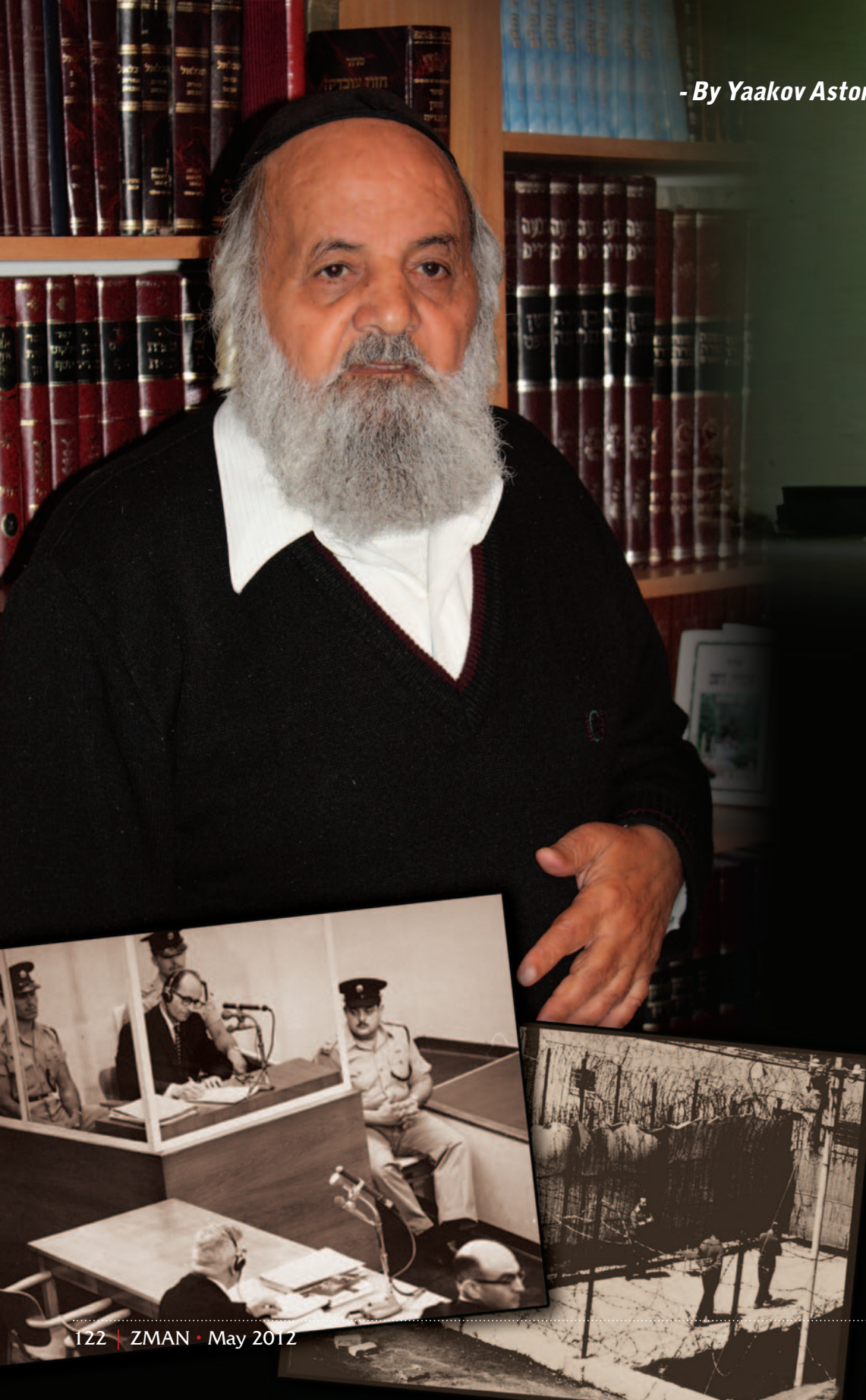


- By Yaakov Astor



# Eichmann's Trial and Execution

Almost 50 years since Eichmann's execution, *Zman* interviews his executioner and revisits the trial that changed history

*The Eichmann trial is a watershed in the history of the Holocaust. It changed so many things about the world's understanding of the Holocaust—as well as Jewish life in Eretz Yisrael and globally—that today we take these monumental changes for granted. This is the riveting account of that trial interspersed with the refreshingly frank comments of Shalom Nagor. While Adolf Eichmann sat in prison awaiting trial, Nagor was his guard, and then was also the one who pulled the lever that opened the trap door at Eichmann's hanging. Compassionate to a fault, the sensitive Yemenite-born Nagor is the least likely person to serve as executioner. Read his surprising and insightful comments about arguably the most important trial in modern history.*

May 23, 1960.

It is a typical sunny day in Israel. Around 4:00 in the afternoon, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion walks up to the podium in the Knesset, as he has done countless times in the past. No one has any idea that he is about to deliver news that will shock even the most hardened Israeli....

*I have to inform the Knesset that a short time ago one of the greatest of the Nazi war criminals, Adolf Eichmann, who was responsible, together with the Nazi leaders, for what they called "the final solution" of the Jewish question, that is, the extermination of 6,000,000 of the Jews of Europe, was found by the Israeli Security Services. Adolf Eichmann is already under arrest in Israel and will shortly be placed on trial in Israel under the terms of the law for the trial of Nazis and their collaborators.*

Not only was the Knesset shocked, but the common Israeli was too when he heard it. Indeed, news of the capture of Adolf Eichmann stunned the entire world.

Reaction was fiercely opinionated, both pro and con. The *Washington Post* editorialized that "anything connected with the indictment of Eichmann is tainted with lawlessness" (May 27, 1960) and it protested the trial. The *New York Times* wrote that "No immoral or illegal act justifies another... the rule of law must protect the most depraved criminals" (June 18, 1960).

The government of Argentina expressed its outrage, and declared the incident a violation of its international sovereignty. On June 15, it filed an official complaint with the UN. Interestingly, although they complained, Argentina never did demand that Eichmann be returned.

The Israeli foreign minister at the time was future prime minister Golda Meir. She apologized for any breach of law, but said that in this case a violation of law was justified. Argentina did not find the apology acceptable and sent Israel's ambassador

home. However, diplomatic relations were never severed. (On August 5, diplomatic contacts between representatives of the two nations resulted in a joint communiqué which stated that the matter which "infringed on fundamental rights of the State of Argentina" was now closed.)

Despite official and formal protests, most people—Jew and non-Jew alike—greeted the news of Eichmann's capture with awe and applause. One way or another, the news electrified the world.

## Eichmann's "Apartment"

Eichmann was taken to Ramle, a remote top-security prison where extraordinary precautions were taken to thwart escape or even an attempted rescue commando raid. The Israelis even installed anti-aircraft weapons at the compound.

Eichmann's guards were chosen very carefully to ensure that none of them would be motivated to take revenge. After all, it was only 16 years after the Holocaust and many prison employees had either gone through the camps or had lost family members. Shalom Nagar, the man who would eventually put the noose around his neck, was one of the guards. *Zman* sat down with him to get his unique perspective on the man they called the "Architect of the Final Solution."

*I guarded him for six months in Ramle. I was one of the 22 guards. We were called "Eichmann's guards."*

*They put him in a special wing on the second floor. We called it Eichmann's "apartment." There were actually five rooms. We worked in 24-hour shifts and then went home for 48 hours. While guarding him, we'd switch off: We'd sit with him for three hours, then rest; then three more hours sitting with him and three more hours' rest. And so on.*

*There was one guard always in Eichmann's room, which was always me. In addition, there was another guard in the next room to guard me and Eichmann.*

*And there was another guard in a third room to guard the two of us! See how well guarded it was! And this was already the most secure prison in Israel! He was protected by so many guards because there was reason to believe that he might want to take his own life and we were to prevent that at all costs.*

*They didn't trust anyone. Whenever his attorney came I'd lead Eichmann in from one side while the lawyer would come from the other side. They sat across from each other with a bullet-proof glass between them and used a microphone to communicate. They could speak but not actually touch or pass anything because the lawyer might pass him poison or something.*

## "You Murdered My Parents; Now You're My Prisoner!"

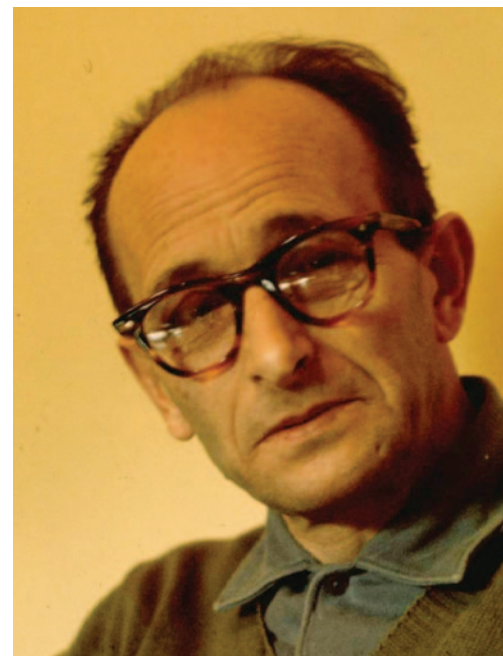
Of course, the prison guards were expected to prevent Eichmann from escaping, but that was the least of their worries. One of the greatest security nightmares Israel ever faced was to guarantee that Eichmann remained alive throughout his trial. He had



Shalom Nagar at his modest house in Cholon.

to be protected from possible foreign spies or commandos sympathetic to the Nazis trying to kidnap or kill him, family members of Eichmann's victims, as well as from taking his own life.

To help deal with this considerable difficulty, the prison authorities decided that the guards who were appointed to protect Eichmann had to be Sefardic. Since most of the Jews who hailed from Arab lands had not suffered under the Nazis, they would not be driven to avenge themselves against Eichmann as much as their Ashkenazi counterparts.



Eichmann in his cell.



Eichmann in the courtyard outside his cell.