

# THE GOLEM IN THE VELD

## An historical fiction

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Now this policeman was harassing us in our own synagogue. He noted the registration numbers of all the guests outside in the car park off Louis Botha Avenue. He went into what we called the sanctuary and sat at the back with a borrowed skull-cap on. Scarlet. Captain Van Wyk made notes as the officiating Rabbi Blumberg spoke about what progressive Jews like us could do now that the Afrikaner Nationalists had come to power after the whites-only election of 1948. A synagogue warden came up to the plain-clothes detective and asked him to stop. He said he was a police-officer and was investigating a charge of treason. He showed his police ID card. The warden was shocked and whispered this information to the rabbi during his address. Blumberg acknowledged this with a smile and a wave of his hand as if it didn't matter. "Above all", he said in the midst of his discourse: "We must show that we are not going to be intimidated".

By the time I was 13 I knew from what my parents told me, from what had already emerged at the Nuremberg trials and the books and articles that followed, that millions had died in a war against the vilest racism the world had ever seen - in Europe. The killing of civilians was mercilessly industrialised in the death-camps. And now this. We were challenging the petty, second-rate white supremacy of sometimes resentful, narrow, people, once themselves suppressed by British imperialism. Boers. We were flinging our existential rationale in the faces of cruel Calvinist farmers and their rugby-playing urban proletariat: a white Jewish boy and a Xhosa/Zulu boy, his best friend, were entering together into a rite of passage, the sons-of-the-commandment, as b'nei-mitzvah.

My father and uncles and my older second cousins and my school-mates' male kin and women - military nurses - had served in Montgomery's 8th Army in North Africa, some killed, others wounded, many captured or surviving but traumatised at battles like Tobruk and El Alamein. These men and women were Christians and included Africans and mixed race people who served as "auxiliaries", not allowed to carry arms in case they learned how to turn them against the white man, digging trenches, being batmen for officers, carrying wounded and dead soldiers off the battlefield, fighting to protect the world against a totalitarian ideology that would destroy liberal democracy forever. My father Lewis, a reconnaissance photographer and his co-pilot had baled out of a plane shot up by the Luftwaffe narrowly escaping being burned alive in the Western Desert then walking in the intense heat with little water and food, starting their way with maps and compass back to the Allied lines, coming across Bedouins or Tuaregs with whom they pleaded for help saying in Arabic (from a handy textbook which they quickly memorised whilst anxiously waiting in case the camel caravan was in the pay of the Germans) that Allah was the All-Compassionate one and offering Egyptian money. They arrived back by camel and Lewis promised the All-Compassionate that his life would be dedicated to peace and good works (and, in case God was also nearly overcome by the heat) gave all the money he had in his tent to their rescuers.

My father often pondered the happy thought that at least Field Marshall Rommel was not a Nazi. And the unhappy thought that when he lost in North Africa, Hitler ordered him to commit suicide or

be executed. There was hope for the Germans and the human race if only because an Erwin Rommel showed the way. And yet were we not all doomed as potential slaves of the next imperialist world power? A dystopian race with their Android- robots salvaging an uninhabitable world, devoid of the fauna and flora of our hitherto wonderful planet.

This was the world into which I and Phakamisa Mtwana were entering - into our Jewish manhood. As well as getting through the primary school syllabus coached by my sister Esther and me, Phakamisa and I had gone to Rabbi Blumberg's Hebrew and Jewish history lessons and Rabbi Blumberg and the other Progressive Congregations' rabbis had eventually accepted Phakamisa's conversion to Judaism.

And here was an alleged Hitlerite, Captain Van Wyk, interned by Field Marshall Smuts, the defeated prime minister, whose United Party except for its liberal Minister of Native Affairs and ex-deputy prime minister, Jan Hofmeyr and a few other progressive M.P.s, also supported an all-white voting franchise and white supremacy. Yet they fought the Nazi racists heroically. Did they? Or was it just self-preservation on behalf of a racism which they thought was white western civilisation and historically home-grown and natural in Southern Africa?

But, as I say, Van Wyk's presence didn't just represent an attempt at state control of ordinary white middle class liberals. It was also because a white boy and a black convert, Phakamisa Mtwana, 13, were having a joint bar-mitzvah. A young man with a Xhosa mother and a Zulu father had become one of the Chosen People. Unheard of. An outrage. Moreover he would have a clinically safe circumcision in this his 14th year, as is the custom amongst even amongst urban African Christians. His father, Matthew, took Phakamisa's peer group from the villages in the Valley of a Thousand Hills, into the lower Drakensberg where they found hundreds of San (Bushpeople's) rock cave paintings, centuries old, perhaps a thousand years old, including the famous scene of the dying Eland with crossed back legs, which was the /Xam's icon into the world of the ancestors and the deities like the Moon, Mantis, the grandson of Mantis, the mysterious water-snakes which are associated with the rain.

The Reverend Dr. Shepstone, a descendent of Theophilus Shepstone, the founding administrator of the colony of Natal, was a medical doctor and anthropologist and accepted indigenous bricolage (a syncretic religion) in his pastoral mission. He sat each young lad in front of a rock covering with sterile cotton-wool and with sterile cotton bandages and antiseptic preparations and after a local anaesthetic, conducted the circumcisions. After each the formula: "I am now a man!" was shouted in Zulu. Not very Jewish, not the covenant of Abraham, not very Christian, but as tribal and analogous. The rest of his peer group were trained for their first communion in Shepstone's Anglican Church. But Rabbi Blumberg, I, Mordechai, and my sister Esther had been teaching Phakamisa Hebrew and the Bible stories and even Kabbalah which we secretly learned without his permission from Rabbi Philip's books after a promise of secrecy that no one outside our circle would know that we knew the "emanations" of God, absorbed in part from ancient Greek philosophy.

I imagine now what was going through Captain Van Wyk's mind "- Smuts het my interneer - maar, man, ons Afrikaners het vir julle geveg, nie ek nie, en Rommel het ons ook dood geskiet, goeie Afrikaners, vir julle, die Jode, het ons gesterwe, en nou word julle net kafferboeties. Wat is verkeerd met die Christilike geloof van die naturel?"

“Smuts interned me - but man, we Afrikaners fought for you, not me, but others and Rommel shot us, good Afrikaners, we were wounded and died for you, the Jews, and now you’ve become just brothers of the kaffirs. What is wrong with the Christian faith of the native?”

All this whilst Phakamisa and I, sitting in the first row in front of the holy ark in Temple Abraham practised our Torah portions in whispers to be read, or chanted, from the handwritten Torah scroll - which is hard because it is without vowels. It was August so it was Deuteronomy. There was another thing probably bothering the Special Branch. Esther my sister at 16 had secretly joined the Communist Party of South Africa which had Soviet spies who reported to Moscow about good reds and deviant Trotskyist reds, spies who themselves might be shot on Stalin’s orders or because of some commissars’ decision in the International. Some were. Even American reds were killed in the Soviet Union.

Esther claimed, quoting from apparently impeccable sources, that more Africans died as a result of the slave trade than Jews in the concentration camps. A few years later, she was immune to the argument that Stalin’s Jewish doctors were in serious danger of being executed for plotting to make the Soviet dictator sick in the first place. So the dying Red Tsar of all the Russias, was left lying in his own urine for fear of any caring professional being wiped out by what must have been by then the indiscriminate paranoid fury of Uncle Joe who had the energy to give fatal orders even when he was himself at death’s door and incontinent.

It seems in retrospect as if Nelson Mandela was used as a Christ-like icon of forgiveness, leadership and reconciliation whilst the second and third presidents committed crimes such as HIV/AIDS denialism (banning anti-retroviral drugs and labelling AIDS as purely a disease of poverty, not caused by a virus, but produced by white colonialism). As a direct result of his actions, he caused the death of thousands of patients, young and old who could have been saved - for the sake of propaganda: in fact, indirectly guilty of manslaughter with a Master’s degree from a good British university; and then the third president and his intermediaries taking bribes from British and French arms industries to favour the purchase of frigates and jet-fighters as well as pillaging state funds to build his own personal luxury residences and live his grand life-style.

But all that disillusion was later. At the time, the struggle was purer. We all, including Rabbi Blumberg knew very well why Captain Van Wyk was there. To terrify the reds and the so-called kafferboeties (“brothers of the infidels” literally - any white who thought Africans should be treated with brotherly love). This was no ordinary security policeman. He already had a reputation for inflicting terror on political dissidents, many of whom were Jews. I say many. There were right-wing Jews as well who actually joined the Afrikaner Nationalist Party because Calvinist whites, also Chosen - identified with the beleaguered state of Israel and exchanged military secrets and materials to enable both countries to build nuclear weapons.

Had a limpet mine gone off attached to the outer wall of another Progressive synagogue in Johannesburg 30 years later many may have been killed. The intention was to intimidate the many Jews who supported the state of Israel rather than the rights of the displaced Palestinians. And hated the Arab states who expelled as many oriental and Spanish Jews as the Israelis expelled Palestinians: 700,000 each way. This figure was emblazoned on my mind since the 1950s when I became politically conscious. And now this trouble. Rabbi Blumberg had written to the Minister of Justice protesting about a Special Branch presence during a previous service, and for his pains he

had bricks thrown by hooligans through his glass front door in a quiet street in Orange Grove. One was wrapped in paper bearing the message: "Remember Auschwitz, Rabbi." It was even spelt correctly. But then the assailant ended any ambiguity and spoilt it all with a postscript: "We gaz you Jews for free with a pipe from your own exhorst in your own garaarge."

When Rabbi Blumberg called in at the Highlands North police in Louis Botha Avenue with the bricks and their messages the Afrikaans sergeant on duty shook his grey head and commiserated with "Julle liberaliste Jode, die mense van die Boek - you liberal Jews, the people of the Book." The rabbi found it ironic - as intended. What the old sergeant was implying was this: "What are you complaining about? You brought about your Judaism and therefore Christianity and then when the blacks take it all seriously and start demanding equal rights like Jesus talking about the poor inheriting the earth you complain." Parenthetically he added that we were upsetting the ducktails who no doubt smashed the rabbi's front door! Ducktail haircuts lacquered into place were a sign of working-class white youth culture. Ducktails also beat up my friend Gerald Williams, when he went into the streets of the city centre. He was gay theatre director. So this was a scene set for a dramatic confrontation. It was August 1949 and, to make matters subversive, not only had whites suffered in the war against fascism, some had been made militant leftist by what they had seen of Hitler and Mussolini, but, now liberalism was on the rampage with Phakamisa Mtwā and me, Mordechai having a joint bar-mitzvah, of course at the age of 13, our initiation not just into "manhood" but in the minds of the reactionaries into "bleddy communism". Judaism was for regte Jode nie vir die Kaffers nie [real Jews not kaffirs]. The ghost of Rabbi Hillel who possibly taught Jesus and said "What is hateful to you do not do unto others" - bit the red dust of Jo'burg.

A brown African boy and his friend a white South African boy, born and brought up as a Jew, but Phakamisa converted to Judaism by Rabbi Blumberg of the Orange Grove Liberal Synagogue.... What next? "My God", as Henny-Penny said, when an acorn or something fell on her head. "The sky is falling in!" This had become the talk of the town, reported in *The Jewish Times* and *The Zionist Record*. An article and even pictures appeared in the more serious Sunday paper, *The Sunday Times*. Phakamisa, is Xhosa for "resurrected". This deeply felt Christian name made cynical South Africans laugh. But, we said heatedly, we Jews also believe in the resurrection of the dead at the coming of the Messiah. Of course it was a myth, a metaphor for resurgence of the spirit, said my father who was an intellectual.

Phakamisa's mother Alina, an ex-secondary school teacher who maiden name was Kote, now a domestic worker, lived with us first in Springs and now in Bellevue East in Jo'burg. Phakamisa's father, Matthew Mtwā was a professor of African languages, no less, at Fort Hare University in the Eastern Cape, then an all-African institution (founded by white missionaries). Alina was fired from her teaching job on specious grounds by the Eastern Cape department responsible for what they called then "native education" which was going to become Verwoerd's notorious "Bantu Education". Actually she taught about the effect of colonialism on the tribal African societies to the matriculation class, the Standard Tens - the 17-year olds - in her history lessons. She was serious. There were benefits like partial extension of the vote to some Africans and Coloured people in the old Cape Colony. There were independent judges and the rule of law - sometimes. If it suited the settlers. What did her pupils feel about of that? She was teaching them to think, argue, find evidence. It wasn't at all dangerous stuff. Except to your average white voter, with his neat bungalow and garden, perhaps a tennis court and a swimming pool and shares in the Johannesburg stock exchange

in "Kaffirs" - gold-mining investments. Some conservative Christian African parents objected. The township militants called the objectors "sell-outs". Education was becoming dangerously politicised.

Alina was labelled as a trouble-maker in Alice, the town near Professor Mtwá's university, Fort Hare. Her head-teacher was frantic. He was torn this way and that by the provincial native education department and the parents (some of whom supported Alina). The local Bishop of the Anglican Church of the Eastern Cape Province supported her. The children sensed the trouble brewing and starting acting up. Alina stuck it out until the authorities enhanced her pension. Against her husband's advice but exhausted by the harassment she resigned and took Phakamisa and herself off to Springs and then Jo'burg to work for Minna Fayge, my mother, who first met the Mtwá family when she gave a piano recital to the Music Society of Fort Hare University, including in her programme an African composition called "Mabalel" based on a poem by the famous Afrikaans writer Eugene Marais set to music by my maternal aunt's husband the composer Jeremiah Himmelstein. As for Alina, an educated woman working as a domestic... She wanted to save her pension money for her old age. Maybe Phakamisa would come adrift as many aspiring African intellectuals did and need money.

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My father Lewis and my grandfather, my mother's father, Rabbi Philip, and his follower, Scholem Hurwitz - nicknamed the Golem - came to the rescue when the service ended. In the sense that a united force was needed to deter Captain Van Wyk from staying on and disrupting the reception in the next door hall by taking further notes - spying on us. Somewhat like the Golem made out of clay by Rabbi Loeb, the rabbi in late medieval Prague who animated his robot with a nearly-human mind, Scholem the Golem would attack people he regarded as anti-Semites, criminals, or evil-doers, usually verbally, sometimes physically, and hide for months in the forests of Belarus until the police gave up looking for him. What good would it do imprisoning or institutionalising him since he was only dangerous within range of those he suspected of being slanderers, thieves, exploiters, bullies, seducers, murderers - and Jew-haters? He was also a genius at learning languages. My grandfather was a restraining influence on Scholem. The law in Eastern Europe actually incited anti-Semitism. It was almost official in the Tsarist Empire and under Soviet Communism the Jews were called by the commissars "rootless cosmopolitans" and any hint of Zionism was tantamount to treason.

Coming to South Africa after surviving the Holocaust with Rabbi Philip, and seeing other people's daily experience of suffering because of their race, Scholem sobered up especially when it was brought home to him that he was now a white man, and, supposedly, by South African morality, it behoved him to "behave himself." He had "islands" of great intelligence but suffered what we now know as autism. He was on the spectrum of the Asperger's syndrome. Rabbi Philip's and Scholem's lives during the war provided us with a kind of heroic perspective through which we came to see this South African society where the violence was hidden in the townships and came out at night and in the early hours of the morning in the white suburbs when burglars were about. During the day the whites burgled the state itself. Compared to the Second World War South Africa was then certainly a tyranny but stopped short of genocidal violence: - genocide was very much repressed as an historical memory. No one seemed to recall that 250,000 Cape San ("Bushmen") were wiped out by Dutch farmers in the 18th century.

There was ethnic oppression but what would South Africa do for labour do if its indigenous populations were murdered en masse instead of being merely enslaved by the Pass Laws?

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I have to write about grandfather Philip. He first left with his immediate family - my grandmother and their siblings and their most immediate relatives from Lithuania, Belarus and eastern Poland in the early 1920s when my mother was a very young woman. My parents, Lewis and Minna Fayge married in the 1930s and settled in Springs on the east Witwatersrand and then my mother built a block of flats in Bellevue East and Philip and Rosa my grandmother lived in Berea, Johannesburg. Philip then went back to try to rescue his other relatives - cousins - who, when the war broke out in the summer of 1941 found themselves trapped between the advancing German armies and the retreating Soviet forces. Philip was lucky. He was friends with a Polish aristocrat who, unusually, had a Jewish wife. She was originally from Leningrad - St. Petersburg - her father and grandfather Turkish Jews, Sephardis - that is originally from Spain from which their Catholic Majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella expelled their ancestors (and the Arabs) in 1492 as part of the union of a purely Christian Castile and Aragon.

The Sephardi grandfather of the Countess Lublienewski, Moshe Cordovero, had permission from the immediately pre-Bolshevik Tsarist government to settle as a merchant banker in Russia. His granddaughter was Luna Lublinewski - now the wife of the Polish aristocrat, Count Stanislaw Lublienewski. Their daughter was Estrella. The Sephardi Jews, expelled from Spain in 1492, still kept alive their Jewish traditions and spoke many languages as well as their native Ladino - medieval Spanish just as we spoke Yiddish - medieval German. Lublienewski, still nominally a Catholic living on a great manor on the border of Belarus and Poland had to hide his wife Luna and their daughter Estrella in the cellar of their mansion when the Germans invaded the whole of Poland, Lithuania and Belarus in the summer of 1941. But this was dangerous because the servants would be aware of this stratagem and some were anti-Semitic even if anti-German Polish or Belarussian nationalists. What if Luna and Estrella were betrayed? Everyone knew of the Einsatzgruppen and the Police Battalions made up of anti-Semitic Poles, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, who as soon as the Wehrmacht arrived were organised into death squads which, supervised by the SS, went from village to village and to the towns and cities shooting Jews. If Rabbi Philip, my grandfather would take charge of Luna and Estrella, and give shelter to Lublienewski himself (who would be threatened by the Russians if they won the war and who were already sworn to wipe out the Polish aristocracy as they started to do at Katin) - Stanislaw would show him his secret hiding place which could accommodate Stanislaw, Luna, Estrella and the relatives of Philip and other stranded Jews, including the Golem, the Rabbi's devoted follower, body-guard, fighting-man and thinker.

The Golem's parents, grandparents, siblings, extended family kin were murdered by the Nazis. But Scholem had hidden in, and somehow managed to live on and with the fruits and animals of the vast Novagrudak forest as a wild man. He was six feet six inches tall and built like a Goliath, with thick black bushy hair and beard. He had a capacity for learning languages, from text books, and dictionaries and for reproducing text and speech verbatim. He had a photographic memory. He was able to analyse philosophical works. But he was incapable of empathic interaction except with those who showed they understood his autism and even then he could not engage in intimacy. Before the Nazis arrived he attached himself to Rabbi Philip who had a psychotherapeutic gift for relating to

Scholem. If Scholem's sense of human, animal and inanimate natural rights was violated he would use a super-normal skill in tracking down his enemy whom he would beat or reason with - depending on the circumstances. He could reason about justice and compassion, but during the war, just as important, his isolation from human society enabled him to learn how to hunt and gather in the forest which were skills at which he excelled, enabling him to follow tracks and the droppings of wolves, foxes, deer, even the few wild boar and bison left in the forest. There were edible, smaller game-animals like hares, fish in the streams, ducks and geese which he would be able to kill for food with his prized hunting rifles and caches of ammunition, nets and snares hidden in strategic places.

And so there came about a group of fugitives from the Nazis under the leadership of Rabbi Philip and the Polish Count and guarded by Scholem and fed by the hunting expeditions of this Golem - all of them hidden in a bricked up cave up a small rocky hill which an ancient volcano had thrown up in the Novagrudak forest. Ingeniously they installed wood-burning stoves and chimneys. They even had my grandfather's horse (Soos) and cart, cow (Para), calf (Yaldah) and dog (Kelev) from his small-holding near his eastern Polish village, living in a stone and timber built barn, built by Count Stanislaw next to the cave and heated, so they had milk and cheese. They were totally inaccessible to the outside world. When the war ended some hoped to find a way of re-settling in Lithuania, Poland and Belarus. Luna, their daughter Estrella and Count Lublienski hoped they would manage to survive in post-war communist Poland and Belarus by turning their mansion and manor into a collective farm which they would manage, and offer as a museum of local, national and folk history. By the time the Russians arrived the Polish aristocracy knew they were doomed unless they fled. The Lublienskis, Rabbi Philip and his in-laws, nephews and nieces and cousins made their way amongst the millions of refugees who had fled the Nazi destruction, now, fleeing the Red Army. They travelled to displaced persons' camps in Vienna and thence in 1947 to Palestine, later Israel.

Scholem Hurwitz the Golem was devoted to Rabbi Philip and wanted to come with him to South Africa, where my maternal grandmother Rosa, was waiting patiently for the impossible to happen: Philip would come back alive and well, having done his duty for the rest of the family who would now be living on kibbutzim and towns in Palestine, then Israel. The Zionist government-in-waiting of David Ben Gurion, then the Israeli government, heard about the Lithuanian, Polish and Belarus survivors and issued the rabbi and Scholem with medals and certificates attesting to their heroism in surviving and saving others from the Holocaust. They went to Jerusalem where the Jewish Agency tried to persuade the rabbi and Scholem to stay on as Palestinian citizens and to bring Rosa my grandmother to Palestine from South Africa. Rosa and the rest of the family in Jo'burg were too rooted in South Africa to take up this offer.

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The joint bar-mitzvah of me and Phakamisa Mtwá genuinely outraged Captain Van Wyk. He was a dangerous and powerful enemy with the Special Branch behind him. His colleagues in Port Elizabeth already played some part in damaging Alina's Mtwá's life and driving her out of high school teaching. She felt she was lucky to find my parents, first in Springs, then in Jo'burg itself, prepared to employ a politically suspect person if only as a domestic worker. One thing led to another. Whereas her husband Matthew Mtwá stayed behind in Alice at Fort Hare in the Eastern Province, Phakamisa fell under the influence of our Judaism, as well learning from my older sister Esther's textbooks, and with us as teachers, worked his way through the primary school syllabus. He then went to Father

Trevor Huddleston's St Peter's secondary school in Sophiatown. But Phakamisa and Alina and when Matthew visited, all occupied rooms in the house in Springs and then in a separate guest's flat in Sheridan Court not in the servants' quarters in the back yard, or on the roof of the building, with the maids and the flat cleaners, the migrant Zulu workers, the Ngubane family. This was against at least the conventions of segregation and possibly the Urban Areas Acts which governed the Pass Laws. And this outrage set a bad example to other African servants - we learned - a deviant act which could be defined as incitement to disorder. Furthermore there was a Group Areas Act either on the statute books already or on the way. Blacks could work but not live, except as servants, in white areas. Even then their passes (internal passports) had to be signed by their employers.

Captain Van Wyk knew all about us already. There he was, bold as brass, making notes about possible subversion emanating from this innocent religious occasion, but in South Africa, a subversive event - a white Jewish boy and his African friend Phakamisa and their parents celebrating the coming of a future multi-ethnic democratic South Africa. What a hope, thought the well-educated and intelligent Captain Van Wyk! If Germany, Italy, Japan, the Soviet Union, China with hundred or thousands of years of feudal or industrial civilisation (the art of living in cities peacefully and cooperatively) behind them but still lapsed into fascism or totalitarian communism and huge bloodshed like the death-camps, forced labour and torture of P.O.W.S, mass rape, Stalin's purges, the Great Leap Forward - what did the future hold for Africa? After all Afrikaners were Africans, the White Tribe of Africa. They held South Africa in trust for God.

Scholem the Golem had been in South Africa staying with my grandparents, Philip and Rosa in Barnato Street. in 1949 he was aged 30 and trying to fight off his autism by finishing a B.A. degree at Wits. University majoring in African languages and then an honours degree in social anthropology studying the San, the tribe who spoke the language /Xam and who lived in what was then still Bechuanaland, a British Protectorate, descendants of those called the Cape Bushmen, of whom perhaps 250,000 were killed by Dutch farmers and their Griqua commandos in the 18th century as "vermin". They stole and mutilated Dutch cattle. Being hunter-gatherers they had no cattle and could not be bargained with. Scholem had learned Afrikaans in a few months. My sister Esther, my father Lewis and my grandfather Philip briefed Scholem in the Orange Grove social hall of Temple Abraham during our bar-mitzvah reception as to who Van Wyk was and what he was doing scribbling in a notebook during a bar mitzvah service. Scholem carried a pistol in a shoulder holster in case; you never knew, the Holocaust could resurface at any time. So, we later discovered, did Captain Van Wyk.

The big thing was not to make a fuss, not to alarm Phakamisa and me, Alina and Matthew Mtwala, their and our relatives and guests, not to provoke Rabbi Blumberg, not to spread panic and anger amongst the guests in the congregation who at the end of the Sabbath service already entered the reception next door. My father Lewis tried the friendly approach and introduced Van Wyk to grandfather Philip and enquired if Van Wyk was investigating a crime. He knew Van Wyk who invited himself to meetings of the radical ex-servicemen's organisation, the Springbok Legion and made no attempt to hide the fact that he was a Captain in the Special Branch, there to spy. There had been discussion in the Springbok Legion, the ANC and the Indian Congress about non-violent resistance along the lines of Mahatma Gandhi's satyagraha. Van Wyk came out with it: "The government has instructed the police to gather information about the preparation of a case involving treason being plotted by certain individuals and organisations. A campaign of defiance against what you people call

unjust laws which could escalate into a treasonous plot against the state.” “But this is a religious service”, said my father.

Van Wyk was a tall, 200 pound rugby forward who played for a Pretoria club team. He had even made the Northern Transvaal provincial team and was a leading member of his local Dutch Reformed Church, a lay preacher. His father was an advocate at the Johannesburg bar, a criminal lawyer who recently had been the defence counsel for farmers in the Bethel area of the Eastern Transvaal accused of beating and killing African farm labourers who were offered virtually as slave labourers by the prisons to farmers in the country areas. Father and son were blond, blue eyed, some would say handsome members of an assumed herrenvolk who had joined the Die Ossewabrandwag, the Ox Wagon Brigade during the war. The son was ambitious. He had done a political science degree at Pretoria University and was studying psychology and criminology part-time with the University of South Africa for a Master’s or a Ph.D. degree. He was obviously destined for promotion. He spoke in a soft, reasonable voice: “Since when is it religious to give a bar-mitzvah to a native boy, a Zulu/Xhosa boy, who was a Christian, to convert him, to reinforce liberalist ideas in a native woman teacher who has already spread them to her pupils, trying to turn them against the white man, to spread further sedition to a native man who miraculously, has become a professor, and then if that isn’t enough to have a mixed gathering in a white area where the facilities are expressly licensed for whites only?” He spoke softly in perfect English, conversationally, but what he said was shocking, unbelievable, the sort of thing that happened under what Dr Verwoerd would come to call apartheid.

“So how long are you staying?” said my father, evenly, trying to keep the atmosphere calm and unthreatening. Van Wyk stood up. He was nearly as tall, broad and muscular as Scholem. “I am just warning you, Lewis and with due deference, your father-in-law, the rabbi, for whom I have the greatest respect. As for Mr Scholem Hurwitz, he may have performed miracles of heroism over there in Eastern Europe. But here, he’s a white man, although a Jew, and his heroism is not required. Remember, it’s not every Jewish or Polish or Lithuanian immigrant who is given South African citizenship. Don’t as the English say, push your luck. Look what happened in India when the British handed over to the native Indians after your Mahatma Ghandi used the very tactic the African and Indian Congresses are trying to use here in South Africa? Your Indian and your African can be very vengeful after years of exploitation. You see, we built up the country and - yes - there was cruelty and mass-murder of the Bushpeople two hundred years ago. The English press called me and my father Hitlerites. But have you any idea of what the Afrikaner farmer and city dweller suffered when the Boer War turned the more average Afrikaner into a poor-white? So that Cecil Rhodes and Alfred Beit and Leander Starr Jameson and the Oppenheims became rich? Like the German masses after world war one, and again after the Allies’ bombing in world war two - reduced to poverty? Jews like you are the exception. For the rest, money is their god. I’m pleased you’ve returned to Jehovah rather than Karl Marx like some. Here you live as whites protected by people like me, and for our thanks your call us Hitlerites. My father’s brothers were badly wounded Up North supposedly fighting for South Africa, but we also discovered that we were fighting for the Jewish race ultimately. You’re lucky Rommel wasn’t a Nazi. No wonder Hitler ordered him to commit suicide or be executed. If the elite of Germany are biologically superior why shouldn’t they take command of Europe and the world? The Zionists have just hammered the Arabs. Why don’t all of you go to Palestine the land God promised you? We Afrikaners are the real Africans. We’ve got no where else to go. I bid you good-morning. And mazel-tov! Keep away from the communists. Get this - what’s his name - Phakamisa -

a pass when he comes of age. Let him and his mother sleep in the servants quarters. In my opinion we could arrest him and her and the professor Mtwá if they sleep in the house or in a flat with the rest of the flats rented to whites in a white area like Bellevue East. It's incitement to disorder, a bad example to the other natives. Get their passes in order. Remember, the Group Areas Act coming into force. Goeie middag!"

Scholem had the keys of grandfather Philip's Vauxhall car and after an interval so that his move would be less noticeable, followed the policeman. Whilst grandfather Philip and my father pacified my mother, the rabbi, me, Phakamisa, Alina, and Matthew. Esther - my staunch sister was, by this time, enraged. Scholem had been impassive. My grandfather went to look for him. The reception was about to begin in the Orange Grove synagogue hall where the caterers had laid the tables ready for the special Sabbath meal that followed this unique bar-mitzvah.

Van Wyk had got the information he needed to build up files on more enemies of what would be called later the apartheid state. He got into his Volkswagen and drove off up Louis Botha Avenue towards Pretoria near where he lived. He had a refurbished farm-house acquired by his wealthy and distinguished lawyer father and had given to his son Christian Van Wyk and his family. His father had no doubt that Christian would soon be promoted to the rank of major in the militarised South African police. Then Colonel. Then General.

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My grandfather Philip was alarmed to find that Scholem had driven off in his Vauxhall, and presumed, correctly, that Scholem was following the armed police Captain's Volkswagen. It was Saturday and for all he knew Van Wyk was on his way home, which was indeed the case. Was it too late to try to catch up with Scholem in another car - perhaps my father's - Lewis' Chevrolet? After all Scholem had a burning sense of justice and injustice. He was also armed, utterly silent and purposeful. He had tracked down and fought alongside communist insurgents during their period of hiding in the Belarus forest. He had survived by ruthless attacking tactics and self-discipline when under orders from a Red Army officer known only as Comrade Fyodor. In carefully planned ambushes he had killed SS soldiers and Belarussian police who had sworn allegiance to the invading German army and were carrying out the shootings of Jews. Nor did he give away any information about where he and the others were hiding in the forest. But attacking, let alone killing a South African policeman in peacetime was an entirely different matter. More than likely Scholem would be the fatality if it came down to guns. Rabbi Philip drove up Louis Botha Avenue in Lewis's car trying to catch up with Scholem who was chasing Captain Van Wyk whilst Lewis and Minna Fayge, with amazing savoir faire kept calm and presided over the reception lunch with Rabbi Blumberg, Matthew, Alina and Esther. There were speeches and a band and dancing. But all in the shadow of Philip and Scholem's absence.

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Rabbi Philip finally caught up with the Golem who was tailing Christian Van Wyk's car. Luckily, miraculously, Philip had seen Scholem turning off the Pretoria Road to a farmhouse near "Irene" which was the residence of Smuts, now leader of the opposition United Party. Then he followed the rough country road to the two parked cars in front of Van Wyk's house. Both men were covered in the red dust of the road, actually rolling around in the dust. As Philip got out of Lewis's car he saw a

whole posse of what turned out to be the teenage cousins of Van Wyk and friends of his sons, holding Scholem down and handcuffing him. Scholem stood up. Philip dashed out of his car. It looked as if Scholem was going to get a beating from Van Wyk. The rabbi shouted: "Don't hurt him! He's psychotic when he's under stress. He doesn't know what he is doing!" "Yes, exactly!" shouted Van Wyk. "He had a go at drawing his bloody Russian pistol and pointed it at my head! Until I tackled him! Which reminds me! You people are stopping me having my Saturday afternoon rugby! Now what are we to do with this lunatic of your's, rabbi?"

Van Wyk's wife, a surprisingly pretty, delicately boned woman came down the veranda of the house and Van Wyk told her what the fighting, shouting, swearing had been all about. The cousins, the sons and the sons' friends went back to a mowed field next to the house where they had been practicing rugby. They laughed and shouted about the mad Jews that poor Christian had to deal with keeping the country safe from communism and liberalism. Mrs Van Wyk came up to the rabbi and spoke in heavily accented English. "Whatever my husband says about Jews, I disagree with. It was the war, you see, rabbi - Christian's brothers were wounded Up North - and before that the Depression and before that the Boer War. It embittered people like Christian and his father." "By rights I should ring for an ambulance to take him to Sterkfontein, to put him in a locked ward. In perfect Afrikaans, he's been raving about God telling Him to redeem me, a Special Branch policeman, even though I am practically beyond redemption because of the job I do!" shouted Van Wyk with surprising candour about what his job entailed. By this time he had his own gun back in his shoulder holster and Scholem's stuck in his belt. "I could charge him with attempted murder!" Philip's heart sank. "He had the nerve to point this Russian pistol at my head before I tackled him really low like a ton of bricks! Scholem! You should play rugby, with your physique! All these African languages and even the Bushman language, he's learnt from Professor Mtwa! It's a terrible waste of time. It will take a hundred years at least for the Africans as you call them to catch up. By the way, has he got a licence for this Russian automatic pistol? Otherwise I'm going to take him to court and charge him for assault as well as carrying a firearm without a license. Lucky my cousins and my sons and their friends were here and came to the rescue. Otherwise Scholem's or my brains would have been blown out."

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We all realised that "the struggle", if we allowed it to do so, would consume us. So we disengaged. Scholem found an African wife in Bechuanaland. Her name was Agnes Moloji. There was a multi-racial high school in the tribal capital Serowe. It had been founded by a charismatic Afrikaner liberal called David Van Welleigh where Scholem taught English literature and language, resorting often to his knowledge of Setswana to explain the African parallels to English idioms, grammar and the cultural setting. The amazing thing was that his autism improved the more languages he learned and spoke. He came to fetch Phakamisa and me for his annual visit to his /Xam San (Bushpeople) friends near Ghanzi in south-western Bechuanaland. In fact he became an autism research "phenomenon", writing a paper after interviewing other autistic people who were learning other languages. At this point at last I understood that God was the Transcendent. There was no God as such. But anything that brings a process into a resolution is a Transcendent. A moment of God-like-ness.