

# Ephraim (Moshe) and Menashe Reichenberg

**Ephraim (Moshe) and Menashe Reichenberg** were the oldest two of seven children born to Avraham and Mahala Reichenberg in Papa, Hungary. Avraham was a famous cantor in his town; Menashe had inherited his father's singing talent, whereas Moshe's voice was hoarse and deep, and he possessed no talent for singing.



Moshe was 17 when he and his family were deported from the ghetto in Rakospalota (in Hungary) on July 7, 1944. After a frightening three-day journey with 70 to 80 people packed in a sealed livestock wagon, the Reichenberg family arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau. In the midst of the confusion, terror, and disorder on the selection platform, Moshe heard "*Zwillinge raus*" ("twins out"). Because Moshe and his older brother, Menashe, were strong and healthy and looked very much alike, they were separated from the crowd by Jewish camp workers, who whispered to them, "Stay on this side; you at least have a chance to stay alive."

After a cold shower, Moshe and Menashe were shaved, underwent disinfection, donned the striped inmates' uniform, and had the numbers B-10506 and B-10507, respectively, tattooed on their left forearms. They were assigned to Birkenau Barrack 11 together with approximately 1,000 children, mostly twins and dwarfs. Moshe asked one of the other boys about being reunited with his family. The boy took Moshe to a crack in the wooden wall of the barrack, pointed to the crematorium chimney with smoke coming out of it, and told him, "Look, your loved ones are being released through the chimney and dissipated into the wind!" Menashe wanted to commit suicide, but Moshe told him he would not be able to cope alone; only with combined forces would they have a chance to survive.

After a few days, the two brothers were taken to the medical laboratories of Dr. Josef Mengele. Because of the difference in the boys' voices, Mengele decided to perform experiments on their vocal cords. The doctors injected a substance into their anterior necks, which immediately led to swelling, high fever, muteness, and a state of exhaustion for several days. Menashe was incapable

of swallowing for a prolonged time. These injections were repeated every four to five days for over three months, until Dr. Mengele fled from Auschwitz. On January 18, 1945, Moshe and Menashe were forced on the notorious death march from Auschwitz and then spent ten days in the freezing cold in sealed livestock wagons, until they reached Sachsenhausen, a Nazi concentration camp 35 kilometers north of Berlin. Thankfully, they were liberated by the Soviet army in April 1945.

On their way back home to Budapest, Menashe had to be hospitalized in Prague for complications resulting from the medical experiments; in June 1946, after a prolonged hospitalization, he died. Moshe changed his name to Ephraim in memory of his brother Menashe, after the sons of the biblical Joseph, Ephraim and Menashe. When Ephraim returned to Budapest, he found no surviving family members. Ephraim realized he had to make a decision: either grieve for the rest of his days or begin rebuilding his life. He chose the latter. He emigrated to Israel in 1948, married, and started to work as a bus driver.

The medical experiments caused Ephraim to suffer from shortness of breath with worsening hoarseness and swallowing difficulties. In 1965, he lost his voice completely and for the next 19 years could only communicate through writing. In addition, at the sites of the injections, Ephraim developed malignancies that invaded his esophagus, which led to further breathing and swallowing difficulties. After more than 20 surgical procedures he regained many functions, but he still could not speak. However, in 1984 he began to use an innovative German-produced external voice amplifier that enables him to speak with an artificial voice.

Ephraim's family today consists of two children, five grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. He worked for the communications ministry until his retirement. Today he tells his life story in schools and organizes meetings of survivors of Mengele's experiments.



Looking back, Ephraim had no nightmares, and he bears no bitterness toward Dr. Mengele and his medical team. He believes that his warm family upbringing despite significant poverty, his sincere love of life, and his desire to find meaning in experience helped him overcome adversity and even thrive after Auschwitz.

Ephraim believes that survivors of trauma should take control of their situation, mobilize their inner strength, and move on. In developing this positive approach, he does not believe he is ignoring his experience. Even when sick or broken, one can cry or decide to move on; he chose the latter. He looked life in the eye with a smile. He wants to help others to do the same..