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# opinion דעות

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## Real March



Prof. Ariel Rubinstein  
Photo: Orel Cohen

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## The telegram

### Ariel Rubinstein recounts World War II-era story of genuine 'March of the Living'

Ariel Rubinstein

My mother got married in Jerusalem in the summer of 1941. The wedding ceremony was conducted in her apartment, which also functioned as a kindergarten, and my mother was proud that her friends were able to obtain six eggs and bake one torte cake.

On November 26, 1941, someone filled in a form for my mother. A red cross screams from the top of the form, framed by a request in English and German to fill in the details in block letters. It is addressed to the Red Cross office in Geneva, via the War Organization of the British Red Cross and Order of St. John at Beit David in Jerusalem.

The form has three parts and whoever filled it in did so very meticulously, using a typewriter. There is my mother's address: Leah's Kindergarten, Tel Arza neighborhood in Jerusalem, Palestine. There is the addressee: her sister, Sara Ratner, 31 Nowolipie Street, Apt. 15, Warszawa. And between the addresses, there is a space for a message. A warning appears, in English and in German, that the message must be limited to "family news of a strictly personal character." An explicit demand restricts the message to 25 words. For my mother, 20 were enough. She wrote in the Polish language: "I married Jehude Rubinsztejn from Bialystok. How are you? The parents? Brothers? Are all the relatives in good health? I kiss you all. Yours, Leja."

The telegram is marked with three stamps. One is a black stamp by the British censor. The second is a red stamp from the Red Cross office in Switzerland. The third is also red, from the office of the Polish Red Cross. There is also an additional red stamp with the date "December 17, 1941" and I'm not sure what it refers to. Such exemplary order could exist only in Switzerland. If so, the telegram arrived there a week before Christmas and perhaps was delayed because of the holidays.

I once asked my mother why she had immigrated to Palestine. She explained that Uncle Eliyahu, an important Zionist activist, traveled back and forth between Palestine and Bialystok. When he saw that my mother, whose family went bankrupt between the wars, was having difficulty finding a husband, the uncle suggested that she come to Palestine because "there are good young men there and you don't need money for matchmaking." He not only made the suggestion, but also went to the trouble of arranging an immigration "certificate" for her.

I never imagined that my mother in Jerusalem had the chance to inform her concerned sister in Warsaw that she had fulfilled the mission. But then I found the telegram in a drawer in my mother's and father's big dresser, under the sheets and the starched tablecloths that rested in peace, unused, until my parents also passed away.

The telegram reached my mother's sister around March 11, 1942, or perhaps on that very date, a few days after Purim. I imagine that her sister received the telegram and was given a short time to respond to it. On the back of the telegram sheet, she wrote by hand and in the Polish language exactly 25 words: "Congratulations. We wish you happiness. We are all healthy. I received greetings from Bialystok and Otwocke. Everyone is healthy. Waiting for news from you and from your husband. Sarah." On April 10, 1942, the return telegram arrived at the Red Cross office in Geneva. From there, it made its way to Leah's Kindergarten in the Tel Arza neighborhood and landed there in the spring or summer of 1942. The Grossaktion in the Warsaw Ghetto began on July 23, 1942 and continued for 58 days. Sarah, her husband Wolf and her daughter Bela were probably on one of the transports that departed Warsaw for Treblinka during that period.

I think I know what my mother's sister meant when she wrote that she was waiting for news from my mother and her husband. And indeed, the arithmetic of nature indicates that my parents conceived my sister around the time the telegram arrived. When she was born, my parents did not know whether

Bashe, my mother's mother, was still alive. Thus, they named her Batsheva. Eight years later, I was born.

It is clear to me that my mother and father would not have traveled to any March of Life, with or without Israeli flags. Instead, they made the real march.

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