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**Speech on the occasion of the presentation of the Leo Baeck Award
to Hubert Burda in Berlin on 2 November 2006**

by Salomon Korn

There are numerous memories, stories and anecdotes about Leo Baeck as a teacher and lecturer. In retrospect, his students have always considered it a great fortune to have met Leo Baeck or to have visited his rabbi seminar. All descriptions have one thing in common: It is not only the admiration for the great scholar, rabbi and philosopher, but most of all the deep impression that Baeck as a person made on them. Trying to capture his nature in one phrase, one of his companions created the beautiful phrase “*politeness of the heart*“. This was the most striking character trait of this much admired teacher and scholar.

Even during his imprisonment at the concentration camp Theresienstadt, Baeck used every opportunity to let his fellow inmates benefit from his knowledge. With his lectures on the nature and essence of the Jewish religion, he provided comfort, distraction and religious edification in difficult times. All his life, he tried to convey the respect for different opinions and beliefs to the participants of his rabbi seminar. An attitude that, for him, was the basic requirement of religious tolerance. Contrary to the majority of his colleagues, he persistently encouraged his students to think for themselves, led open talks and faced up to any critical question: “*For a while now, a nice habit has been developing,*” is how Baeck himself summarized his observations as a teacher in a speech held at the general assembly of the General Rabbi Association in 1898, “*that the young people go from one seminar to the next. (...) Why should a person only have one direction?*“

Leo Baeck's role as a teacher and the descriptions provided by his students are worth mentioning because Hubert Burda was also fortunate enough to meet formative personalities during his years as a student at the University of Munich: independent people who supported him in following his own interests, especially in pursuing his love for art and painting. To what extent these studies were seen as a suitable training for working at a publishing house by his family in Offenburg was of secondary importance to the student of art history, archeology and social studies. "*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,*" is a quote from the Book of Isaiah and a statement that accurately describes the youngest Burda son's sometimes painful process of cutting the cord.

With Hubert Burda, striving for independence has never gone hand in hand with intellectual aloofness. On the contrary: It is an inherent part of his nature that he never considers himself too good to accept advice and suggestions from others. Talking to and exchanging thoughts with his respective counterpart is something like a keynote of Hubert Burda's life. For this reason, he frequently brings together visionaries, specialists and experts from all areas of knowledge who jointly develop concepts, exchange ideas and initiate new developments. It is quite telling that these meetings do not necessarily take place in the conference rooms of his publishing group, but also outside, in gardens, on a mountain peak or – under the snappy title "Cool people in the hot desert" – in the sands of the Negev desert.

The combination of seeking advice and providing clear-sightedness Hubert Burda shows is also reflected in numerous projects he has initiated. One example of many is the "Hubert Burda Center for Innovative Communications" that is part of the Ben Gurion University in Beer-Sheva. The institute's field of work and its direction point to the founder's instinct for topics of the future and his entrepreneurial competence in choosing a location. This project is especially worth mentioning as it continues a tradition established by other important

German publishers such as Axel Springer, Reinhard Mohn or Georg von Holtzbrinck, names that are closely connected to the honest endeavor of building a bridge between Germany and Israel and establishing a long-term dialog between Jews and Non-Jews as well as between Germans and Israelis. *“The way of a German publisher goes through Jerusalem.”* This was Axel Springer’s maxim, which Hubert Burda has never forgotten. It has even become his mission he feels obliged to, and not only because of the own corporate history. As it is tainted by the long shadow of national socialism, I asked Hubert Burda for a private conversation that would shed a brighter light on him, his personality and his family’s history.

When, at dusk, you enter Hubert Burda’s home for the first time, you seem to cross the same mirror that Orpheus crossed in Jean Cocteau’s movie of the same title, just to enter a different world on its other side. There are walls with fresco paintings and trompe l’oeil ceilings which seem to reach out forever and open the view on ideal landscapes, architectural fragments, romantic ruins – constructions of fantasy, desires and dreams no reality can meet. Ludwig Uhland would have written the following into Hubert Burda’s “family book”: *“Das Bild ist höher als sein Gegenstand, / Der Schein mehr Wesen als die Wirklichkeit. / Wer nur die Wahrheit sieht, hat ausgelebt; / Das Leben gleicht der Bühne: dort wie hier / Muss, wenn die Täuschung weicht, der Vorhang fallen.”*

“My house,” explains Hubert Burda during our tour, *“is the built manifestation of my dissertation about the ruins in the paintings of Hubert Robert.”* Crucial to Robert’s selection of motives, as Hubert Burda writes in his dissertation, is only their ability to promote higher feelings. And so, following Hubert Robert’s motives, the house of Hubert Burda becomes a resonating space for inwardness, a miracle castle of silence, a quiet island within the disquiet Hubert Burda empire. This complex, connected cosmos seems to be encompassed by a virtual sky whose pillars are based on the “world as will and idea”,

on motivation and creative power, on evaluating theory by practical application and practice by theoretical consideration.

And all the different aspects mirrored in the different facets of this sky that seems to arise from Hubert Burda's interests, his desire for knowledge and his curiosity: art history, literature, painting, architecture; consumer technology, digital lifestyle, iconic turn; Heidelberg, Hölderlin, the castle; Heidegger, Peter Handke, Sloterdijk; the Petrarca Award, the Hermann Lenz Award, Bambi; neurobiology, brain research, awareness; Odysseus, the Phoenicians, Gutenberg, the internet; Auerbach, Benjamin, Kafka, Panofsky, Wittgenstein; foundations, charity, patronage; humor, joie de vivre, parties; family, friends, companionship – *”Und überm Teich ein gleitendes Gespräch / Noch tiefere Wölbung spiegelnd als der Himmel“ (Hofmannsthal)*

That evening in September, when I accepted Hubert Burda's invitation to have dinner at his house, we sat at a table in his library, and within a continuously expanding conversational horizon, we perambulated the world: the world of art, of literature, of history, to finally move on to Hubert Burda's father and his role during the Nazi time. According to Hubert Burda, his father had been an opportunist, benefiting from the “Arianization” of Jewish property, there was no way of denying this fact. But he did not definitely know, Hubert Burda continued, whether he – had he been in his father's place – would not also have been an opportunist, profiteer or follower.

Hubert Burda openly faces the history of the parents' publishing house during the Nazi time, when the printing business of the Burda family developed into a prospering publishing house thanks to the commercial skills of Senator Franz Burda. A difficult heritage that the son already had to deal with decades before succeeding his father as the head of the company. The starting point was the existential crisis which the Jewish printing business owners Berthold, Ludwig and Karl Reiss were facing after the Arianization laws were enacted by the National Socialists.

Due to the rigorously enforced expropriation of the Jewish population between 1933 and 1938, the brothers Reiss were forced to part with their business.

The so-called “Arianization procedure”, with a strict focus on the then-lawful process, followed the same pattern everywhere in the German Reich: The interested party, a financing bank, benefiting party members and a compliant financial authority worked hand in hand. Jewish business people like Berthold Reiss and his brothers had no choice but to sell their property – not only the work of a lifetime, but of generations – far below value. The consequences of “Arianizing” Jewish property were dramatic for the affected people. Even though compensation payments were made after the war, also by the Burda organization, the commercial and social consequences cannot be expressed in numbers. The people concerned were forced to deprive themselves and their families of their means of existence. Franz Burda, a member of the Nazi party since 1938, acquired the Mannheim-based company, one of Germany’s largest and most modern printing houses at extremely favorable conditions. And the laws of the time tided over any ethical concerns. At that time, what he did had long been common practice: In 1938, already two thirds of the about 100,000 Jewish businesses had been liquidated or “Arianized“.

The fact that tens of thousands of other business people shared the fate of the Reiss brothers and that buyers could refer to the law, does not make up for the wrong done. The Nazi laws were based on disrespect for human dignity. This chapter in the history of the Burda publishing house is an exemplary part of German history. It is a lesson to learn for later generations about the question of guilt and conscience, of involvement and handling the heavy burden of this heritage.

The renaming of the publishing holding to “Hubert Burda Media” in 1999 was anything but the son’s try to free himself from the shadows of the past. On the contrary, the successor of the man whom many only

referred to as “the senator” avows himself – in critical loyalty – to his roots. The holding’s new name thus demonstrates a change in corporate philosophy that had been evident long before the actual renaming. “Hubert Burda Media“ stands for modern, responsible entrepreneurship that is characterized by its voluntary commitment to community service. The campaigns, social commitments and projects Hubert Burda has founded and which are overseen by the Burda Foundation are an expression of this attitude.

“What can I do to ensure that this chapter in German history will not be forgotten?” – This question posed decades ago when dealing with the history of the Nazi crimes has since been Hubert Burda’s driver to actually walk the talk. The campaign “Partners for Tolerance”, initiated in cooperation with fellow publishers from Springer, Bertelsmann and Bauer, for example, has provided large donations to Steven Spielberg’s Shoah Foundation as well as to the new Center of the Israeli Cultural Community in Munich. It represents the wish to bear in remembrance the memory of the incomprehensible.

Many people who support Jewish concerns or projects against oblivion, whether by donating money or by doing volunteer work, do so also because they hope that the era of the so-called German-Jewish symbiosis could be revived. This belief is based on a misunderstanding: The majority of Jews who lived in Germany between the time of the emancipation and the early 1930s, were – despite the fact that they felt German without reservation – not a fully integrated part of German daily life. The names of famous German Jews do not change this fact. Moreover, the Jewish world that existed in Germany before 1930 was completely and finally destroyed by the Nazi crimes. What has come later has not been a revival of the former German Jewry, but a new beginning on the fragile foundation of millions of death people and destroyed or stolen property. What has developed in Germany since then is a new Jewish community of about 100,000 people, which cannot be compared to anything in the past.

Hubert Burda has difficulties accepting this. During our evening conversation in the library of his home, you could feel the sadness about the German-Jewish era of the pre-war times which is past recovery. How hopeful, Hubert Burda romanticized, it had all started with Moses Mendelssohn, Rachel Varnhagen and Henriette Herz, with those salons as the birthplace of a literary public and German-Jewish dialog. I raised the objection that those salon conversations took place in a quasi exterritorial space and usually required the christening of the “Jewish participants” – return invitations from non-Jewish participants never occurred. The same is true for the supposed German-Jewish symbiosis – which was the temporary phenomenon of a unique transition period, in which German-Jewish culture arose from the all-consuming friction between two different cultures and which vanished with a Jewry consuming itself with outstanding cultural productions.

Even though his mind came to accept this during our conversation: his will, his wish, his vision were reluctant. He strongly believes in a *”tradition of Jewish German thinking – without hyphen“* that could be created again, as Hubert Burda said, *“but as a part of German history in a different religious and cultural tradition“*. The former paradise, that is something he is aware of, is finally lost and, having eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge, we can never go back there. But it has been replaced by Utopia, the country thought up by Thomas More, in which an ideal society prevails. And this is what we have to strive for.

With his personal commitment in the context of the complicated Jewish-German-Israeli relationship network, Hubert Burda has followed his beliefs and has taken a firm stand at the side of the German post-war Jewry. He makes his contribution to promoting the integration of almost 100,000 Jews who have immigrated from the former CIS countries. The Center of the Israeli Cultural Community in Munich, a construction project Hubert Burda has supported generously, is further going to advance the integration of these

immigrants and their descendants, thus strengthening Jewish life in Germany. At the same time, the building is a manifest symbol for the confidence of the Jewish community in the democratic stability of the Federal Republic of Germany.

A social climate characterized by tolerance and cosmopolitanism is among the crucial prerequisites for facilitating the integration of Jewish immigrants into the Jewish community as a part of German society. Not least in respect for Leo Baeck's work during the post-war years, the presentation of this award is also connected to the hope of strongly promoting the integration of Jewish immigrants, as this is in the interest of the entire society. After the liberation of the concentration camps, Leo Baeck might have taken a gloomy view of the future of a Jewish community on German ground, but fact is that he remained in close contact with the first communities in post-war Germany and regarded their "*propagation*" – as he called it – with favor. 50 years after Leo Baeck's death in London, now that the Jewish community in Germany is growing more strongly than at any other point since the end of the war, his words are again of striking topicality: "*One world goes and one world comes, but man remains – man and his duty. With these words we commemorate the past, with these words we welcome the future.*"

As the evening progressed, the conversation at the Burda home became more and more personal. We started to talk about his affinity to Judaism. Where it came from, Hubert Burda was unable to say. His strong connection to Bavaria, Baden and Germany left aside, he also considers those places home that radiate the spirit of Jerusalem, Athens and Rom: Amsterdam, Lisbon, Paris, London, New York, Tel Aviv, Munich – "*Wie Heimatahnung glänzt es her / Und war doch nur zu kurzer Rast*" (Hesse).

That all sounded very European, I commented. After all, for centuries Jews who had been – apart from the clergy – the only people who

could read and write, had kept relationships across borders and mastered several languages, had been the first Europeans. This is one of several points that I also see in him. And don't the Hofmannsthal lines he likes to quote point in the same direction: "*Ganz vergessener Völker Müdigkeiten / kann ich nicht abtun von meinen Lidern, / Noch weghalten von der erschrockenen Seele*" Apart from the fatigue that he definitely does not feel, he feels a strong connection to these lines, Hubert Burda admits. Nevertheless, something remains that he cannot name, and maybe that is for the better; because the secret covering everything must not be unveiled completely if the magic of life is to be kept.

‘What an unusual combination of rationality and mystery characterizes Hubert Burda’s way through life,’ I thought, back at my hotel room long past midnight when all the impressions, bonmots, quotes, pictures and thoughts arising from our evening of conversation kept me awake. The title of Maurice Sendak’s children’s book “*There must be more to life*” should also be the title of Hubert Burda’s autobiography. Doesn’t this baroque man with his infatuation with paintings, fantasy and ideal worlds resemble a believing apostate, a religious renegade – equally close to sensuality and confession? And if Hofmannsthal is to be quoted, then it should be the lines from “**Lebenslied**” which seem so characteristic for Hubert Burda: “*Ihm bietet jede Stelle / Geheimnisvoll die Schwelle; / Es gibt sich jeder Welle / Der Heimatlose hin*“ – an explorer of life, a persistent nomad of being, who – despite his down-to-earth attitude – feels at home in many parts of the world, whose global way of thinking does not know any borders any more. Aren’t there similarities with the one people that, as a people bound not by space but by time, have been forced again and again for the last two thousand years to pass boundaries and borders?

One of the legendary personalities in European publishing history is the British publisher George Lord Weidenfeld: a cosmopolitan, an intermediary between religions with an exceptional gift for

networking. Hubert Burda has been on friendly terms with him for many years. Their talks about Jewish-Israeli matters have made a strong impression on Lord Weidenfeld. I quote: *“The other day someone asked me, with unconcealed astonishment, what made my faith in the future of friendship between Germans and Jews so adamant. I answered: ‘Because I have come to know at first hand the new Germany; because I have real friends whom I trust and who I know feel deeply about the causes that are dear to me. And, by the way, have you met Hubert Burda?’”*

We don't know what the other person answered. The Central Consistory of Jews in Germany, however, shares the opinion that they have come to know Hubert Burda as a true friend and ally of the Jewish community. To say thank you for his partnership and his commitment, he will now be honored with the Leo Baeck Award 2006.

Dear Hubert Burda: Congratulations!