Reconciliation with Qadaffi

An Offer Refused

DAVID GERBI

What is the use of more Jewish stories? I need them: nothing exists without stories. Stories are the memory of the world.

—Chaim Potok, *Old Men at Midnight*[1]

Longing for My Homeland

I was born in Tripoli, Libya, to a wealthy and respected orthodox Jewish family with roots in North Africa dating back two millennia. (There is actual proof of a Jewish presence in Libya from at least 312 BCE.) I was the fourth of six children and, with my parents, was among 5,000 Jews exiled from Libya in 1967 after the Six-Day War. We emigrated to Italy, arriving without possessions or documents, apart from a certificate from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). In Part I of this article, I described my boyhood in Tripoli and the pogrom that lead to our flight to Rome.

My story, however, is part of a much larger historical context: that of the Sephardic (Sephard means Spain in Hebrew) Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492. During that year, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain issued an edict: "... we, therefore, order all Jews and Jewesses ... to leave with their sons and daughters, servants and relatives, big and small ... and not dare to ever return" (Rubin 1995). My ancestors belonged to a community of Sephardic Jews who sought refuge in the Arab state of Libya.

In the mid-twentieth century, Libya experienced several periods during which violence toward Jews was common and Jewish people were exiled. In 1936, Libya was an Italian colony, and in 1938, a racial law against Jews was applied and persecutions ensued. In 1942, during the Nazi period, riots broke out in Tripoli and hundreds of

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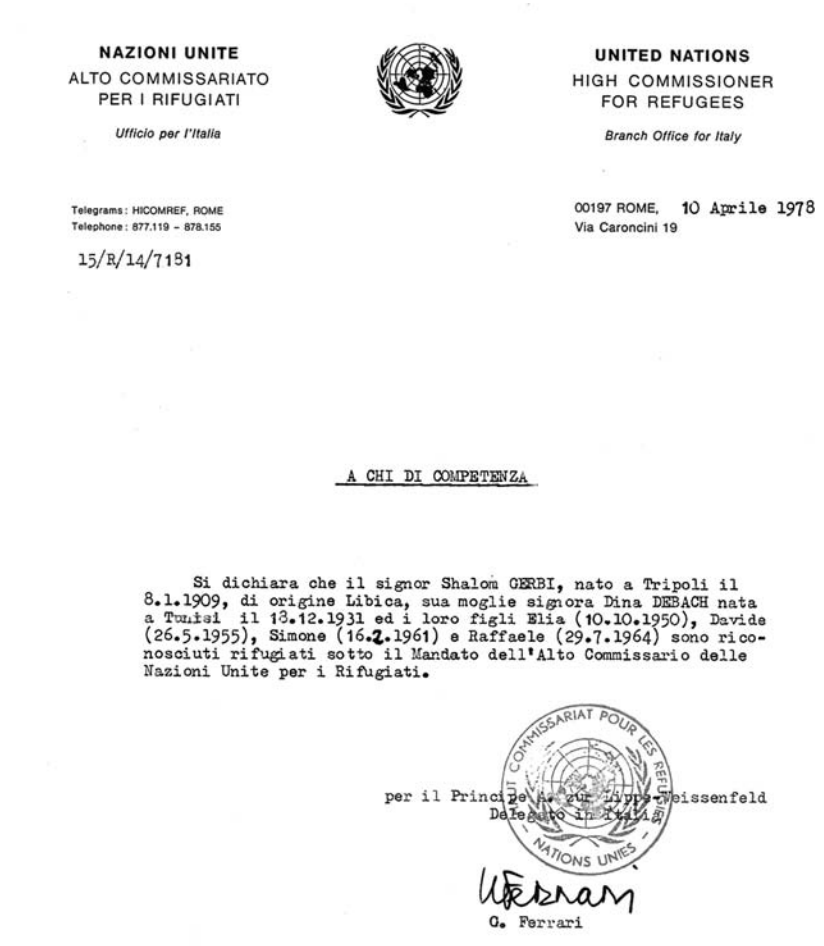

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A CHI DI COMPETENZA

Si dichiara che il signor Shalom GERBI, nato a Tripoli il 8.1.1909, di origine Libica, sua moglie signora Dina DEBACH nata a Tunisi il 13.12.1931 ed i loro figli Elia (10.10.1950), Davide (26.5.1955), Simone (16.2.1961) e Raffaele (29.7.1964) sono riconosciuti rifugiati sotto il Mandato dell'Alto Commissario delle Nazioni Unite per i Rifugiati.

per il Principe A. zur Lippe-Weissenfeld
Delegato in Italia

HAUT COMMISSARIAT POUR LES REFUGIÉS
NATIONS UNIES

G. Ferrari

Certificate from UNHCR (1978) confirming UN refugee status originally granted in 1967

Jews were killed. Riots recurred in 1945 and in 1948 as a reaction to the establishment of Israel as an independent state. Hatred was so strong that in 1949 most Jews decided to leave the country and go to Israel. In 1952, when Libya became an independent country, still more Jews emigrated to Israel. Only a small community remained in Libya. The final exodus, which I experienced personally, took place in 1967 after the Six-Day War between much of the Arab world and Israel. During those terrible days, when many Libyan nationals threatened to kill Jews, the Libyan government refused to guarantee our safety. Therefore, our family was forced to flee after having lived peacefully with Arabs for hundreds of years, despite the vicissitudes and tensions caused by political changes. According to the 1931 census, 24,534 Jews were living in Libya; the numbers had increased to 38,000 by 1948, of whom 20,000 lived in Tripoli alone. By 1951, only 8,000 remained, most of them in Tripoli. By the time Qaddafi came to

power on September 1, 1969, only about 100 Jews were left in Libya. By 1974, after more than 2,000 years of continuous presence in Libya, the Jewish community had all but disappeared. Among the handful still left was an eighty-year-old woman who resided in an old people's home in Tripoli. The home was owned by the Qaddafi family. Her name was Rina Debach, and she was my aunt.

Just when the caterpillar thought it was over, it became a butterfly.

—Anonymous

Our family was welcomed into the Jewish community in Rome, and even though we were poor, we felt safe. I continued my studies in the seventh grade at the Angelo Sacerdoti Jewish School. The teachers were very friendly and tried hard to make us feel at home. I met some of my old schoolmates from Tripoli and made new Roman Jewish friends. We were often asked what our life was like in Tripoli and how we had survived the pogrom. Each of us told our own story of how our family was able to escape. I could afford no text or exercise books, but I always tried my best. One day our Italian teacher, Mrs. Pavoncello, assigned an essay entitled something like "What is your biggest dream?" My dream was to return to Tripoli to take care of the beautiful little plant on our veranda—the plant that my mother had given me. I wanted to go back to being a small, carefree boy, to my life from before, when all I had to worry about was watering my plant and playing.

After school, I worked as a waiter. One afternoon, while carrying the usual tray full of coffee and cappuccino, I ran into my Italian teacher. Immediately, I changed direction, hoping she had not recognized me. I hid inside a doorway until she passed. I was frightened and ashamed for her to see me on the street dressed as a waiter, when I should be home studying. I did not dare tell anyone what had happened, and I worried all night long. I was very tense when I went to school the next day and the teacher called me to her desk. My heart was beating fast and my legs were trembling because of the fear and shame I felt. To my surprise, the teacher gave me a beautiful plant, congratulated me warmly on my essay, and, as if this was not enough, she complimented me in front of the class for being a hard-working student. Many years later I had the pleasure of meeting this teacher again, and she gave me a beautiful poem decorated with a drawing of a little plant. I realized then why she had been so understanding; in the poem, she told me that she, too, had suffered and had to run away from home to avoid being deported. Every time I feared the worst, I received the best.

When I turned thirteen, I reached the age of Bar Mitzvah—religious majority. Unexpectedly, I was given the opportunity to study the *Arvit*—a sort of initiation—the prayer of the Friday eve, the beginning of *Shabbat,* which is expressed by the singing in public of a boy becoming an adult. During this process, I was supported by a hazan, a cantor, Massimo Misano, a gentle young man who kindly offered to guide me and to teach me the melodies of the prayers. All this happened in his parents' house,

where I was welcomed with great warmth, smiles, and snacks. Massimo was particularly enthusiastic about teaching me because I was the first boy from Tripoli to celebrate his Bar Mitzvah according to the Sephardic Italian rite. He contributed to my education for a long time, but not just to the religious aspect: he let me have the dazzling experience of riding a *Vespetta 50* motorbike and encouraged me to sell souvenirs at tourist sites in Rome. For the Saturday morning prayers, I studied for the second part of my Bar Mitzvah with my favorite rabbi in Rome, Rabbi Moshe. He dedicated his precious time to my education totally *le shem shamaim,* without accepting any compensation. He was really at one with what he thought, with what he said, and with what he expressed from his heart. The humane way he behaved toward his fellows showed a spirit in harmony with himself and the world.

The long-awaited day finally arrived. I was bursting with joy also because my sister Miriam bought me a marvelous velvet jacket, very fashionable in those days, and I also received an elegant suit. I sang with a great deal of enthusiasm and "some" false notes. I was happy that I had managed to do everything without burdening my parents, who were too occupied with their economic and family responsibilities. I still remember the surprise on my father's face, as if he couldn't believe he could have a son like me. He did not properly congratulate me with words, but, strangely enough, on that day his eyes were full of admiration, and at the end of the ceremony, his hand touched my shoulder. My mother and my sisters kissed me, full of joy: it was an opportunity for my family to express a sense of belonging, of a new balance and integration into the Jewish community of Rome.

During the Shabbat morning prayer, I had to read from the *parashah*—the weekly Torah portion—of *Miketz,* which recalls the story of Joseph. His figure became truly emblematic for all my later personal evolutions. A Kabbalistic tradition affirms that the destiny of every individual is enclosed by the *parashah* that he reads on the occasion of his Bar Mitzvah. Joseph is a dreamer and an interpreter of dreams, just as I was to become later. He is a Jew who goes to live among a foreign people, the Egyptians, just as I lived among the Arabs. He chooses to achieve reconciliation both with his own brothers and his former enemies, the Egyptians—exactly the goal I want to reach, a reconciliation between Libyan Jews and Arabs. He takes great care over the burial of his father's bones—just as I want to reestablish the peace of the cemetery of my ancestors in Tripoli.

Only very recently did I learn that my grandmother's brother, assassinated during the riots in Tripoli, was an actor who frequently interpreted Joseph's story, both in Arabic and Hebrew. I realized that the performing arts, especially acting, have been part of my family for some time. It is hardly by chance that, at the age of forty, I returned to his figure in a thesis I wrote for the Italian Association of Analytical Psychology (AIPA).

Blow on a dead man's embers
And a live flame will start.

—Robert Graves, "To Bring the Dead to Life"[2]

My father had taught me the art of risk-taking and adapting to circumstances. However, I was totally unprepared in 1979 when I found myself dealing with death. My uncle died in February, my grandfather in March, my best friend Momo in August, my father in September, my sister's father-in-law in October, and my sister Ruby's six-month-old baby in the same month. At my father's hospital bedside, my mother spoke to him even though his eyes were shut. I told her that he could not hear her as he was in a coma. "No," she replied, "he can hear, look at his eyes." Tears were coming from his eyes, and, at that moment, I became aware that we each have a soul.

All these deaths during such a short period of time (six people in eight months) catapulted me into a deep depression, and my ability to work was greatly reduced. In addition to everything else, I lost my capacity to love. Because of a strong feeling of guilt and betrayal regarding my father, I felt compelled to end my relationship with an American Catholic girl I had met in Madrid in 1978, even though I was deeply in love with her and she wanted to convert.

These years were especially hard for me because I felt like an orphan again, bereft by the loss not only of my country, but also of my father, my relatives, my girlfriend, and especially of my friend Momo. I did not know how to deal with the mystery of death. Moreover, I was not satisfied with the rabbis' usual reassuring answers concerning the destiny of the dead. I insisted on trying to discover the answers through my imagination and by asking the rabbis questions about where my father's soul was since he was no longer physically present on Earth. My questions were not of a philosophical or intellectual nature. Trying to understand the meaning of these events was as important to me as the air I breathed. One rabbi told me that during the first month of mourning, we must leave a window or door open in order to help the soul of the departed say farewell to the place and the people to which he was bound. During this period, he explained, the soul keeps going in and out of the house. This idea often kept me awake at night, and I had the strange feeling of my father's and others' presence. The sensation started before I spoke with the rabbi, so it was not due to the power of suggestion. His explanation confirmed my fear and awoke in me the desire to learn more about the next world. C. G. Jung described the same sensation (1964, 73). His approach was of great help to me during my first exploration of the unconscious. The presence of God on one side and an evil demon on the other brought me to the study of Kabbalah. Before falling asleep, I entrusted my soul to the Almighty. I just wanted to sleep without having to share the night with "a guest."

Unfortunately, the more time passed, the more my condition deteriorated: I was not sleeping at all, and I left the *abatjour* (the bedside lamp) on all night long,

disturbing my brother Elia's sleep. One morning my mother asked him to accompany me to our family doctor. When I told the doctor about the strange sensation I had of the "presence," he tried to reassure me by simply saying that it did not exist and then giving me tranquillizers. When I got home, I threw them into the wastepaper basket as if I were playing basketball. At that moment, it was as if I had come to an agreement with myself. I wanted to get to the bottom of the matter: study, meet teachers, have other experiences . . . I wanted to see clearly. I had gained about ten pounds, and in order to sleep, I was willing to do eight hours of gymnastics a day. Dreams and nightmares proliferated. The more I sought contentment, the more conflicts increased within me. The more I tried to understand, the more complicated I found the problem of life and death. I believe it was my faith in God that saved me from being completely overcome by the unconscious.

In any case, I had to get up in the morning and go to work. I was introduced to psychoanalysis when I shared my pains and nightmares with my brother Elia's friend who amazed me with his exact interpretation of one of my dreams. I started therapy and discovered my passion for the unconscious—and for dreams and their possible interpretations. After three years of therapy, at the age of twenty-six, I decided to go back to university to study psychology.

I was also zealous about dancing and attended dance therapy sessions. The secret flame that was buried under the pain had never been extinguished, and I ran around in spirals with tremendous speed and vitality, made sounds, shouted, and beat on the floor with rhythmical movements. I was moving in the Middle Eastern dance style when suddenly I froze. I couldn't talk, move, breathe, or listen. I lost touch with my inner and outer worlds.

My teacher asked, "What's happened David?"

"I can't move," I replied.

"Why?"

"Because these are Arab dance movements and I am Jewish . . . but I must admit I love them."

She insisted that I continue because nothing grows if frozen. And so I continued to move, and this was the beginning of a long journey that led me to recognize, accept, and love my Libyan identity again.

After I had discovered the pain that the pogrom had left inside me, after I had felt the repressed anger and sadness, I could finally access my whole identity. After years of dance therapy, authentic movement, and psychoanalysis, I was ready to help other people. I worked with old people who were in the nursing home of the Jewish Hospital in Rome, and when that job ended, I continued to work as a volunteer with children at the Jewish Orphanage at Pitigliani Institute in Rome. My experience with children, adolescents, and the elderly matured my sense of responsibility. Years later, Henry, an Israeli colleague, observed that it was not by accident that I chose to help widowers and orphans; this was, in effect, my family's condition.

My love for Israeli and Middle Eastern dances and the need to earn money for my personal therapy convinced me to start a dance program open to young people regardless of their religion. I felt that dancing revealed something very beautiful: a principle of inter-religious unity. During one program, I met the president of the association "Libyan Jews for the Trialogue of Peace." He invited us to an international conference to be held in Rome in January 1989, which was the second international convention of Jews from Libya. I was finally given the opportunity to express the part of my identity that I had been trying to repress for years. Performing the Hanna (a North African and Middle Eastern wedding tradition) together with a group of Jews from Tripoli and Italy was a real liberation. In a solo piece, I was finally able to enact my love and loyalty toward my homeland. I was free to declare, without feeling guilty or without betraying Judaism, a part of my own identity. I prepared a performance in which one of the groups represented the Hanna rite for a Jewish Libyan wedding. Another group did a folk dance, and I danced the *Dror Ikra*—the Jewish Yemenite dance of liberty and a Shabbat song.

Every day after my dance lessons, I stopped on the bridge going to Piazza Mazzini to look at the sky that God had designed for us that day. Life, created by the Divine stroke of a brush, seemed to change every day, and the simple gesture of looking at the sky gradually became a fixed appointment for me. The colors and the shapes of the clouds have always amazed and filled me with enthusiasm. Every time I stopped to look at the sky, I perceived that something magical and mysterious was happening. You cannot remain indifferent if you have a sensitive soul. You ask yourself many questions before a sunset or when looking at the sky whether it is serene, cloudy, light pink, clear, brilliant, dark, with white creamy clouds, stormy, or in many other different forms according to its infinite expressions. Through these ordinary experiences, I became aware of the Divine mystery.

Later, I would come understand better what I was feeling then. I would learn that, according to Kabbalah, we come into the world with only part of our soul inside our body and part of it strewn as shattered pieces throughout the universe (Schneider 2009, 69). Our task is to collect them wherever they may be found. We get divine assistance in this task, for, in so doing, we are repairing the world as well as ourselves.

Remember the past, live in the present, trust in the future.

—Hebrew lyrics by Abba Kovner, Beit Hatafutsot,
The Museum of the Jewish People, Tel Aviv, Israel

As soon as I obtained my Italian citizenship, I went to visit the old Ghriba Synagogue in Djerba, Tunisia, where my family name originated. Until then, I had not been able to travel because my Italian permit only allowed me access to a few countries. (Of course, I could not travel to Libya because, when Qaddafi rose to power in 1969, he confiscated all Jewish property and declared that Jews could never return to Libya.) Rabbi Elyhau Coen

gave me a warm welcome. He told me I was the first Jew from Libya to visit there since the Six-Day War and invited me to his house to eat couscous. The familiar North African jasmine perfume that filled the air brought the atmosphere of my childhood back to me. I reconnected with my roots by speaking Arabic, eating oriental cuisine, visiting the *shuk,* buying souvenirs, and gazing at Libya from across the Mediterranean Sea. Looking at the palms full of dates and enjoying the familiar Sahara wind made me feel almost at home and created an even deeper longing to return to my beloved Tripoli. When I returned to Rome, I brought with me all kinds of spices, fruit, dried fruit, *ushek* (Arab incense), *ruaha* (fans), *berrada* (a vase for water), and *coffa* (an oriental bag).

I was working with my dreams in my psychoanalytic sessions and discovered that they had the power to help me to heal and to grow. Many of my dreams led me to visit biblical places, especially burial sites. At the beginning of my training in Jungian psychology, I went to visit the tomb of Joseph, near Hebron, to pay homage and to pray. The figure of Joseph has been very important since my Bar Mitzvah and remained so during my depression, my psychoanalysis, my training, my profession, and has now become part of my vision for peace.

Some years later, after another dream, I went to Jerusalem to visit the tomb of Aaron (Moses's brother in the Bible). I connected with Aaron's story because he was in touch both with people and with God; he was the high priest, and he also loved and pursued peace. When I was ready to enter Jordan to visit his tomb in Petra, the Israeli policeman who had accompanied me was stopped at the border. I started to panic when I had to continue all alone in an Arab world. I saw many armed people, including Palestinian refugees.

I managed to find the spring where, according to the Torah, Moses turned bitter water into fresh water. Then I climbed Mount Nebo with the help of a new friend, Ibrahim, a Muslim taxi driver, who accompanied me everywhere, protecting and reassuring me. He took me to the site where Moses was told he could not enter the Promised Land. From Jordan, I could see Israel clearly even though it was night. On one side of the border the lights were all yellow, on the other side white. The first night I slept in Petra, I had a dream in which enormous figures of Moses and Aaron encouraged me to go on and complete my journey. When I woke up, I was no longer afraid. At Aaron's tomb, a polite Muslim guard allowed me to perform a ritual that was prohibited by his religion: in accordance with a mystical Jewish tradition, I brought a bottle of wine and blessed it.

In Jordan, I understood their language, but I did not want them to know I was a Jew. They seemed visibly puzzled by this strange Italian visitor who spoke English and yet had something in common with them. Ibrahim, my taxi driver, told me that in my accent, gestures, facial expressions, appearance, and, in particular, the way I laughed and shook hands, I resembled the people of Jordan.

When I was able to enter the Arab culture without anyone knowing that I was Jewish, I found out that we—Jew and Muslim—were not very different from each other in basic cultural ways, though we were quite different in loyalties and religious practice. This understanding allowed me to love my Libyan identity again. I felt as if I had found some pieces of my shattered soul, but I also realized that the repair was not yet complete.

Peace. It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart.

—Unknown

Return

Whatever you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.

—Johan Wolfgang von Goethe
Spoken by the Manager, "Prelude at the Theatre, *Faust*[3]

On May 16, 2002—which happened to be the 5th of Sivan, the night of my Jewish birthday—I had this dream:

> I am at the Libyan consulate with my workshop teacher, and he is helping me to obtain a visa and some documents. The employee of the consulate refuses to give them to me. He does not want me to communicate with the consulate via e-mail either. Then two other people arrive and a waiter brings them two big, very soft cakes filled with cream. Afterward the waiter brings me a similar, but very small cake. I accept it because I realize that even though it is small it is quite enough for one person. Then the waiter approaches me and I can see that he is wearing a Jewish prayer shawl. He comes very close to me and our faces are so near that we can almost touch with our noses. I realize that he is Qaddafi. He is very touched when he sees that I am satisfied with the small cake and then we hug each other. Then I say, "We can hug a better way," and we move our shoulders so our hearts touch when we hug.

On August 23, three months later, I read an Italian newspaper headline, "The new Qaddafi is looking toward the West." Other articles reported that the United States and Europe were astonished by the metamorphosis of Colonel Qaddafi, his son Saadi's passion for soccer, and his other son Seif's involvement in charities and human rights. I was so excited that I could not sleep that night, just like the sleepless night during the 1967 riots when I lost faith in the future; only now I was I finally regaining faith in the future—and in humanity. I had spent thirty-five years of my life hoping and praying that one day I would be able to see my native Libya once more. This desire, however, was accompanied by the fear of being persecuted again: I might be arrested as a spy. These unhappy thoughts made my innocent enthusiasm to return to my childhood environment slowly fade away. Because of the risks involved, I tried to focus my life more on the present and future than on the past.

The lifestyle within the Jewish Libyan community had not changed significantly. On the contrary, we preserved traditions, cuisine, ritual, language, and customs. We opened Tripolitan synagogues; Jews from Tripoli married Roman Jews; and commercial activities were beginning to flourish. There was little doubt that we were in Rome to stay. Nevertheless, something in me continued to long for the land where I was born. I struggled between the "reality" of my life, which at times made me feel hopeless and impotent, and my desire to return to Tripoli. The prohibition of return kept feeding a complicated conflict within me—between the desire to return and the impulse to dissolve any connection to the homeland that was rejecting me. I kept hearing a still, small voice inside me trying to persuade me to find a way to return at least once to the land where I was born.

By chance, when my mother, Dina Debach, applied for a birth certificate through the Italian Consulate in Tripoli to renew her passport, a consulate employee noticed that her surname was nearly the same as that of an elderly Jewish woman in Tripoli, whose name and surname were Rina Debach. My uncle, who was helping my mother in her application, realized that this woman was my aunt. She was the last known Jew to reside in Libya. We had lost contact with her years before, when she stopped corresponding, so we thought she was dead. But she was alive, eighty years old, and living in a nursing home owned by the Qaddafi family. She was there due to psychological problems that resulted from her being without her family for thirty-five years.

I knew that I had to make the effort to see her while she was still alive. One consulate officer told me that my aunt wanted to be buried in a Jewish cemetery, but at that time, Tripoli had no Jewish cemetery. I was given the name of Andreina Fontana, the Vice-Consul at the Italian Consulate in Tripoli, and found out that she had visited my aunt. Andreina made every effort to help me obtain a visa, even taking my letter, translated into Arabic, and sending it to Qaddafi through official channels, along with a copy of the manuscript of my first book about peace. Unfortunately, nothing happened.

While sharing my frustrations with my sister Ruby, she told me that the Libyan Ambassador to Italy had been a frequent customer of her clothing shop in the center of Rome for over fifteen years. Another miracle of synchronicity happened, and three days later, after the ambassador found out that I was Ruby's brother, I was granted a visa to return to Libya, the first visa given to a Jew in thirty-six years.

This new adventure thrilled me. I was going to visit my aunt and possibly meet Libyan authorities for my "Peace Project." My uncle gave me a pair of very elegant Pierre Cardin shoes; my sister gave me a beautiful Pal Zileri suit. I no longer looked like a refugee but rather like a person of substance. On September 5, 2002, I arrived at the airport in a taxi and checked the timetable for my flight, Rome-Tripoli AZ 871. I felt the need to be quiet, so I could listen to my emotions and express myself through tears. The crew was Italian, the passengers Libyans, and I, the only Jew, a son of Libya and Italy—alike but at the same time different. The sky was a deep blue with bright white clouds.

After a two-hour flight, I was very happy to be welcomed by the Vice-Consul of the Italian Consulate in Tripoli. I met Andreina Fontana and Ettore Scalia, who also worked at the consulate. He, too, had been born in Tripoli. All around me I saw signs in Arabic and English. I felt so tense that I started seeing black dots. I went through passport control and customs without any problem. It was like seeing the Red Sea open up before me. Andreina held me by the arm. We went outside, and suddenly I felt the familiar air: its freshness, the same breeze I remembered from childhood, and I saw that particular light of Tripoli, hot but not blinding.

As I was driven to my hotel in a diplomatic car, I began to hear people speaking in Arabic from the opened window of the car. Everywhere I saw date palms with round orange and yellow dates. I wanted to pick a cluster and taste their sweet, forgotten flavor! At the El-Kebir Hotel, I was greeted by smiles, and my suitcases were taken upstairs to a suite. It was the first time I had been in a suite: a beautiful table, sofas, armchairs, two televisions, refrigerator, radio ... all kinds of luxuries. A waiter brought me a tray full of every kind of fruit and another full of traditional pastry: baklava, la burica, and other Tripolitan specialties. The refrigerator was full of drinks, dried fruit, and pistachios ... everything in abundance! I opened the windows and could see the Tripoli promenade, with all the ships lined up—a fantastic sight! I had heard that Tripoli was not as beautiful as it once was, that it had been neglected and left to ruin; instead, it was clean and very beautiful. I thought of my mother, sister, uncle, and brother, who were all waiting anxiously for my telephone call, but I was overwhelmed by the new experience and could not think of anything else.

David Gerbi, Tripoli 2002, in front of the shop that had belonged to his father, Shalom Gerbi. The shop had been confiscated by the Libyan government, when the family was forced to leave Libya in 1967.

David Gerbi embraces the new owner of his father's shop in a gesture of reconciliation.

Andreina had organized a dinner at her house with all her friends from the consulate, and I was deeply touched by their kindness and hospitality. We started to get to know each other through our stories. Andreina's house—big, bright, and very quiet—was located not too far from the city's center. I told them of the emotions I experienced upon my return and how the fears, accumulated over the years, were beginning to fade.

The following day, I visited the Galleria de Bono, near my childhood home, and I felt very excited when I recognized the street and my father's shop on the left. I also saw our house on Sciara El Kaira Street. Many memories came rushing to my mind . . . the barber, my father's and uncle's shop.

Later, Andreina took me to visit my aunt at a luxurious nursing home. We were greeted by one of the physicians, Doctor Sriti, with the words "*Salam aleikum*." He shook my hand with his right hand and put his left hand over his heart—a very affectionate, traditional Tripolitan way to greet someone—and offered us Arabic coffee and mint tea. I told him about my aunt, and he showed me her medical chart, telling me of the difficulties they had had because no one knew her story. Then I saw her walking slowly with crutches beside a nurse who helped her to sit down on a brown sofa. I did not remember her: she was a very thin, small woman who appeared to be having a conversation with herself. In a low voice, she asked herself something and then replied out loud, gesticulating jerkily. I wondered who she could be speaking to, since she hadn't spoken to any family during these past years? It was as if she were conversing with us—the members of her family who had disappeared long ago. Perhaps through these fantasies she was able to survive suffering in solitude. I had brought her some dried fruit, bath foam, shampoo, and Italian perfume. I also brought a pendant with Hebrew letters engraved on it.

David Gerbi visits his Aunt Rina in a Tripoli nursing home.

My aunt stood and asked, "*Shaw ada*?" ("What is this?") She seemed irritated.

I replied in Tripolitan Hebrew: "*Ada, shem Shaddai*." ("This is God's name.")

Our eyes locked. She looked up, opened her hands, and said: "*Kewech Rabbe.*" ("The power of God.") She looked at me intensely.

I told her that night was Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year; after that it would be Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement; and after that Simchat Torah (the Feast of Joy for the Torah).

She interrupted me, "*La samachni.* Forgive me if I correct you. Before Simchat Torah comes Sukkot" ("the Feast of Booths").

"You are right, Aunt Rina!" My error was providential because from that moment we began speaking to each other. She wanted to know who I was, and I told her I was Dina's son.

She replied: "You are the son of Dina Vetrina, the one who has a flat nose!" Everyone started laughing.

I told her that she was the sister of Luli, Liliana, Sion, Dina, and Lillo.

"Oh, Luli, Locco's wife." This was the nickname of my aunt's husband. "How are Mary and Berto?" Did they ever get married?"

"Yes, they did. They have a daughter by the name of Wally, then Vito, Herzel, Daniele . . ."

Suddenly, she looked me straight in the eye, and I could see that she was more alert.

Before leaving, I hugged and kissed Aunt Rina who grabbed my arm forcefully. This gesture made me understand the importance of my presence, and I assured her that I would come and visit her again soon. I knew then that we must help her to be with her family during the last years of her life.

The following day I had an appointment with Qaddafi's closest aide. I went to the Italian Consulate and from there to an elegant section of the city. I sat down in front of Professor Mousa Cousa, Head of the Libyan Secret Service, who welcomed me politely and asked me to relate my life: education, profession, family history. I always tell the truth, even if I have some difficulty remembering that my family is divided among Israel, Italy, and the United States. This was the first time that I mentioned the word "Israel" in front of a Libyan authority because, before being exiled, it was prohibited and dangerous to pronounce this word before any Arab. I told him about my peace project and how it began. He offered me mint tea, and I gave him a bag with a letter of thanks and gifts for Qaddafi. Before leaving, I asked him if we could embrace in the customary Tripolitan way, and so we embraced, heart-to-heart. He assured me that the government considered me their guest and that I could stay for the entire period I had planned. Furthermore, he told me that I was free to travel throughout the country.

After this meeting, my mind was glutted with memories of the terror of our departure, the soldiers, and the curfew. I had been welcomed like an important person and given permission to go around freely. I wanted to transmit this experience to all my friends as proof that a dialogue was possible.

I wanted to visit a *shuk,* and as we got closer to the market, I noticed how much I felt at ease in this world full of colors and perfumes. Before entering, Fosi, my bodyguard and companion in Tripoli, put a hand on my shoulder, "*Anta trabelsi miya miya.*" ("You are one-hundred percent Tripolitan.") Before entering, he took me to Piazza Verde and showed me the fifty-three flags of all the African countries as a tangible sign of Qaddafi's desire to unite Africa. The atmosphere was festive, people selling garlands of jasmine and music everywhere. It was late afternoon, the time young couples get married. I started to sing, "The bride has arrived," an old Tripolitan wedding song that I remembered from my childhood. I breathed in the fragrance of incense and felt overcome by the desire to buy some, along with the traditional terracotta in which it is burned. I found it difficult to explain to Fosi that I knew the popular tradition according to which the incense is burned against the evil eye. When I said in Tripolitan dialect "*Hedali bel aen*" ("He gave me the evil eye"), Fosi burst out laughing and put his hand on my shoulder. I saw in his eyes the emotion of having shared with me something very deeply Tripolitan.

The following day, Fosi and I returned to my father's shop and to the apartment where I had lived as a boy. On the door of the apartment, there was a sign indicating that the El-Harouj Food Company and Catering Service was located there. Nothing

was the same in the apartment where I was conceived and born and where I spent the first twelve years of my life. When I told the owners I was born in that apartment, they offered me coffee and allowed me to visit all the rooms and take photos. I thought how strange life is: the new owners were customers of my sister's shop in Rome! A thousand threads still link Libya to Italy. One of the owners, very sensitive to my feelings, left me alone in the living room. He could feel my need to make contact with a lost reality. I went to every room to say good-bye and thanked everyone. All of a sudden I felt rich again for having touched that land and home that represented my roots. Everything seemed possible at that moment.

After dinner at a seaside restaurant, I asked to return to the area of Galleria de Bono, the wealthy shopping district near my former home: every time I went there, I remembered a piece of my life. Walking in the area that had been behind the Beth El Synagogue, I saw the corner where the Triestina Latteria had been located. Further ahead was my Uncle Sion's shop. The sewers were the same as those of years ago, the tiles made of small square pieces, some of which had been broken. All at once, I was in front of my grandmother's house, number 26. I remembered this now-silent street as being busy and full of noise. I was eagerly looking around for a piece of my life, and I decided to go back to see what happened to Beth El Synagogue. There was *nothing*—only a big parking lot. The entrance had been transformed into a travel agency; there were shops and houses. Later I learned that in Libya when a house or shop is vacated, it implies that it is available for another person to take. I wondered what could still be saved of our traditions in Libya: the cemetery, the synagogues, the school?

I felt very comfortable with the Libyans. In the evenings, I often spoke with Fosi, Ali my driver, and some of their soldier friends. We talked about philosophy, religion, psychology, and the meaning of life while drinking Coca-Cola and eating pizza. When we were talking about *sfensa,* the Libyan pancake, they said: "Let's go have some tomorrow morning." "You are Libyan; remain here." These words had an important effect on me; the last time I had had anything to do with Libyan soldiers was when they had forced us into exile. It seemed like a paradox, thirty-five years later, that they were inviting me to go and eat *sfensa* with them and telling me to remain in Libya.

On a visit to the Italian consulate, I met a supervisor who lived near the former location of the Jewish cemetery. He informed me that the cemetery had been covered by buildings and a highway, but there were still 2,500 square meters available. We went immediately to the location, where tall buildings were being constructed next to a lot where children were playing soccer. Thinking that the bones of my loved ones were beneath made me very sad. This was my moment: alone with God and my loved ones. I imagine that perhaps, with help, the remaining space could be transformed into a rose-garden with a plaque in remembrance of the Jewish community.

Exterior of the Sal Dar Bishi (synagogue), Tripoli (Photograph taken in 2007.)

I then visited the Sla Dar Bishi Synagogue, where the Tablet of the Laws and the Star of David were still very clear although the building was in poor condition and covered with dirt. With much sadness, I took photos to document its state of deterioration. I asked an old man for information about the other synagogues. One had been transformed into a mosque. Another had become a Center of Documentation (*ex Sla Dar Serussi*), opened in 2001, in which I discovered with surprise that there were eight marble plaques, some belonging to members of the Arbib family. On the first floor, scrolls of the Torah were well preserved, even though placed backward. There was also a *Meghillat Ester* (the Book of Esther) and a sacred scroll, as well as documents of various well-known Jewish families such as the Habibs and Fadluns. We were accompanied by a well-trained guide, a young girl wearing white gloves, who told us the entire story of the Libyan Jewish community, as well as the history of Libya when it was under Turkish, Italian, and English rule. She spoke openly about the exodus of the Jews in 1967, as well as the later expulsion of Italians in 1970.

As I continued to explore the city, I saw the old bakery, where as a boy I had taken the Shabbat bread to be baked. Many remembered the Tripolitan Jews and my family, particularly one old man sitting outside near what had been the Talmud Torah. I was told that the Jewish quarter had become populated almost exclusively by African immigrants.

During my stay in Tripoli, I had been working to bring Aunt Rina to Rome, contacting my family, religious, and community leaders, and diplomats in Rome, as well

the diplomats and Libyan authorities I had met in Tripoli. On September 12, I woke up to the good news that my aunt had been issued a passport valid for three months. However, I would have to try to obtain the necessary documents in Rome before she could leave.

On my last day, I said good-bye to everyone at the consulate and returned for the last time to visit the Galleria de Bono. Back at the hotel, the maid who greeted me reminded me of my mother and grandmother, who were also very sweet and gentle while maintaining a sense of dignity. She was sincerely sorry when I told her I was leaving. The other staff expressed genuine affection and wished me a good trip and to return again soon. As I was driven to the airport, I felt I had established a basis for a future development of cordial relations, and I felt grateful to the Italian Consulate as well as to the Libyan government.

At the gate, Fosi and I embraced with affection and emotion, with a promise to meet again soon: *inshallà*. I turned around, and he was there smiling and waving his hand in farewell. I felt confused. My mind was full of images and thoughts: the driver, the respect the police had shown me, the smiles, my passport stamped in a hurry . . . everything helped to erase the images of our departure in 1967. I felt I was a new person and happy that I had not abandoned my dream.

Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great ones make you feel that you, too, can become great.

—Mark Twain (1835–1910)

As soon as I returned from Libya, I left for the United States at my own expense to bring a message of peace from Qaddafi, a promise I had made to the Italian Vice-Consul, Andreina Fontana; the Libyan Ambassador to Italy, Gaddur; and the head of the National Security Services, Mousa Cousa. I flew back and forth during the months of October, November, and December 2002. I wanted to play a role in this ambitious project out of the love that still tied me to Libya and to erase the bitterness I felt when seeing my native land on the list of rogue countries. Libya's message was one of détente and normalization through indemnity and rejection of terrorism. Wherever I went, I was happy to report that I had been treated well and that my aunt was also treated well. I recalled the conversation I had had with Mousa Cousa, which he concluded by saying that resuming diplomatic relations with the United States of America could be the first step to obtaining normal diplomatic relations with Israel.

As a Jewish son of Libya, I was deeply motivated by this project, and I was sure that Italy, through the Italian Jews and the Israeli Jews of Libya, could be the bridge for improving relations between the State of Israel and Libya. I spent a lot of time searching for people interested in this opportunity. They questioned whether Qaddafi's intentions were genuine; on the one hand, they did not want to miss a good opportunity for the

benefit of the world, but, on the other hand, they were skeptical because of Qaddafi's reputation. I stayed in Manhattan for more than a month, and my hotel room became my office. I had a computer, a printer, a telephone, and a fax at my disposal. I went from moments of despair to moments of hope. I always asked God for advice on how to proceed for peace in times of war. In the hope that my efforts would eventually bear fruit, upon my return to Italy, I sent Ambassador Gaddur a list of all the contacts I had established with Americans who were willing to arrange meetings with the Libyans.

My Aunt Rina Debach arrived in Rome on October 7, 2003. She was full of emotion when she met her family and saw the crowd waiting at the airport. There was a very friendly atmosphere among the Muslims, Jews, and Christians who were there to meet her. Not long after joining her family, she passed away peacefully and was buried in Israel on November 30, 2003, as she had wished.

Rina Debach, David Gerbi's aunt, arrives in Rome, October 7, 2003.

It became my dream that I could be the first Jew to return home to Libya: I would live and work in Rome where I have my practice, in Tripoli where I would restore the synagogue as a symbol of reconciliation, and in Jerusalem where I teach psychology at the Jungian Institute. Tripoli is my Libyan natural "mother," Rome is my Italian adoptive "mother," and Jerusalem is my religious "mother," while America is my progressive "mother." Might I resume the life that was interrupted in 1967 and reconstruct, together with my Muslim fellows, a future of peace in the Mediterranean, Middle East, and the West?

In September 2004, exactly two years after my first visit to Tripoli, Qaddafi officially invited the Libyan Jews who live in Italy to return home. In October 2004, the international embargo was removed, and Libya opened its borders. It was no longer on the list of countries that encouraged terrorism, and it had normalized its relations with the United States and Europe. Although Qaddafi had previously legalized the confiscation of properties belonging to forcibly exiled Jews and then prohibited a Jewish return to Libya, my first trip had given me hope that things could change and that I would be able to return to Tripoli as "a man of peace." I imagined that perhaps I would be able to reach Colonel Qaddafi's heart and invite him to eat couscous with me at my house.

On October 10, 2004, a Jewish delegation of Libyans residing in Italy was invited by the Libyan government to return to Tripoli to talk about restitution of confiscated properties, both public and private. I hoped that the new opening of Libya toward the world and the world toward Libya would alleviate the pain of exile. Perhaps we would overcome the humiliation and recoup our honor and dignity, which, at times, felt crushed during years of injustice, anger, and suffering. Yet I also knew that when we talked about "letting go" of the desire for revenge in order to embrace the possibility of genuine forgiveness, it needed to be understood that such a task demanded the sacrifice of time and effort. Phrases such as *that's so typical, what do you expect, they always do that,* in our referring to the "other," had to be instantly abolished from our mental vocabulary. These were unhelpful, not only because they made us hopeless and cynical, but, so too, because they did not bode well in the attempt to build unity. Most of all, we needed to become aware that, when we were hurt, we instinctively built resentment and looked forward to a moment of revenge. We also wanted justice; we wanted to be sure that others felt remorse for what they did; we wanted acknowledgment of the wound that had been inflicted on us; and we looked for compensation. In our minds, we said to ourselves that only then would we finally be able to normalize our relationships through forgiveness and reconciliation. Yet reality was not always the way we wished it to be. Acceptance was not necessarily dependent on justice. It was, in fact, separate from circumstantial events and, as previously mentioned, dependent on an inner state of being.

Performance of "Making Peace with Qadaffi," Baxter Theater, Cape Town, 2007

I had told the story of my exile in a book entitled *Peace Builders* (*Construttori di Pace,* 2003), and then I wrote a second book, inspired by the positive experience that I had in Libya in 2002, entitled *Making Peace with Qaddafi* (2007), which ended with my proposal to rebuild the synagogue in Tripoli. I also wrote a monologue—a kind of a one-man play—which I performed in the United States in 2006 (with the support of the SIT Graduate Institute, CONTACT, and the Jewish Community of Amherst), and in South Africa in 2007 (with the support and the sponsorship of the United Nations, the Italian and Israeli Embassies, various Jewish communities and universities in South Africa, the World Islamic Focus, and the Center for the Interreligious Dialogue). At that time, I also presented the monologue at the IAAP conference in Cape Town.

Following the "Making Peace with Qaddafi" presentation, attended by the Libyan vice-Ambassador and representatives of the Libyan embassy, I received an official response to a letter I sent to Qaddafi, expressing appreciation and thanks for my efforts undertaken in the search for peace, for my concern for the future of Libya, and for my attempts to strengthen Libya's relationships with the rest of the world. The letter ended with a new invitation to go to Libya after the holy month of Ramadan.

In November 2007, I made a second trip to Libya, where I was treated respectfully and again received permission to visit Tripoli and the entire country, including Leptis Magna, Sabratha, and centers in which ancient Jewish communities had resided. I visited Zanzur, Sabha, Dafne, Jefren, Gherian (where the Berbers were very hospitable to me), Homs, Zliten, and Misrata. When possible, I turned on a little light in every place where there were ruins of cemeteries and synagogues and I prayed and recited the Psalms in memory of the souls remaining in those places. I reached Bengasi, crossing the Sahara in a Mercedes, under the protection of a bodyguard and driver.

I visited the Jewish district, and many *Bengasinis,* after discovering that I was Jewish, asked me with much affection about the famous family of the Bedussas, the Zarrughs, and the Nahums. I perceived in them both nostalgia and a sense of unease for the expropriation from which they had benefited. I was invited to visit the psychiatric hospital in Bengasi, and as a teacher in Jungian psychology, I was given the chance to speak to the Libyan psychologists on the interpretation of dreams from psychoanalytic and Jungian points of view. I was extremely happy at such an opportunity; it felt unbelievable that it was so easy to reconstruct relationships with people of the same country. But, instead, when I returned to my hotel, I was suddenly informed to prepare myself because I had to fly from Bengasi to Tripoli to meet an important person.

When I landed in Tripoli, I found myself escorted by ten people who then confined me in a room where I was submitted to an interrogation. During the interrogation, they also searched the backpack that contained my *siddur, teffilin*, *tallit,* and *mezuzot* (prayer book, phylacteries, prayer shawl, and Torah parchments). They asked me what those objects were, and I answered that they were sacred objects used to pray.

LIBYAN PEOPLES BUREAU

THE PEOPLE'S BUREAU OF THE
GREAT SOCIALIST PEOPLE'S
LIBYAN ARAB JAMAHIRIYA
900 Church Street
PRETORIA

المكتب الشعبي
للجماهيرية العربية الليبية
الشعبية الاشتراكية العظمى
بريتوريا

Ref: 1/28/1239
Date: 10/9/2007

الاشارى :
التاريخ :
الوافق :

الشعار في كل مكان

Date : 10 September 2007

Dr. David Gerbi

With reference to your letter addressed to brother leader Mummar Algaddafi , the Libyan Peoples Bureau would like to inform you that H.E. the secretary for African Affairs of the general peoples committee of Foreign Liaison &International co operation asked to convey his appreciation and thanks for the efforts you carried out for the sake of peace , your concern for the future of Libya , and your endeavours to strengthen its relations with the rest of the world .
In this regard you are invited by H.E. the secretary for African Affairs to visit the Great Jamahiriya after the holly month of Ramadan ,on a date you will be informed in due course.

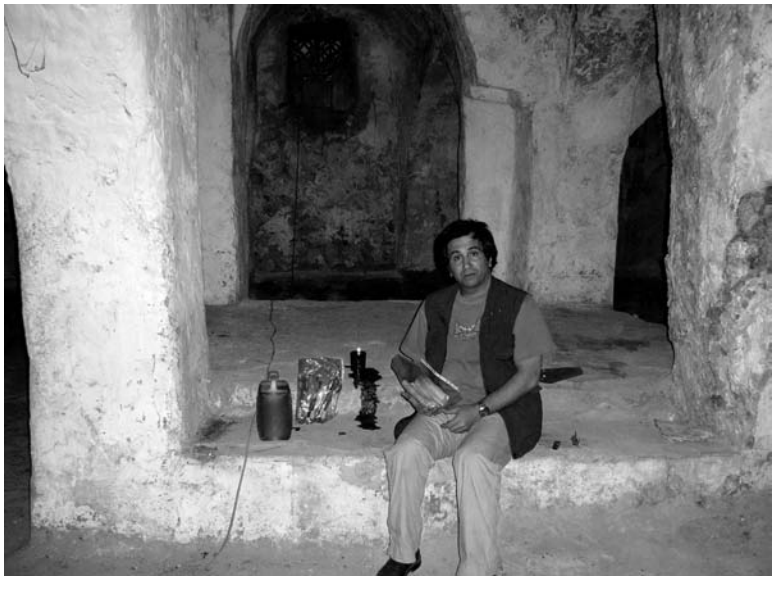
With best wishes and regards

The Libyan Peoples Bureau
Pretoria

P.O. Box 40388, Arcadia, Pretoria Tel. (27-12) 342 3902 Fax 342 3904

Invitation from the Libyan Government, 2007

David Gerbi inside the Sal Dar Bishi, Tripoli, 2007



David Gerbi with the mezuzot in the Sal Dar Bishi, Tripoli, 2007

They wanted to know what the *tallit* was for. "*Shawa ada?*" ("What's this for?") I showed them how to wear it. I wound it around my body completely, and, lifting my hands and looking aloft, I said in front of thirty people: "*Ana nhaf ca men Rebbe.*" ("I am only afraid of God."), and after thirty seconds of sacred silence, one of them timidly said, "*Bai anta masci.*" ("It is all right you, you can go.") All of my possessions were confiscated, but the most important thing is that they took possession of the six parchments of the *mezuzot* destined for the Synagogue. I was then loaded on an airplane, but I was not told my destination. I was not permitted to retrieve my belongings from the hotel in Tripoli, which included €10.000,00 (approximately US$13,000) brought to begin the restoration of the synagogue, as well as credit cards, my house keys, personal computer, and clothing.

I was traumatized and frightened again. After reciting the *Tefillat Haderech*—the prayer for the ones who travel—I discovered I was on my way to Malta. It was a strong shock, because I had been exiled once more, without any reason or explanation, again dispossessed of all of my belongings. From there, with difficulty, I made my way home to Rome.

After three months of sick silence, I decided to make public the whole history—to ANSA, *The Jerusalem Report,* and the Israeli newspaper, *Yediot Aharonot.* Four months later, 90 percent of all that had been confiscated from me in Tripoli was returned; however, the six parchments, that have enormous symbolic value for me, are still in Libya.

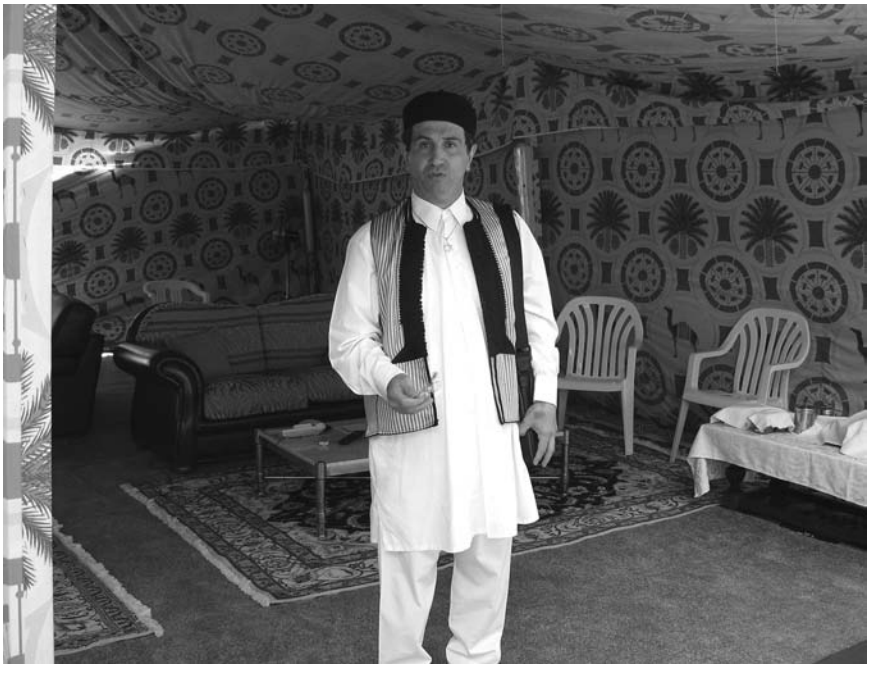
David Gerbi after being retraumatized

To dare is to lose one's footing for a moment. To not dare is to lose oneself.

—Soren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)

On June 13, 2009, Qaddafi visited Rome and invited the Libyan Jewish community in Rome to meet with him on Shabbat. I decided to go, not because I wanted to talk about money or affairs, but about the sacred purpose of restoring the synagogue.

I always wondered why the six parchments remained in Libya, and today, I think I understand that there may be a deeper meaning, not one necessarily intended by Qadaffi: so that the reconstruction of the synagogue as symbol of reconciliation could be undertaken by Libyan Jews and Libyan Muslims.



David Gerbi in Qadaffi's tent at the Libyan Embassy in Rome, 2009

At the meeting with Qaddafi, I wore a traditional Libyan robe, with the Jewish star at my neck, but when I introduced myself, I spoke in Italian. I did all this on purpose because I wanted to show in a concrete way my affiliation to the three ethnicities: Jewish, Libyan, and Italian. When I faced Qaddafi, we both looked at each other straight in the eyes, and he smiled at me in an astonished way when he saw the traditional Libyan robe paired with the *Magen David* (the Star of David). I let him recognize me as the nephew of the last Jewess of Libya. I spoke to him about my pride in deeply living the wealth of my three identities and my determination not to give up any of them. I also reminded him of the synagogue project. For the whole time, he held my hand and smiled, nodding to me.

Facing my enemy and Israel's enemy without fear was good for me. It was therapeutic, also, because only after having faced him with courage, never looking away, could I shake his hand and meet him as a human being. I could do it in the manner that Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the eighteenth-century founder of the Chabad Hassidic sect advised his followers, "Humble your heart . . . for a soft answer dispels anger. And, as water reflects a face to a face, maybe [your enemies'] hearts will soften in return" (Schneider 2009, 177).

I didn't meet with Qaddafi on Shabbat to speak about the restitution of confiscated possessions but to restore my Libyan origins and to allow the possibility of a conciliatory

David Gerbi meets with Qadaffi in Rome, 2009.

experience with him. But I did not and I do not give up easily. Peace without justice is a false peace and cannot last. And justice demands action. I hope that the Jewish and International Community does not continue to ignore my project but can be of support. *Shabbat Shalom* means Saturday of Peace, and it has been the most proper day for me to start speaking of peace again. You make peace with your enemies and not with your friends. Ben Gurion, founder of the State of Israel, said that whoever doesn't believe in miracles is not realist (Spiro 2010, 407). I believe in the theory of small footsteps; this is how I was able to help my aunt, and it is also my hope for the synagogue in Tripoli.

I also hope for the miracle of peace between Libya and Israel because only then will my two identities—Libyan and Jewish—feel truly at peace. As a psychotherapist, I worked intensively on the theme of the multiple identities within myself, and I know how important it is not to live in conflict but in harmony, which, for me, is the Mediterranean identity of Jewish-Italian-Libyan. They are all parts of me, and I love and I accept them all; they make me rich and strong in their difference because they are also united and in harmony inside of me.

> *Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer . . .*
>
> —Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*[4]

On February 17, 2011, the Libyan people began their revolt. They asked for freedom, human rights, and a new government. During the forty-two years of Qaddafi's

regime—which was born from fear and continued to exist out of fear and not from consent, Qaddafi has killed members of the Libyan opposition and strangers alike. He has sent into exile Libyan Jews, Libyan Muslims, and Libyan Christians. Today, his love for his power is stronger than his love for the Libyan people. Because of his love for his power, he is ready to kill anyone who disagrees with him, as he did in 1969. This is his pattern. Qaddafi is a man with whom you cannot negotiate. Today, I can see the murderer's face, a face that made many people suffer, including my parents, myself, my family, my community, and my friends. Qaddafi has humiliated international law and has always violated human rights. Qaddafi's megalomania, his inflated and omnipotent ego during his forty-two years of dictatorship, has caused irreversible consequences. Humiliation, threats, and corruption have been his instruments for dividing people to his advantage. Today, I know that the effort I made to contribute to peace in Libya, for which I dedicated my entire life, was in vain during Qaddafi's regime because he did not know how to greet the possibility of transforming Libya into a welcoming country: multireligious, multicultural, multiethnic, multilingual, as it was in the past that I remember from my childhood.

For the first time in my life, I can talk freely without fear of repercussion, either against myself, my family, or my loved ones. For the first time in my life, I have the right to judge and condemn my enemy. Until now, I was still a prisoner of my fear of Qaddafi and the long hand of his regime. Today, I no longer feel stuck in a place of being invisible and silent. I reclaim my courage to expose myself and be loud enough to be heard. My heart is with the Libyan people's desire for dignity, freedom, hope, and the possibility to determine their destiny—one that reflects their true will and aspirations. Today, as a Jungian psychoanalyst, I can see how the archetype of victim and perpetrator has been active in me. The perpetrator was my inner Qaddafi who would not allow me to fight and achieve my own freedom. The inner experience of trauma is unbearable, stimulating archetypal images and often containing a powerful victim-protector-persecutor within the structure of the personality who actively seeks to guard the true self from annihilation. I did all this inner work with many years of analysis to regain my soul that was violated by Qaddafi's brutal law, which exiled me from living in my homeland of Libya. I never stopped believing that one day I would be free. I wasn't born equipped with the democratic blueprint. I knew only monarchy and dictatorship. But, thanks to my Italian and Jewish identity, I started to learn the importance of John Quincy Adams's words, "Individual liberty is individual power, and as the power of a community is a mass compounded of individual powers, the nation which enjoys the most freedom must necessarily be in proportion to its numbers the most powerful nation" (Letter to James Lloyd, 1 October 1822).

I pray to God that a free Libya will soon be born and peace attained and, as my Aunt Rina was the last Libyan Jew, that I will be the first Jewish Italian Libyan to return to rebuild the synagogue as a symbol of reconciliation and hope. I would like to leave

my readers with the lessons I have learned as expressed best by my own quote: "When everything goes wrong in spite of all your good intentions, when you try to get unstuck and instead you get more stuck, when you find ambiguity in spite of all your efforts to find clarity, only then you can start to feel happy because you are getting close to the light that comes after the darkest night of the soul . . . and most of all your persistence will be rewarded with greatest progress and result. Many people unfortunately give up when they are very close to the goal. So never, never, never give up your vision and your passion."

ENDNOTES

1. Epigraph from Chaim Potok, *Old Men at Midnight,* New York: Knopf, 2001.
2. Epigraph from Robert Graves, "To Bring the Dead to Life;" *The Complete Poems in One Volume,* ed. Beryl Graves & Dunstan Ward, Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2000.
3. Epigraph from Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, "Prelude at the Theatre," in *Faust: A Norton Critical Edition,* 2nd Edition, trans. Walter Arndt, ed. Cyrus Hamlin, NY: Norton & Co., 2001.
4. Epigraph from Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet,* NY: Vintage, 1986.

NOTE

All photographs are coutesy of the author.

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Dr. David Gerbi is a psychotherapist and Jungian analyst who divides his time between Italy and Israel. He is a member, since 1995, of the International Association for Analytical Psychology (IAAP) and of the Israel Institute for Jungian Psychology (IIJP), and was a member of the Associazione Italiana di Psicologia Analitica (AIPA) from 1995 to 2005 and Laboratorio Italiano Ricerca Psicologia Analitica (LIRPA). In 2004, Dr. Gerbi was a witness for Peace for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in Rome and, in 2007, was nominated by UNHCR as Ambassador for Peace in South Africa. He has been a member of the Committee of Information and Peace Initiative (COMIN). Dr. Gerbi is a columnist with *Shalom,* a monthly magazine for the Jewish community of Rome. In addition to his private practice in Rome, he teaches at the Psychotherapy Institute of Ruolo Terapeutico in Milan, at the Jung Institute in Jerusalem, and conducts seminars internationally on dream interpretation, involving techniques of psychodrama and movement. As an actor and dancer,

Dr. Gerbi mounted a one-man show entitled *Making Peace with Qaddafi* in 2006 and, since then, has performed it in theaters in the U.S., Japan, Italy, Israel, and South Africa, and is currently developing an updated version for 2011/2012, *Making Peace with Our Enemy: Inner Enemy and Outer Enemy*. He has written two books on the subject of peace. Dr. Gerbi is currently working on a third book focusing on the psychological and spiritual productive approach to our enemy. *Correspondence:* Via Cesare Pascarella 34, Rome 00153, Italy. E-mail: davidgerbi26@mac.com; website: www.davidgerbi.it.

ABSTRACT

Jungian psychoanalyst Dr. David Gerbi describes the journey of his awakening to peace and reconciliation in this two-part article. Jungian psychoanalyst Dr. David Gerbi describes the journey of his awakening to peace and reconciliation after the traumatic expulsion of his family from their home in Libya. The first part of this article describes his experience after his family's emigration to Rome. In the second part, he describes his return to Libya and subsequent contact with the Libyan dictator in Rome. His work demonstrates how the traumas of the past can be turned into opportunities for the future and that a condition for peace with one's enemies is making peace with one's own self.

KEY WORDS

Arabs, Christians, dance therapy, dream interpretation, exile, exodus, Israel, Jew, C. G. Jung, Kabbalah, Libya, Muslim, peace, pogrom, Qaddafi, refugee, riot, Sephardic Jews, Six-Day War