# Class #14- My father was a decorated Nazi and I am a Jew

# Senior Fellowship Leadership Program

Rabbi Pinny Rosenthal - prepared collaboratively with Rabbi Yoni Sacks



<https://www.chabad.org/multimedia/video_cdo/aid/2375263/jewish/I-Am-the-Son-of-a-Nazi.htm> minute 9:39

1. What event motivated Bernd to explore his past?
2. Why do you think Bernd ‘s exploration never happened before?
3. How did the murder of the Israeli athletes in the 1972 Munich Olympics change Germany’s approach to the Holocaust?
4. What was Bernd’s evolution from seeing his father as a war hero – the youngest tank commander under General Heinz Guderian, the Father of the German Blitzkrieg to ultimately converting to Judaism and joining the IDF?
5. Did Bernd convert purely to escape the evil of Nazism or was there an attraction to the positive of Judaism as well?

Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 43:8

(8) Rabbi Nechunia, son of Haḳḳanah, said: Know thou the power of repentance. Come and see from Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who rebelled most grievously against the Rock, the Most High, as it is said, "Who is the Lord, that I should hearken unto his voice?" (Ex. v. 2). In the same terms of speech in which he sinned, he repented, as it is said "Who is like thee, O Lord, among the mighty?" (*ibid.* xv. 11). The Holy One, blessed be He, delivered him from amongst the dead. Whence (do we know) that he did not die? Because it is said, " 9:15 'I could have unleashed My power, killing you and your people with the epidemic and you would have been obliterated from the world. 9:16 The only reason I let you survive was to show you My strength, so that My name will be discussed all over the world." (*ibid.* ix. 15).

He went and ruled in Nineveh. The men of Nineveh were writing fraudulent deeds, and everyone robbed his neighbor, and they committed sodomy, and such-like wicked actions. When the Holy One, blessed be He, sent for Jonah, to prophesize against (the city) its destruction, Pharaoh hearkened and arose from his throne, rent his garments and clothed himself in sackcloth and ashes, and had a proclamation made to all his people, that all the people should fast for two days, and all who did these (wicked) things should be burnt by fire.

1. What verse does the Midrash use to prove that the King of Ninveh was, in fact, Pharaoh?
2. Why did Paroh do teshuva? What was his journey according to the Midrash?

First Confrontation with Pharaoh

5:1 Moses and Aaron then went to Pharaoh and said, 'This is what Hashem, God of the Hebrews, declares: 'Let My people leave, so they can sacrifice to Me in the desert.' '

5:2 Pharaoh replied, 'Who is Hashem that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not recognize Hashem . Nor will I let Israel leave.'

5:3 'The God of the Hebrews has revealed Himself to us,' said [Moses and Aaron]. 'Please, allow us to take a three day journey into the desert, and let us sacrifice to Hashem our God. Otherwise, He may strike us down with the plague or the sword.'

The Final Plague

12:29 It was midnight. God killed every first-born in Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh, sitting on his throne, to the first-born of the prisoner in the dungeon, as well as every first-born animal.

12:30 Pharaoh stayed up that night, along with all his officials and all the rest of Egypt. There was a great outcry, since there was no house where there were no dead.

12:31 [Pharaoh] sent for Moses and Aaron during the night. 'Get moving!' he said. 'Get out from among my people - you and the Israelites! Go! Worship God just as you demanded!

12:32 Take your sheep and cattle, just as you said! Go! Bless me too!'

12:33 The Egyptians were also urging the people to hurry and leave the land. 'We are all dead men!' they were saying.

1. How is Old Germany- represented by Bernd’s father - like Paroh?
2. What level of personal *makkot* produces teshuva?
3. How was the Munich massacre a Maka which woke up the Young German generation represented by Bernd?

Scenario #1 - Joe MJER hates to floss and brush his teeth every day. Every time he goes to the dentist, he gets chided, but always falls back to the same bad habits. What would Paroh advise Joe to do?

Scenario #2 Jane MJER has a non-observant friend- Nancy. Nancy often asks Jane, “why she is observant?”. How would Bernd advise Jane to answer this question given his experience of fleeing his old life and finding meaning in his new Jewish life?

Scenario # 3 – Steve MJE’er has issues with health, his growing weight and increasing blood sugar levels. Yet, he is afraid to go the doctors – as he senses that he will have to make radical changes. What would Paroh advise Joe to do?