54,000 Jews, were murdered at Auschwitz-Birkenau, or died during the terrible "Death March" from January to May 1945 (see more here). A member of the Bourla family survived the inferno. He married another Holocaust survivor, and in 1961 they had a son, his only child, Israel Abraham Bourla, also known as Albert Bourla.

ALBERT BOURLA

Albert grew up and was educated in Thessaloniki. He received his doctorate in reproductive biotechnology from the Veterinary School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. At 34 he left Greece and in 1993 he joined Pfizer in the US. He held many important positions and in January 2016 he served as president of the company's Innovative Health Group. At the beginning of 2020 Bourla was the CEO of Pfizer International. In 2020, in light of the global COVID19 outbreak, Bourla ordered his team at Pfizer to act aggressively to develop a coronavirus vaccine. In November 2020, Pfizer announced that the vaccine they developed was effective in 95% of cases.

COVID19 and LA SHOAH

Simon Griver writes in «Globes» (January 4, 2021): *"There is no mystery as to how Israel has already managed to vaccinate*

more than 1.25 million people. In just over two weeks, 13.5% of the population, including 52% of people over 60 will be vaccinated. Israeli health maintenance organizations are effective, highly digitalized and have been mobilized with enormous efficiency. What is not clear is how Israel received so many doses of the Pfizer vaccine so quickly… Israel had ordered millions of doses of the Moderna and AstraZeneca vaccine, but did not order any doses of the Pfizer vaccine. When Pfizer announced that its vaccine was 95% effective against Covid-19 Israel's top health officials were embarrassed that the country had bet on the wrong horse. So Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu immediately spoke to Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla. It was the first of several calls. And ultimately Israel received four to five million doses of the world's best vaccine in existence before the end of 2020, enough to vaccinate and save the lives of at least two million people. "

It is very sad to think how many millions of future and potential "Albert Bourla"s were lost in the Shoah. But on the other hand, it is quite a miracle how Holocaust survivors rose from the dust and ashes, and by themselves or through their descendants, save the lives of their brothers and sisters in Medinat Israel.