



ON TO LEIPZIG!

History and Stories from Israel at the Book Fair 2026

By Brigitte Chaya Nussbächer



Leipzig reveals itself through cultural flourishing, a dark past, and a revitalized Jewish community.

Amid the bustle of the Book Fair, history turns tangible and the present is challenged. Historical contexts from Germany and Israel, personal stories, and developments surrounding Israel, up to the current Iran conflict, come alive.

What remains is a hope thousands of years old and a voice that does not remain silent.

On March 19, 2026 the time has come: we board the train to Leipzig so that I can give a lecture at the Book Fair the following day and present my book “*Israel’s Trial by Fire – The Fateful Years Around October 7, 2023.*”

Until now, we have known Leipzig only as a city of beautiful architecture and impressive musical tradition. Now we are discovering new dimensions: Leipzig as a historic center of printing and the book trade, Leipzig as one of the oldest trade fair locations in the world (since 1190), and Leipzig as the home of one of the most important and vibrant Jewish communities in Germany, with a 700-year history.

We are staying in a hotel in the former Jewish quarter, just a three-minute walk from the synagogue, which became a refuge for Jewish citizens during the Nazi era. On our first morning, we wander through the Waldstraßen district.



Street in the Jewish quarter – The Rosenthal Villa (Private Photos)

In the 1920s, thousands of Jewish community members lived here, shaping the city's science, culture, and commerce as businesspeople, craftsmen, doctors, and lawyers. During this time, the Jewish community initiated 48 charitable organizations and also founded a hospital and a retirement home.

During the Holocaust, Leipzig's Jewish community was almost completely destroyed. Before the deportations began in 1942, many people were forced into so-called "Jew Houses" and subjected to forced labor in the subcamps of Buchenwald. One of the most notorious was the Leipzig-Thekla (in the northeast of the city), where prisoners worked for the armaments industry - many of whom were burned alive in a locked hall in April 1945. Local companies in Leipzig also became part of the Nazi forced labor system and profited from labor supplied by the concentration camps.

Today, stumbling stones and a few signs commemorate this dark past.



Traces of the Crimes of the Nazi Era (Private Photos)

It is painful and deeply moving to know all this and to see the tangible traces. Since my lecture on International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2026 - and especially after reading dozens of books in preparation - I have gained a completely new understanding of this terrible period, which also left deep scars on Leipzig's history, representative of the entire European continent and all countries occupied by Germany.



Yet destruction was not the final chapter in the Jewish history of this city. After the Peaceful Revolution and German Reunification, Jewish life in Leipzig experienced a new awakening, becoming once again the largest community in Saxony and eastern Germany, with more than 1,300 members. Today, services are once again held in the synagogue, and cultural life has been revived.



Synagogue – House of the Israelite Religious Community (Private Photos)

In 1998, TOS Leipzig was founded here. Like all TOS communities, it is conscious of its spiritual Jewish heritage and stands unequivocally alongside the Jewish people and Israel, more clearly than any other community we know. It also operates the kosher Café HaMakon, which includes an exhibition on the Nazi era and contributes to coming to terms with the past. Through the “Marches of Life,” encounters and reconciliation between descendants of perpetrators and victims are encouraged, and a clear stand against antisemitism is taken.



Café HaMakon – The Exhibition (Photos TOS Leipzig)



This evening, a seminar titled *“Breaking the Vail of Silence”* is taking place in this community, addressing “entanglements in National Socialism” and “transgenerational transmission.” Many people live with the traumatic burdens of their ancestors without being aware of how these affect their own lives. In this seminar, participants are invited to explore these roots and experience personal restoration.

And this is where I will also present my book tonight as part of the seminar, under the same motto as the Marches of Life: *“For Zion’s sake, I will not keep silent.”*

Before that, however, we are at the book fair - the original reason for our journey. It is a new experience, and never before have I been able to contribute so little to the success of an event. On an anonymous stage, book presentations and readings take place every half hour; transitions happen within a minute, and there is no room for individual design. Around 70 chairs are set up, and everything takes place amid an intense level of noise, as the next stages are right beside it.

And yet, it is something special, precisely here (without bodyguards or police protection), to set up a menorah, wear a Star of David, and be a voice for Israel, at a time when criticism of Israel is growing louder and when the Lower Saxony branch of the Left Party has only just passed a resolution by a large majority rejecting what it calls the “Zionism that currently exists in reality.”



Reading at the Book Fair (Private Photo)



A Voice for Israel (Private Photo)

I speak about the miracles that have taken shape since the founding of Israel, recount in fast motion the history of the last 100 years, explain what connects the current Iran conflict with October 7, and what truly happened on that day. These are perspectives beyond the headlines of mainstream media, revealing the connections between the mullah regime and terrorist organizations surrounding Israel, making visible the export of the Islamic revolution through the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and naming the ultimate goal: global dominance of Islam.

But I also take the audience to Israel, sharing personal impressions and moving stories from one of the most difficult periods in the country’s history.



I conclude my talk with these words:

“I would like to end with an ancient yet very relevant question: the global situation is unpredictable; Israel and the entire world are facing existential questions. What provides orientation and stability in such a time? What lies behind the unbroken hope of the Israeli people, despite trauma, and what gives them the ability, in the midst of suffering and apparent hopelessness, to rebuild something new and wonderful out of ruins and ashes?”

It is trust in a covenant - and in the One with whom it was made. Only through this can we explain the miracle of the re-establishment of Israel 2,000 years after its destruction, and of all times after the Holocaust. Only through this can we understand how the small state of Israel has endured over the past 78 years despite multiple wars on several fronts and despite seemingly overwhelming numerical inferiority.

The promise of this covenant is thousands of years old and recorded in the document that is the most widely read book in the world. This book, the Bible, was once the foundation of Western civilization as well - and in part still is. One may dismiss it as outdated, but its content remains profoundly relevant. In this document, the right of Israel to exist is anchored, and anyone who goes to Israel with open eyes and an open heart will, through facts and reality, see how many statements from the Word of God have become reality. Am Israel Chai!”



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