

Drexel University

From the Selected Works of James Gross

Fall 2014

Dead or alive: Researching Israeli relatives

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Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/jamesgross/57/>

CHRONICLES

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דברי הימים

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REFLECTIONS FROM YOUR CHRONICLES TEAM

Fall 2014



H*a-karat ha-tov* (הכרת הטוב) is the Hebrew term for "gratitude" and literally means "recognizing the good." When we are grateful, we are acknowledging the good that already exists in our world.

During our Steve Schechter Memorial Lecture in October, I mentioned how Steve (z"l) taught by personal example and inspired us to share his broad vision for JGSGP and emulate his dedication and passion. I believe the best tribute we can pay him is to acknowledge what a positive force he was for JGSGP and carry on his vision. That vision exists on two fronts. We can continue to strive as a society to educate about Jewish genealogy through our programming, genealogy fairs, Facebook page, website, quarterly publication, and Speakers Bureau. We can also perpetuate the vision by continuing to explore and research our respective family histories and to write and share the narrative that the research ultimately generates.

We can take great pride in what JGSGP has accomplished on many levels. I want to extend a hearty vote of thanks to all *Chronicles* contributors, past and present, and once again extend an invitation to all our readers to continue our tradition of quality content. Your editorial team doesn't, however, rest on its laurels. Did you notice our new look? Beginning with this issue we're changing our format from a newspaper style to one that's more informal and eye catching. We examined the publications of other JGS's and opted for this new style that we hope you'll find fresh and aesthetically appealing.



Fig. 3 Google Earth image of Har Nebo Cemetery with family grave locations marked.

Author David Brill is a member of JGSGP and has been researching his own family history in Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, and the United States for over 20 years. Coordinator of the Russian Interest Group (RIG) for JGSGP, he has made several presentations about various aspects of genealogical research in regions of the former Russian Empire. David has been active in transliterating documents, including all existing Jewish and vital records for his ancestral shtetl of Usvyaty, Russia. He also maintains a Kehilalinks page for Tuchin, Ukraine. Contact David at brilldr@comcast.net

DEAD OR ALIVE: RESEARCHING ISRAELI RELATIVES

by James Gross



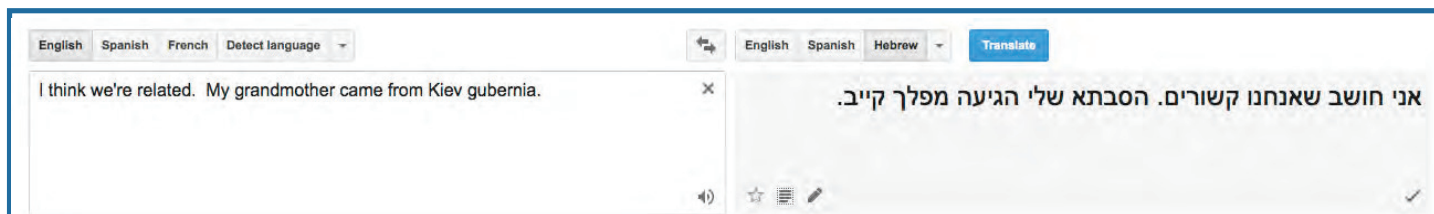
I have a number of family branches in Israel including several exclusively Hebrew speaking Friedman / Fridman relatives. I, on the other hand, don't read or speak Hebrew. I will share a few methods which I used to cross the Hebrew language barrier via online searches and select databases. This short article may help some of you locate or research some of your Israeli-Hebrew speaking relatives. For purposes of simplicity, I will distinguish between living and deceased relatives.

Living relatives:

To reach out to my living Hebrew speaking relatives, I used Facebook¹ and Google Translate². I had a feeling that some of my Hebrew speaking relatives might have their names listed on Facebook in Hebrew characters. I

therefore needed a transliteration of their English surnames into Hebrew. I entered their English surnames in Google Translate, copied and pasted the Hebrew equivalent into the Facebook search box, and reviewed the results.

Where possible, I searched for already known Israeli relatives on Facebook and reviewed their friends list. When I identified a potential relative, I typed out a few short sentences in English, used Google Translate, and sent the resulting Hebrew translation to that person. I was able to identify, locate, and communicate with a few relatives using this method.



I had previously connected with an in-law cousin on Facebook who sent me a URL link to a website containing information about one of my Israeli *Haredi* (very Orthodox Jews who reject secular culture) branches. Since the webpage was primarily in Hebrew, and the English version omitted information, I used a Google website translator to view a more complete English version of the website³.

Deceased relatives:

While at the 2014 IAJGS conference in Salt Lake City, I was able to access two online Israeli databases: the All Israel Database available from the Israel Genealogy Research Association (IGRA)⁴, and the EIRI Search Engine, available from the Israel Genealogy Society⁵. I used these two new databases to locate a number of historical Israeli vital records related to my deceased, Israeli relatives.

My primary Israeli database searches were for my distant Israeli cousins with the surnames of Fridman and Friedman, many of whom lived in Haifa. Those relatives are distantly related to Chief Rabbi Avraham Yitzhok Kook and also related to Rabbi Zvi Friedman, a senior rebbe in Bnei Brak. Even though the surname Friedman is fairly common in Israel, I was able to identify and locate several records on my relatives. .

The IGRA website has a good article by Daniel Horowitz that lists a number of useful online resources to help with Israeli research⁶. There is also a research guide from the Center for Jewish History⁷ as well as Israeli cemetery burial listings at www.jewishgen.org⁸. Hopefully the tools, strategies, and links mentioned in this article will help you research your deceased Israeli relatives and enable you to engage your living relatives directly in Hebrew. ❖

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Author James Gross has been working on his family tree since the early 1990s. A periodic contributor to various genealogy newsletters, James volunteers regularly at the Cherry Hill, NJ Family History Center where he helps other genealogists in their research. He also has a genealogy website: <http://tinyurl.com/gross-steinberg>. James can be reached at: navistar96@yahoo.com