

Commemorative Speech at the Inauguration of the Marga Goren-Gothelf Square

Brandenburg an der Havel, 16 May 2025

“Slowly, our memory displaces the bad memories – and we remember the good times of our lives.”

– Marga Goren-Gothelf, Golden Book of the City of Brandenburg, 2010

When we speak of the life of Marga Goren-Gothelf, we do not only speak of the past.

We speak of courage. Of education. Of humanity.

We speak of a journey – from destruction, back into life.

That we are gathered here today, on what would have been her 100th birthday, is a sign of great respect.

And it is a very personal matter of the heart for me to express my deepest thanks to her family:

More than twenty of Marga’s relatives have travelled here from Israel.

Your presence makes this moment truly special.

It reminds us: remembrance does not end with the final page of a history book. It lives on – in children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren. And in the bonds between places that still have much to say to each other.

This square, which we now name after Marga Goren-Gothelf, is just steps from the house where she once lived with her family – near the Millennium Bridge.

This place now stands as a symbol. A bridge – between past and present.

Between memory and responsibility.
Between loss – and the restoration of dignity.

Marga was born here, in Brandenburg an der Havel, in 1925.
Her childhood was marked by education, language, and warmth.

As the daughter of a successful businessman, she grew up in a world where she belonged – if only for a time.
But in October 1938, at the age of thirteen, she was deported from Brandenburg during the so-called “Poland Action,” together with her mother and sister.

She lost her home.
But she never lost her inner compass.

What followed was a long flight – through Poland, England, and France – until she finally arrived in Palestine.
What she built there defies description.
Marga didn’t just build a new life. She built the future – in the truest sense of the word.

In Rishon LeZion, together with her husband Uri Goren, she started a family she was immensely proud of:
Two sons. Six grandchildren. Fifteen great-grandchildren – the youngest born just recently.
This family – your family – is the living counter-image to the destruction once inflicted upon her.

But Marga didn’t stop there.
She became a teacher, then a school principal – an educator with conviction.
To her, education was never an end in itself. It was a mission.
She believed in civic education – and she knew:

Education cannot be neutral when it seeks to protect democracy.

It must stand on the values it defends – human dignity, freedom, and equality.

And yet, Brandenburg an der Havel remained in her heart. Her return in 1984, her visits after 2010 – she did not come back to accuse.

She came to share her story.

I had the honour of meeting Marga in person – during several moving encounters, most recently in 2022 in Rishon LeZion. She was full of life, clear in her thinking, warm and wise in her words.

It was a privilege to listen to her – and a joy to laugh with her.

I was all the more grateful that we could formally present her with the honorary citizenship of Brandenburg an der Havel – together with her family.

She was deeply proud of that moment. And so were we.

As a contemporary witness, she reached especially the young. In classrooms here in Brandenburg, she told her story – not to accuse, but to invite understanding.

Her voice was never raised in blame – it was a hand held out in dialogue.

And today, this outstretched hand is more needed than ever. Because we are witnessing the rise of right-wing extremism once again – not in the shadows, but in broad daylight. Loud and dangerous.

Marga Goren-Gothelf's life shows us where exclusion, hatred, and ideology inevitably lead.

Her story stands as a warning: never again can we allow such paths to be taken.

She believed: remembrance must not fade. And she did everything she could to keep it alive.

Her words, written in the Golden Book in 2010, say it all:

"I loved the city of Brandenburg (Havel) and its surroundings very much as a child – and that has never changed."

That we now make her name visible is the result of a long journey – one of reconciliation, of mutual respect, and of recognition.

But a day like this is not an ending.
It is a beginning.

Because this square is not just a place of memory – it is a commitment.

A commitment to keep telling her story.

To make it accessible to the next generation.

To strengthen civic education – because democracy lives through learning.

And to create spaces for encounter – especially between Germany and Israel.

Because real peace is not born from treaties alone.
It grows from human connection.
From dialogue. From friendship.
Civil society is the soil where reconciliation can take root.

If you wish to learn more about the life and legacy of Marga Goren-Gothelf, I warmly recommend her autobiography:
“I Have No Other Country – The Journey of Marga (Gothelf) Goren.”

It is available online at:

www.marga-goren-gothelf.de

Dear guests,
this square is now a part of our city.
May it not only serve as a place of remembrance, but as a
space for encounter.
May it raise a question – “Who was Marga Goren-Gothelf?” –
and offer an answer that can guide us all.

Let us not only preserve her story – let us learn from it.
Democracy lives through education.
Peace grows through encounter.
And remembrance protects us from forgetting.

We bow our heads in honour of a life that gave hope – and still
gives hope today.

Thank you