

HOLOCAUST

BOOK TWO

*Prepared By Ner Le'Elef*

# HOLOCAUST BOOK TWO

**Prepared by Ner Le'Elef**  
Publication date 27 January 2013

Permission is granted to reproduce in part or in whole.  
Profits may not be gained from any such reproductions.  
This book is updated with each edition and is produced several times a year.

Other Ner Le'Elef Booklets currently available:

**AMERICAN SOCIETY  
BOOK OF QUOTATIONS  
EVOLUTION  
HILCHOS MASHPIAH  
JEWISH MEDICAL ETHICS  
JEWISH RESOURCES  
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT  
ORAL LAW  
PROOFS  
QUESTION & ANSWERS  
SCIENCE AND JUDAISM  
SOURCES  
SUFFERING  
THE CHOSEN PEOPLE  
THIS WORLD & THE NEXT  
WOMEN'S ISSUES (Book One)  
WOMEN'S ISSUES (Book Two)**

For information on how to order  
additional booklets, please contact:

Ner Le'Elef  
P.O. Box 14503  
Jewish Quarter, Old City, Jerusalem 91145  
E-mail: [nerlelef@netvision.net.il](mailto:nerlelef@netvision.net.il)  
Fax #: 972-02-653-6229  
Tel #: 972-02-651-0825

# HOLOCAUST

## BOOK TWO

### CHAPTER E - JEWISH RESISTANCE

7

a. Those Not Interned.....	7
b. Those Interned.....	9
What should the Jewish Response Have Been	14
c. World Jewry.....	15
Did They Go like Sheep to the Slaughter?	15
Kiddush Hashem – The Mitzvah & Its Application to the Hol	24
Kiddush Hashem – In Death	33
Chagim	39
Shabbat	45
Prayer, Study, Mitzvos	52
Resistance	59
Kapos, Judenraats, Secularists	65
J Rescue Efforts	68
J Orthodox Rescue Efforts	68
American Jewry	68
American Jewry	79

**CHAPTER F-JEWISH RESPONSES AFTER THE  
HOLOCAUST 85**

What Faith Was Lost?	85
Can it be Regained?	87
What is the Appropriate Response to the Holocaust?	89
What was learned from the Holocaust?	91
Responses	99
Rebuilding	102
Teaching Our Children	103
Building Memorials; Holocaust Studies	110
i - Yom Hashoa	114
Holocaust Judaism	115
Can we forgive the Germans?	118
Holocaust Claims	119

**APPENDIX C: 119**

i - Reading List	119
d. Overview.....	119
e. Hashkafa.....	120
f. Heroism and Inspiration.....	120
g. What did the Jews know:.....	120
h. What did the Allies know?.....	121
i. The Arabs and the Holocaust .....	121
j. What did The Germans know?.....	121
k. What the Church Knew .....	122
l. Hungarian Jewry and the local population.....	122

**CONTENTS OF BOOK ONE:**

**THE HOLOCAUST – A SPEECH SUGGESTION**

**CHAPTER A: NAZI GERMANY AND THE HOLOCAUST: A HISTORICAL SUMMARY**

- i. History of the Holocaust
  - a. *1933-1939*
  - b. *Nation and Race*
  - c. *1939-1945*
- ii. Children in the Holocaust
- iii. Changes in Holocaust Literature
- iv. Comparison of Nazi Decrees with Previous Era

**CHAPTER B: WAS THE HOLOCAUST UNIQUE?**

- v. The Claim and its Critique
- vi. Studies of the Holocaust
  - d. *Because of the uniqueness of Anti-Semitism, Western scholarship cannot explain the Holocaust*
  - e. *Why was there no comprehensive treatment of the Holocaust by Orthodoxy until recently?*
  - f. *Should we be silent now?*
- vii. The Nazis Understood the Uniqueness of the Jews
  - g. *Hitler's Vision for the World*
  - h. *Nazism as a Function of Golus Anti-Semitism*
  - i. *The Jew and the Nazi – Total Conflict*
  - j. *Nazis Chosen Nation*
- viii. The Jews – Not Subject to Usual Historical Forces

- ix. The End of Edom – Uniqueness of Evil
  - k. *Were the Nazis Amalek?*
  - l. *Anti-Semitism – The Evil of Edom*
  - m. *The Holocaust as a preparation for the Messianic era*
- x. The Question

## **CHAPTER C: REASONS FOR THE HOLOCAUST**

## **CHAPTER D: WHERE WAS MAN? THE PLACE OF NAZISM IN EUROPEAN HISTORY**

- xi. Did the Germans Suddenly Become Anti-Semitic?
  - n. *A Century of German Anti-Semitism Prior to WWII*
  - o. *Social and Political Changes*
  - p. *Freeing the Instincts*
  - q. *The Decline of the West*
  - r. *Social Darwinism, Racism and Nietzsche*
  - s. *The Supremacy of Nationalism*
- xii. What Kind of People Were Involved?
  - t. *Intellectuals at the Forefront*
  - u. *The Medical Profession*
  - v. *The Legal Profession*
  - w. *The Church*
- xiii. How could ordinary people become murderers?
  - x. *Deep rooted Anti-Semitism*
  - y. *Distancing and blurring of responsibility*
  - z. *Division of Labor*
  - aa. *Denial*
  - bb. *Separating Duty From Personal Feelings*
  - cc. *Loyalty, solidarity and Nationalism*
  - dd. *Duty and Morality*
  - ee. *Did the excuse "I was just following orders" hold any water?*
  - ff. *Did the excuse "I didn't know" hold any water?*
  - gg. *Honesty*
  - hh. *Morality of Toughness and Violence*
  - ii. *Sense of Meaning*

xiv. Responses of the Allies and Neutral Countries during and after the War

- jj. Would the Allies have taken in the Jews if they could have?*
- kk. When did the Allies know?*
- ll. What did the Allies do?*
- mm. What did the Allies not do?*
- nn. Bombing Auschwitz*
- oo. The British*
- pp. Helping non-Jews*
- qq. How did the American Public React?*
- rr. American Congress and Politicians*
- ss. The genocide finally addressed – the Bermuda Conference saves 630 refugees*
- tt. The American Military*

xv. Responses of the Church, the Axis and Other Countries

- uu. The Pope*
- vv. Responses of Germany after the War*
- ww. Austria*
- a. Poland*
- b. Italy*
- c. Hungary*
- d. Ukraine*
- e. France*
- f. Switzerland*
- g. Holland*
- h. Canada*
- i. Belgium*

xvi. Righteous Gentiles

xvii. Nuremberg & Other Post-War Responses

- a. The Nuremberg Trials*
- b. A Crime Against the International Community*
- c. Nations Take Stock*

## **CHAPTER E - JEWISH RESISTANCE**

***a. Those Not Interned***

It was extremely difficult for anyone in Europe to know and believe the horrors of what the Nazis were doing. To show this, we take an example of responses by the leadership of Dutch Jewry.

From July 17 to August 1942, at least 10,000 of the total 15,760 deportees had perished in the gas chambers or from exposure and ill treatment. Those in faraway Amsterdam, which might as well have been on another planet, saw fit to record in their minutes: "Finally, the first report of a case of death in Auschwitz is received by the meeting." Schmidt's words had also suggested that many of the rest, and quite probably the majority, would return to the Netherlands after Germany's defeat (as to which no one had the least doubt), though as early as January 1939 Hitler had spoken about the "extermination of the Jewish race in Europe" and there was hardly a Nazi leader who had not echoed these sentiments on many occasions. Thus on June 15, i.e., a good six weeks before his address of August 2, Schmidt was "loudly applauded" for declaring before a district assembly of the N.S.D.A.P and N.S.B. (the Dutch Nazi party) that the destruction of Jewry "will continue until the last Jew had disappeared" – but these and similar effusions were generally dismissed as mere figures of speech, as general declarations of hostility that might lead to humiliation, persecution, and ill-treatment but that did certainly not reflect a set determination to eradicate every Jew in person.

This misconception might have been avoided had Jewish and Non-Jewish circles in the Netherlands not refused to give credence to the B.B.C *Radio Oranje* (the official Dutch Broadcasting service from London) when it reported the mass murder of Jews in Eastern Europe. On June 26, 1942, the B.B.C., and one day later Radio Oranje, basing themselves in the Polish authorities, gave news of the killing of more than 700,000 Jews. A month later on July 29, *Radio Orlanje* first mentioned the subject of gas chambers. It is true that many Dutchmen did not make it a regular habit to listen to broadcast from London; the Jews among them had been forced to hand in their radio receivers early in 1941. Moreover, at the time, the illegal newspaper – all of which gave prominence to the reports from London – still had much smaller circulations than they were to enjoy during the last phase of the war. Incidentally, the Communist underground paper *De Warrheid* which was read by thousands had anticipated the B.B.C. when, early in June, it published the news that in territories like the Ukraine where millions of Jews had lived only a few years earlier, "not a single one has survived – men, women, children and old people have been exterminated one and all."

When something, and perhaps a good deal, of all this percolated through to the leaders of the Jewish Council, they dismissed it all as mere exaggeration and as anti-German war propaganda.

Their reactions did not change even six months later when, on December 17, 1942, the government of the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union together with seven of their allies, including the Netherlands and the French National Committee, broadcast the following report on events in Eastern Europe:

"In Poland, which the Germans have turned into their chief slaughterhouse, all Jews, with the exception of a few skilled hands needed for war work, have been systematically dragged out of the ghettos set up by the invaders. Of these people, no word or sign has been heard again. The stronger have been worked to death in labor camps. The weaker have been left to die of cold and starvation, or else subject to mass murder. The number of victims is estimated at many hundreds of thousands."

Only six days earlier, once again on the authority of the Polish government, the B.B.C. and Radio Oranje had mentioned the figure of a million victims.

Remarkably enough, the Allied report made no mention of such extermination camps as Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Treblinka, and Majdnek, although they had been in existence for many months. No less remarkable were the reaction of the two presidents of the Jewish Council. When one of them, A. Asscher, was told about the broadcast, he informed Professor Cohen (his co-president) and others that while he thought the Germans capable of every kind



of horror, he could not credit even them with this sort of thing: “as far as I am concerned, the reports are nothing but English propaganda, with the sole intention of inciting the world against Germany.” Professor Cohen has described his own reaction in the following words:

“The fact that the Germans had perpetrated atrocities against Polish Jews was no reason for thinking that they behave in the same way toward Dutch Jews, firstly because the Germans had always held Polish Jews in disrepute, and secondly because in Holland, unlike Poland, they had to take notice of public opinion.”

Hence, Schmidt’s pronouncement of August 2, 1942 about “clearing the rubble in the empty towns”; hence the requests to the Jewish Council to run vocational training courses, hence permission to write letters to the deportees. The Germans made a practice of forcing Jews in the extermination or labor camps to send letters or postcards to their families on arrival at the camps or later, with the brief message that their life was quite reasonable or at least quite tolerable. For those who wanted to believe the best, and believe it at all costs, it was said that the letter, more than anything else, weighed far heavier in the balance than any amount of rumors about German threats of ‘extermination.’

The whole thing went so much beyond the powers of human imagination that as I myself once put it:

“Our mind, once having grasped the facts, immediately spews them out as something utterly alien and unnaturally loathsome.” Remember the Jehovah’s Witness who had lived by the side of the gas chamber and the crematorium in Birkenau: “one day we would believe our own eyes, the next day we would simply refuse to do so.” This tallies with many post-war accounts, one from a man who, in Birkenau, formed part of a group which saw the chimneys smoking, day in and day out: “The people themselves,” he wrote, “pretended that the place was a brickyard or a soap factory. This mass delusion lasted for four weeks.” All that time, this man was the only one who dared to face what was, in fact, the unbearable truth.

These defense mechanisms spring from deep and inherent qualities shared by all mankind: a love of life, a love of family, a fear of death, and an understandable inability to grasp the reality of the greatest crime in the history of mankind, a crime so monstrous – in its execution rather than in its gigantic scope – that even its perpetrators were unable to dwell on their activities for too long.

#### ***b. Those Interned***

Small numbers of Jews were rescued by

- 1) organizing mass rescue flights (Denmark)
- 2) granting Jews special status (Sweden and Swiss protective papers)
- 3) joining resistance groups (the Marquis in France; partisans in the Polish-Soviet area.)

Individual escape was also occasionally possible from labor camps, death trains, even from death camps like Auschwitz, and perhaps most surprisingly, for the few survivors of the uprisings in the death camps of Treblinka and Sobibor. The long-term consequences of bribing German officials were of no decisive importance.

Yitzchak Arad, Jewish Prisoner Uprisings in the Treblinka and Sobibor Extermination Camps: *Acts of Resistance and the Organization of the Revolt in Treblinka*:

The first act of resistance, which is mentioned in many testimonies, was the killing of SS Unterscharfu"hrer Max Bialas by the Jew Meir Berliner on September 10 or 11, 1942. Meir Berliner had arrived in Treblinka from Warsaw a few days before in one of the transports of the "big Aktion." At that time it was the practice to take out several hundred people from each transport to work arranging the belongings of the murdered; the same day or a few days later, the group was liquidated and was replaced by other people selected from new shipments. At the evening roll-call of the prisoners, Max Bialas instructed those who had arrived that same day to line up on the side. It was not clear who was to be liquidated --the new arrivals or those who had arrived earlier. At that moment Berliner jumped out from the ranks of the prisoners, lurched toward Bialas and stabbed him with a knife. A great commotion followed. The Ukranian guards opened fire. Berliner was killed on the spot, and in the course of the shooting more than ten other prisoners were killed and others were wounded. When the tumult subsided the prisoners were lined up again for roll-call. Christian Wirth, who was in Treblinka at the time, arrived on the scene accompanied by Kurt Franz, the second in command of the camp. Ten men were removed from the ranks and shot on the spot in full view of all the others. On the following day, during the morning roll-call, another 150 men were taken out, brought to the Lazarett and shot there. Max Bialas died en route to the military hospital in Ostrow. (Ibid., 231-232; Testimony of Eliyahu Rosenberg, Yad Vashem Archives), 0-3/4039.)

Following this event a new practice was introduced; a permanent group of Jewish prisoners was now retained in the camp to carry out all physical labor. The daily executions of Jewish prisoners was now of limited scope and encompassed mainly the infirm and weak who were no longer able to work and those who had committed violations even of the most minor sorts. The place of those who were killed was taken by new men selected from the transports slated for annihilation, which continued to stream into the camp.

The lesson learned by the Jewish prisoners who worked in the camp was that the cost of a courageous act like that performed by Berliner was very high--more than 160 Jews were executed in reprisal for the killing of one SS man. In light of the fact that the Germans had also changed their methods, instances of this sort did not recur. It became clear that individual, spontaneous acts like that of Berliner, however admirable, were not the way to rescue, nor could they even slow down the annihilation activities in the camp....

At the end of October or beginning of November, two Treblinka prisoners, assisted by others, managed to escape on the freight train carrying the personal belongings of the murdered out of the camp. At the end of November or beginning of December, seven people from the group that worked on the station platform were caught trying to escape by train. They were taken to the lazarett and shot there by Kurt Franz. The camp prisoners were called to a special roll-call which Franz informed them that for each escapee ten Jews working in the camp would be shot. (Gitta Sereny, *Into that Darkness--From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder*, London, 1974, p.196.)

At the beginning of winter, under cover of darkness, another four prisoners escaped. They slipped out of the barrack, cut the barbed-wire fence and got away. As an immediate reprisal twenty sick people were taken out and shot on the spot. (Wilenberg, op.cit., pp.36-37)

Yitzchak Arad: *Revolt in Treblinka*:...The groups of fighters acted separately... set fire to the large fuel tank, and when it exploded all the nearby buildings caught fire... also immobilized an armored vehicle in the garage. The prisoners' quarters and the warehouses

were also set aflame, and the group working in the potato silo hurled hand grenades at the SS quarters. The explosions and gunshots were heard in all parts of the camp. Prisoners began running in the direction of the square and the eastern and southern fences of the camp. The Ukrainian guards and SS opened fire from the guard towers and elsewhere, and some of the insurgents who were armed returned the fire. Several Ukrainians were wounded and their weapons taken from them. The few grenades and meager ammunition that the rebels had was running out very quickly. The camp was going up in flames and in total disarray, and the prisoners began to break through the fences and get themselves over the anti-tank obstacles, throwing blankets and coats on the barbed wire. Many of those fleeing in the area of the fences were hurt and fell, but the others trampled over them and continued to run. All the members of the "organizing committee," ... and other members of the underground who were actively involved in the revolt, were the last to make for the fences; most of them were hit and fell within the camp....

On the day of the uprising there were 850 prisoners in the entire camp. About half, including most of the members of the underground, were killed trying to escape, gunned down in the camp itself, between the fences or near them. About 100 prisoners decided to remain in the camp and made no attempt to escape. Despite the heavy gunfire, about half of those who tried to escape did manage to get over the fences. ... The pursuit, the combing of the area and the roadblocks resulted in the capture of most of the escapees, most of whom were shot on the spot. ... of the 850 prisoners in the camp, it is probable that at least 100 escaped and successfully eluded the pursuit forces. This estimate is higher than the figure generally accepted until now. On October 20 most of the remaining Jewish prisoners were transferred to Sobibor, where they were killed. Another 25-30 prisoners remained in Treblinka and were shot there a few days later. In order to cover up the crime, a farm-house was built on the site of the camp, trees were planted, and a Ukrainian peasant was employed to guard the deserted place. (Sereny, *op.cit.*, pp.249-250; Franciszek Zabicki, 'Rozbicie obozu w Treblince', Warsaw, 1977, pp.94-95)

*Uprising in Sobibor:* ...the rest of the prisoners sensed that something was afoot, but they still did not know what. According to the plan, the prisoners of war and the members of the underground, some of them armed, took up position in the front rows. The operation plan was now disrupted. A truck that had arrived from outside the camp appeared in Camp 2 and came to a halt near the building of the camp headquarters. The driver, Oberscharführer Bauer, spotted a dead SS man lying there and then saw a prisoner running from the building. He immediately opened fire on him. (Testimony of Biskowitz, Eichmann's Trial.) At the same time the commander of the Ukrainian guard, a Volksdeutsche from the Volga area, appeared at the roll-call square. The insurgents attacked him and killed him with ax blows. The rest of the prisoners became panic-stricken. The Ukrainian guards, who now realized what was happening, opened fire. At that point ... began stage two of the revolt. With cries of Come on! Hurrah! the insurgents broke toward the gate and the fences, and from that moment on there was no control over what happened. Some of the insurgents broke open the main gate and escaped from there southwest toward the woods. Another group broke through the fences north of the gate. The first of this group triggered the mines, were wounded and killed, but the others who crossed the area where the mines had already exploded, managed to flee, as they stepped over the bodies of their comrades.

Of the 600 prisoners who were in the camp on the day of the uprising, 300 managed to escape. About 150 were killed by the guards' gunfire or by the mine explosions. Approximately 150 sick prisoners and those from Western Europe and Germany, who had

not been let in on the preparations for the revolt, and those who did not manage to escape, remained in the camp area. Some of them got hold of weapons and continued to fight until they were killed. Some of those who were caught on camp grounds were shot that very same day. The others, including the prisoners in Camp 3 (the area of the gas chambers) who had taken no part in the uprising, were shot on the following day when the chief of staff of Operation Reinhard, Hermann Hofle, arrived in the camp from Lublin. (Rutkowski, op.cit., pp. 42-43; Ruckerl, op.cit., pp.196 197.)

In the week following the escape, 100 of the 300 escapees were captured or shot to death. (Rutkowski, op.cit., p.43.) It was a great achievement on the part of the insurgents that 200 of them did manage to get away. ... However, despite the relative success, the vast majority of the escaped prisoners did not live to witness the day of liberation. Some were caught and killed at later stages of the escape, and others died as fighters in the ranks of the partisans. It is estimated that from all the escapees from Sobibor, only about fifty survived until the day of liberation.

The attitudes of the Jewish victims toward the Nazi terror varied with their ages, political affiliations, religious convictions, and opportunities of avoiding the terror. The elements of Jewish existence were fundamentally different from those of their non-Jewish neighbors, namely: isolation from the outside world; the absence of the possibility to continue normal economic activities; detention of large masses in ghettos and Jewish quarters; obstacles to hiding because of high degree of Jewish recognizable ability by type and circumcision; strong family ties which frequently jeopardized the family as a whole; the reluctance of non-Jews to be identified as Jewish sympathizers; no government in exile allied with the anti-Axis coalition; and difficulties in communicating with other Jewish communities, and especially those in the free world.

Roughly speaking, the victims fall into two categories: those gradually conditioned by various inhuman methods to a loss of their physical and mental powers of resistance (e.g in the Polish areas), and those surprised by sudden attack (e.g., in the U.S.S.R. and Serbia). In polarized categories they are frequently characterized as *heroica* and martyrdom (*kiddush hashem*). The *heroica* embrace resistance in all its manifestations: attempts at evading Nazi terror by forged documents; procuring foreign passports; attempts at circumventing the Nazi orders which imposed restrictions affecting daily life along with ingenious devices intended to halt or slow down, the Nazi policy of starvation and emaciation; attempts at preserving Jewish life by all possible "illegal" means, including bribing Nazis; spiritual resistance, to preserve human dignity in the face of Nazi terror, including the establishment and maintenance of "illegal" educational institutions on all levels, and preserving records of the Holocaust for future generations; participation in armed resistance movements, and creation of Jewish armed groups, which involved difficulties and dangers both from the Nazis and fellow partisans<sup>1</sup>; the difficulties and dangers both from the Nazis and fellow partisans; the ghetto fighters who fought for Jewish honor without any hope of survival manifested in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising; and the acts of armed resistance in the extermination camp of

<sup>1</sup> *The Jewish Underground*, by Rabbi Eliahu Ellis & Rabbi Shmuel Silinsky: Some Jews managed to flee, escape, or otherwise hide from the Nazis. Some took to the woods, and were among the founders of the "partisan" movements, the guerrillas fighting against the Germans from the woods. The Germans did not have endless forces, and they could not go into all the forests to flush everyone out. Certain areas were simply left cordoned off.

The biggest problem for the Jewish underground was that they did not get Allied support like other nationalist groups. Those groups were getting money, weapons and supplies flown in. In addition, the Jews were not only fighting the Germans, but they were also fighting the locals. There were wild gangs who swore that they would kill any Germans they found... and also any Jews. The Jewish resistance was fighting on both ends.

Auschwitz and outright revolt in Treblinka and Sobibor. The dangerous flights of Jewish inmates from extermination camps were a form of resistance that brought the story of the slaughter of a people before the world. Decorations for bravery given to Jewish members of the Allied armies<sup>1</sup> and partisans were disproportionately numerous, due largely to their realization that they fought an enemy not only of their country, but also of their people. This applies even more so to the Palestinian Jewish Brigade and the Haganah parachutists, among whom were Emma Sereni and Hannah Szenes.

The overwhelming majority of those called upon to assume the functions of members of the Judenrat did so out of the traditional sense of Jewish communal responsibility. They became gradually apprehensive of the dangers inherent in this office, as exemplified in two

---

<sup>1</sup>Steve Lipman, *The Chance To Fight Back*: The Jewish Week, 04/09/2004: .... "Most people had relatives over there," Whiteman says. "They didn't know there were [death] camps, but they knew what [the Nazis] were doing. They wanted to rescue as many people as possible. There was a tremendous passion to overcome Hitler." In their ranks were men like Henry Kissinger, the former secretary of State, and countless other Jews who risked their lives and comfort here to return to Europe in U.S. uniforms. .... The number who volunteered to return to Europe in khaki during the war ... may be as many as 10,000," says Deborah Dash Moore, professor of religion at Vassar College and author of the forthcoming "GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation" (Harvard University Press). Like all Jewish soldiers, the foreign-born ones faced particular risks if captured. "Every Jewish soldier had the H [for Hebrew] on his dog tag," Lerner says, and were often used in intelligence work. "They made a vital contribution," Berenbaum says. "It intensified their American identification, and it intensified their feelings as a Jew." It hastened their adaptation to America, too. "They had the great agent of Americanization — World War II," Berenbaum says. And it gave them a psychological advantage. "They probably are less wounded" than Holocaust survivors and other refugees who, to some degree, were unable to shed their identities as victims. "Because they had the opportunity to fight back." About Face (aboutfacefilms@aol.com)... tells the story of a score of European-born veterans culled from some 200 who were interviewed for the film and a visual archive. The first known documentary on the subject, it relates soldiers guarding German soldiers from their hometowns, liberating relatives from concentration camps and meeting their future spouses among the survivors.

Source Unknown: The Palestinian Jewish parachutists were a group of British-trained volunteers who were dropped behind enemy lines in Nazi-occupied Europe during the last two years of World War II. In 1942 the Jewish Agency for Palestine applied to the British for assistance in sending Jewish volunteers to Europe, who as emissaries of the Yishuv (the Palestinian Jewish community), would help to organize local resistance and rescue operations among the Jewish communities. The British were unwilling to send the hundreds of volunteers envisioned by the Jewish Agency, but ultimately agreed to train a few units of Jewish parachutists who were recent immigrants from certain targeted countries that they wanted to infiltrate. The British Special Operation Executive (SOE) intended to deploy the volunteers as wireless operators and instructors on their liaison missions to the partisans, while the British Military Intelligence branch (MI9) planned to use them to locate and rescue Allied POWs and escapees. Both branches consented to the volunteers' dual role as British agents and Jewish emissaries. The candidates were selected from the ranks of the Palmach (the strike force of the Jewish military underground), [Zionist](#) youth movement activists and Palestinian Jews already serving in the British army. Of the 240 men and women who volunteered, 110 underwent the training program that commenced in Cairo in March 1943. Because of certain operational difficulties, only 32 of the trained volunteers (including three women) were sent on missions to Europe. Nine of the Jewish parachutists were sent to [Romania](#), three to [Hungary](#), five to Slovakia, ten to Yugoslavia, three to [Italy](#) and two to [Bulgaria](#). The first group was dropped into Yugoslavia in May 1943; the last was dropped in southern Austria on the last day of the war. Of the 32 volunteers, twelve were captured. Seven of the twelve were subsequently executed, including [Haviva Reik](#) in Slovakia and [Hannah Szenes](#) in Hungary. The Jewish parachutists succeeded in making contact with the various national resistance movements in the Balkans, including Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia. Several were active participants in the Slovak National Uprising. Others succeeded in aiding Allied POWs in Romania and organizing immigration to Palestine in the immediate post-liberation period.

dicta contained in secret Nazi documents referring to the German Government, but undoubtedly of general applications:

- 1) "The Judenrat is to be made fully responsible in the precise meaning of the word for the implementation according to schedule of all directives, present and future"
- 2) "Whenever difficulties arise, the dissatisfaction of the Jews is directed against the Jewish administration and not against the German supervisory organs." The Judenrat, therefore, served as a hostage group for the "good behavior" of the communities and as a lightning rod for Nazi misdeeds.

The process by which the member of the councils became gradually more and more submissive has been strikingly formulated by Rezal Kasztner: "Step by step, they were made tractable. In the beginning, relatively unimportant things were asked of them, replaceable things of material value like personal possessions, money, and apartments. Later, however, the personal freedom of the human being was demanded. Finally, the Nazis asked for life itself." This gradualism demands, coupled with ever-increasing terror, was an ingenious and effective psychological device.

It is difficult to imagine that the ghettoized masses could have basically existed at all without the presence of the Jewish council. Whether sympathetic or unsympathetic, or even opposed to resistance, the councils contributed directly or indirectly to the resistance movements by their very presence. In the Eastern areas *the resistants* infiltrated some council organizations, using council-issued identification and police cards. In the last phase of its existence the Ostredna Zidov in Slovakia became an organ of resistance and rescue for all of Europe.

The crisis came when and where the Judenrat was called upon to assist in deportations to the death camps, particularly after the destination of the deportees was already known. In the meantime the original composition of the Jewish councils had changed considerably, with the lowering in the level of character, judgment, and the ability of members. Some of the members committed suicide or refused to cooperate and were repressed. There is no evidence that where there were no Jewish councils (e.g. in the first phase of the German invasion in the U.S.S.R) or where their help was not solicited, the percentage of losses was lower due to the lack of "assistance." Nor were the Nazis impressed by the supreme self-sacrifice of Adam Czerniakow, chairman of the Warsaw Jewish Council, who committed suicide on learning of the forthcoming deportation of Warsaw Jews for extermination. Further, there is no evidence that the replacement of members of councils less inclined to "cooperate" by those more inclined to do so (as, e.g., the replacement of Artur Rosenzweig by David Gutter in Cracow) had any influence on the final outcome. The special privileges recorded by the Nazis to council members notwithstanding, the percentage of victims among the members of the Jewish councils were practically the same as that of their constituencies. In the final analysis, the Nazis had sufficient time to complete their task with or without the Jewish councils, witnessed by the fact that the process of destruction of the Jews was practically completed long before the end of the war or even before Himmler's orders to stop extermination.

### ***What should the Jewish Response Have Been***

Jews grasped at the illusory hope of a continued Jewish existence in Nazi Germany. They undertook measures of self-help that included vocational training and retraining, establishing the Judischer Kulturbund, and centralizing Jewish representation in the Reichsvertretung.

---

During this period, some 280,000 Jews emigrated despite the psychological difficulties inherent in such a decision for a community deeply rooted in Germany and notwithstanding the limitations on emigration (e.g the immigration quota law in the United State, the "white paper" of 1939 on Palestine, and restrictive action by most European governments). While the official Nazi German line was to get rid of the Jews, the potential emigrant had to overcome various difficulties. More "efficient" emigration procedures (including threats of internment in concentration camps, followed by actual internment) were instituted only in 1938.

c.

### *World Jewry*

On the international level, Jewish organizations pressed unsuccessfully for the adoptions by the Assembly of the League of Nations (1933) of a resolution confirming the principle of protection of minorities and obliquely condemning Germany for their treatment of the Jews. They initiated the Benheim Petition in the League of Nations, whose successful conclusion suspended the application of German Racial Laws in Upper Silesia for over four years. They pressed for action by the Assembly of the Leagues of Nations in favor of "refugees from Germany, Jewish and others," and for the appointment of a High Commissioner to protect the refugees and investigate possibilities for their emigration. This last effort, along with the special conference in Evian, proved useless. A boycott of German goods and services was spontaneously begun by Jews in various countries, but it lacked a worldwide apparatus and its influence on the German economy was of no decisive consequence.

### *Did They Go like Sheep to the Slaughter?<sup>1</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup>IN-DEPTH FEATURES: *Who Did the Rescuing During the Holocaust?* Yisroel Spiegel: The Zionist and secular propaganda systems... wanted to entrench in the masses the idea that the Holocaust was conclusive proof against the chareidi worldview and proof for the "realistic" approach, i.e. secularism, in ensuring Jewish continuity in such a cruel world.

This first step in their campaign was the "charge" that European Jewry went like sheep to the slaughter. The secular leadership ignored the fact that they had no means of defense, and there was no possibility in the world to stand up against the mighty Nazi war machine, the overwhelming enemy which, at the peak of its power, subjugated entire countries from when the war broke out until the beginning of its downfall in the marshy, Russian winter. In the methodical path of destruction of the Nazi war machine were whole populations. First and foremost of course, the six million Jews were murdered, but also tens of millions of people from other nationalities, including hundreds of thousands of prisoners, mainly Russians, who were killed brutally. Many Russians were commanded to dig holes which afterwards became mass graves, after they were shot down with machine guns. Not one of them rose up against his captors and murderers even though they were trained soldiers.

The mocking, contemptuous complaint against holy Jews of walking like sheep to the slaughterer, was aimed at glorifying the mythological "sabara," a Zionist, secular creation, fearless, and promising "No more!" meaning that after the Jewish state, the Zionist vision, nothing like this will ever happen again.

A few years ago, when Ehud Barak was the commander-in-chief of the army, he said in his speech in Poland at the annual March of the Living program, that the State of Israel had arisen late, and maybe if it had been set up before the Holocaust it would have been prevented, meaning to say that the State would ensure the reality that "this will not happen again."

With time, secular propaganda stopped using this mocking, insulting tone when they mentioned the six million Holocaust victims. Several incidents caused this, including the horrible murder of 11 Israeli Olympic athletes in Munich 28 years ago, when they were killed, unfortunately, in the same way, "like sheep to the slaughter." Neither their Zionism, their Israeli-ism, nor their physical and military training helped them.

In her book, Between Dignity and Despair, Marion Kaplan shows that far from seeming inevitable, the Holocaust was impossible to foresee precisely because Nazi repression occurred in irregular and unpredictable steps until the massive violence of November 1938. The Nazi hierarchy did not complete plans for the "Final Solution" until 1941. How could German Jews expected to know in 1938 - much less in 1933- that gas chambers awaited them?"

---

...But later, something else happened as a result of an argument about Zionist failures to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. This argument underwent various changes, one of which was that it was not possible to save Jews from the jaws of the Nazi murderers, a claim that was intended to remove all blame from Zionist leaders.... There is something very puzzling here: This is the very movement that fought and won for itself recognition from the entire world as the only representative of the Jewish nation as a whole, managing to shunt all others (including chareidi Judaism and the historical Agudas Yisroel) aside, branding them as sectorial organizations that cannot speak for the entire Jewish people.

This is the movement whose followers took credit for acquiring international consent to establish a Jewish state and for the formation, development, and settlement in Eretz Yisroel.

If this was such a powerful and successful movement, how did it come to be so weak and worthless regarding the rescue of Jews from the Nazi fires? If this was such a powerless movement, how could it found kibbutzim and yishuvim, dry up marshes and cultivate desert, set up underground movements in Eretz Yisroel, enlist hundreds and maybe thousands for the Jewish brigade in the framework of the British army, and finally--the deciding feat--the establishment of the Jewish State?... we are talking about tendentious, false propaganda, occasionally changed according to the needs at that particular time.

When it was found necessary to glorify the idea of power and conquering, they belittled the millions of Jews who were in the hands of the enemy and only someone who could take the credit for an act of "rebellion" or an "uprising," real or imaginary, beneficial or harmful, earned acclaim. Only they died a "hero's death" in the ghettos, while all the others, as they say, "went like sheep to the slaughter," which had, for them, the worst connotations. We will not repeat here the insulting expressions that the official propaganda, inspired by Zionist leaders, attached to the *kedoshim* and *tehorim Hy'd*.... investigators and historians who did not tire of going through archives, newspapers of that time and protocols of Zionist institutions, and their findings formed a horrifying picture: the intentional silence of the Holocaust, criminal apathy, preference for the establishment of Israeli settlement and the position that "the State in process" stands above and beyond all cries for help.

Then a new period began for the propaganda of the establishment. Suddenly it was decided that the stature of the institutions that had seen themselves as "a government in formation" before the establishment of the State, and as official and representative leadership of the Jewish nation in the world, were to be minimized. Suddenly, they began claiming that essentially the victims were themselves guilty because they had not listened to warnings of the foreseen and they did not hurry to leave the Valley of Tears and make *aliya*, which would have served them as a "safe harbor." They were "blameworthy," and particularly the rabbonim and *admorim* were chosen as the most guilty because, according to them, they had forbidden their numerous followers from going to Eretz Yisroel.

What did they want? For us to break through the fortified walls of the Nazis in order to save them? Were we qualified for this? But if they had come to Eretz Yisroel, they now speculated, they would have been saved -- exactly as the half a million Jews who lived there before the outbreak of war were safe!

Lie follows falsehood and confrontation follows confrontation. Much has already been written about this. For one thing, that in occupied Europe besides chareidi Jews (whose number was large even though they were still only a minority amongst all Jews) millions of non-chareidi Jews lived: Zionists, secularists, religious, Bundists, Communists and so forth, who were far from heeding the voice of rabbis and *admorim*. Why didn't they make *aliya* in order to be saved?

Also a lot has been written about the fact that the still- small Jewish settlement in Israel was rescued from Nazi persecution and dangers of destruction, *R"l*, only through an obvious miracle, because the Nazi advance came to little more than a step outside of the borders of Eretz Yisroel. It was only Hitler's craziness that drove him to



## What is Jewish Resistance?<sup>1</sup>

In the first decades after the war, Jewish heroism was bound to the notion of Jewish resistance. Those who participated in armed resistance against the Nazis were likened to the new tough breed of Zionist Jews, and their heroism was attributed to a shedding of their "passive" Diaspora-like behavior. Those who did not resist with arms (or at least flee the Nazi onslaught) were regularly portrayed in the literature as having gone to their deaths "like sheep to the slaughter<sup>2</sup>."

However, since the 1980s, Holocaust writers increasingly recognized that it was only one of many legitimate Jewish responses. "Spiritual resistance" and the Jews' daily struggle to survive the Holocaust was also resistance.

Eck was probably the first to use the term *Kiddush HaChayim* (sanctification of life) to express some aspects of this kind of resistance. In time, this more encompassing treatment of resistance, which also includes armed resistance, engendered the Hebrew term *Amidah*, explained by Dworzecki as "a comprehensive name for all expressions of Jewish 'non-conformism' and for all the forms of resistance and all acts by Jews aimed at thwarting the evil design of the Nazis."

---

launch a surprise attack against Russia that enticed him to shift his resources away from the Middle Eastern front at the last minute -- and that is how salvation came to Eretz Yisroel and its Jewish settlement

An additional significant historical fact is that the gates of Eretz Yisroel were really closed to Jews. Only a few, and only at certain times, were given *aliya* permits ("certificates"). Even that small amount of *aliya* permits was under the firm control of the Zionist movement and the Jewish Agency, who restricted the chareidi population to only six percent of these immigration certificates. How could chareidi Jews have made *aliya* and saved themselves?

...It happens to be that in the mass of the grim and depressing story of the efforts to save Jews from the Holocaust horrors, one bright point, which is impossible to invalidate or shake because of its validity, always shines through. It is the series of amazing Jewish rescue efforts planned and carried out by chareidi Jews, such as Vaad Hahatzala in the United States, led by HaRav Eliezer Silver *zt'*, whose story we opened the article with, and Tzeirei Agudas Yisroel in the States (together with whom some people from the Revisionist movement worked), and individual Swiss activists, who were also chareidi, above whom hovered with heroic strength, Rav Weissmandel *zt'*, who accomplished what he did within occupied Europe.

It is a brilliant historical fact that is, of course, like a bone stuck in the throat of all the proponents of Zionist propaganda. Besides what it teaches -- that even then there were Jews who put aside any calculations, put themselves in terrible danger by transgressing laws, paying bribes, forging documents, everything possible for the higher purpose of saving Jews -- it topples the whole house of cards upon which they based their revised, false history. Yes, real rescue was carried out, unfortunately, only at the margins. One must not think that it was possible to save six million Jews, when there were around 10 million Jews in the range of danger. No, this was such a huge matter that no one could say that it was possible to deal with the whole thing or even with most of it.

..."At some stage, around 1949, the way they related to Holocaust survivors changed. But that happened,' Yoav Gelber says, 'when they began to realize that the future of Zionism depends on the last survivors making *aliya*. Only then did they begin to take an interest in European Jewry -- not because they were worried about their fate, but because they worried about our fate, here in Eretz Yisroel.'"

<sup>1</sup>Based on an article by Robert Rozett in the Jerusalem Post, Apr. 24, 2003

<sup>2</sup>Around the time of the Adolf Eichmann trial in Jerusalem (1961), three books surfaced that openly attacked Jews for their purportedly shameful behavior during the Holocaust: Raul Hilberg's seminal volume, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Bruno Bettelheim's *The Informed Heart*, and Hannah Arendt's report on the Eichmann Trial, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

Even where there was active resistance, it was not always the best thing. As Levin puts it<sup>1</sup>: "The urge to fight was more emotional than logical; the preferred course of action was the honorable one, even when it was not necessarily the most practical or productive for the rescue of large numbers of Jews."

Jewish resistance can be an inclusive term denoting all of the diverse forms of Jewish nonconformity and rescue.

As Michael Marrus showed, there were many different types of resistance<sup>2</sup>: "Symbolic Resistance, or I remain what I was; Polemic Resistance, or I tell the truth; Defensive Resistance, or I aid and protect; Offensive Resistance, or I fight to the death; (and) Resistance Enchained, or freedom fighters in camp and ghetto."

*Like Sheep Why Didn't You Fight*, By Sam Halpern (a survivor gives his personal answer to this often-asked question):

When I was first brought to Kamionka, there were Russian prisoners of war [some of whom the German had decided to kill.] ...

There was nothing the Russian could do in the face of many armed German soldiers. Polish soldiers, whose army had been swiftly defeated at the start of the war, faced the same situation. I saw four or five German soldiers control a thousand Polish POWs. Later on in Kamionka, a small number of Germans did whatever they wanted with Russian soldiers, men who had been trained to fight battles. High-ranking officers were reduced to powerless, ordinary men when confronted with the lowliest German soldier and a gun. When the tide turned and the Germans began losing the war, I beheld the same sight in reverse: hundreds of mighty German soldiers, who only weeks before took life or saved it as their mood dictated, were now herded about passively by a few Russian soldiers with weapons.

These soldiers had all been trained to fight, to use firearms, to survive under the harshest conditions. If they could not resist imprisonment, how were we Jews - a civilian population, with little or no firearm experience and no weapons, a tribe of merchants, artisans, scholars, women and children, all weak from starvation and exhaustion - able to rebel against a well-equipped army? If you are under the gun, there is little you can do.

Certainly, there were a few, wonderful exceptions. The Warsaw Ghetto uprising, the first of its kind among a civilian population in Poland, is the most famous. Even in Warsaw, however, organizing to fight did not take place when there had been half a million Jews in the ghetto. Only when almost the entire ghetto had been liquidated and death was at hand did a few thousand remaining residents - right-wingers, leftists, Bundists, religionists, atheists, Jews of every political and religious stripe - band together, under the leadership of Mordechai Anielewicz, to fight since they knew their days were numbered. They realized they would not be able to beat the German army. But if they were going to die, they would at least take some Germans with them.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Fighting Back: Lithuanian Jewry's Armed Resistance to the Nazis, 1941-1945

<sup>2</sup>Presented as a paper at the Yad Vashem 1993 conference, "Major Changes Within the Jewish people in the Wake of the Holocaust," he employed a system for classifying resistance first presented by Swiss historian Walter Rings.

<sup>3</sup> Mitchell G. Bard, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to World War II*, 2nd Edition. NY: Alpha Books, 2004; [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#); Israel Gutman, ed. *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust Vols. 1-4*. NY: Macmillan, 1995. In 1942, [Hitler](#) decided to liquidate the [ghettos](#) and, within 18 months, had the more than two million Jews who'd survived the ghettos deported to [death camps](#). The Germans ordered the Jewish "police" in the [Warsaw ghetto](#) to round up people for deportation. Approximately 300,000 men, women, and children were packed in cattle cars and transported to the [Treblinka](#) death camp where they were murdered. This left a Jewish population of between 55,000 and 60,000 in the

Those of us in Kamionka who were young and still strong would have been more than willing to fight in an organized fashion if we thought we had the slightest chance of making a difference. For months after learning of the German defeat at Stalingrad, we waited for partisans who were rumored to be in the vicinity. It would have been a great honor, a tremendous opportunity, to join them, to fight to save the lives of innocent Jews and non-Jews under German occupation. We had heard that the partisans liberated a camp not far from ours. Many Jews had joined their ranks immediately. In the end, though, the partisans did not come near Kamionka until the camp had already been liquidated.

*Should They Have Tried To Escape:* A survivor explains that freedom was not worth the horrible price, by Sam Halpern:

...Arie and I often spoke of escape. The simple reason we did not try, until the very end, was that we did not want to save two lives at the expense of scores of others. We had seen what often happened when other Jews escaped and their flight was discovered.

Once, a landsman from a town not far from Chorostkow ran away while working on the road. The next day, Hauptsturmführer Rebel came into the camp and ordered everyone into the yard. It was raining and very cold, but we were made to stand there, without moving, from five until seven o'clock in the morning. Then Rebel stood in front of us in the center of the yard, facing the inmates.

"A man ran away today," he thundered. "You will all pay the price." We were frightened for we knew how the Germans punished.

"You, you, you, and you," the hauptsturmführer pointed at four Jews randomly. "Himmel commando, shoot them!" A Ukrainian police officer, only too happy to oblige, dragged the men from the line and shot them right in front of us with one bullet each to the head. They wanted to frighten us, and they succeeded.

---

ghetto.

In April 1943, the Jews learned the Germans planned to deport all the people who remained in the Warsaw ghetto to [Treblinka](#). A group of mostly young people formed an organization called the Z.O.B. (for the Polish name, Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa, which means Jewish Fighting Organization). The Z.O.B., led by 23-year-old [Mordecai Anielewicz](#), issued a proclamation calling for the Jewish people to resist going to the railroad cars.... The Jews in the ghetto believed that what had happened in January was proof that by offering resistance it was possible to force the Germans to desist from their plans. Many thought that the Germans would persist in unrestrained mass deportations only so long as the Jews were passive, but that in the face of resistance and armed confrontation they would think twice before embarking upon yet another Aktion. The Germans would also have to take into account the possibility that the outbreak of fighting in the ghetto might lead to the rebellion spreading to the Polish population and might create a state of insecurity in all of occupied Poland.. ...The ghetto fighters were warned of the timing of the final deportation and the entire Jewish population went into hiding. On the morning of April 19, 1943, the Warsaw ghetto uprising began after German troops and police entered the ghetto to deport its surviving inhabitants. Seven hundred and fifty fighters armed with a handful of pistols, 17 rifles, and Molotov cocktails faced more than 2,000 heavily armed and well-trained German troops supported by tanks and flamethrowers. After the Germans were forced to withdraw from the ghetto, they returned with more and more firepower. After several days without quelling the uprising, the German commander, General Jürgen Stroop, ordered the ghetto burned to the ground building by building. Still, the Jews held out against the overwhelming force for 27 days. On May 8, the headquarters bunker of the ZOB at 18 Mila Street was captured. Mordecai Anielewicz and a large number of his colleagues were killed in the fighting, but several dozen fighters escaped through the sewers. On May 16, Stroop announced the fighting was over. He said his forces had captured 56,065 Jews and announced that he was going to blow up the Great Synagogue on Tlomack Street (which was outside the ghetto) as a symbol of victory and of the fact that "the Jewish quarter of Warsaw no longer exists." Approximately 300 Germans and 7,000 Jews were killed in the uprising, and another 7,000 Jews were deported to [Treblinka](#). The outcome was preordained, but the dramatic act of [resistance](#) helped raise the morale of Jews everywhere, if only briefly.

"If any of you think of running away, the blood of your fellow Jews will be on your head," the SS officer screamed at us.

These monsters actually had the audacity to blame us for trying to save our lives. In the end, no matter how twisted this logic was, Jews would die if we ran away, and I said to Arie that I would never consider escaping: "I will not have others killed because of my decision." Arie agreed. He too did not want to live with the death of other Jews on his conscience.

Of course, when I was wildly galloping with Chestnut in an open field or thick forest, I thought of running away. Who wouldn't have, in my situation? However easy it would have been for me to escape, I did not. I could not stand the thought that others might die because of a selfish act of mine; then too, I had no place to go. It might be argued that in the end almost everyone was killed, and so my escaping would not have made a difference. It is true that almost everyone was killed. But that was because the German barbarians were obsessed with their notions of racial purity. No one was killed because Sam Halpern decided to look out for himself alone. For me that has made all the difference.

*The Silence of the Lambs*, by Rabbi Benjamin Blech

The Jews were rounded up and herded like cattle to the slaughter. For some, strangely enough, that makes the victims guilty of becoming accessories to their own murder!

Yes, it is true that the Jews didn't rise up en masse against their executioners. Like the rest of the world, which couldn't believe the horrors of the Holocaust even once they were over, the Jews couldn't imagine the extent of the Nazi atrocities until it was too late to do anything about it. They believed they were going to be resettled and given an opportunity to be granted life in exchange for labor. They believed the sign at the entranceway to Auschwitz that proclaimed, "Arbeit Macht Frei" – "Work makes one free." They believed they were herded into the synagogue to be addressed by the Nazis, not to be doused with gasoline and burned to death.

And when they finally suspected the worst, no one in the world would help them. They could get no guns; arms to defend themselves were unavailable. If one rose up to fight, a thousand would be cruelly punished and tortured. Jews were not led like lambs to the slaughter. They were deluded, as was the world. They were isolated, and they were abandoned.

And yet these "lambs" managed an unparalleled demonstration of courage in the revolt of the Warsaw Ghetto. They were able to hold off the Nazis longer than it took these Germans to conquer all of Poland.

Mordechai Anielwicz, who died with his colleagues in the command bunker at 18 Mila Street, Warsaw, at age 24, wrote in the last entrance of his diary: "The last wish of my life has been fulfilled. Jewish self-defense has become a fact. Jewish resistance and revenge have become actualities. I am happy to have been one of the first Jewish fighters in the ghetto. Where will rescue come from?"

Rescue never came, but the Jews proved that given the slightest opportunity, they would fight to the death to protect and preserve their people....

The Destruction of the European Jews by Raul Hilberg:

Rabbi Leo Baeck, [noted] after the war:

*I made it a principle to accept no appointments from the Nazis and to do nothing which might help them. But later, when the question arose whether Jewish orderlies should help pick up Jews for deportation, I took the position that it would be better for them to do it, because they could at least be more gentle and helpful than the Gestapo and make the*

*ordeal easier. It was scarcely in our power to oppose the order effectively.*

When Baeck was in Thereseinstadt, an engineer who had escaped from Auschwitz informed him about the gassings. Baeck decided not to pass on this information to anyone in the ghetto city because "living in the expectation of death by gassing would only be harder."

Raul Hilberg "The Destruction of the European Jews", Pgs 967-976:

The "Conveyer Belt" The killing operation was a combination of physical layout and psychological technique. Camp officials covered every step from the train platform to the gas chambers with a series of precise orders. A show of force impressed upon the victims the seriousness of unruliness or recalcitrance, even as misleading explanations reassured them in their new, ominous surroundings. Although there were breakdowns and mishaps in this system, it was perfected to a degree that justified its characterization by an SS doctor as a conveyor belt (am laufenden Band). The initial action in the predetermined sequence was notification of the camp that a transport was arriving. Notice was followed by a mobilization of guards and inmates who were going to be involved in the processing. Everyone knew what would happen and what he had to do. From the moment the doors of a train were opened, all but a few of the deportees had only two hours to live. The arriving Jews, on the other hand, were unprepared for a death camp. Rumors and intimations that had reached them were simply not absorbed. These forewarnings were rejected because they were not sufficiently complete, or precise, or convincing.

When, in May 1942, a group of deportees was being marched from Zolkiewka to the Krasnystaw station (where a train was to take them to Sobibor), Polish inhabitants called out to the column: "Hey, Zydzi, idziecie na spalenie! [Hey Jews, you are going to burn!]." A survivor of that transport recalls: "The meaning of these words escaped us. We had heard of the death camp of Belzec, but we didn't believe it". A sophisticated Viennese physician who was in a cattle car remembers that another deportee noticed a sign in a railway station and called out "Auschwitz!". The physician noticed the outline of an "immense camp" stretched out in the dawn and he heard the shouts and whistles of command. "We did not know their meaning," he says. In the evening, he enquired where a friend had been sent and was told by one of the old prisoners that he could see him "there." A hand pointed to the chimney, but the new inmate could not understand the gesture until the truth was explained to him "in plain words." Another physician, from Holland, reports: I refused to...leave any room for the thought of the gassing of the Jews, of which I could surely not have pretended ignorance. As early as 1942 I had heard rumors about the gassing of Polish Jews...Nobody had ever heard, however, when these gassings took place, and it was definitely not known that people were gassed immediately upon arrival.

The great majority of the deportees could not grasp the situation so long as they did not know the details of the killing operation, the when and the how. Those who came with premonitions and forebodings were usually unable to think of a way out. On a Warsaw transport to Treblinka in August 1942, a young deportee heard the words, "Jews, we're done for!" The old men in the car began to say the prayer for the dead. Another young man, stepping off a train in Treblinka, saw mounds of clothing and said to his wife that this was the end (Das ist das Ende). Cognition was thus converted to fatalism more readily than to escape or resistance. The German administrators, however, were determined not to take chances, lest some impetuous resistor in the crowd create a dangerous confrontation. They were going to move swiftly while reinforcing Jewish illusions to the last possible moment. To this end they set a pattern of procedures that was virtually the same in every camp save only for those

variations that stemmed from the different layouts and installations in each enclosure. The ramps at Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka were too short to accommodate lengthy trains. At each of these camps, transports were backed into the compound to be unloaded a few cars at a time.<sup>38</sup> On the Belzec ramp the arriving Jews were received with the music and singing of a ten-man inmate orchestra.<sup>39</sup> Kulmhof was reachable only by road or narrow-gauge railway. Initially, deportees were brought from the immediate vicinity on trucks. Trains from the Lodz ghetto halted at Warthbrucken (Kolo),<sup>40</sup> where the victims were sometimes kept overnight in the local synagogue and from where they were taken by truck to Kulmhof. Later a more complicated logistic procedure was instituted to avoid public display of the deported Jews in Warthbrucken. The victims were loaded on a narrow-gauge train and kept overnight in a mill at Zawacki. They were then driven to Kulmhof in trucks.

At Auschwitz the ramp was first located between the old camp and Birkenau. Those who were directed to the Auschwitz I gas chamber "streamed" through the gate. When Birkenau was opened, long columns ran through a gauntlet several hundred yards long to one of the crematoria.<sup>42</sup> Not until the spring of 1944 was the spur built in Birkenau. On the new ramp, trains were unloaded a short distance from the gas chambers. The cars, emptied of the living and the dead, were moved to a fumigation installation.

One hot day, a loadmaster opened up a car and was jolted when a blackened corpse tumbled out. The car was filled with bodies that the camp personnel had neglected to remove. Following the unloading of the trains, there was a twofold selection procedure. The old, infirm, and sometimes small children were placed face down near a pit to be shot. At Sobibor, where trucks picked up the aged and infants, guards would occasionally try to toss the babies from a considerable distance into the vehicle. At Treblinka those unable to stand were taken to a pit near the infirmary for shooting. From the first Auschwitz ramp, trucks would remove the old and the infirm to the gas chambers. The camps also selected strong persons for labor. In the General- government camps, or Kulmhof, very few individuals were needed as work crews, and women among those chosen were but a handful.<sup>49</sup> Asked about the children, a former member of the SS establishment in Treblinka declared at his trial that "saving children in Treblinka was impossible [Kinder in Treblinka zu retten war unmöglich]."<sup>50</sup> Labor requirements at Auschwitz were greater, and at the Birkenau platform SS doctors (Mengele, König, Thilo, or Klein) would choose employable Jews for the industrial machine. Selections were not very thorough, however. The victims were paraded in front of the physician, who would then make spot decisions by pointing to the right for work or to the left for the gas chamber.<sup>51</sup> Men and women were separated for undressing in barracks. An impression was being created that clothes were to be reclaimed after showers.<sup>52</sup> At Sobibor, one of the SS men, dressed in a white coat, would issue elaborate instructions about folding the garments, sometimes adding remarks about a Jewish state that the deportees were going to build in the Ukraine.<sup>53</sup> At Kulmhof the victims were told that they would be sent for labor to Germany, and in Belzec a specially chosen SS man made similar quieting speeches.<sup>54</sup> In all three of the Generalgouvernement camps, there were special counters for the deposit of valuables.<sup>55</sup> The hair of the women was shorn,<sup>56</sup> and the procession was formed, men first. In Sobibor, groups of fifty to one hundred were marched through the "hose" by an SS man walking in front and four or five Ukrainians following at the rear of the column.<sup>57</sup> At Belzec, screaming women were prodded with whips and bayonets.<sup>58</sup> The Jews arriving in Treblinka, states Hoss, almost always knew that they were going to die.<sup>59</sup> Sometimes they could see mountains of corpses, partially decomposed.<sup>60</sup> Some suffered nervous shock, laughing and crying alternately.<sup>61</sup> To rush the procedure, the women at Treblinka were told that the water in the showers was cooling down.<sup>62</sup> The victims would then be forced to walk or run naked through the "hose" with their hands raised.<sup>63</sup> During the winter of 1942-43, however, the undressed people might have to stand outdoors for hours to

wait their turn.<sup>64</sup> There they could hear the cries of those who had preceded them into the gas chambers.<sup>65</sup> The Auschwitz procedure evolved in stages. In April 1942, Slovak Jews were gassed in Crematorium I, apparently with their clothes on.<sup>66</sup> Later, deportees from nearby Sosnowiec were told to undress in the yard. The victims, faced by the peremptory order to remove their clothes, men in front of women and women in front of men, became apprehensive. The SS men, shouting at them, then drove the naked men, women and children into the gas chamber.<sup>67</sup> During the third stage, in 1942, the abuse was replaced by politeness, and the speech making by Aumeier, Grabner and Hossler began. The victims were now told to undress for the showers, before the soup that would be served afterwards became cold.<sup>68</sup> For added security, gassings would be scheduled for a time before daybreak, when the camp inmates were still sleeping, or for the night hours, after the curfew had gone into effect.<sup>69</sup> At Birkenau, illusion was the rule. It was not always simple or possible, inasmuch as at least some of the deportees had observed the sign "Auschwitz" as the train passed through the railway yards,<sup>70</sup> or had seen flames belching from the chimneys, or had smelled the strange, sickening odor of the crematoria.<sup>71</sup> Most of them, however, like a group from Salonika, were funneled through the undressing rooms, were told to hang their clothes on hooks and remember the number, and promised food after the shower and work after the food. The unsuspecting Greek Jews, clutching soap and towels, rushed into the gas chambers.<sup>72</sup> Nothing was allowed to disturb this precarious synchronization. When a Jewish inmate revealed to newly arrived people what was in store for them, he was cremated alive.<sup>73</sup> Only in the case of victims who were brought in from nearby ghettos in upper Silesia (Sosnowiec and Bedzin) and who had had intimations of Auschwitz was speed alone essential. These people were told to undress quickly in their "own best interest."<sup>74</sup> Once there was a major incident in front of an Auschwitz gas chamber. A transport that had come in from Belsen revolted. The incident occurred when two thirds of the arrivals had already been shoved into the gas chamber. The remainder of the transport, still in the dressing room, had become suspicious. When three or four SS men entered to hasten the undressing, fighting broke out. The light cables were torn down, the SS men were overpowered, one of them was stabbed, and all of them were deprived of their weapons. As the room was plunged into complete darkness, wild shooting started between the guard at the exit door and the prisoners inside. When Hoss arrived at the scene, he ordered the doors to be shut. Half an hour passed. Then, accompanied by a guard, Hoss stepped into the dressing room, carrying a flashlight and pushing the prisoners into one corner. From there they were taken out singly into another room and shot.<sup>75</sup> Selections were carried out not only on the platform, in order to pick out deportees who would be able to work, but also within the camp, to eliminate inmates too sick or too weak to work any longer. The usual occasion for the choosing of victims was the roll call, where everybody was present;<sup>76</sup> another place was the hospital;<sup>77</sup> and sometimes selections were carried out block by block.<sup>78</sup> One former inmate, recalling such targeting, says: "I tried to make myself as inconspicuous as possible, not too erect, yet not slouching,; not too smart, yet not too sloppy; not too proud, yet not too servile, for I knew that those who were different died in Auschwitz, while the anonymous, the faceless ones, survived."<sup>79</sup> A young intellectual from Italy, who was in an Auschwitz hospital because of a swollen foot, was told by a gentile Polish inmate: "Du Jude, kaputt. Du schnell Krematorium fertig [You Jew, finished. You soon ready for crematorium]."<sup>80</sup> In Treblinka, to have been bruised in the face was considered a calamity. The wounded man, "stamped" (gestempelt), was a candidate for selection at the next roll call.<sup>81</sup> In Auschwitz the victims would try every subterfuge to escape. They tried to hide. Occasionally they tried to argue. A nineteen-year-old girl asked the Auschwitz women's camp commander, Hossler, to excuse her. He replied, "You have lived long enough. Come, my child, come."<sup>82</sup> Driven by whips between cordons of Kapos and guards, the naked people who had been picked out were loaded on trucks and driven to

the gas chambers or to a condemned block. Before Christmas in 1944, 2,000 women were packed into Block 25, which had room for 500. They were kept there for ten days. Soup cauldrons were pushed through a gap in the door by a fire guard. At the end of ten days, 700 were dead. The rest were gassed.<sup>83</sup> Gassing would begin with a command. At Treblinka a German would shout to a Ukrainian guard: "Ivan, water!" This was a signal to start the motor.<sup>84</sup> The procedure was not necessarily fast. With no room to move in the small chambers, the victims stood for thirty or forty minutes before they died. According to one Treblinka survivor, people were sometimes kept in the chambers all night without the motor being turned on.<sup>85</sup> At Belzec, where Oberscharfurer Hackenholt was in charge of the motor, a German visitor, Professor Pfannenstiel, wanted to know what was going on inside. He is said to have put his ear to the wall and, listening, to have remarked: "Just like in a synagogue."<sup>86</sup> At Kulmhof, the doors to the van were closed by Polish workers. One was inadvertently locked in with the Jews and raged in despair to get out. The Germans decided that it would not be prudent to open the door for him.<sup>87</sup> When the Auschwitz victims filed into the gas chamber, they discovered that the imitation showers did not work.<sup>88</sup> Outside, a central switch was pulled to turn off the lights,<sup>89</sup> and a Red Cross car drove up with the Zyklon.<sup>90</sup> An SS man, wearing a gas mask fitted with a special filter, lifted the glass shutter over the lattice and emptied one can after another into the gas chamber. Although the lethal dose was one milligram per kilogram of body weight and the effect was supposed to be rapid, dampness could retard the speed with which the gas was spreading.<sup>91</sup> Untersturmfuhrer Grabner, political officer of the camp, stood ready with stopwatch in hand.<sup>92</sup> As the first pellets sublimated on the floor of the chamber, the victims began to scream. To escape from the rising gas, the stronger knocked down the weaker, stepping on prostrate victims in order to prolong their own lives by reaching gas-free layers of air. The agony lasted for about two minutes, and as the shrieking subsided, the dying people slumped over. Within fifteen minutes (sometimes five), everyone in the gas chamber was dead. The gas was now allowed to escape and after about half an hour, the door was opened. The bodies were found in tower-like heaps, some in sitting or half-sitting positions, children and older people at the bottom. Where the gas had been introduced, there was an empty area from which the victims had backed away, and pressed against the door were the bodies of men who in terror had tried to break out. The corpses were pink in color, with green spots. Some had foam on the lips, others bled through the nose. Excrement and urine covered some of the bodies, and in some pregnant women the birth process had started. The Jewish work parties (Sonderkommandos), wearing gas masks, dragged out the bodies near the door to clear a path and hosed down the dead, at the same time soaking the pockets of poison gas remaining between the bodies. Then the Sonderkommandos had to pry the corpses apart.<sup>93</sup> In all the camps bodily cavities were searched for hidden valuables, and gold teeth were extracted from the mouths of the dead. In Crematorium II (new number) at Birkenau, the fillings and gold teeth, sometimes attached to jaws, were cleaned in hydrochloric acid, to be melted into bars in the main camp.<sup>94</sup> At Auschwitz the hair of the women was cut off after they were dead. It was washed in ammonium chloride before being packed. The bodies could then be cremated.

## **Kiddush Hashem – The Mitzvah & Its Application to the Hol**

-



The nation of Israel was created for this purpose: "This nation I have created for Myself, [in order that] My glory they shall tell" (Isaiah 43:21)<sup>1</sup>. "Telling God's glory" is the essential definition of *Kiddush Hashem*.

It seems remarkable that the sanctification and desecration of God's Name should be dependent on the actions of humanity. It is, in fact, only by virtue of Hashem's infinite kindness that this is the case. Wishing the good of mankind, Hashem placed His own glory—His sanctification or desecration—in the hands of Man. By fulfilling our purpose of sanctifying Hashem, we are able to earn our reward for the World to Come—a direct factor of our living in accordance with our essential purpose.

Rabbi Norman Lamm, introduction to The Holocaust and Halakhah by Irving J Rosenbaum:

Jewish heroism is sadly incomplete unless adequate attention is paid to those whose courage was expressed in living as well as dying with dignity, in an often quiet but always fierce resistance to the Nazi program of psychological humiliation and degradation visited with special relish upon the Reich's Jewish victims. ... the magnificent ... courage ... of believing Jews who summoned up an unbelievable and invincible dedication to G-d, to Judaism, and to life itself. They tapped that mysterious and mystical reservoir of the Jewish spirit which has been the Jew's surest promise of survival. The faith of the Jew in his G-d and his Torah and his people was pitted against the diabolical archenemy ... And this faith often-remarkably often!- triumphed over the demons unleashed in this "enlightened" century. ... The Nazi's secular messianism went up in flames in Berchtesgaden while Jews still proclaimed their confidence in the coming Messiah. What is most remarkable, to the point of taxing credibility, is the staggering psychological stamina and spiritual invincibility of those Jews who sought guidance in Halakhah (Jewish law) from their few remaining rabbis. Questions (*she'elot*) on fine points of Jewish law were directed to a scholarly rabbi, and answers or responsa (*teshuvot*) were offered. Dedication to Torah was expressed not in the abstract, but in the minutiae of daily life even in *extremis*. ... People stood ready to offer up not only their own lives but even the lives of their only surviving children if this was the decision of Halakhah. The ancient *Akedah* motif- the sacrifice of Isaac by his father, Abraham- was played out in all its terrible magnificence...

The Mitzvah of Kiddush HaShe-m (ויקרא כב לב (אמר): ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל) and it's corollary, not to desecrate His name (ויקרא כב לב (אמר): ולא תחללו את שם קדשי) involves all of our Avodas HaShem,<sup>4</sup> for Kiddush HaSh-m in its broadest terms means "any action that makes G-d's truth more apparent"<sup>5</sup> and this is achieved every time we do His Will – כי האדם לא נברא רק לעבוד בוראו (Chinuch).

<sup>1</sup> ישעיה פרק מג כא: עם זו יצרתי לי תהלתִי וְסִפְרוֹ:

<sup>2</sup> רמב"ם ספר המצוות מ"ע ט ובפ' ה מהל' יסודי התורה הל' א; חינוך מצוה רצ"ו; סמ"ג; סמ"ק; אמנם הרב סעדיה גאון לא מנע מצוה זו דכל מקום שיש לאו ועשה רק מונה אחד מהם ובמצוה לג מנה את הלאו של חלול ד' (ר ירוחם פישל פערלא שם) וכתב הרב ירוחם פישל פערלא שלרס"ג שכל יהודי חייב מטעם מצוות אהבת השם למסור את נפשו על ע"ז גילוי עריות ושפיכות דמים אבל שאר מצוות לומדים מקדוש השם.

<sup>3</sup> רמב"ם לאוין ס"ג: ... והוא הפך קדוש ד' ומקורו מלא תחללו את שם קדשי (ויקרא כב לב); בה"ג ל"ת קלז, סמ"ג לאוין ב; סמ"ק פה; רס"ג ל"ת לג, חינוך מצוה רצה

<sup>4</sup> נתבונן נא – הנה המצוה העיקרית היא קדוש ד'. כי היא כוללת הכל, כל המצוות וכל עניני עבודת ד' תוכנם הוא קדוש ד' (מכתב מאליהו ח"א עמ' 3-22) ובכד הקמח: ואין ראוי לשום אדם לחפץ כבוד בעולם הזה כי אם לכבודו יתברך להשתדל במעשים שיתקדש בהן שם שמים ולא שיחולל בסבתו

However, these are not simply commandments. Rabbeinu Yonah explains that our primary purpose in this world is to sanctify G-d's name:

רבינו יונה שערי תשובה שער ג' ס' קנח: ואמרו חז"ל כי עון חלול ד' גדול מכל העבירות, ולא יתכן להתכפר בתשובה ויסורין. ואמרו רבותינו ז"ל אין מאריכים בפרענות לעונש חלול השם אחד שוגג ואחד מזיד ועתה התבונן גודל חיובנו לקדש את יו והבדילהו להיות לו Mitzvos השם, כי עיקר מה שקדשנו השם יתברך בתורתנו וב לעם – כדי לקדשו וליראה ממנו, ראוי שיהיו מקדישיו קדושים, בשגם הכלים שעובדים בהם לפני השם יתברך צריכים להיות קדש, כמו שנאמר ולא תחללו את שם קדשי ונקדשי בתוך בני ישראל אני השם מקדשכם. שים לבך להבין, כי הענין שאמרנו מפורש במקרא הזה

*Our Sages said that the sin of Chillul HaShem is the greatest of transgressions ... And now reflect on how great is our obligation to sanctify G-d's name, for the main reason why G-d sanctified us with His Torah and Mitzvos to be a nation to him is in order to sanctify Him and to be in awe of Him....*

In fact, by keeping His Torah, we, the Jewish people, are called G-d's witnesses<sup>1</sup>. According to our Sages, the testimony we are giving is to His very existence<sup>2</sup>. It was for this reason that we were taken out of Egypt to become a nation and keep G-d's Torah<sup>3</sup>. This applies in particular to a *Gezeiras Shemad* when there is an attempt to wipe out the Jewish people or to get them not to keep His Torah.

1. Ordinarily, a person who is told, "Either you eat pork, or I will kill you" (and so with any Mitzvah other than the big three), is required to eat the pork and save his life. According to the Rambam he is required to sin, and is a sinner if he gives up his life<sup>4</sup>. For it is written וחי בהם that we are to live by the Mitzvos and not die for them. However, if he (and others) are threatened with death if they are caught keeping a particular Mitzvah (e.g. Shechita) (not during a גזירת שמד – see the next point below), and he tries to keep the Mitzvos without being caught, then, even though he risks his life, this is praiseworthy<sup>5</sup>.
1. However, if there is a גזירת שמד, even for the smallest observance or custom and even in private he should give his life. This is true even if the non-Jew is telling the Jew to transgress for his, the non-Jew's, own pleasure or benefit<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup>Rabbi Scheinman wrote the following article in The Jewish Observer, September, 1980, "Bikrovei Ekodesh": The Six Million "Kedoshim"

<sup>1</sup>ישעיה מג י: אתם עדי נאום ד'  
<sup>2</sup>פסיקתא דרב כהנא: אתם עדי נאום ד' ... כי אני הוא, לפני לא נוצר קל, ואחרי לא יהיה. תני ר' שמעון בר יוחאי: אם אתם עדי אני ראשון ואחרי לא יהיה, ואם אין אתם עדי כביכול אין אני ד'.  
<sup>3</sup>חינוך רצו: ולשון ספרי: על מנת כן הוצאתי אתכם מארץ מצרים שתקדישו את שמי ברבים.  
ובספרא, אמור, פ"ח פייסקא ו: על תנאי הוצאתי אתכם מארץ מצרים על תנאי שתמסרו עצמכם לקדש את שמי (אני ה' אשר הוצאתי אתכם מארץ מצרים להיות לכם לאלהים (ויקרא כ"ה ל"ח) על מנת שתקדשו שמי ברבים)  
<sup>4</sup>רמב"ם הל' יסודי התורה פ"ה הל' א: ואם מת ולא עבר הרי זה מתחייב בנפשו  
ושם הל' ד: כל מי שנאמר בו יעבור ואל ירוג ונהרג ולא עבר הרי זה מתחייב בנפשו  
<sup>5</sup>חז"ל הספר חמרא וחיי סנהדרין עד ע"ב ד"ה ומה שהקשה: ומה שהקשה שם הרב כסף משנה בסוף לשונו מההיא דרב חנינא בן תרדיון שמסר עצמו ללמוד תורה ודבי יהושוע בן לוי לסמוך זקנים ודברי המדרש מה לך יוצא ליטקל וכו' נראה דלא קשיא שהם לא היו מוסרים עצמם על מה דלא מחייבי גו'

<sup>6</sup>ספר חמרא וחיי על סנהדרין עד ע"א

2. However, during such a שמד, one does not have to risk one's life to observe a positive commandment<sup>1</sup>, though one may do so<sup>2</sup>. Thus the Tanna Elisha risked his life to wear tefillin at a time of שמד under the Romans<sup>3</sup>.
3. There is a special level of Kiddush HaSh-m which is called Kiddush HaSh-m BeRabim, when the Kiddush HaShem is done in front of ten Jews<sup>4</sup> or with the knowledge of ten Jews<sup>5</sup>. In fact, any time a Jew is being asked to publicly & purposefully desecrate Judaism, he is required to give up his life instead. This applies at all times and for any mitzvah<sup>6</sup>. If he does give up his life, he is considered holy and gets the world to come<sup>7</sup>. The Rambam states that these are the martyrs of the kingdom, whose stature is unmatched by any other<sup>8</sup>.
4. Although strictly speaking this concept of Berabim needs ten Jews and not non-Jews<sup>9</sup>, the concept also extends to acting as described above also in front of non-Jews<sup>10</sup>.
5. A person who is unwittingly the vehicle of Kiddush HaSh-m is still considered to have fulfilled the Mitzvah in all its glory. We learn this kind of "passive" *Kiddush Hashem* from G-d's declaration of "*Bikrovei Ekodesh*" in regard to Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu. Through suffering Divine retribution, they became instruments of Divine revelation. וידם אהרן: *And Aharon was silent*: "He found comfort in the *Kiddush Hashem* that resulted from their death<sup>11</sup>." (see below for lengthier discussion)
6. A person who is *Mechallel Hashem* is forgiven only through his death: He had lifted his hand audaciously, defying the existence of the Deity. Only when he himself crumbles into nothingness is a proper perspective restored.
7. One says "*Kaddish*" after the passing of a close relative, for an intimate encounter with death brings a person closer to the realization that this world was created by the Almighty and is ruled in accordance with His will. The surviving relative expresses verbally his humility before G-d's eternal sanctity. If this death can help others comprehend G-d's Omnipotence, it surely is a great *zechus* for the deceased<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> חידושי הרמב"ן, שבת מט.

<sup>2</sup> שם

<sup>3</sup> מסכת שבת מט עמ א

<sup>4</sup>הגמ' סנהדרין עד ע"ב לומד היקש של תוך תוךמהבדלו מתוך העדה הזאת לונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל. ועדה היא עשרה שנאמר עד מתי לעדה הרעה הזאת  
הל' יסודי התורה פ"ה הל' ד

<sup>5</sup>מאירי מובא בספרחמרא וחיי סנהדרין עד ע"א: שהרי אסתר נקראת בפרהסיא

<sup>6</sup>רמב"ם הל' יסודי התורה פ"ה הל' ב: אם נתכוון להעבירו על המצוות בלבד ... ואם אנסו להעבירו בשדה מישראל יהרג ועל יעבור

<sup>7</sup>ר' בחיי, ויקרא, כב לב: וכך דרשו רז"ל ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל מסור עצמן לקדש את שמי, יכול ביחיד, ת"ל ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל

<sup>8</sup>גפ כאן להנאת עצמו מותר לעבור שהרי הגמ' קורא לאסתר בפרהסיא ואומר שכיון שלהמאת אחשורוש היתה ולא להעבירה על דתה, היתה מותרת

<sup>9</sup> חינוך מצוה תקו: ולמדנו מזה שהמקדש שם שמים בגלוי זוכה לו ולדורותיו בעולם הזה, מלבד זכותו שקיימת לנפשו בעולם הבא:

<sup>10</sup>רמב"ם, הל' יסודי התורה, פ"ה הל' ד: וכל מי שנאמר בו יהרג ואל יעבור ונהרג ולא עבר הרי זה קידש את השם ואם היה בעשרה מישראל הרי זה קידש את השם ברבים כדניאל חנניה מישאל ועזריה ורבי עקיבא וחביריו ואלו הן הרוגי מלכות שאין מעלה על מעלתן.

<sup>11</sup>סנהדרין עד. וכמה פרהסיא אמר רבי יעקב אמר רבי יוחנן אין פרהסיא פחותה מעשרה בני אדם פשיטא ישראלים בעינן דכתיב ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל וכו' כתיב הכא ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל וכתיב התם הבדלו מתוך העדה הזאת מה להלן עשרה וכולהו ישראל אף כאן עשרה וכולהו ישראל

<sup>12</sup>ואע"פ שהחוב של קדוש ד' הוא בעצם לקדש את השם לפני עשרה ישראלים דווקא, מ"מ המושג של קדוש ד' וחלול ד' שייך לפני גוים ג"כ עיין רמב"ם הל' יסודי התורה פ"ה הל' יא בסוף ובפי"א מהל' גזילה ואבידה ובתוס ב"מ פז: ד"ה אלא ובשו"ע י"ד ס' רלב ס' יד וכן בגיטין מו. וברש"י סנהדרין כו: ד"ה אוכלי ובשאר מקומות. )

<sup>11</sup>Rabbi Scheinman, in The Jewish Observer, September, 1980, "*Bikrovei Ekodesh*": The Six Million "*Kedoshim*"

<sup>12</sup>Both examples were brought by Rabbi Scheinman, in The Jewish Observer, September, 1980, "*Bikrovei Ekodesh*": The Six Million "*Kedoshim*"

8. On the other hand, there is a countervailing Mitzvah to giving one's life and that is the command of פקוח נפש: (ויקרא יח ה: ושמרתם את חקתי ואת משפטי אשר יעשה אתם האדם וחי בהם אני ידוד darshened - וחי בה ולא שימות בהם - Therefore, where Kiddush HaSh-m by giving one's life is not required, the Rambam holds one is not allowed to give one's life. The Sdei Chemed<sup>2</sup> writes that a person should not put himself in a position that will lead to *Kiddush Hashem*, because that is not what God wants. This is why the Torah did not write explicitly about Avraham's experience in Ur Kasdim. Sanctity of life – וחי בהם – and Kiddush HaSh-m, are two overlapping concepts. וחי בהם refers not to survival as a basic biological need but to a struggle for survival based on recognition of the value of life in a Jewish or moral context ("live by *them*," i.e., the precepts of the Torah.")

### The Issue of Kiddush HaSh-m in the Holocaust.

There are two major issues of Kiddush HaSh-m in the Holocaust:

1. Was this a time of שמד or not?
2. Did the fact that the Jews did not choose their death, but were forcibly killed still allow their death to be an act of Kiddush HaSh-m?

#### 1. *Was this a time of שמד or not?*

Therefore, the question of whether the Holocaust was a time of שמד or a situation of פקוח נפש depends on the objective of the Nazi policy. If the Nazis' aim was to annihilate the Jewish people physically, then survival should have taken precedence over observing the commandments. But if the Nazis were also waging a spiritual struggle aimed at eradicating the Torah and Judaism, then it was a time of שמד<sup>3</sup>.

One of the earliest issues was the demand by the Nazis that animals had to be stunned (claiming that this was for humanitarian reasons) prior to Shechita. Although some rabbis were originally inclined to be Meikal for the sake of the sick and elderly (sofek pikuach nefesh), a consensus emerged that regarded a stunned animal as a *treifa*. The Sridei Aish (Rav Yechiel Wienberg) has an entire volume (vol. 1) of his own teshuvos and those of others, devoted to this issue.

Underlying the Halachik debate was, to a large extent, the question of whether the ban was a religious edict or a political one. Because its purpose was crucial to a Halachik decision, certain questions were asked: What was the nature of the Nazi regime? What was the aim of its edicts? Did it differ fundamentally from previous regimes? There were those who felt that this was not a religious edict (i.e. a גזירת שמד) but a general restriction designed to make Jewish life difficult, "just as they have dismissed the teachers and declared

<sup>1</sup> משאת המלך על ויקרא פרק יח פסוק ה: הנה למדו מקרא זו היתר פיקו"נ דכתיב וחי בה ולא שימות בהם. ונראה דהיתר פיקו"נ אינו לא מגדר דחיה ולא מגדר הותרה, אלא ה"ז על דרך עת לעשות לה' הפרו תורתך, שאמרה תורה ... שלצורך פיקו"נ מותר להפר תורה, ולכן תלי היתר בכוננתו:

<sup>2</sup> שדה חמד פאת השדה כללים א' ח' יח (ח"א צא)

<sup>3</sup> Esther Farbstein, *Hidden in Thunder*, pg/ 158

a boycott of Jewish merchants, all to distress them and to take away their livelihood. Similarly, the ban on kosher slaughter is only meant to distress us.” As proof he cited the fact that the Nazis were not forcing the Jews to eat forbidden meat. Furthermore, they had openly declared that they did not want the Jews to assimilate<sup>1</sup>. Others held that it was a time of *שמד*<sup>2</sup>. Finally Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski of Vilna, ruled stringently, primarily because he did not consider the issue a matter of life and death.

When the war broke out, the emerging consensus was that it was physical annihilation of the Jews that the Nazis were after, and the situation was dealt with as one of *פקוח נפש*, putting survival ahead of religious observance. However, this never became a sweeping generalization, and each case continued to be judged on its merits<sup>3</sup>. For example, even when non-kosher meat was permitted in Lodz, the people continued to adhere to prohibitions, customs (e.g. Chasidic dress), and positive commandments (e.g. Shabbat candles, Kiddush, Tefilin, and festivals). Moreover, the rabbis instructed people to minimize the violation. Therefore when Rabbi Yehoshua Moshe Aronson told those around him in Auschwitz to eat chametz on Pesach and non-kosher meat all year round in small quantities and with pauses<sup>4</sup>. So too, when the rabbinic board of the Lodz ghetto first allowed the eating of non-kosher meat<sup>5</sup>, it only permitted women who had just given birth, provided that they had a medical opinion stating that they needed it and weak people, each of whom had to have a personal rabbinic ruling<sup>6</sup>.

There were many who did not avail themselves of these heterim, even when they were made available. Thus, in the Kovno ghetto, Rabbi Kahane-Shapiro permitted the force laborers to eat non-kosher meat, but most of the Slobodka yeshiva students who were there (60-80 people) refused to eat meat the entire time they were in the ghetto<sup>7</sup>. Jews risked their lives to fast on Yom Kippur, put on Tefilin, eat matzah, dwell in a Sukkah, pray and avoid non-kosher food. For some this reflected their view that the Nazis intended the physical annihilation of the Jews to bring about their spiritual annihilation, and that this was indeed a time of *שמד*.<sup>8</sup>

*2. Did the fact that the Jews did not choose their death,  
but were forcibly killed still allow their death to be an act of  
Kiddush HaSh-m?*

Therefore in the Mishnah quoted above, R' Akiva is saying or means to say "Even in your suffering you can rejoice, O Israel! When you remember before whom you are being purified, then your physical sensations will be nullified, and you will not feel the pain<sup>9</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Yitzchak Unna of Mannheim in Sridei Aish 238 and Rabbi Ephraim Mei Lassman in Sridei Aish, 387, brought in Ester Farbstein, *Hidden in Thunder*, pgs. 159-160

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Amongst them, Rabbi Ze'ev Zvi Hahohen Klein of Berlin.

<sup>3</sup> Farbstein, pg. 160 – 161

<sup>4</sup> Farbstein, pg. 161

<sup>5</sup> February 23, 1941.

<sup>6</sup> Farbstein, pg. 168. Later on the dispensation was broadened.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. The Benei Akiva youth movement in Lodz refrained from eating meat for months after it was permitted.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 162 -163

<sup>9</sup> Shapira, *Sacred Fire*, 11-12

On various occasions in Jewish history, Jews have chosen to give up their lives rather than convert. But during the Holocaust they were not given the choice of whether to live or to die. There was no offer to save one's life by accepting another religion – Jews who had accepted Christianity were herded in the ghettos and camps together with all other Jews. A Jew could not choose to transgress and save his life<sup>1</sup>. Rabbi Aronson said that the question of whether this was called Kiddush HaSh-m troubled him incessantly “while I was still in the valley of deepest darkness in the Auschwitz and Buchanwald camps.”<sup>2</sup>

As the Michtav MeEleiyahyu 3:348 put it: “Many people have asked in amazement: What is gained by these deaths? If they had died because of an edict of apostasy and given their lives for the sanctity of God's name it would be something. These murderers however, did not insist on faith; they insisted on destroying, killing and annihilating believers and apostates alike and killing everyone for having been born Jewish. So what is the purpose of this? The people who were killed were not even given the opportunity to perform *Kiddush HaShem!* So why and wherefore?”

Rabbi Huberband quoted the answer that was to reflect the consensus: Kiddush HaSh-m depended on the killer's intent as much as on the victim's state of mind<sup>3</sup>.

As Rabbi Aaronson explained:

“But where the gentile has a quarrel with the word *Jew* and the very concept of Judaism is what bothers him, the Jew's death is called *Kiddush Hashem*, even if the gentile does not force him to transgress his religion. Since all the nations of the world know with certainty that the Jews are God's people, their harassment and hatred of this nation is solely because of this .... It is therefore clear to me that the deaths of the Jews who were killed in all sorts of strange ways merely for being Jewish were cases of *Kiddush Hashem*, because they were killed for being members of the chosen people, who have a relationship with G-d<sup>4</sup>.”

According to the Agudas Israel underground newspaper in Warsaw: Amalek is concerned not so much with the Jews as with Judaism: the Jewish outlook, the Jewish worldview, the Jewish sense of honesty, the Jewish sense of justice, the Jewish attitude toward the indigent and the deprived ....<sup>5</sup>

It was not only the Rabbis who recognized the Nazi intent. Chaim Kaplan, a Zionist teacher, wrote in his diary:

The Nazis want to eradicate worldwide Judaism .... The spiritual essence of Judaism is the antithesis to the spirit of Nazism. .... Between these two adversaries there can be no compromise<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dworzecki, *Day-to-Day Stand*, pg. 377.

<sup>2</sup> R Aaronson, *Alie Meroros*, 305.

<sup>3</sup> Huberband, *Kiddush Hashem*, 247. He quotes the Rambam: “Maimonides rules that if a Jew is killed, even without any overt attempt to make him abandon the Jewish faith, but because he is a Jew, he is considered a martyr.” However, this Rambam does not appear to exist. Nevertheless, the argument itself has many supporters.

<sup>4</sup> R Aaronson, *Alie Meroros*, 306

Mordecai Lensky, too, explained:

*If a Jew is found slain on the road, he is called a kadosh because he was killed for being Jewish. This is how Maimonides ruled. Accordingly, the essence of holiness is dying due to one's Jewishness. A Jew can thus attain the crown of holiness without being put to a test.* (Lensky, *Heyyei haYehudim*, 209.)

<sup>5</sup> *A Kol in der Midber*, in Kermish, *Itonut ha-Mahteret ha-Yehudit*, 5:221

<sup>6</sup> Kaplam, *Megilat Yesurin*, 173

Rav Arele Rabin of Lanowce was taken with his community to the cemetery dressed in a kittel, stating: *Such a death is Kiddush Hash-m because our only sin is that we are Jewish.* (Rabin, Kanovits, 99)

What all these commentators are saying is that it is not only one's choice to die that constitutes Kiddush HaShem. Even if one is forced to die, without choice, the reason one is being killed – because one is Jewish – also comprises Kiddush HaShem. This would apply to religious and secular Jews alike. (Similarly, a soldier in the Israeli army who dies defending his fellow-Jews has committed an act of Kiddush HaShem<sup>1</sup>.)

Thus the Rambam, in his Igeres on Kiddush HaShe-m, wrote:

“Someone who is privileged by G-d to rise to such a high level, i.e. to be killed for the sake of Kiddush Hashem, even if his sins are like those of Yerovam ben Nevat and his friends, belongs to the world to come, whether or not he was a Torah scholar. As they said, “no one can attain the place in which those killed by the state stand ... These are the *Kedoshim* of Lydda.(who gave their lives to save the community).”

However, it would seem that as much as these Jews may not have chosen to die, their attitude to their death is significant. They have to appreciate and affirm to themselves that they are dying as Jews<sup>2</sup>, or at least they should not be rejecting their Jewishness at the point of their death. As Rav Dessler (*Michtav Meleiyahu*, 3:348) explained: “The point was not to have an ordeal of apostasy and not to sanctify G-d’s name in the eyes of the nations. .... The ordeal was to see who ..... would sanctify G-d’s name within his own heart and turn wholeheartedly to G-d.”

Because of this, many Jews wanted to be prepared for what they knew was going to be their ultimately and untimely death. The Gemorrah tells us who R' Akiva, who himself was martyred for the sanctification of G-d's Name, prepared himself his entire life for this event.

In the summer of 1941, amidst starvation and extremely high mortality in the ghetto, the Piasezner Rebbe addressed the question that R' Akiva's disciples had asked their teacher:

We are forced to conclude that when the students asked "Our Teacher, thus far?" they were not referring to the matter of R' Akiva's death at all... The students were watching him submit to the yoke of heavenly dominion... They were not asking him a question at all, but were wondering aloud how it was possible for R' Akiva to concentrate on reciting the Shema, accept upon himself the yoke of heaven, and meditate on the word "One" in the midst of such agony, whilst his flesh was being raked with iron combs.

He answered them, "All my days I have been at pains over this verse in the Shema... 'When will I ever have the opportunity of fulfilling it properly?' I asked myself... 'R' Akiva was saying, "Not only did I desire to fulfill this commandment properly, I was also in pain at being unable to fulfill it." Therefore, "it was both my desire and my pain that brought down

---

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Haberland ventured this definition of Kiddush HaShem: “A Jew gives his life to save a fellow Jew, and even more so-to save a group of Jews. .... A Jew dies while fighting to defend other Jews.”

<sup>2</sup> There are those who have attempted to take this logic further, saying that how one went to one’s death, given the elements of choice that were evident at the time, such as walking upright, maintaining one’s faith and singing songs that reflect values, would determine whether this was an act of Kiddush HaShem or not. Perforce, use of such logic would significantly limit the number of *Kedoshim*. However, the logic need not be extended thus far. As long as one was aware that one was being killed as a Jew, and one did not reject this fact, (which is not the same as saying one fully embraced it), it would seem to be sufficient to gain status as a *Kadosh*.

so much Divine Light that even under torture I am not disconcerted. I am able to don the yoke of heavenly dominion while concentrating and meditating."<sup>1</sup>

On another occasion, the Rebbe continued: If only people would bear in mind that it is not because we robbed or did anything wrong to anyone that we are being persecuted, but because we are Jews – children of Israel, bound to G-d and to his holy Torah<sup>2</sup>. ... But because we tend to feel only our physical pain and not the spiritual pain, and because we fail to remind ourselves that what we are enduring is actually a war upon G-d and His Torah, therefore, there are certain individuals who experience a weakening of their faith.<sup>3</sup>

Rabbi Elisha Horowitz, a dayan and head of the yeshiva in Dej, Transylvania, made the following public announcement. "I hereby make a 'declaration' that I will not deviate from my faith in G-d even if I am tortured terribly and am not in control of my words and thoughts."<sup>4</sup> In his last letter to his family, Shmuel Yehuda Grigott of Hungary wrote:

The Bystrica jail. I was caught here on Monday of the Torah portion Vayetze. Now, if the good Lord wants me to be among the millions who have been killed and slaughtered and have given their lives for the sake of kiddush Hashem, I accept it with love. I hereby make a declaration that I am a Jew who believes in the Divine salvation, and all my notions and bad thoughts that go against this declaration are null and void, invalid and non-existent. I have no prayer book or collection of pages with which to recite the whole Al Het confession; instead I am saying what has entered my mind. Remember me, and may (my statement) find favor as if I had said it in all its minute details and with the intentions that the upright Jews had.<sup>5</sup>

The Jews of Dzialoszyce went to their deaths after a three-day fast, prayer and confession. At dawn on the third day of fasting and repentance, all the Jews of Dzialoszyce assembled at the old beit midrash – they, their wives, and their children – dressed in Shabbat clothes covered with kittels as if it were Yom Kippur, and recited the Neilah prayer: "You

---

<sup>1</sup> Shapira, *Sacred Fire*, 205-206

<sup>2</sup> R' Akiva's conversation with his disciples also formed the basis for a sermon the Piasezner Rebbe gave in late 1941, when death, starvation and illness were felling many Jews:

This can be explained in a way that teaches us something about our own plight. The terrible tortures R' Akiva endured caused such great suffering in his disciples that he was provoked to ask the same question that was asked by Moses when he was shown this same event (Talmud Menachoth 29b): "Is this the Torah and this its reward?" The disciples were afraid that they might have doubts, however fleeting, as a result of their emotional and visceral response, and that their faith might be damaged. They wanted their teacher, who was so powerful in his faith, to speak of his belief, so that his faith might inundate them. When they asked, "Our Rabbi, thus far?" they were saying, "Can you be our teacher thus far, even into the circumstances of this terrible death?" Perhaps they did not articulate their question fully, or make it more specific, but merely hinted at it in order to avoid invoking the response that the Talmud says had already been given to Moses: "Be silent."

R' Akiva understood that that the students were not questioning G-d but rather begging him to bestow upon them some of his faith, and so he told them something about himself and his own aspirations to faith: "All my life I was in pain over this verse... Right now I have the opportunity to love G-d with all my soul. Should I not grasp it?"

The disciples' question echoed the questions being voiced in the ghetto. The Rebbe saw himself as having R' Akiva's job: to bestow on them some of his faith, and so he told them something about himself and his own aspirations to faith: "All my life I was in pain over this verse... Right now I have the opportunity to love G-d with all my soul. Should I not grasp it?"

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 252-253.

<sup>4</sup> Fuchs. *Ha-Shoah bi-Mekorot Rabbaniyim*, 348

<sup>5</sup> Written on Nov. 20 1944, in the jail of Bystrica, Slovakia. See Kuhl collection, Yad Vashem Archives, 048/57-1.



have given a hand to sinners and Your right hand is outstretched to accept those who repent." They recited the confession publicly: "We have sinned, we have betrayed...." Finally, they blew the shofar and cried out loud, "The Lord is G-d." When the heartrending service ended, it was almost time to report to the market square. Silence prevailed in the beit midrash, a dreadful, lofty silence. Again the old dayan roused himself, approached the ark to say goodbye to the old beit midrash – where for generations upon generations Jews had forged the chain of the Torah – and declared, "Dear Jews, children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! Our days of repentance were only preparation for the holy, awesome day of judgment that has come upon us. With the consent of G-d, with the consent of our entire holy community, and with the consent of all the generations that have preceded us, we swear to strengthen ourselves and increase our holy faith until our last breath! May it be His will that, through the merit of our forefathers and through the merit of the schoolchildren, we can return our souls on the word ehad: Hear O Israel, the Lord is our G-d, the Lord is One!"<sup>1</sup>

When the Boyaner Rebbe, Rabbi Moshenyu Friedmann, arrived in Auschwitz on Passover 1944, he spoke about the eternity of the Jewish people and about future revenge. His remarks were documented by Sonderkommando members in Auschwitz in their diaries:

He undressed along with everyone else. He then addressed the Oberscharfuhrer; holding onto the lapel of his coat, he spoke to him in German: "You, cruel murderers, human scum, do not think that you will succeed in destroying the Jewish people. The Jewish people will last forever and will not vanish from the stage of history. But you, despicable murderers, will reap your own rewards. For every Jew killed, ten Germans will fall. You will be wiped out and will disappear, not only as a power, but as a people. The day of revenge and reprisal is at hand. The innocent blood you have spilled will be demanded of you; our blood will not rest until the blazing and extinguishing wrath is poured out upon you and destroys your animal blood." He spoke with great emotion and great strength. Then, when he had finished, he put on his hat and in great excitement called out "Shema Israel," and all the Jews faithfully responded with him "Shema Israel" out of a sense of profound faith which had surrendered them all in the last moments of their lives. It was a moment of supreme elevation, such as may be encountered but once in a lifetime, proving the eternal nature of Jewish spiritual resistance.<sup>2</sup>

## **Kiddush Hashem – In Death**

During the Holocaust, Rabbis and leaders prepared themselves and their followers for the need to die in an act of Kiddush HaSh-m by studying the issue with their students. This happened in the Warsaw Ghetto with Rabbi Menachem Zemba. In the Wieruszow ghetto, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Eibeshutz, Rabbi Carlebach of Hamburg, taken with some of his community to a camp in Riga would tell people to be constantly ready to perform Kiddush Hash-m. Just before deportation from Sanniki, Rabbi Aronson delivered a sermon on the subject. When Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman was taken with rabbis and students from the Kovno ghetto to the Ninth Fort on July, 6, 1941, he spoke of the importance of intent at the time of death, telling his listeners that they should be careful not to have a thought that would disqualify their offering. The Piaseczner Rebbe, in his Shabbas Shuva Droscha, on October 1939 said: R Akiba said, "Lucky are you Israel! Before whom are you being purified.

<sup>1</sup> Shahar, "Yehudei Dzaloshits."

<sup>2</sup> Mark, *Scrolls of Auschwitz*, 208. See also Gurman, *Anashim va-Efer*, 351-355.

Besides the two major issues that we dealt with above, there were many other issues having to do with death and deportations to death in the ghettos and camps. We will consider a few of the most pertinent here:

1. *Was there a preferred way to go to one's death? Other than the Kiddush HaSh-m of the death itself, was there a way, moments before death that would maximize the Kiddish HaSh-m?*
2. *What to do about someone (a child crying in a bunker for example) who was endangering the lives of others?*
3. *How to respond to requests to hand over people (or lists of people) or a greater number would be killed.*
4. *Was it permissible to save one's life at the expense of another?*
5. *Was it permissible to commit suicide rather being killed or under other circumstances?*

**1. Was there a preferred way to go to one's death? Other than the Kiddush HaSh-m of the death itself, was there a way, moments before death that would maximize the Kiddish HaSh-m?**

Toward the end, Reb Avrohom Grodjensky, Mashgiach of Slabodka, and Reb Elchonon Wasserman, were in the same ghetto together with their students. The execution date had arrived and they spent their last hours together. Rav Grodjensky asked Rabbi Wasserman to deliver a talmudic discourse on "Kiddush Hashem" the commandment to sanctify the Name of G-d in death. Rabbi Wasserman was surprised at first, but he acceded to the request. When he was finished, Rabbi Grodjensky delivered his last "mussar" (ethics) discourse, and the group surrendered their souls from a spiritual summit far above Nazi ability to profane.

Reb Elchonon Wasserman's last moments have been recorded by an eye witness, Rabbi Efraim Oschry of New York:

*"In heaven they seem to consider us great tzaddikim, for it seems that we have been chosen to atone with our bodies for Klal Yisroel. If so, we must repent, sincerely and fully, now, on the spot. Time is short. We must realize that our sacrifice will be a more perfect one if we hallow ourselves. In that way we will save the lives of our brothers and sisters in America. Let none of us think an impure thought which would render us unfit as a korban. We are now able to fulfill the greatest of mitzvos... 'You scorched her with fire and with fire You are destined to rebuild her.' The very fires that consume our bodies are the fires that will rebuild the Jewish nation<sup>1</sup>."*

---

1

A slightly different and embellished version of the events and Rav Elchonon's speech is recorded by Rabbi Oshry, in *Hurban Lita* (New York, 1952): On the eleventh of Tamuz, 5701 (July 6, 1941), he was sitting with a group of rabbis and *roshei yeshivah*, great Torah scholars, who were gathered in the Kovno ghetto, giving a *she'ur* in the tractate *Niddah*. All present were so deeply engrossed in the subject matter that they did not react for a moment when a band of Lithuanian fascists broke into the room. The Lithuanians were enraged and began to fire their rifles; then the rabbis rose from their places, trembling. One of the Lithuanians taunted

Rabbi Oshry concludes: “And so they marched proudly to their death, thirteen of the great sages of Israel with Rabbi

## **2. What to do about someone (a child crying in a bunker for example) who was endangering the lives of others?**

There were several halachik issues dealing with saving lives at the expense of another. Once, in one of the camps, there were many Jews who were hiding in a bunker. During one of the Nazi searches, a child in the bunker began to cry. Someone put a pillow over his mouth and it later emerged that the child had been smothered. Rabbi Shim Ehprathi (מגיא ההריגה) relates that a similar case happened in his family, where his brother R Yitzchak Zevi Ephrati prohibited the placing of a pillow over a child to quiet it. In the end the members of his family were discovered and were led to be executed. On the way they chanted, “ואעי”פ, “... שיתמהמה אחכה לו”.

## **3. How to respond to requests to hand over people (or lists of people) or a greater number would be killed.**

One repeated issue was the request to hand over people or a greater number would be killed. There was often a fine line between הצלה where everything needs to be done, and מסירה, which is one of the most serious of crimes. As the Rambam wrote:

*If gentiles say to them, ‘Give us one of you we will kill him, or else we will kill of of you,’ they should all let themselves be killed rather than hand over one Jew<sup>1</sup>.’*

When it comes to saving lives, one can choose to save a Sage, for example, over someone else. But when it comes to handing over someone to be killed, no choice of this sort can be made. Rav Kook explained: “The inner worth of individuals is invisible to the human

---

them, ‘You were organizing a revolt in order to go to Israel. But we caught you! You will not escape! Come with us!’ They were lined up ready to be marched away when Rabbi Wasserman turned to his fellow prisoners and said, in his quiet and tranquil voice, ‘It appears that in Heaven they view us as *tzaddikim* [righteous men] worthy to atone with our lives for the people of Israel. We must, therefore, immediately repent here and now, for the time is short and the Ninth Fort [the place for execution] is near. We must remember that we will in truth be *mekadeshei ha-shem*, those who sanctify God’s name. Let us therefore go with heads erect, let us, God forbid, have no unworthy thoughts, which like *pigul*, unfit intention, in the case of a sacrifice rendered it invalid. We are now about to fulfill the greatest commandment- that of *kiddush ha-shem*. The fire which will destroy us is the flame out of which the Jewish people will be rebuilt.” Rabbi Oshry concludes: “And so they marched proudly to their death, thirteen of the great sages of Israel with Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman at their head. That day they were slain in the Ninth Fort.”

<sup>1</sup> רמב"ם, הל' יסודי התורה ה' ה (על פי הירושלמי תורמות ח י והתוספתא תרומות ז כ וד"ל הרמב"ם: נשים שאמרו להם עובדי כוכבים תנו לנו אחת מכן ונטמא אותה ואם לאו נטמא את כולכן יטמאו כולן ואל ימסרו להם נפש אחת מישראל וכן אם אמרו להם עובדי כוכבים תנו לנו אחד מכם ונהרגנו ואם לאו נהרוג כולכם יהרגו כולם ואל ימסרו להם נפש אחת מישראל ואם יחדוהו להם ואמרו תנו לנו פלוני או נהרוג את כולכם אם היה מחוייב מיתה כשבע בן בכרי יתנו אותו להם ואין מורין להם כן לכתחלה ואם אינו חייב מיתה יהרגו כולן ואל ימסרו להם נפש אחת מישראל:

eye. One person may be worth as much as six hundred thousand people, and even if he is not worthy, his descendents might be important and equal in worth to many others<sup>1</sup>.”

Hence the Rabbis of the Vilna ghetto warned the head of the *Judenrat* not to hand over Jews to the authorities. Gens ignored them, deciding to transport the old people, deciding, in effect, who would live and who would die. The Rabbis in Levov (Lwow) did a similar thing. The head of the *Judenrat*, Dr. Hendryk Landsberg turned angry and burst out: “you gentlemen appear to believe we live in pre-war times and you come to the chairman of a religious *kehilla*. Let me tell you, the times have changed completely. We are no longer a religious community, but an instrument to carry out the orders of the Gestapo.”<sup>2</sup>

But, things were not always so simple. In October, 1941, the Gestapo ordered the Jewish Council of Elders to assemble the entire ghetto. The Council knew that those who would be considered unfit for work would be liquidated. On the other hand, refusal to obey the orders might lead to liquidation of the whole ghetto. The question was put to Rabbi Avraham Dov Shaprio. The rabbi (who later died in the Ghetto) fainted on hearing the report. The following morning, he ruled that they had to fulfill the order, for it was not the Jews themselves who were making the selection, they were merely assembling the people. Of the 26,400 Jews who assembled, only 17,400 returned home that evening.

Several other cases where the rabbis actually agreed to a selection involved their belief that this was for forced labor and not for death. It was in any case very difficult to know for sure that the death camps even existed and life in the ghetto itself was often seen as to hold no prospect for life. Despite this lack of certainty, Rabbi Aaronson ruled for the *Judenraat* in Konin that they should rather let themselves be killed than hand over one Jew. “and from then on the leaders of the Jews in our camp resolved not to provide any list; they could take [people] on their own.”<sup>3</sup>

In the Tsanz ghetto, the Eichensteins, rabbis from the Zydaczow dynasty, were taken by the Nazis as hostages until a certain refugee in the ghetto be handed to them, the Rebbe and his sons refused to tell the people to comply and they paid with their lives<sup>4</sup>.

On the other hand, the rabbi of Kovno, Rabbi Avraham Dov-Ber Kahane-Shapiro allowed the head of the *Judenrat* to hand out 5,000 ‘white papers’ allowing “productive” people – skilled tradesmen – to stay in the ghetto while the others would probably be deported to their death, because this was an act of *hatzala* and not *mesira*<sup>5</sup>.

#### 4. Was it permissible to save one’s life at the expense of another?

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Meisels, שער מחמדים in מקדשי ד: In Auschwitz, a father bribed one of the Kapos to release his son who had been selected for the crematoriums because he was below 18 and did not reach the right height. (It was Erev Rosh Hashana!) However, before freeing the boy they seized another boy, because they had to hand over an exact number to the S.S. that evening. However, there were many people who given the same opportunity, would not redeem their own children at the expense of ones own, for, as the Talmud (Pesachim 25b) states, one should not save ones own life at the expense of another as perhaps the latter’s life is more valuable than one’s own.

---

<sup>1</sup> משפטי כהן קמב

<sup>2</sup> Esther Farbstein, pgs. 189-192

<sup>3</sup> Aaronson, *Alei Merivot*, 227, in Farbstein, pg. 198.

<sup>4</sup> Farbstein, pg. 205

<sup>5</sup> Farbstein, pg. 201.

Rabbi Meisels himself was asked a similar question by one who appeared to be an unlearned Jew. He writes: “When I heard that question trembling took hold of me. I had been asked to decide a matter involving life and death. I replied: “:My dear friend, how can I, in my position, give you a clear decision on this question seeing that even in the time when the Temple was standing a question concerning capital cases had to be brought in front of the Sanhedrin. I am here in Aushwitz without any books any *halacha*, without any other rabbis, without peace of mind, ...” However, the father persisted in asking, finally concluding: Rabbi I have done what the Torahs commands me to do , i.e. to ask a rabbi for a decision and there is no other rabbi here whom I could consult. IF you can give me no reply whether or not I may redeem my child, it appears you yourself are not sure that I may do so, for were it certainly permitted you would have told me so. I therefore take it for granted that according to the halacha I may not do so. This is sufficient for me. For that reason my only child will be burned according to the Torah and halachah. I accept this with love and joy. ....” All day Rosh Hashanah he walked about happy, repeating to himself that he had the merit to offer his only son to G-d.

In Sosnowitz, Moshe Merin wanted the Jewish Council to make up a list of a thousand Jews to be handed over for deportation. When the *Rav* of the community, Rabbi Yeshaya Englard, blocked him in this, Merin made up the list himself and in revenge, put Rabbi Englard and his family on it. At the last moment, he apparently reconsidered and offered to take Rabbi Englard off the train. But the *Rav* asked whether he would substitute others in his place and, upon receiving a positive reply, insisted on going to his death<sup>1</sup>.

Rabbi Leon Ansbacher, who was in the Vurs camp in southern France, attests that request to remove names from the lists were the hardest trials in his life, and he heard the same from other rabbis. Although the lists were made up by the French command, people would come to him in tears to try to have their names removed from the lists of people to be transported from Gurs. “It was the cruelest and worst thing in my life. Not save him? How could I do that? Save him? But then someone else would go in his place. How could I do that? It was the most horrible of the horrible.” Despite the dreadful tragedies occurring before his eyes, he decided not to save these people because he knew that others would be taken in their stead, unless someone volunteered to go. The decision was especially hard when a list included people who did not fit the criteria and who ostensibly had the right to be released, or when the rabbi’s family members were on the list. In his testimony, Rabbi Ansbacher describes an agonizing personal experience, when a girl who was his ward- and for whom he considered himself responsible – was taken. He believes that Rabbi Rene Hirschler did the same, as did other rabbis , because taking names of the lists was halachikally forbidden<sup>2</sup>.

Rabbi David Kahane of Levov, was in the Janowski labor camp, where he performed brutal forced labor. One day, he received a note from his wife telling him that the Uniate Catholic metropolitan Szeptyckyj was offering him refuge and he could escape without fear. He termed this note “a burning flame”. In his memoirs he wrote:

*The note meant life, whereas each day in the camp meant death. Everyone of us wanted so much to live, to live at any price, to live as a free man and see Hitler’s defeat.*

*I can hardly find the words to describe the inner struggle that raged in my heart on the cold winter morning during the roll call. I think that without having gone through the experience of a forced labor camp, one simply cannot understand this inner life-and-death*

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Rabbi Joseph Elias in The Jewish Observer, October 1977, *Dealing With “Churban Europa”*.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Leo Ansbacher, testimony Yad Vashem Archives, 033c/112, esp pp. 17-20 in Farbstein, pg 199.

struggle. To me it seemed then that in my hand I was holding a burning flame and not a written note from my wife. And I decided to let the opportunity pass. I did not even tell my friends about it. I knew full well that for every escaped prisoner four or five other Jews would be shot at the next roll call. ... So I stayed on. "Why should you regard your blood as more red ... than the blood of others and your life as more worthy than the life of others? Perhaps the opposite is true?"<sup>1</sup>

## 5. Was it permissible to commit suicide rather being killed or under other circumstances?

Judaism forbids suicide (מאבד את עצמו לדעת). The Gemorrah learns this from את ארן י (מאבד את עצמו לדעת).<sup>2</sup> We do not mourn for such a person<sup>3</sup> and his grave is separated from the others and placed at the edge of the cemetery<sup>4</sup>. However, Shaul Hamelech committed suicide and was not condemned for this<sup>5</sup>.

Rabbi Oshry writes that on October 27, 1941, two days before the great slaughter of the Jews of the Kovno ghetto, he was approached by the head of one of the distinguished Jewish families of the city with a *she'elah*. Ten thousand men, women and children of the ghetto had already been taken away in preparation for the slaughter. The householder declared to Rabbi Oshry that he was convinced that the sadistic SS troopers would not simply kill him when he was taken, but would first torture and slay his wife, children and grandchildren before his eyes. He did not believe he would be able to withstand such torture; his heart would certainly fail him and he would surely die. His *she'elah*, then, was: "Is it permissible to hasten his end, to set his own hand against himself, even though it not be lawful." This was a more difficult question than the one of whether someone, who once he committed suicide, can nevertheless be given full burial honors and mourning rites. Here the question was whether the suicide itself could be permitted, or at least on prohibited.

One who is afraid that he will be forced to abandon Judaism and violate its commandments, and therefore kills himself, is not denied any burial or mourning rites. This, says the Ritva, was the reason that during the persecutions of the Crusades, fathers

<sup>1</sup> Kehane, Levov Ghetto Diary, 127-8 in Farbstein, 223-4.

<sup>2</sup> בבא קמא צא עמ' ב: אין אדם רשאי לחבל בעצמו אילימא האי תנא הוא דתניא ואך את דמכם לנפשותיכם אדרש רבי אלעזר אומר מיד נפשותיכם אדרש את דמכם ודלמא קטלא שאני

<sup>3</sup> רמב"ם הל' אבילות פ"א הל' יא שו"ע יו"ד שמה א

ומקור הדברים במסכת שמחות ב: (א) המאבד עצמו לדעת אין מתעסקין עמו בכל דבר רבי ישמעאל אומר קורין עליו הוי נטלה הוי נטלה א"ל ר"ע הנח לו בסתמו אל תכבדהו ואל תקללהו אין קורעין עליו ואין חולצין עליו ולא מספידין עליו אבל עומדין עליו בשורה ואומרין עליו ברכת אבליים מפני שהוא כבוד חיים כללו של דבר כל שהוא כבוד של חיים מתעסקין בו כל שאין כבוד של חיים אין הרבים מתעסקין עמו לכל דבר: (ב) איזהו המאבד עצמו לדעת לא שעלה בראש האילן ונפל ומת בראש הגג ונפל ומת אלא זה שאמר הריני עולה לראש הגג או לראש האילן ואפילו עצמי ואמות ורואין אותו שעלה לראש האילן ונפל ומת הרי זה בחזקת המאבד את עצמו בדעת וכל המאבד את עצמו לדעת אין מתעסקין עמו בכל דבר: (ג) מצאהו חנוק ותלוי באילן הרוג ומושלך על גבי הסייף הרי זה בחזקת המאבד את עצמו שלא בדעת ואין מונעין הימנו כל דבר: (ד) מעשה בבנו של גורנוס בלוד שברח מבית הספר והראה לו אביו באזנו ונתירא מאביו והלך ואבד עצמו בבגד ובאו ושאלו את רבי טרפון ואמר אין מונעין הימנו כל דבר:

<sup>4</sup> שו"ת הרשב"א, תשסג

<sup>5</sup> שמואל א לא ג) ותכבד המלחמה אף שאול וימצאנהו המורים אגנשים בקשת ויחל מאד מהמורים: (ד) ויאמר שאול לנשא כליו שלף חרבך ודקרני בה פן יבואו הערלים האלה ודקרני והתעללו בי ולא אבה נשא כליו כי ירא מאד ויקח שאול את החרב ויפל עליה: (ה) וירא נשא כליו כי מת שאול ויפל גם הוא על חרבו וימת עמו:

slaughtered their children with their own hands<sup>1</sup>. Some say that this is why Shaul HaMelech committed suicide (and not because he was afraid of being tortured per se)<sup>2</sup>.

However, Rabbi Oshry decided according to those, including the Rambam, who held that Shaul's suicide was because he was fearful of being made sport of - demeaned, degraded or tortured – by the Philistines. Similarly, the Yalkut Shimoni says that King Zedekiah sought death rather than see his sons slain<sup>3</sup>. He therefore permitted this in this case in Kovno as well, provided that the person was a G-d-fearing person and provided that his decision is not widely publicized. The Nazis often taunted the Jews of Kovno for not committing suicide as did so many of the Jews of Berlin. Such mass suicides would be a desecration of G-d's name, for it would indicate that the Jews had no trust in the mercy of G-d, who would rescue them from the impure and cursed hands of the Nazis. This would then fulfill the wish of the murderers, whose goal was to infuse the Jews with a spirit of despair and to extinguish within them any spark of hope for G-d's salvation. In fact, in the entire ghetto of Kovno, there were only three cases of suicide. Only in the last week, when it became known for certain that the ghetto and its labor camps were to be destroyed and the remaining Jews transported to Germany-there almost certainly to be slaughtered-only then did the number of suicides in the ghetto increase. But even that week, the number was relatively small.<sup>4</sup>

In his Warsaw diary, Chaim Kaplan notes this phenomenon of low suicide as a general characteristic of Polish Jewry, coming from a certain hidden power, rooted in our eternal tradition that commands us to live. This was in contrast to the more cultured and wealthier German and Austrian Jews, where entire families and thousands of Jews wiped themselves out<sup>5</sup>.

## Chagim

On Friday, March 2, 1945 we reached Mauthausen... in those last few difficult weeks that we spent in the concentration camp, some of us worked in the unloading of cars of grain for the warehouse. A number of times, our small group succeeded in taking a little bit of wheat from the warehouse. The religious Jews among us gave up their bread rations in exchange for that wheat. In this fashion they accumulated a small quantity of wheat for *Pesah*. They crushed the grains of wheat with a hammer into a kind of flour. This they baked into *matzot* and so, some tens of Jews were able to conduct the two *sedarim*.

Late at night, when the guards had left our block, several tables were set up in the washing room. We lit two candles, each participant received one small *matzoh*. One of us began reciting the Haggadah in tremulous voice, the rest repeated it after him weeping, their voices choked with sobs. Thus did a small group of Jews, in the shadow of death, conduct the two *sedarim* in the Mauthausen concentration camp.

Rabbi Samson Stockhamer, one of the well-known rabbis of Warsaw, was taken, after the loss of his entire family, to a work camp in the south of Germany. An eyewitness describes how:

---

<sup>1</sup> ריטב"א, מס' עבודה זרה, פ"א בשם רבינו תם.

<sup>2</sup> בדיק הבית קנו, ים של שלמה, בבא קמא נט

<sup>3</sup> ילקוט מלכים ב, פ' כה

<sup>4</sup> The paragraphs above are from Irving Rosenblum's *The Holocaust and Halakah*, pgs. 35 – 40. The final observation was made by Leib Garfunkel, a member of the *Aeltestenrat*.

<sup>5</sup> Rosenblum, *ibid*, pg 41.

On the Festival of Passover, 5705, the last Passover of his life, he refused to eat any *hametz*. I knew that this abstention from *hametz* was tantamount to fasting for eight days. It would lead to complete weakening of his strength and endanger his life. I tried to persuade him to eat something because of *pikuah nefesh*, the saving of life. I said to him, "this is not one of the sins which is in the category of *yehorag ve-al ya'avur*, where one must sacrifice his life rather than violate the commandment." He replied, "I know the law. But I have another very important reason. There are 2,500 Jews in this camp. It is only right that at least one of them should refrain from eating *hametz*. If you know of another one who lets no *hametz* pass his lips, then I will think the matter over. But I doubt if such a person is to be found. Therefore, the obligation rests upon me to be the one Jew out of 2,500 who observes the prohibition of *hametz* on *Pesah*. I fulfill this obligation joyously and with love." Indeed, no food entered his mouth all eight days of Passover, except for a little water. It was indeed miraculous to see how his powerful will overcame the weakness of his body and how he continued to work at the forced labor together with his fellows..."

Rabbi Joshua Greenwald tells of his concentration-camp experiences:

I learned that one of the inmates had a *siddur*. I went to him secretly with a bit of paper that I had found... I copied the *shemoneh esreh* of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. On Rosh Hashana we prayed in one of the blocks without the Germans finding out. I recited the *shemoneh esreh* from my handwritten copy, and the rest of the prisoners, about two thousand men, repeated it after me quietly amidst tears and sighs and sobs. We had barely finished the prayers when we were compelled to go out to that day's forced-labor task... On the eve of Yom Kippur, at sunset time, the Germans took us out for an "inspection." Knowing that it was a holy day, they kept us there until it was dark so we were not able to eat the morsel of bread which we had hidden and put aside to prepare for the fast... we were worried that we would not be able, God forbid, to fast and to fulfill the *mitzvah* of the day properly. Kol Nidre night we prayed in the same place as we had on Rosh Hashanah. However, on Yom Kippur morning we were unable to finish. In the middle of *Shemoneh Esreh*, the murderers broke in, their weapons drawn. We tried to run away in different directions, but not everyone was able to escape. Those who were caught were beaten murderously. *Ne'ilah* we were able to pray in hidden spots without any disruption... After Yom Kippur our hearts were overjoyed that we had had the merit of fulfilling the commandment of fasting... At the time I really understood what *kiddush ha-shem* was... As I observed the sacrificial spirit of even Jews who had been irreligious in the past trying now to fulfill the commandments of God and rejoicing in fulfilling the will of their Creator...

... The fourteen hundred boys who had been condemned to be sent to the crematorium and were locked up in one of the blocks learned that I had a *shofar*. They began to cry out and plead bitterly that I should enter their block and sound the one hundred blasts for them in order that they should have the precious *mitzvah* of *shofar* in their last moments. I did not know what to do. For it was a very dangerous situation. If the Nazis should come suddenly and find me among them, there was no doubt that they would take me to the crematorium... the lads cried out bitterly, "*Rebbe, rebbe*, come, for God's sake; have pity on us; let us have the merit of this *mitzvah*, in our last moments." The entreaties of the boys did not allow me to rest... I decided not to turn them away empty-handed. I began to bargain immediately with the *kapos*. After many entreaties and for a substantial sum which was gathered together, they agreed to my request. But they warned that if I heard the gate bell sound, the signal that the SS men were coming, this would mean that my fate would be the same as that of the boys; for then they would not let me leave the block under any circumstances.

I agreed and I went in to the boys. I took the precaution of stationing my son outside to watch and see if the SS men were approaching the gate. If he saw them he would run and



warn me so I could leave immediately- even if it should be in the very midst of sounding the *shofar*.

The truth be written, this decision did not conform to the Halakhah, for I well knew that according to halakhah, I should not have taken even the slightest risk for the sake of sounding the *shofar*. But after we had seen with our own eyes, thousands of people killed and burned, or falling dead in the field from the hard labor, like sheaves after the harvest, my life had no worth at all, and this was the reason for my coming to this decision... After the sounding of the *shofar*, when I was about to leave the block, one boy stood up and cried out, “The *rebbe* has strengthened our spirits by telling us that ‘even if a sharp sword rest no a man’s throat, he should not despair of God’s mercy.’ I say to you, we can hope that things will get better, but we must be prepared for them to get worse. For God’s sake, let us not forget to cry out *shema yisroel* with devotion at the last moment”...

... On Yom Kippur in Stutthauf, the Jews in the camp were made to stand lined up in an open field from dawn until late afternoon. Then the Nazis brought out pots of hot, fragrant stew made with carrots, potatoes, and meat. The inmates had not seen the like of such food for years. Each person could have as much as he wanted. The wonderful smell of the stew so tempted the weary, starving Jews that it was difficult to resist. They encouraged each other to overcome the temptation: “Let us not be seduced... Let us show that even starving as we are in this camp, we will not sell our sacred day.” There were some who were so weak and feeble that they were overcome by the intoxicating aroma and could not resist; they looked down at the ground in shame, and ate. The rest of the prisoners, among them Jews, who had never before fasted on Yom Kippur, did not succumb. They fasted and stood on their feet until nightfall. Toward evening, at *ne’ilah* time, the men of the camp drew close to each other and conducted the *ne’ilah* prayers, and repeated over and over again to each other, “This year in Jerusalem.” ...

Suddenly we saw a group of men. At their head was an old Rav, wrapped in his tallis and holding in his hand an open siddur. He passed before us as a figure from out of this world, and called aloud: “Be comforted, be comforted, my people.” (Chayim Lazar, quoted by Schonfeld.)<sup>1</sup>

*Pain and...fear...kept us awake...The moon shone through the window...and gave the pale, wasted faces of the prisoners a ghostly appearance. It was as if all the life had ebbed out of them. I shuddered with dread, for it suddenly occurred to me that I was the only living man among the corpses.*

*All as once the oppressive silence was broken by a mournful tune. It was the plaintive tones of the ancient “Kol Nidre” prayer. I raised myself up to see whence it came. There, close to the wall, the moonlight caught the uplifted face of an old man who, in self-forgetful, pious absorption, was singing softly to himself...This prayer brought the ghostly group of seemingly insensible human beings back to life.*

*We sat up very quietly, so as not to disturb the old man, and he did not notice that we were listening...When at last he was silent, there was exaltation among us, and exaltation which men can experience when they have fallen as low as we had fallen and then, through the mystic power of a deathless prayer, have awakened once more to the world of the spirit. (Szalet, quoted by DesPres.)<sup>2</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Rabbi Joseph Elias in The Jewish Observer, October 1977, *Dealing With “Churban Europa”*

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Rabbi Joseph Elias in The Jewish Observer, October 1977, *Dealing With “Churban Europa”*

The Chassidic Grand Rabbi, Reb Klonymos Kalman Shapiro of Pia'chena, was one of the powerful spiritual forces of the Warsaw Ghetto. During Purim 1941, he told his disciples that the "Zohar" likens Purim to Yom Kippur because, just as a Jew must fast on Yom Kippur whether he likes it or not, so must he rejoice on Purim even if there is nothing to be happy about

In a similar vein, the grand rabbi, Reb Shlomo of Slonim looked for a way to dance on a Purim when he was a prisoner in a concentration camp. He challenged his Nazi guards to a dance contest. They showed their prowess. Then the rabbi danced as though he were in another world, singing the Purim song: "Shekol kovecha lo yevoshu...those who place their hopes in You will never be shamed and humiliated

late ,צ"ל Perhaps the most amazing incident of all involves Rabbi Aharon Rokeach Grand Rabbi of Belz. When he was told that the last known survivor of his immediate family, his oldest son Reb Moshe, had been thrown into a burning synagogue and gone to a fiery death, the Belzer Rebbe exclaimed, "The Creator in His mercy has allowed me to share" in the sacrifices of my people

## Yom Kippur

The Satmar hazan, Naftali Stern lead Rosh Hashana services in the Nazi labor camp at Wolfsberg in 1945. The central benediction of the Rosh Hashana *Amida*, in which God is implored to "rule again over the entire world in Your glory" — words that one of the attendors, Halivni, recalls being intoned by the inmates at Wolfsberg with more passion and *kavanah*, than anything he had ever before witnessed in a synagogue. These Jewish slave laborers' were pleading to God to restore His rule over humanity<sup>1</sup>.

## Sukkot

In mid-October 1943, during Succot, one of the inmates, Josef Rosensaft smuggled a tiny apple into the Birkenau barrack where the inmates had gathered to pray so that the highly respected Rabbi of Zawiercie, known as the Zawiercier Rov, could recite the Kiddush blessings. Throughout the prayers, my father recalled, the aged Rov stared at the apple, obviously conflicted.

At the end of the clandestine service, he picked up the apple and said, in Yiddish, almost to himself, "*In iber dem zol ikh itzt zogn, 've-akhalta ve-savata u-verakhta et Hashem Elohekha...*" (And over this, I should now say, 'And you will eat, and you will be satisfied, and you will bless your God...').

"*Kh'vel nisht essen* (I will not eat)," he went on, "*veil ikh vel nisht zat sein* (because I will not be satisfied), *un ikh vill nisht bentchn* (and I refuse to say the Grace After Meals)."

And with that, he put down the apple and turned away.

The rabbi never lost his faith in God. Like the hassidic master, Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, however, he was not able to accept, without challenging G-d, His decrees.

---

<sup>1</sup> Allan Nadler, *Jerusalem Post*, Wed. Jun 11, 2008, reviewing, David Weiss Halivni, *Breaking the Tablets: Jewish Theology After the Shoah*, Rowman & Littlefield.

One evening around the same time, my father and a group of Jews from Zawiercie were sitting in their barrack when the Zawiercier Rov suddenly said, again in Yiddish, "You know, *der Ribboine shel-oilem ken zein a ligner*" (the Master of the Universe can be a liar). Asked how this could possibly be, the rabbi explained, "If God were to open His window now and look down and see us here, He would immediately look away and say, '*Ikh hob dos nisht geton*'" (I did not do this) - and that, he said, would be the lie<sup>1</sup>.

## Hanukka

In the summer of 1944, Rabbi Moshe Nosson Neta Lemberger of Makov<sup>2</sup> and members of his congregation were deported to a slave labor camp near Vienna. Their first assignment as slave laborers was from July 21 to November/December 1944, felling trees in the forests around Vienna<sup>3</sup>. In his introduction to his book *Klei Golah*<sup>4</sup>, R Lemberger describes Hanukka in the camp:

"Hannukka approached. At that time, some of the groups were sent to do the work of movers. Many of the homes of the Austrians had been bombed, and the district governor gave their owners houses in other parts of the city. We had to move the furniture from one side of the city to the other. We located what was left intact within the ruins of the bombed houses. We carried bathtubs, big cupboards and large, heavy ovens down several stories to cars and after they were transported to their new location, we had to take them up into the substitute apartments the owners were given. This was exhausting work, especially since we were already weak from the hard labor, the subsistence diet and the minimal sleep we got in rooms without window panes, since they were all bombed out. On occasion, as we carried down heavy loads hung around our necks, we thought that our life's force would end before we reached the bottom of the stairs.

"On Erev Hanukka, we came upon a five-story building that had an artist's studio on the roof, with a view of the surrounding landscape. We had to carefully carry down the paintings, canvases and paints. We went up and down those five stories more than 40 times that day. Our legs swelled until each step felt like the stabs of a thousand needles. But how great was our joy, and how all pain was forgotten, when we suddenly discovered a tin of oil, just like

---

<sup>1</sup> Menachem Z. Rosensaft, *The Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 29, 2008

<sup>2</sup> His books include *Klei Golah*, homilies on the Bible and the holidays; responsa and halachic discussions; and *Ateret Moshe*, novellae on the Torah and responsa he wrote while in Theresienstadt.

<sup>3</sup> They were then transferred to a bakery, and finally to Theresienstadt. TOWARD THE end of the war, Lemberger and 1,200 other members of his congregation were taken to Theresienstadt, where they were liberated. After the war he went to Budapest, then returned to Makov, where he served as town rabbi. He also established and directed a yeshiva there. He made aliya in 1951 and settled in Kiryat Ata, where he led a congregation until his death. His son, Rabbi Shimon, replaced him as *admor*. Lemberger died on 20 Heshvan 5743 (1982) in Kiryat Ata.

<sup>4</sup> Published in 1995 in New York

the Hanukka miracle. Carefully someone hid it under his armpit, as the punishment for anyone who took any of those objects was an immediate death sentence. But in those situations, we felt an inner impulse to do a mitzva, and did not wonder or discuss whether Halacha required us to endanger ourselves. We discussed the case of one who finds an object that was lost in the sea. Such an object is considered abandoned property, and therefore the previous owner has no claim to it. Thus in this case, we were not using stolen property and thus not performing a mitzva by way of a sin.

"For the few weeks preceding this incident, most of the Jews in our camp had been saving the margarine ration that was distributed every Sunday around that time. It was about as big as half a matchbox, and we used this to light the Hanukka candles. In addition, each man tried to obtain a small amount of oil in any possible manner. Those who were working in factories took risks during working hours, hiding congealed oil someplace on their bodies and bringing it to the camp. In the basement of the camp, we found ceramic flowerpot bottoms in the shape of candleholders. Despite the great difficulty and danger, no one was willing to give up the mitzva of lighting candles, even though I told them that according to Halacha, it was enough for each head of household to light one candle for the whole family, or that we all could light together and that there was no need to light additional candles for each night. But who listened to this, and who was willing to renounce this mitzva?

"We recite the *she'asa nissim* ['Who has wrought miracles'] blessing on each night of the holiday - every moment we remained alive was a miracle. So we lit candles in song. How can I describe how we sang '*Maoz Tzur*,' and shouted the verse 'Bare Your holy arm and hasten the end for salvation,' hoping it would happen any moment, 'for the triumph is too long delayed for us.' Who can extol the spiritual elevation we felt during those moments?

"It was enough to see the learned hassid Katriel Shalom Weiss, may God avenge his death. With tears of joy, he lit the Hanukka candles with oil brought to him by his daughters, who had thereby endangered their lives at their place of work. In the afternoon (in the middle of their work), they came to the camp with the precious treasure for their father, and when they returned to their workplace, a gun factory hidden in the forest, it had been bombed to smithereens. The soldiers who had been their supervisors were killed, along with others, giving concrete meaning to the verse, 'To those who fear You, You gave a banner to be raised high' (Psalms 60:6)<sup>1</sup>.

R Lemberger then continues his tale of their miraculous escape. "On Shabbat Hanukka, we were driven in a transport with three others of our group, one of whom was my dear student Avraham Baruch Shalaman, may God avenge his death. We were taken to a place far from our camp and from the forest area, because the train tracks had been bombed and the freight cars could not approach to load coal for industry. [Allied bombings increased as the

---

<sup>1</sup> *The excerpt from Rabbi Lemberger's book is part of a collection of rabbinic writings from the Holocaust, collected and annotated by Esther Farbstein (in a database now available in Hebrew; soon to be published in English as *The Holocaust in Prefaces to Rabbinic Literature*) and translated by Jessica Setbon and Shira Leibowitz Schmidt, to be published by Artscroll-Mesorah in 2009. This excerpt appeared in *The Jerusalem Post*, Dec. 24, 2008*

Red Army approached Vienna.] Our job was to load the coal from the freight cars onto trucks. The place was empty, silent. At the nearby entrance to the forest, there was a hut where an old Austrian woman sold soft drinks and refreshments to hikers. After finishing our work, we had to go back to the hut, and from there we were driven back to the camp. During our work, two civilians passed us, walking back and forth. I said to my companions that I could tell they were up to no good. The expressions in their eyes, and their winking and teeth-grinding revealed that they had a reason for walking past here.

"We prayed *Minha* for Shabbat Hanukka on the train cars. We could see the Vienna cemetery at a distance. In our prayers, we called on the holy ones who were buried there, including our son Asher Anshil, may God avenge his death, who died on 6 Mar-Heshvan, due to their treatments in their hospital. He was already buried there. We also called upon the strength of my ancestor, the Or Zaru'a [Rabbi Yitzhak of Vienna, teacher of the Maharam of Rothenburg], who was buried in one of the old cemeteries in Vienna.

"After our work, when we went to the hut, the old woman said to us, 'Do you hear the whistles of that pack of devils? You have four or five minutes. If you can hide among the weeds, you'll be saved.' So we lay down and crawled through the slush and mud, between a bush and the weeds, and silently sang the Shalosh Seudos song, 'No entry to arrogant dogs.' Miraculously, our transport was two hours late. If it had come on time, those devils would have realized that we were supposed to be nearby, and who knows what would have become of us."

## Shabbat

One of [Rabbi Oshry's] students, a certain Reb Ya'acov, came to him during the period when starvation was rampant in the Kovno ghetto with the following *she'elah*. He had the opportunity of working in a forced-labor detail in the ghetto kitchen, rather than in the more arduous construction work at the airfield which the Germans were constructing near Kovno. However, in the kitchen he would be forced to violate the Sabbath by cooking. On the other hand, if he did accept the kitchen assignment, his already weakened body might be strengthened by the opportunity of getting somewhat more of the "black soup" which the Germans provided for the Jewish workers. Would cooking on *Shabbat* be permitted under these circumstances? Since the lighter labor and the increased food ration might keep him from dying of starvation, would this not be considered a case of *pikuah nefesh*, saving of life, which overrides the prohibitions of Sabbath Labor? He further inquired if he himself might eat the soup which he cooked on the Sabbath, since ordinarily a Jew is forbidden to derive any benefit from the product of labor performed by him on the Shabbath...

...For a time, at least, others in the Kovno ghetto managed to avoid Sabbath labor. Rabbi Elhanan Person, a survivor of that ghetto, writes:

Many made great sacrifices in order to keep the Sabbath. They agreed to perform the most difficult labor during the week in order to be given freedom from work on the Sabbath. There were those who gave up on the special food rations which were distributed to those who would work seven days (including *shabbat*) at the airfield in order to avoid desecrating the Sabbath- this at a time when hunger was too great to bear.

Similar sacrifices are recorded of the Jews in the other ghettos of Nazi Europe. Even in the concentration camps, some individuals managed to avoid working on *Shabbat*. The brushmaker in the labor camp of Plaszow “were particularly zealous in the observance of *Shabbat*...under circumstances which it is impossible to imagine. The Germans had set for us a production quota for each week. We worked madly to complete the required number during the six weekdays so that on *Shabbat* we could appear to be working at full speed whereas in reality we did not work at all. Only when the German manager made a sudden inspection (on *Shabbat*) did we turn on the machines, since *pikuah nefesh* was involved...”

... Some did not eat their daily bread ration so that on Friday night they could have to bits of bread (*lehem mishneh*) over which to recite the *Kiddush*...

In his book *Dignity to Survive*, Yona Emanuel recounts of his mother: On Friday night of Shabbat Nachamu, 1944, Chana Emanuel was subjected to a trial by members of the *Judenrat* in Bergen-Belsen for the offense of breaking camp rules by cooking a portion of porridge for her youngest child. She had prepared the food for her daughter on a day on which camp inmates were being collectively punished and no food had been provided. The trial was conducted entirely by Jews who served as prosecuting and defense attorneys, judges and court clerks. Contrary to the norm, Chana Emanuel’s trial was exceedingly brief. She waived her right to present a defense and accepted the verdict of forfeiture of her bread ration for a number of days. When later asked why she had made no attempt to defend herself or to plead mitigating circumstances, Chana Emanuel replied that the clerk recording the minutes of the trial was Jewish. Had she spoken, he would have proceeded to transcribe every word she uttered. Accordingly, she resolved to remain silent and accept further privation, rather than cause additional desecration of the Sabbath on the part of a fellow Jew.<sup>1</sup>

... In her testimony at the Eichmann trial, Rivkah Kuper describes the lighting of Sabbath candles at Auschwitz:

When we arrived on the eighteenth of January 1943 we were put into the blocks at Birkenau. They had previously been horse stables... Among the first things we sought were two ends of candles. Friday night we gathered together on the top tier of our block. There were then about ten or twelve girls... We lit the candles and began quietly to sing Sabbath songs... we heard choked sobbing from the tiers of bunks all around us. At first we were frightened, then we understood. Jewish women who had been imprisoned months, some of them years, gathered around us, listened to the songs. Some asked us if they might also recite the blessing over the candles... From then on, every *shabbat* we lit the candles. We had no bread, there was nothing to eat, but somehow we managed to get the candles. And so it was on all holidays. We fasted on Yom Kippur in Auschwitz. True, we ate no *matzot* on *pesah*, but we traded our rations with the other prisoners for potatoes so that on *pesah* we could at least fulfill the commandment of “thou shalt eat no *hametz*”<sup>2</sup>...

---

<sup>1</sup>The youngest Emanuel child, Bitya, was barely three years old in 1942, when the extermination of Dutch Jewry began. As the danger escalated, her parents placed Bitya with a childless non-Jewish couple in the countryside. One day, Bitya and the woman caring for her visited the Emanuels.

When the assembled family members recited the Grace After Meals, Bitya’s caretaker whispered a prayer while making the sign of the cross and Bitya followed her example. Bitya’s parents refused to send the child back into hiding in a non-Jewish home. They informed the older children: “We received you children as a deposit from Hashem. We do not know when we will be obligated to return our deposit, but...we will return you as Jews” (p. 126). At the age of five years and four months, Bitya died of starvation in Bergen-Belsen and returned her soul to God. It was for preparing food for Bitya that Mrs. Emanuel was subjected to the earlier described trial.

<sup>2</sup>...Rabbi Oshry describes the consequence of his ruling:

Once I had instructed my students that they could fulfill the mitzvah of the Four Cups with tea sweetened with saccharin, they accepted upon themselves the obligation of aiding others to fulfill this great

On Friday, March 2, 1945 we reached Mauthausen... in those last few difficult weeks that we spent in the concentration camp, some of us worked in the unloading of cars of grain for the warehouse. A number of times, our small group succeeded in taking a little bit of wheat from the warehouse. The religious Jews among us gave up their bread rations in exchange for that wheat. In this fashion they accumulated a small quantity of wheat for *Pesah*. They crushed the grains of wheat with a hammer into a kind of flour. This they baked into *matzot* and so, some tens of Jews were able to conduct the two *sedarim*.

Late at night, when the guards had left our block, several tables were set up in the washing room. We lit two candles, each participant received one small *matzoh*. One of us began reciting the Haggadah in tremulous voice, the rest repeated it after him weeping, their voices choked with sobs. Thus did a small group of Jews, in the shadow of death, conduct the two *sedarim* in the Mauthausen concentration camp.

Rabbi Samson Stockhamer, one of the well-known rabbis of Warsaw, was taken, after the loss of his entire family, to a work camp in the south of Germany. An eyewitness describes how:

On the Festival of Passover, 5705, the last Passover of his life, he refused to eat any *hametz*. I knew that this abstention from *hametz* was tantamount to fasting for eight days. It would lead to complete weakening of his strength and endanger his life. I tried to persuade him to eat something because of *pikuah nefesh*, the saving of life. I said to him, "this is not one of the sins which is in the category of *yehorag ve-al ya'avur*, where one must sacrifice his life rather than violate the commandment." He replied, "I know the law. But I have another very important reason. There are 2,500 Jews in this camp. It is only right that at least one of them should refrain from eating *hametz*. If you know of another one who lets no *hametz* pass his lips, then I will think the matter over. But I doubt if such a person is to be found. Therefore, the obligation rests upon me to be the one Jew out of 2,500 who observes the prohibition of *hametz* on *Pesah*. I fulfill this obligation joyously and with love." Indeed, no food entered his mouth all eight days of Passover, except for a little water. It was indeed miraculous to see how his powerful will overcame the weakness of his body and how he continued to work at the forced labor together with his fellows..."

Rabbi Joshua Greenwald tells of his concentration-camp experiences:

I learned that one of the inmates had a *siddur*. I went to him secretly with a bit of paper that I had found... I copied the *shemoneh esreh* of Rosh Hashana and Yom

---

mitzvah of the Four Cups, which corresponds to the four expressions of redemption. They distributed sweet tea to all those who did to have even this beverage in order that they, too, should be able to fulfill this practice, which symbolizes redemption; thereby strengthening their spirits and rejoicing their hearts with the hopes that the day was not far distant when they, dwellers in darkness and in the shadow of death, the prisoners of the ghetto, would merit redemption from their enemies who had vowed to destroy them...

In Warsaw, on the very eve of the Great Ghetto Revolt of Passover 1943, the Piazneser rebbe convened a bet din to declare that legumes were permissible because it was a *sha'at ha-dehak* an emergency situation. Also on the eve of that Passover, in the midst of the pre-revolt tensions, the rebbe of Sokolov, Rabbi Benjamin Morgenstern, came to one of the Jewish officials asking for immediate and urgent help. He had prepared many "bills of sale" for the mekhirat hametz of Jews in the ghetto, and now, when it was incumbent upon him to transfer all of it to a gentile, there was none to be found in the ghetto. None of the Poles had come to the Warsaw ghetto that day. The official, Abraham Handel, prevailed upon one of the Polish drivers, one Stanski, himself an anti-Semite, to acquire all the ghetto hametz for a substantial bribe.

At the risk of their lives, that same Passover eve a group of Hassidic rabbis, including the Piazneser rebbe and the rebbe of Sokolov, adhered to ancient Custom and drew well water (*meyyim shelanu*) for the baking of matzah...

Kippur. On Rosh Hashana we prayed in one of the blocks without the Germans finding out. I recited the *shemoneh esreh* from my handwritten copy, and the rest of the prisoners, about two thousand men, repeated it after me quietly amidst tears and sighs and sobs. We had barely finished the prayers when we were compelled to go out to that day's forced-labor task... On the eve of Yom Kippur, at sunset time, the Germans took us out for an "inspection." Knowing that it was a holy day, they kept us there until it was dark so we were not able to eat the morsel of bread which we had hidden and put aside to prepare for the fast... we were worried that we would not be able, God forbid, to fast and to fulfill the *mitzvah* of the day properly. Kol Nidre night we prayed in the same place as we had on Rosh Hashanah. However, on Yom Kippur morning we were unable to finish. In the middle of *Shemoneh Esreh*, the murderers broke in, their weapons drawn. We tried to run away in different directions, but not everyone was able to escape. Those who were caught were beaten murderously. *Ne'ilah* we were able to pray in hidden spots without any disruption... After Yom Kippur our hearts were overjoyed that we had had the merit of fulfilling the commandment of fasting.... At the time I really understood what *kiddush ha-shem* was... As I observed the sacrificial spirit of even Jews who had been irreligious in the past trying now to fulfill the commandments of God and rejoicing in fulfilling the will of their Creator...

... The fourteen hundred boys who had been condemned to be sent to the crematorium and were locked up in one of the blocks learned that I had a *shofar*. They began to cry out and plead bitterly that I should enter their block and sound the one hundred blasts for them in order that they should have the precious *mitzvah* of *shofar* in their last moments. I did not know what to do. For it was a very dangerous situation. If the Nazis should come suddenly and find me among them, there was no doubt that they would take me to the crematorium... the lads cried out bitterly, "*Rebbe, rebbe*, come, for God's sake; have pity on us; let us have the merit of this *mitzvah*, in our last moments." The entreaties of the boys did not allow me to rest... I decided not to turn them away empty-handed. I began to bargain immediately with the *kapos*. After many entreaties and for a substantial sum which was gathered together, they agreed to my request. But they warned that if I heard the gate bell sound, the signal that the SS men were coming, this would mean that my fate would be the same as that of the boys; for then they would not let me leave the block under any circumstances.

I agreed and I went in to the boys. I took the precaution of stationing my son outside to watch and see if the SS men were approaching the gate. If he saw them he would run and warn me so I could leave immediately- even if it should be in the very midst of sounding the *shofar*.

The truth be written, this decision did not conform to the Halakhah, for I well knew that according to halakhah, I should not have taken even the slightest risk for the sake of sounding the *shofar*. But after we had seen with our own eyes, thousands of people killed and burned, or falling dead in the field from the hard labor, like sheaves after the harvest, my life had no worth at all, and this was the reason for my coming to this decision... After the sounding of the *shofar*, when I was about to leave the block, one boy stood up and cried out, "The *rebbe* has strengthened our spirits by telling us that 'even if a sharp sword rest no a man's throat, he should not despair of God's mercy.' I say to you, we can hope that things will get better, but we must be prepared for them to get worse. For God's sake, let us not forget to cry out *shema yisroel* with devotion at the last moment"...

... On Yom Kippur in Stutthaus, the Jews in the camp were made to stand lined up in an open field from dawn until late afternoon. Then the Nazis brought out pots of hot, fragrant stew made with carrots, potatoes, and meat. The inmates had not seen the



like of such food for years. Each person could have as much as he wanted. The wonderful smell of the stew so tempted the weary, starving Jews that it was difficult to resist. The encouraged each other to overcome the temptation: “Let us not be seduced... Let us show that even starving as we are in this camp, we will not sell our sacred day.” There were some who were so weak and feeble that they were overcome by the intoxicating aroma and could not resist; they looked down at the ground in shame, and ate. The rest of the prisoners, among them Jews, who had never before fasted on Yom Kippur, did not succumb. They fasted and stood on their feet until nightfall. Toward evening, at *ne’ilah* time, the men of the camp drew close to each other and conducted the *ne’ilah* prayers, and repeated over and over again to each other, “This year in Jerusalem.” ...

Suddenly we saw a group of men. At their head was an old Rav, wrapped in his tallis and holding in his hand an open siddur. He passed before us as a figure from out of this world, and called aloud: “Be comforted, be comforted, my people.” (Chayim Lazar, quoted by Schonfeld.)<sup>1</sup>

*Pain and...fear...kept us awake...The moon shone through the window...and gave the pale, wasted faces of the prisoners a ghostly appearance. It was as if all the life had ebbed out of them. I shuddered with dread, for it suddenly occurred to me that I was the only living man among the corpses.*

*All as once the oppressive silence was broken by a mournful tune. It was the plaintive tones of the ancient “Kol Nidre” prayer. I raised myself up to see whence it came. There, close to the wall, the moonlight caught the uplifted face of an old man who, in self-forgetful, pious absorption, was singing softly to himself...This prayer brought the ghostly group of seemingly insensible human beings back to life.*

*We sat up very quietly, so as not to disturb the old man, and he did not notice that we were listening...When at last he was silent, there was exaltation among us, and exaltation which men can experience when they have fallen as low as we had fallen and then, through the mystic power of a deathless prayer, have awakened once more to the world of the spirit. (Szalet, quoted by DesPres.)<sup>2</sup>*

Ernst Papanek, Austrian socialist educator and self-confessed total ignoramus in Jewish matters:

It was pure arrogance in our part to think that we could decide whether the Orthodox orphans would get kosher food or not. [These forty children, between 11 and 13 years of age] were tied together by the most powerful common background we ever saw...Despite everything, the Orthodox children were always the most confident of their ultimate triumph and the least scarred by their persecution. They knew who they were, and what they were persecuted for. They did feel different, they did feel special, they did feel that they had been chosen by G-d to fulfill some Almighty purpose. In one sense they didn't have to win over anybody or anything. They won by being<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Rabbi Joseph Elias in The Jewish Observer, October 1977, *Dealing With “Churban Europa”*

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Rabbi Joseph Elias in The Jewish Observer, October 1977, *Dealing With “Churban Europa”*

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Rabbi Joseph Elias in The Jewish Observer, October 1977, *Dealing With “Churban Europa”*

In Sosnowitz, Moshe Merin wanted the Jewish Council to make up a list of a thousand Jews to be handed over for deportation. When the *Rav* of the community, Rabbi Yeshaya Englard, blocked him in this, Merin made up the list himself and in revenge, put Rabbi Englard and his family on it. At the last moment, he apparently reconsidered and offered to take Rabbi Englard off the train. But the *Rav* asked whether he would substitute others in his place and, upon receiving a positive reply, insisted on going to his death<sup>1</sup>.

**“The Nazis did not want only to destroy the Jew; they aimed to destroy his spirit and everything he stood for. In this they glaringly failed<sup>2</sup>.”**

Rabbi Joseph Elias wrote the following article in *The Jewish Observer*, October 1977, *Dealing With “Churban Europa”*:

The point is made by Hilberg and Dawidowicz, among others, that Jews historically have become conditioned not to use violence. Be that as it may—in Nazi Europe mass resistance was out of the question. Foot quotes de Gaulle as calling resistance a “bluff that worked”—and that only under the very special conditions that existed in France. A limited amount of sabotage and underground work was possible in Eastern Europe, and was indeed done; but on a mass scale, resistance—except just prior to liberation—could at most be a heroic but suicidal gesture of defiance and revenge.

Moreover, Garlinski, in his meticulous account of underground work in Auschwitz, stresses that it took months to set up any organization—and therefore Jews, unlike other prisoners, were unable to do so; they were destined for the crematoria and had an average life expectancy of three months. They did not even have the time to make those basic adjustments to the surrealistic and horror-laden underworld of Auschwitz (“another planet”) which alone held out a hope of survival (DesPres). Sereny points out that the Nazis fiendishly provided entirely different receptions in Auschwitz for Jews from Eastern and Western Europe, playing on their different world outlook in order to totally disorganize and overwhelm them. In the same way, the Nazis turned the treatment of the Jews in the ghettos into a devilish art, alternating murder with promises of a respite, deliberately creating confusion and uncertainty, and after every “Aktion” fanning hopes of survival for those that remained.

And yet, as we read the accounts of those terrible days, we are made to realize by all the writers that there was a possibility of a resistance of a different nature than is usually envisioned. The Nazis did not want only to destroy the Jew; they aimed to destroy his spirit and everything he stood for. In this they glaringly failed...

Schonfeld quotes Efraim, a standard-bearer of secularism, whom the Holocaust brought to the gates of repentance:

From where did the thousands of Jewish police (*kapos*), who served the Germans in the concentration camps and the ghettos, come? The survivors of the Holocaust all concur that they originated from the underworld and from the *maskilim*—the very people who denounced their “unenlightened” brethren for their more traditional garb.

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Rabbi Joseph Elias in *The Jewish Observer*, October 1977, *Dealing With “Churban Europa”*.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Joseph Elias in *The Jewish Observer*, October 1977, *Dealing With “Churban Europa”*.

Did not these maskilim harbor the same feelings of scorn and even hatred as their masters, the Nazis?...Here one must record the blatant fact...that Torah true Jewry—Jews wearing the traditional rabbinical or hassidic garb—never held positions in the Jewish police force, which administered ghetto Jewry, and never served as kapos.

Actually, there were some isolated cases of Kapos emerging from among the religious ranks, but they were a rarity indeed.

It is important to note that Trunk indeed points out that the *Judenrats* and ghetto administrations were largely dominated by assimilationists (the Jewish police in Warsaw was commanded by a *Meshummad*, and the Vilna Ghetto by Jacob Gens whose wife was a Lithuanian Christian) or Zionists (Merin, the “ruler” of Sosnowitz, for instance, was a Revisionist, and Rumkowsky, “the king of Lodz,” a General Zionist). From the various studies there emerge many reasons why they played such a dominant role in the ghettos (and later as *kapos* in the camps). They had a better secular education, often were professionals, and knew German; not only those who only realized their Jewish identity when the Nazis took over, but a good many secularized Jews who had played a role in Jewish life, in a way felt closer to their new masters than to the poor, ragged, old-fashioned Jewish masses; their ambition and power-seeking was not restrained by Torah considerations; and they felt confidence in their won ability to decide what was right and wrong.

In the beginning, most Judenrat members meant well; but as the Jewish councils emerged more and more as impotent tools of Nazi persecution, their more idealistic members sought to get out or resisted the Nazis and were killed. With some notable exceptions, those who remained deluded themselves that they were doing a good thing. By preparing the lists of Jews who were sent to their deaths, they thought that they were saving other Jews. But in reality they merely stoked the crematoria.

It is noteworthy that in connection with their work—as for instance in the case of Abba Kovner, head of the *Hashomer Hatzair* in Vilna—there appears again the infamous policy of “selective rescue.” Dessler, the Vilna Jewish police head, wrote in his diary (quoted by Schonfeld):

Those who were deported were chosen by my Jewish police for I wanted to save the young and the intelligentsia. But when the time came for a breakout to the forest, Kovner promised to exit fifty of his friends from the organization exclusively...Tens of young, healthy, strong people gather in the courtyard and plead before Kovner that he permit them to join those leaving, but he threatens them with his revolver and chases them away. (Lazar, quoted by Schonfeld)

What a contrast to the role played by the Rabbis, as outlined by Trunk and others!

In Sosnowitz, Moshe Merin, mentioned above, wanted the Jewish Council to make up a list of a thousand Jews to be handed over for deportation. When the *Rav* of the community, Rabbi Yeshaya Englard, blocked him in this, Merin made up the list himself and in revenge, put Rabbi Englard and his family on it. At the last moment, he apparently reconsidered and offered to take Rabbi Englard off the train. But the *Rav* asked whether he would substitute others in his place and, upon receiving a positive reply, insisted on going to his death. Or take the contrast, in Auschwitz, between Eliezer Greenbaum, son of Yitzchak Greenbaum, whom we mentioned before, an all-powerful *Kapo* who, according to K. Tzetnik’s testimony, delighted in murdering religious Jews (he was later killed by Jews in *Eretz Yisroel*, according to Schonfeld), and Rabbi Meisels who took his life into his hands to fulfill the last request of a few hundred boys marked for extermination, and blew *shofar* for them on *Rosh Hashanah*!

Of course, the Merins, Kovners, Greenbaums, *et al* were a relatively small number—and it has been argued that they, too, were victims of a situation too immense for them—but the fact that such figures could appear is a tragic demonstration of how low it is possible to fall when Torah is forsaken. Just as the drift away from Torah deeply affected the rescue efforts of Jewry in the free world, so it cruelly affected the Jews under the Nazi heel. Again, assimilation to a non-Jewish world and its values not only helped prepare for the disaster, but accompanied and worsened it.

## Prayer, Study, Mitzvos

The stories of Jews risking their lives, giving up food and going to great lengths to do Mitzvos during the Holocaust are so many that they show a very deep penetration of love of G-d and His Torah into the very bones of these people.

Besides the actual Halacha, Jews were also motivated by their intense pain at the thought of desecrating the Mitzvos. A report by Rabbi Yona Emanuel, from Bergen Belsen (1944), testifies to an incident on Shabbat when they had to take apart silk cocoons:

It was easy work, done while sitting down, although in terms of Shabbat it was forbidden labor – taking something apart, a Torah prohibition! ...I sat across from Rabbi Dasberg<sup>1</sup>. To this day I can see him before my eyes. Suddenly the rabbi sighed and said, “We’re forgetting that today is Shabbat!” And Rabbi Dasberg explained: “I know we’re allowed to work, but we are not allowed to forget that today is Shabbat. There’s no dispensation for that. No Dispensation.” After a brief silence, he continued: “One of us should sit here but not work, just sit and not work, not take apart cocoons. Then we’ll all feel that today is Shabbat.” We were in shock. Our lives were all at risk and the rabbi was warning that we were forgetting it was Shabbat. We accepted the rabbi’s proposal and that’s what we did.<sup>2</sup>”

Another case in the Lodz Ghetto is reported by Josef Zelkowitz:

*He (Yaakov Eli) had to agree, after the fact to let the women use their own dishes to take soup [made from horse-meat] at the kitchen. But then it transpired that his wife, Sarah, had brought little Mendel into the conspiracy .... Yaakov Eli hardly ever cried ...He did so first when he discovered that his Mendel had been eating soup from the kitchen .... He cried a third time when he discovered that his Mendel had been admitted to school. There, in addition to lunch every day, he would receive a hunk of horsemeat once a week<sup>3</sup>.*

Jews went to great lengths to do things that in normal times would have been halachikally meaningless, so as not to forget the Torah and its precepts. “The matzo on Pesach wasn’t kosher, but it existed. It kept us from forgetting. It served as a means of preserving the memory of the Pesach holiday<sup>4</sup>.” Numerous examples of this came up during the Holocaust – for instance, making Kiddush on an inappropriate beverage or drinking four cups of an inappropriate beverage on Pesach so as not to forget what Kiddush or a Seder is; of putting on Tefilin before dawn<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Shimon Dasberg of Groningen, one of the leading rabbis of the Netherlands.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Yona Emanuel, oral testimony and letter to Ester Farbstein, pg. 164

<sup>3</sup> Zelkowitz, *In those Terrible Days*, pg. 145, in Farbstein, pg. 171. Farbstein (pg. 172) reports that later, when the dispensation was broadened, there were hundreds of Jews who would eat only kosher food.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Katan, Yad Vashem Archives, 03/10235, in Esther Farbstein, pgs. 164-165.

<sup>5</sup> Esther Farbstein, *ibid*, footnote 22.

In the Lodz ghetto, many struggled to retain their traditional dress, as a part of their efforts to retain their identity and tradition<sup>1</sup>.

Rabbi Oshry relates that the Jews of Kovno continued to pray and study together, [despite the fact that they risked their lives]. On Rosh Hashanah of 5703 (September 12, 1942), they sounded the *shofar* without fear even though the Germans might hear it; and not only did they assemble in the synagogues to pray, but they even organized services in the ghetto hospital. The leaders of this endeavor, in fact, were the “assimilated” doctors, who paid no attention to the German decree and were willing to risk their lives for the *mitzvah* of prayer.

[Even] on the weekdays and Sabbaths, Jews in Vilna, Warsaw, Kletzk, Lodz, Kolomayo, and other ghettos risked their lives for the sake of prayer. In bunkers, cellars, or underground tunnels and specially constructed hiding places (*malinehs*), they assembled to pray in spite of the German interdict against public worship. If there were no *siddurim* someone would write one from memory or from a torn and tattered copy which was still to be found. One Moshe Berkowitz from Zhelikov, whose entire family was destroyed, was hidden in a bunker near Warsaw for some time. His companion there writes that Berkowitz spent months in laboriously writing a *siddur* so that, “God forbid, the world should not remain without a *siddur*.” In the *siddur* he also inscribed the names of his lost loved ones so that, God forbid, the world should not remain without a remembrance of those who gave their lives for *Kiddush Hashem*.” Not only in the ghettos but in many of the labor and death camps daily *minyanim* for prayer were conducted morning and evening.

At the Eichmann trial, Zalman Kleinman testified to an incident indicating the interpretation of *yhoreg ve'al ya'avov* as it applied to prayer, which was given not by the *Sefer haHinukh*'s “great and wise man,” but by a young boy at Auschwitz.

One day I was lying on my bunk in the children's block at Auschwitz, and I saw one of the officials of the block coming with a thick rubber truncheon to beat someone. I jumped off my bunk to see whom he was going to beat. Beatings were given for every “sin,” and the number of blows was according to the severity of the crime. This was the first time the rubber truncheon was used. Generally they would use a stick, which often would break in the middle of the beating... I wanted to see how the rubber truncheon worked; perhaps someday I would meet up with it myself. The official approached one of the bunks. The boy who was there already knew what was in store for him... He bent over and the beating began. The rest of us watched and counted. The boy neither cried nor screamed, he did not even sigh. We wondered; we did not understand what this meant. The count passed twenty-five- this was the usual maximum number of blows. When the count reached forty, he began to beat the boy on the head and feet. The boy neither sobbed nor cried out- a fourteen-year-old boy- and he didn't cry.

The official finished fifty blows and left wrathfully. I remember a tremendous red welt on the boy's forehead made by the rubber truncheon. We asked him what he had done to incur the beating. He replied, “It was worth it. I brought some *siddurim* to some of my friends so they could pray. It was worth it!” He said not another word. He got up, returned to his bunk and sat down.

The continued study of Torah was an even more remarkable phenomenon during the Holocaust. The emphasis on prayer is perhaps explainable, even in non-halachic terms, as a natural human reaction to terror and trial. But the persistence of Torah study in the ghettos and concentration camps is understandable only with the framework of halachic Judaism. ... Saadia Gaon's dictum that “we are a people only by virtue of the Torah” was an operative

<sup>1</sup> Eventually, in 1942, the head of the Judenrat, Rumkowski, banned the traditional dress.

principle to the Jews in the Holocaust. There was no point in national survival- or perhaps even in individual survival- if the Torah should perish. ...

In the Vilna ghetto, for example, the Jews established a regular school system... During one such examination in Talmud, when the students were vigorously discussing a complicated subject, *Ye'ush shelo mida'at*, thirty meters away from the examination stood an SS guard unaware of what was going on.

In the Dautmorgan camp in the south of Germany there was a group of *Yeshiva Bahurim* who would get together at night to study *mishnayot*. Like the rest of the camp inmates, they were bone-tired from the work in the clay pits, close to starvation, covered with vermin because they had not been able to wash for months. Yet one of them, a thin, white-faced lad from Navordok, would recite out loud chapter after chapter of *mishnayot* from memory, and the rest of them would repeat each saying.

In Garlitz, one of the camps in the Fross-Rosen complex, Yankel Pick studied Talmud during the daily march from the "block" to the machine factory where he worked. The distance was about six or seven kilometers. Each day he would declaim in a strong and vigorous voice the *she'ur be'halakhah* (Talmud lesson) which he had selected from the vast store of talmudic material in his memory. He would arrange for some of the other inmates of Block T, also former students of Torah, or *hasidim*, to march alongside him each morning en route to the factory and each evening on their return. Their feet matched to the melody of the Talmud study. It was as if the *niggun*, the melody, was a marching song.

In the labor camp of Plaszow, the Germans set up a factory for the manufacture of brushes. In it they employed the skilled Jewish craftsmen of Cracow, who managed to set up a *she'ur* in the *daf yomi* (a lecture on the page of the Talmud assigned to daily study). This is how it was done. A pocket-size *Horev* edition for the Talmud was concealed in the box in which the brushes were packed. The workmen all sat alongside the long table and read the page of Talmud aloud so that all could hear. He also held ready at hand a half-completed brush, so that it would appear that he was working if the Nazi inspectors should come in suddenly. While they were not able to maintain the regular *daf yomi* schedule, since they had only one volume of the Talmud, they did manage to conduct the "class" almost on a daily basis.

In the Warsaw ghetto, it was not a brush factory but a cobbler's shop which served as the house of study. In his diary of the Warsaw ghetto, Hillel Seidman describes the scene on Hoshana Rabbah (the seventh day of the Succot festival), October 2, 1942.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Now, here I am in Schultz's "shop." The people are driving in nails and saying Hoshanot (prayers). Here are assembled, thanks to one of the directors, Abraham Hendel, the elite of the Orthodox rabbis, religious scholars, Orthodox social workers, and well-known Hasidim. Here you see sitting at the wooden block and mending shoes (the work consists mostly of pulling out nails with pliers) the Kozioglower rebbe, Yehuda Ariei Former, the former rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Hakhmay Lublin. This Jew is sitting here, but his spirit is soaring to other worlds. He does not stop studying from memory and his lips keep moving all the time. From time to time he addresses a word to the Pleasieczna rebbe, the author of Hovat Hatalmidim, who is sitting just opposite him. And then a quirt discussion on religious subjects follows. Gemarot and biblical texts are quoted, and soon there appear on the shoe block, or rather in the minds and mouths of the geonim the Rambam, the Rabad, the Tur...and who cares now about the SS men, about the Volksdeutsch supervisor, or about hunger, misery, persecutions, and fear of death! Now they are soaring in higher regions, they are not in the "shop" at 46 Nowolipie Street where they are sitting, but in lofty halls..."

Scultz's "cobbler shop" was not the only house of study in the Warsaw ghetto. There are at least ten known locations where such illegal cells concerning which documentation is fragmentary. Similar groups existed in the ghettos of Cracow and Lodz. One group of young Hasidim in the ghetto of Cracow sat night and day in a cellar, absorbed in study. Following the liquidation of the Cracow ghetto, they were forced out of the cellar and killed by the Gestapo.

Leib Garfunkel, a member of the Aeltentestrat of the Kovno ghetto, writes that the Talmud was studied regularly and enthusiastically in the two remaining synagogues of Kovno, as well as in temporarily

Jacob Frankel, an accountant, describes what transpired in Buchenwald:

Do not think that the most expensive commodity in Buchenwald was bread. My experience taught me that there was a much more valuable kind of merchandise there- a pair of *tefillin*. I myself took part in a transaction involving the extraordinary price for a pair of *tefillin* of four complete rations of bread. To tell the truth, this was a partnership ventured in which all of us, the *hasidim* of Gur, were involved. We who had resided on ‘tier number four’ of the block were the purchasers. A Ukrainian *kapo*, a *pogromchik* like all of them, was the seller. We had reached Buchenwald in transport directly from Auschwitz. This was in the last stages of the war, when people were sent not only to Auschwitz, but also from it to other concentration camps. At the *selektion*, which had been made in the shadow of the crematoria, everything had been taken from us. There was no opportunity to smuggle a single pair of *tefillin*. What were we, this *hevrayah* of Gur *hasidim* gathered together on this uppermost tier of the wooden bunks, to do now? How could we hold fast without *tefillin*?... God helps! A Ukrainian *kapo* had stolen a pair of *tefillin* from the SS storehouse and was prepared to sell them- for no less than four rations of bread...

... In Buchenwald, to forgo a few rations of bread was tantamount to committing suicide. Was this permitted according to the *din*? As an accountant I was accustomed to work with figures. My calculations showed very clearly that in Buchenwald, to give up four rations of bread meant dying within a week or at most two. Nonetheless, I went to the *kapo* and informed him I was prepared to give him two rations as a down payment. He refused and wanted the full payment in advance. Soon another *hasid*, Abraham Eliyahu Weiss, an Aleksander *hasid* who came from one of the ghettos near Lodz, became my partner. It took several days until the two of us were able to save up four rations of bread. But the *kapo* kept his word and brought us a small pair of *tefillin* wrapped in paper. We quickly inspected them and then prayed in them with an ecstasy which it is impossible ever to experience again in our lives...

Rabbi Joshua Aronsohn describes how *tefillin* were put on in Auschwitz:

When we arose in the darkness of the night, we had just managed to wash, the block leaders and their helpers were hurrying us along to the forced-labor detail. There were long queues of prisoners waiting on line, not for bread or coffee, but to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *tefillin*. We appointed a special “guard” whose job it was to make sure that no one kept the *tefillin* on for longer than it took him to say the one verse of *shema yisrael*, so that more would be able to fulfill the *mitzvah*.

Moshe Brachfeld writes:

After some time we were taken to another camp, where there were about two thousand Jews from Munkacs and other places. They did not have even one pair of *tefillin*. How great was their joy when they discovered that we had brought a pair with us. About five hundred Jews recited the benediction that first day, and so it was every day thereafter. The pressure was so great that we were compelled to divide the set of *tefillin*. One group used only the *shel rosh*, the head *tefillin*, and the other the *shel yad*, the hand *tefillin*. Understandably, each group recited only the one benediction appropriate in each case. There was no other way; we felt it was better that each one should fulfill at least part of the *mitzvah*

---

organized minyan. The study sessions were led by former yeshivah students and learned laymen.

The principal study time was in the evening, when the men had returned from the forced-labor details, starving and frozen... In the ghettos there were some who could not under any circumstance reconcile themselves to not studying Torah all the day long, so they concealed themselves in various hiding places in order not to have to go to the forced labor. The labor office of the Aeltentestrat, which had the responsibility of providing the quota of workers, ultimately allowed these people to be free from fulfilling their forced-labor obligations.

than that only some should be able to fulfill it completely. This was really an elixir of life for us.

I recall a Jew from Munkacs, Reb Aharon Veider, who arose at two o'clock in the night so that he could pray in the *tefillin*. He was able to pray as much as he desired without interruption. Then at about 3:00 a.m. toward morning, the round of those who put on *tefillin* had already begun. It lasted usually until 5:30, the time of the block inspection. I and my brother were the last to get there. Nonetheless we saw to it that the *tefillin* were brought to the place where we worked. There tens of Jews were able to use the short noon-hour break to put on the *tefillin* in a concealed place.

Moshe Fuderman describes how in Dachau, in the "summer block," there were twenty-two men who put on *tefillin*. "Even though we had to put them on in the darkness of the night, we relied on the opinion of the *Rav* of Kovno who, when asked by those in the forced-labor detail whether it was permissible to pray before dawn (since they had no alternative), replied in the affirmative and declared, 'Would that my portion (in the hereafter) be with them.'"...

### **A Talis in Auschwitz**

Rabbi Meisels was a bastion of faith and strength in the torment of the Nazi concentration camps. When he was summoned for transport to Auschwitz, he took only one possession: his prayer shawl. This particular *talis* had been passed down to him and carried a great deal of sentimental and spiritual value. He held on to the *talis* as a symbol of God's protection during the war, and he resolved never to let the Nazis take it away.

When he and his family reached Auschwitz, they were stripped of their every earthly possession. The *talis* was torn away from him to become part of the Nazi treasure trove. Yet Rabbi Meisels would not give up his precious *talis* so easily.

He asked to be given work in the warehouses, sorting out the confiscated goods. Sure enough, as he sorted through the piles, he came across his special prayer shawl. Overjoyed, he now needed to figure out how to smuggle it out from the warehouse. An item of such a large size would not be easy to conceal.

It took a lot of planning and daring, but finally, Rabbi Meisels managed to cut down the large prayer shawl and make it into a pair of *tzitzis* which he could wear underneath his inmate uniform. He wore his *tzitzis* faithfully every day, despite the threat of certain death were he to be discovered.

One fateful day, his worst fear came true.

After the inmates showered, a Russian kapo who worked under the Nazis noticed that Rabbi Meisel's uniform seemed bulkier than usual. He pulled up the hapless rabbi's shirt and discovered the contraband -- the *tzitzis*! Enraged, he began beating and cursing the Jew, demanding to know what it was that the inmate was wearing.

Rabbi Meisels managed to stammer, "*A Gutt-kleid* -- a Godly garment."

This admission brought the kapo to an even greater fury. He dragged the Jew to his bunker and proceeded to pummel him relentlessly.

"You pig!" he screamed. "You have the audacity to tell me that you're wearing a Godly garment? Where is your God in this world? What has He done for you, leaving you at the mercy of this death and destruction? How dare you tell me there is a God!"

The kapo fell silent for a moment, and then he made the Jew this offer. "I am giving you one chance. If you can prove to me that God exists, despite this hell we are experiencing, then I will let you go. But if not, I will finish you off right here and now."

Rabbi Meisels was at a loss for words. How could he possibly respond?



He prayed silently for divine guidance, and then he said, "I will tell you a parable. Once there was a master surgeon who could perform miraculous surgeries that would cure people of the most difficult ailments. One day, a woman with a dreadful disease came to him, and he agreed to perform surgery on her. In the operating room with the surgeon was a shoemaker, who observed the surgeon's every move. The shoemaker watched as the surgeon made incisions into perfectly healthy-looking skin, inflicting -- to his mind -- terrible damage on the patient. *It's absurd to cut into healthy tissue!* he thought. *I only cut into damaged leather when I need to repair it!*

"What a foolish, inept surgeon!" was the shoemaker's ultimate conclusion.

"In this world, we are like that foolish shoemaker," Rabbi Meisels concluded. "We haven't even the slightest inkling of the ways in which God runs the world. Sometimes we see Him cutting into 'healthy tissue,' so to speak, and we are aghast. But He is a Master, and He knows infinitely more than we could possibly know.

### **Seeking all the Answers**

"My great-grandfather," Rabbi Meisels continued, "lived to an extremely old age. When he was asked how he merited such long life, he had a very simple answer. All his life, my great-grandfather told us, he never questioned God. Even when things seemed very difficult to understand, he made a point of never questioning God in his heart or mind.

"Why don't you question God?" we once asked him. The reason he gave was very simple. He didn't want God to tell him, 'You want to know the answers? Come up to the heavens and everything will be clear to you!' He wasn't interested in leaving this world prematurely, just to find out a few answers, no matter how burning the questions were! It was enough for him to believe that God has the answers, and he was content to find out the hidden secrets after 120 years!"

Rabbi Meisels turned to the kapo. "I think you are also hoping to get out of this war alive and make a new life for yourself without the Nazis on top of you. I suggest you take my great-grandfather's advice and hold back on questioning God. You don't want Him to summon you up early, just to give you the answers you seek."

As the Allied forces advanced, the Nazis forced their Jewish prisoners on death marches and moved them around to different locations. Rabbi Meisels found himself being led to a cattle car which would transport him to another camp. As he was about to reach the train, a Nazi by the name of Willy suddenly grabbed him, searched him, and found his precious *tzitzis*. With great relish, the Nazi tore the *tzitzis* in half and threw them into a fire, destroying them forever.

Rabbi Meisels was utterly crushed. He had looked to the *tzitzis* as a reminder of God's protection, and now -- so close to being liberated -- they were taken from him and destroyed. Rabbi Meisel's son, who had also endured the concentration camps, tried to comfort his father but to no avail. The two were shoved onto a cattle car, packed tightly together with their fellow Jews, while their Nazi guards -- Willy among them -- sprawled out on the opposite side of the car.

Overcome with exhaustion and sadness, Rabbi Meisels laid his head on his son's shoulder to sleep a little bit. Suddenly his son felt extremely ill and weak, and he was unable to bear the weight of his father's head.

"I'm sorry," he told his father, "but I can't have you place your head on my shoulder. It's just too painful for me."

Rabbi Meisels was taken aback by his son's uncharacteristic reluctance, but what could he say? He placed his head on the shoulder of the man to his right, while his son rested his head on the shoulder of the man to his left, leaving a space between them.

At that moment, a huge explosion was heard right outside the cattle car and a piece of shrapnel flew through the wall of the train. It went right through the space between the heads of Rabbi Meisels and his son, and headed straight for Willy -- the guard who had destroyed the *tzitzis*-- cutting off both his hands.

Rabbi Meisels recounts that the Nazi guards themselves taunted Willy saying, "So you're going to destroy the Jew's *tzitzis*, Willy? Look what happened to you because of it!"

Sometimes God's ways are hidden; sometimes they are revealed. But they are always just and good. I don't want to live in the question any more. I want to live in the answer. The answer is trust and prayer. I can trust that God is loving, compassionate, and all-powerful, and that He can heal my friend -- indeed, bring any kind of salvation -- in the blink of an eye. I can pray, and remind myself that prayer has an inestimably powerful impact.

I am the shoemaker; He is the Master Surgeon<sup>1</sup>.

### **Shema at the Time of Redemption**

Rav Zvi Hirsch Meizlish, a Hungarian rabbi described the run-up to the liberation of the concentration camps<sup>2</sup>. *As the day of liberation approached, the Nazis sent us westward from Auschwitz. On the train they gave us nothing to eat or drink, and the hunger and thirst were excruciating. On the verge of total collapse, we went outside and plundered the grass growing freely in the fields, eating it on the spot. Uncooked. This grass nourished our bodies and souls, and gave us the strength to live until the liberation. Only then did I fully understand the deepest meaning of the passage from Genesis: 'Thorns and thistles the earth shall sprout for you, and you shall eat the weeds of the field. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.'*

The day of liberation and the sermon he gave inmates at that time. Of what was he thinking? Not revenge, not food, not safety. "The guards fled and we were left on our own. We inmates fell on each other's necks, hugged each other. They hoisted me up on their shoulders and said that I had buoyed up their spirits during the worst and most dangerous moments. I shouted: Friends, we must now say Shema Yisrael. God has seen us through to liberation. We must accept the yoke of Heaven in freedom."<sup>3</sup>

The rabbi saw himself as a link in the chain of those who said the Shema, going back to Yaakov Avinu who fell on the neck of his Yosef and pronounced that very Shema declaration at that critical moment<sup>4</sup>.

### **Torah Scroll from Auschwitz**

---

<sup>1</sup> Riva Pomerantz , from Aish Hatorah Resources, [www.aish.com](http://www.aish.com)

<sup>2</sup> When he worked opposite the crematoria in Auschwitz he vowed that if he survived he would publish the writings of rabbis who were not so privileged, and he made good on his promise by publishing their works in the book *Mekadshey HaShem*.

<sup>3</sup> Shira Leibowitz Schmidt, *The Jerusalem Post*, Jan. 24, 2007

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

A sexton in the synagogue in the Polish city of Oswiecim buried a Torah scroll in a metal box four days before the Germans stormed in and later renamed the city Auschwitz. Jewish prisoners sneaked the rest of it — four carefully chosen panels — into the concentration camp. They entrusted the four panels to a Polish Catholic priest before their deaths.

This Torah remained hidden for more than 60 years, buried where the sexton had put it, until Rabbi Menachem Youlus, who lives in Wheaton, Md., and runs the nonprofit Save a Torah foundation, began looking for it about eight years ago<sup>1</sup>.

Eventually, it was found in 2004 by Rabbi Youlus of Maryland on his second attempt, after his 13-year old son realized that the present-day cemetery was far smaller than the original one. But it was missing the four panels. Rabbi Youlus placed an ad in a Polish newspaper in the area “asking if anyone had parchment with Hebrew letters,” offering to pay a large reward. The very next day a priest in possession of the four panels contacted him. One of the panels contained the Ten Commandments. Another contained a similar passage from Deuteronomy. The priest, who was born Jewish, was himself an Auschwitz survivor. He told Rabbi Youlus that the people with the four sections of the Torah gave them to him before they were put to death.

“The Nazis really thought they had wiped Jews off the face of the earth, and Judaism,” Rabbi Youlus said. “Here we are taking the ultimate symbol of hope and of Judaism and rededicating it and using it in a synagogue (the Central Synagogue at Lexington Avenue and 55th Street). And we’ll take it to Auschwitz.”<sup>2</sup>

## Resistance

Although the rabbis saw their role as primarily supporting spiritual resistance, rabbinic support of armed resistance existed in many of these instances, notably on the part of Rabbi Menachem Zamba in Warsaw<sup>3</sup> and Rabbi Aronson<sup>4</sup>. The Radzyner Rebbe, Rabbi Shmuel Shlomo Leiner, called on Jews to break out of the ghettos, flee to the forests and take

---

<sup>1</sup> Over two decades the foundation has found more than 1,000 desecrated Torahs and restored them, a painstaking and expensive process.

<sup>2</sup> James Barron, April 30, 2008

<sup>3</sup> His story appears in haredi biographer Shmuel Rothstein's 1948 book *Toldot Rabbi Menahem Zamba* and the recently-released *Et La'asot Lehatzalat Yisrael* (The Time to Rescue Israel), written by Dr. Haim Shalem, Farbstein's colleague at Bayit Vegan College.

ZEMBA, A member of Agudat Yisrael's Council of Torah Sages and a central authority in the Polish haredi community, initially opposed an armed revolt against the Nazis, fearing it would needlessly endanger lives. But after a series of transports to Treblinka in July 1942 which reduced the Warsaw Ghetto population from some 450,000 to just 50,000, he realized that the Nazis planned complete annihilation and changed his mind.

"If today Jews were being forced into apostasy," said Zamba, "and we could be saved by agreeing to it, as was done in Spain or after the decrees of [the First Crusade in] 1096, our death would be a kind of martyrdom. But today the only way of sanctifying God's name is by taking up arms." Faced with the Nazi program of subjugation, humiliation and annihilation of the Jewish people, he supported the ghetto fighters' choice to take up arms. Even if the uprising was suicidal, Zamba felt that death in defiance was preferable to death in surrender.

<sup>4</sup> This is so even though it appears that, in most cases armed resistance was either a form of revenge or an expression of Jewish pride, rather than self-defense.

up arms. Rabbi Shlomo David Yehoshua Weinberg, the Slonim Rebbe, allowed underground activists to use his basement as an arms cache. Rabbi Yehoshua Moshe Aronson, who was held in the Konim labor camp, supported a plan by the inmates to take revenge against German soldiers<sup>1</sup>.

"Let us at least defend Jewish honor and avenge our spilled blood," wrote Aronson. The plan was never carried out, however, and Aronson expressed sorrow at having missed the opportunity for vengeance and rebellion.

Part of the reason for the emphasis on spiritual resistance was because this was the only type of resistance possible. But, spiritual resistance was also emphasized by the rabbis because the Nazi threat was perceived as spiritual, not just physical. The Nazis did not only desire to destroy the Jewish people's bodies, they strove to annihilate Jewish morality, sense of justice, compassion, faith. The best route of resistance, therefore, was spiritual: fostering Jewish ideals, customs and belief in God<sup>2</sup>. The secular Zionist establishment in Israel also came to recognize this fact, in time<sup>3</sup>. At the time, however, it was recognized by many Jews in the midst of the holocaust. For example, During Hanukka 1941, A group of Auschwitz prisoners, set fire to eight pieces of cardboard and sang "*Maoz Tzur*" in full sight of German soldiers. Historian Yehuda Bauer who, commenting on this story, states, "None of the people who did this were religious. But on the threshold of death, and in the hell of Auschwitz, they demonstrated. They asserted several principles: that contrary to Nazi lore they were human; that Jewish tradition, history and values had a meaning for them in the face of Auschwitz; and that they wanted to assert their humanity in a Jewish way." Bauer then asks, "Was their act less than firing a gun?"

The Nazis did not want only to destroy the Jew; they aimed to destroy his spirit and everything he stood for. In this they glaringly failed<sup>4</sup>.

For others, deciding not to commit suicide but rather to make an attempt at survival amidst the hopelessness and despair of this situation was their resistance. Those that resisted more actively found that any success resulted in unintended consequences. The Nazis

---

<sup>1</sup> Ester Farbstein, interview with *The Jerusalem Post*

<sup>2</sup> Ester Farbstein, interview with *The Jerusalem Post*

<sup>3</sup> During the 1940s and '50s, the Zionist leadership attempted to recast the Holocaust as a story of secular Jewish military heroism. In the 1970s and '80s as Israelis developed a more sophisticated understanding of the Holocaust, they recognized how futile resistance usually was. They also began to appreciate the spiritual heroism of many in the holocaust.

<sup>4</sup> Elias, *ibid*

practiced the doctrine of collective responsibility. Thus, if a Nazi soldier was murdered by a Jew, not only was that Jew executed, but also his family, and perhaps a hundred other Jews. As a result, few Jews even considered carrying out this active resistance for fear of reprisals.

While there were examples of courageous armed uprisings in the ghettos, resistance also took forms without weapons. For many, attempting to carry on a semblance of "normal" life in the face of wretched conditions was resistance. David Altshuler writes in *Hitler's War Against the Jews* about life in the ghettos, which sustained Jewish culture in the midst of hopelessness and despair.... The writings and oral histories of survivors of the labor and concentration camps are filled with accounts of simple sabotage. Material for the German war effort, for example, might be mysteriously defective, the result of intentionally shoddy workmanship by Jewish slave labor.

For most of the Jews who died in the gas chamber, the issue of resistance was not an issue at all. Until as late as mid-1942, the Jews were unaware that the [Final Solution](#) was being implemented. Stripped of weapons, facing starvation and disease, the prospect of deportation combined with offers of food was an incentive for Jews to board the trains which took them to their deaths. Most believed what they were told that they were going to be relocated to work. For virtually all, the reality that they faced immediate death did not occur until the doors of the gas chambers were sealed, the lights were turned off, and the smell of gas was perceived. By then, it was too late. Those who did resist, either by running from the trains, or attacking their captors, faced certain death. Some took advantage of this option and were summarily executed on the spot....

While there were examples of courageous armed uprisings in the ghettos, resistance also took forms without weapons. For many, attempting to carry on a semblance of "normal" life in the face of wretched conditions was resistance. David Altshuler writes in *Hitler's War Against the Jews* about life in the ghettos, which sustained Jewish culture in the midst of hopelessness and despair.... The writings and oral histories of survivors of the labor and concentration camps are filled with accounts of simple sabotage. Material for the German war effort, for example, might be mysteriously defective, the result of intentionally shoddy workmanship by Jewish slave labor.

However, despite the myth to the contrary, Jewish armed resistance to the Holocaust did occur in [ghettos, concentration camps, and death camps](#). Many of those who participated in resistance of this type were caught and executed, and their stories will never be told. However, there are many verifiable accounts of major incidents of this resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (popularised in Leon Uris' *Mila 18*); Jews who joined the partisans<sup>1</sup>; Jews who escaped the camps or who gave their lives defying orders. But, we stress

---

<sup>1</sup> [Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation](#): Between 20,000 and 30,000 Jews escaped the ghettos and work camps of [Nazi-occupied Europe](#), fleeing to the forests for shelter where they formed groups and fought back against the [Nazis](#) and their collaborators. These brave Jews are known as the [Jewish Partisans](#).

It is important to note that for most victims of the [Holocaust](#), the chance to escape and join the partisans never came. Only very few Jews had the means and the opportunity to escape, and even then, the choice was difficult. Most of these young people were their families' lifelines for survival in the [ghettoes](#) and [camps](#), smuggling in available food and information whenever possible. The Nazis and their collaborators also used a method called Collective Responsibility to deter Jews from escaping the ghettos and camps. Collective Responsibility meant that for each person who escaped, 10 to 25 remaining people would be killed or executed, beginning with the escapee's family.

Daily survival in the forests was very difficult. Exposure and starvation posed as great a threat to the average partisan as did discovery by a Nazi patrol. Shelter was a small dugout in the ground. Adequate clothing and food were scarce. The winter months meant enduring freezing temperatures, but welcoming snow, as it masked the smoke from a campfire.

In the face of these challenges to survival, which often meant risking death to seek or steal food from local villages, the Jewish Partisans organized to sabotage and resist the Nazis. Their missions, carried out in military-

again, much more important than the physical heroism was the spiritual heroism. In the Tuchin Ghetto, Ukraine, seven hundred Jewish families escaped (September 3, 1942). They were hunted down, and only 15 survived. In the [Bialystok Ghetto](#), Jewish paramilitary organizations formed within the ghetto and attacked the German army when it was determined that the Nazis intended to liquidate it. The battle lasted just one day, until the resisters were killed or captured. There were also uprisings in the Vilna Ghetto<sup>1</sup>, Sobibor Concentration Camp<sup>2</sup> and Treblinka, where the Jews actually managed to blow up the camp<sup>3</sup>. In [Auschwitz](#): On October 7, 1944, one of the four crematoria at Auschwitz was blown up by Jewish *Sonderkommandos*<sup>4</sup>.

These acts of resistance are all the more remarkable when one considers the fact that most of these Jews had been learned to live under centuries of persecution under anti-Semitic host countries<sup>5</sup>.

Moreover, resistance was almost always futile. Even non-Jewish resistance, by free partisans was called by de Gaulle as calling resistance a “bluff that worked”—and that only under the very special conditions that existed in France. A limited amount of sabotage and underground work was possible in Eastern Europe, and was indeed done by Jews, whenever they escaped<sup>6</sup> as much as non-Jews; but on a mass scale, resistance—except just prior to liberation—could at most be a heroic but suicidal gesture of defiance and revenge<sup>7</sup>.

If this was true of partisans, it was so much more true of the ghettos and especially the camps. It took months to set up any organization—and therefore Jews, unlike other prisoners,

style units, were very successful in destroying thousands of trains. Apart from mining train tracks, partisans sabotaged communications lines, exploded Nazi-controlled farms and power plants, and successfully rescued scores of other Jews still imprisoned in ghettos and camps.

Many Jewish Partisans fought alongside local groups also resisting the Nazi occupation. Making themselves known to other groups held many risks, however, as anti-Semitism was widespread in the rural areas where Jewish Partisans hid and carried out their missions. Many thousands of Russian soldiers, trapped in Eastern Europe after [Hitler](#) invaded [Poland](#), escaped and formed partisan groups. These Russian partisan groups greatly aided many Jewish Partisans in their struggle to fight and survive in the forests. Among the Russians, however, there was also [anti-Semitism](#).

Though people of all ages became Jewish Partisans, many were very young. Children as young as nine years old fought, and many Jewish Partisans were between the ages of 17 and 25. Most commonly, men and boys carried out all partisan missions, although in some camps, girls and women worked and fought alongside them.

<sup>1</sup> Some inhabitants of the Vilna Ghetto began an uprising against their Nazi captors on September 1, 1943. Most participants were killed, although a few escaped successfully and joined partisan units.

<sup>2</sup> Jewish and Russian prisoners mounted an escape attempt on October 14, 1943. About 60 of 600 prisoners involved in the escape survived to join Soviet partisans. Ten S.S. guards were killed and one wounded.

<sup>3</sup> Seven hundred Jews were successful in blowing up the camp on August 2, 1943. All but 150-200 Jews perished, as well as over 20 Germans. Only 12 survived the war.

<sup>4</sup> These were workers, mostly Jews, whose job it was to clear away the bodies of gas chamber victims. The workers were all caught and killed.

<sup>5</sup> Hilberg and Dawidowicz, among others, make the point that Jews historically have become conditioned not to use violence.

<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Cohen who, as he details in another work, *The Youngest Partisan*, was only 15 in 1944 when he joined the partisans and posed as a German after studying and hiding in yeshivot in Central Europe.

Typical of his fierce boldness is the episode he tells of seeking shelter for the night by non-Jews while he was on the run in the forests:

“Please, let us stay here and tomorrow morning we will leave.’ They refused shouting, ‘No, out!’ I saw that we can’t reason with them, I started to cry and I begged. Still the answer was, ‘No!’ I went into the kitchen, opened a drawer, and picked out the biggest butcher knife. I took that knife in my hand, and walked into the room to confront him. ‘You want to kill me? Here’s the knife - you kill me in front of your father, in your father’s house, but you’re not going to turn me over to the Nazis. Here’s the knife - you can do it now.’ When he saw that, he mellowed. ‘Stay.’” (Shira Leibowitz Schmidt, *The Jerusalem Post*, Jan. 24, 2007. )

<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Joseph Elias, *The Jewish Observer*, October 1977

were unable to do so; they were destined for the crematoria and had an average life expectancy of three months<sup>1</sup>. They did not even have the time to make those basic adjustments to the surrealistic and horror-laden underworld of Auschwitz (“another planet”) which alone held out a hope of survival (DesPres).

Stripped of weapons, facing starvation and disease, the prospect of deportation combined with offers of food was an incentive for Jews to board the trains which took them to their deaths. Most believed what they were told that they were going to be relocated to work.

When they arrive at the death camps, the Nazis were extremely careful to give receptions to Jews that would confuse and overwhelm them<sup>2</sup>, (In the same way, the Nazis turned the treatment of the Jews in the ghettos into a devilish art, alternating murder with promises of a respite, deliberately creating confusion and uncertainty, and after every “Aktion” fanning hopes of survival for those that remained<sup>3</sup>.)

Given these realities, the acts of armed resistance that did occur are all the more remarkable.

### **Warsaw Ghetto Uprising**

The Warsaw Ghetto originally contained almost 450,000 people. By January of 1943, it was down to between 37,000 and 60,000 people as a result of starvation, disease, cold, and deportation. Prior to the uprising, more than 300,000 of Warsaw's Jews had been dispatched from the Warsaw Ghetto in the summer of 1942 in the "Great Liquidation."

Word got out that the Germans were going to finish off the ghetto, clean it out. Those half-starved, disease-weakened ghetto inhabitants decided to fight<sup>4</sup>.

By 1943, the ghetto residents had organized an army of about 1,000 fighters, mostly unarmed and without equipment. They were joined by thousands of others, mostly the young and able-bodied, still needed for forced labor.

When, on April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1943 the Germans came in to clean out the ghetto, much to their surprise, they were met with resistance<sup>5</sup>. The Warsaw Ghetto uprising broke out. It was, as Moshe Arens<sup>6</sup> described it, a desperate battle that pitted a small group of Jewish fighters against the might of the German Army, a battle for the dignity of man and the honor of the Jewish people.

When, the S.S. entered the ghetto to round up more Jews for shipment to the death camps. They were met by a volley of bombs, Molotov cocktails, and the bullets from a few firearms which had been smuggled into the ghettos. There were over a thousand fighters,

---

<sup>1</sup> Garlinski in Joseph Elias, *The Jewish Observer*, October 1977

<sup>2</sup> Sereny points out that the Nazis fiendishly provided entirely different receptions in Auschwitz for Jews from Eastern and Western Europe, playing on their different world outlook in order to totally disorganize and overwhelm them. (In Elias, *ibid*)

<sup>3</sup> Elias, *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Eliahu Ellis & Shmuel Silinsky, *Aish.com*

<sup>5</sup> Eliahu Ellis & Shmuel Silinsky, *Aish.com*:

They had actually been preparing for this, and had convinced the Germans to let them build 631 air-raid shelters. Bombing was going on all around them, and the Germans needed their slave laborers so, to keep them safe from Allied bombings, the Germans had allowed them to do this. Now the people used those very shelters to fight against the Germans

<sup>6</sup> Jerusalem Post, Apr. 24, 2003, THE CHANGING FACE OF MEMORY: Who defended the ghetto? By Moshe Arens



including children. They used pistols and Molotov cocktails against the Nazi weaponry, and they successfully repulsed the Germans.

Twenty S.S. soldiers were killed. The action encouraged a few members of the Polish resistance to support the uprising, and a few machine guns, some hand grenades, and about a hundred rifles and revolvers were smuggled in.

Then the German's returned with major firepower - 3,000 crack German troops with 7,000 reinforcements available. Tanks and heavy artillery surrounded the ghetto. General [Heinrich Himmler](#) promised [Adolf Hitler](#) that the uprising would be quelled in three days, and the ghetto would be destroyed. It took four weeks. The ghetto was reduced to rubble following bomber attacks, gas attacks, and burning of every structure by the Nazis. Fifteen thousand Jews died in the battle, and most of the survivors were shipped to the death camps. Scores of German soldiers were killed. Some historical accounts report that 300 Germans were killed and 1,000 wounded, although the actual figure is unknown.

They started to destroy buildings, bit by bit by bit, knocking everything down. After about a day, they broke into the hospital, shot everyone in their beds, and torched the place. Gradually, they destroyed the entire ghetto.

When the Nazis reached the air-raid shelters, they drilled down, and gassed the people inside. Some fighters escaped to the sewers, and the Germans raised the water levels. In about three weeks, the main fighting was over<sup>1</sup>.

Most of the remaining Jews were rounded up, but it actually took months and months of combing through the ruins and demolishing the destroyed buildings before the uprising was finally put down.

Finally, the commander of the German assault on the ghetto was SS-Gruppenfuehrer Maj.-Gen. Juergen Stroop was able to "declare victory" over the Jews on the evening of May 16. To celebrate his victory he dynamited the great synagogue on Tomalckie Street, abandoned by its Jewish worshipers.

What remained of the ghetto - after the Germans had used flame-throwers to burn down many of the buildings - was dynamited, leaving only a heap of rubble where the ghetto that had once housed more than half a million Jews.

As Elie Wiesel<sup>2</sup> put it: *A few hundred Jews ... rose against what were then the mightiest legions in Europe. Without tangible help from anyone, without training, without any real military experience, they waged a war that will be remembered by future generations as one that, for one moment, made the enemy tremble.*

*All other underground movements in occupied Europe received strategically valuable assistance from London, Washington and Moscow, where special units took care of their needs and paid attention to their concerns: vital links were established, special planes dropped sophisticated weapons and precious radio transmitters, logistical support was made available, agents smuggled through borders and brought money and information... Only the Jewish underground was neglected, isolated, ignored. Its heroic warriors were the loneliest victims of the most inhuman of wars.*

*A single airdrop, an occasional rescue mission would have proved to them, and to the enemy, that they were not forgotten. But the truth is that they were forgotten.*

Moshe Arens adds: "When the revolt in the ghetto broke out in April 1943, all of Warsaw was aware of the fighting. The news of the revolt was transmitted to the Allied capitals by the Polish underground, but no help came for the Jewish fighters - not from the

---

<sup>1</sup> Eliahu Ellis & Shmuel Silinsky, *Aish.com*

<sup>2</sup> Jerusalem Post, Apr. 24, 2003, THE CHANGING FACE OF MEMORY: They did not die alone, By Elie Wiesel



US or England, nor from the Soviet Union; not even a sign of recognition or an acknowledgement by the Allies of the battle raging in the ghetto. The Jewish fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto were unknown soldiers, isolated from the world. Only two years later, after the end of the war, did their valiant battle receive universal recognition.“

Wiesel continues: *When this story is told to today's students, they respond with disbelief and frustration. After all, the Allies had spent gigantic sums and invested extraordinary efforts organizing and financing armed resistance against Germany. Why were Jewish groups, even from the purely pragmatic aspect, so totally disregarded instead of being included in their war effort? Is it that they were given up from the outset? Or that no one trusted their military capacity, their bravery, even their loyalty? Is it possible that the Allies simply did not care?*

*From Antek Zukerman, the second in command of the uprising ... I learned a lot about the concept of dignity in times of distress and oppression. Why did all Jewish fighters insist on the importance of "saving Jewish honor" in resisting the murderers? Didn't all heroes perish as martyrs and all martyrs as heroes? Was dying with a gun in the hand worthier than with a prayer on the lips? Most of my questions remained questions.*

Moshe Arens adds: “When the revolt in the ghetto broke out in April 1943, all of Warsaw was aware of the fighting. The news of the revolt was transmitted to the Allied capitals by the Polish underground, but no help came for the Jewish fighters - not from the US or England, nor from the Soviet Union; not even a sign of recognition or an acknowledgement by the Allies of the battle raging in the ghetto. The Jewish fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto were unknown soldiers, isolated from the world. Only two years later, after the end of the war, did their valiant battle receive universal recognition.”

Wiesel continues: *When this story is told to today's students, they respond with disbelief and frustration. After all, the Allies had spent gigantic sums and invested extraordinary efforts organizing and financing armed resistance against Germany. Why were Jewish groups, even from the purely pragmatic aspect, so totally disregarded instead of being included in their war effort? Is it that they were given up from the outset? Or that no one trusted their military capacity, their bravery, even their loyalty? Is it possible that the Allies simply did not care?*

*One reads Mordechai Anielewicz's letters to his comrades on the Aryan side, or his appeals to Jewish leaders in Palestine and America, and one wonders: Where did he find the strength to overcome despair?...*

Although the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was not really very successful, it was the first time in all of German-occupied Europe that there was any organized uprising against the Nazis. Word got out, and it set a climate. And afterwards, there was Jewish resistance in many other places, including some of the camps.

While the Warsaw Ghetto was fighting for its life, the world had called another conference. They met in Bermuda and, again, absolutely nothing was done to help.

## **Kapos, Judenraats, Secularists**

There is no question that some Jews, trying to save their skin, actively and voluntarily participated in the Holocaust. Christian Dirks refers to the “snatchers,” the Jewish informers for the Gestapo in Berlin. Between 1943 and 1945 some 20 Jews carried out such spying services in the city, hunting the so-called *U-boote*, or Jews in hiding, and other dirty work. Two of them, Stella Kuebler and Rolf Isaacsohn, betrayed thousands of Jews, desperately attempting to hide themselves among gentiles in bombed-out houses, frequently under the most difficult of conditions. Many of them carried forged identity cards, but often fell into the hands of ruthless profiteers, private exploiters and snatchers.

The official designation for Jews appointed by Nazis to help them in the ghettos was ‘Judenraats’; in the death camps - ‘Kapos’. Sometimes, a Kapo was able to act in surprisingly good ways. In 1944, Josef Rosensaft was an inmate in the notorious Block 11, also known as the Death Block, at Auschwitz. He had been there for more than five months, ever since he had been brought back to Auschwitz after escaping from a labor camp to which he had been transferred and hiding in Bedzin for six weeks with a Polish friend.

Throughout his imprisonment in Block 11, he had been continuously tortured. The Germans wanted him to betray the Poles who had helped him escape and who had hidden him, something he steadfastly refused to do.

Millions of European Jews had already perished. Thousands were dying daily. It was the most unlikely setting for prayer and devotion to God.

And yet that night, the Jewish kapo in charge of Block 11 wanted him to conduct the Yom Kippur service. Half-naked, emaciated, starved, my father chanted Kol Nidre from memory in the Death Block of Auschwitz, and led the prayers there that evening and the following day for his fellow prisoners. As a reward, the kapo gave him and the other inmates of Block 11 an extra bowl of soup to break the fast<sup>1</sup>.

Ernst Papanek, Austrian socialist educator and self-confessed total ignoramus in Jewish matters:

It was pure arrogance in our part to think that we could decide whether the Orthodox orphans would get kosher food or not. [These forty children, between 11 and 13 years of age] were tied together by the most powerful common background we ever saw...Despite everything, the Orthodox children were always the most confident of their ultimate triumph and the least scarred by their persecution. They knew who they were, and what they were persecuted for. They did feel different, they did feel special, they did feel that they had been chosen by G-d to fulfill some Almighty purpose. In one sense they didn’t have to win over anybody or anything. They won by being<sup>2</sup>.

“The Nazis did not want only to destroy the Jew; they aimed to destroy his spirit and everything he stood for. In this they glaringly failed<sup>3</sup>.”

Schonfeld quotes Efraim, a standard-bearer of secularism, whom the Holocaust brought to the gates of repentance:

---

<sup>1</sup> Menachem Z. Rosensaft, *The Jerusalem Post*, Apr. 29, 2008

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Rabbi Joseph Elias in *The Jewish Observer*, October 1977, *Dealing With “Churban Europa”*

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Joseph Elias in *The Jewish Observer*, October 1977, *Dealing With “Churban Europa”*.

From where did the thousands of Jewish police (*kapos*), who served the Germans in the concentration camps and the ghettos, come? The survivors of the Holocaust all concur that they originated from the underworld and from the *maskilim*—the very people who denounced their “unenlightened” brethren for their more traditional garb. Did not these *maskilim* harbor the same feelings of scorn and even hatred as their masters, the Nazis?... Here one must record the blatant fact...that Torah true Jewry—Jews wearing the traditional rabbinical or *hassidic* garb—never held positions in the Jewish police force, which administered ghetto Jewry, and never served as *kapos*.

Actually, there were some isolated cases of *Kapos* emerging from among the religious ranks, but they were a rarity indeed.

It is important to note that Trunk indeed points out that the *Judenrats* and ghetto administrations were largely dominated by assimilationists (the Jewish police in Warsaw was commanded by a *Meshummad*, and the Vilna Ghetto by Jacob Gens whose wife was a Lithuanian Christian) or Zionists (Merin, the “ruler” of Sosnowitz, for instance, was a Revisionist, and Rumkowski, “the king of Lodz,” a General Zionist). From the various studies there emerge many reasons why they played such a dominant role in the ghettos (and later as *kapos* in the camps). They had a better secular education, often were professionals, and knew German; not only those who only realized their Jewish identity when the Nazis took over, but a good many secularized Jews who had played a role in Jewish life, in a way felt closer to their new masters than to the poor, ragged, old-fashioned Jewish masses; their ambition and power-seeking was not restrained by Torah considerations; and they felt confidence in their won ability to decide what was right and wrong.

In the beginning, most *Judenrat* members meant well; but as the Jewish councils emerged more and more as impotent tools of Nazi persecution, their more idealistic members sought to get out or resisted the Nazis and were killed. With some notable exceptions, those who remained deluded themselves that they were doing a good thing. By preparing the lists of Jews who were sent to their deaths, they thought that they were saving other Jews. But in reality they merely stoked the crematoria.

It is noteworthy that in connection with their work—as for instance in the case of Abba Kovner, head of the *Hashomer Hatzair* in Vilna—there appears again the infamous policy of “selective rescue.” Dessler, the Vilna Jewish police head, wrote in his diary (quoted by Schonfeld):

Those who were deported were chosen by my Jewish police for I wanted to save the young and the intelligentsia. But when the time came for a breakout to the forest, Kovner promised to exit fifty of his friends from the organization exclusively...Tens of young, healthy, strong people gather in the courtyard and plead before Kovner that he permit them to join those leaving, but he threatens them with his revolver and chases them away. (Lazar, quoted by Schonfeld)

What a contrast to the role played by the Rabbis, as outlined by Trunk and others!

In Sosnowitz, Moshe Merin, mentioned above, wanted the Jewish Council to make up a list of a thousand Jews to be handed over for deportation. When the *Rav* of the community, Rabbi Yeshaya Englard, blocked him in this, Merin made up the list himself and in revenge, put Rabbi Englard and his family on it. At the last moment, he apparently reconsidered and offered to take Rabbi Englard off the train. But the *Rav* asked whether he would substitute others in his place and, upon receiving a positive reply, insisted on going to his death. Or take the contrast, in Auschwitz, between Eliezer Greenbaum, son of Yitzchak Greenbaum, whom we mentioned before, an all-powerful *Kapo* who, according to K. Tzetnik’s testimony, delighted in murdering religious Jews (he was later killed by Jews in *Eretz Yisroel*, according

to Schonfeld), and Rabbi Meisels who took his life into his hands to fulfill the last request of a few hundred boys marked for extermination, and blew *shofar* for them on *Rosh Hashanah!*

Of course, the Merins, Kovners, Greenbaums, *et al* were a relatively small number—and it has been argued that they, too, were victims of a situation too immense for them—but the fact that such figures could appear is a tragic demonstration of how low it is possible to fall when Torah is forsaken. Just as the drift away from Torah deeply affected the rescue efforts of Jewry in the free world, so it cruelly affected the Jews under the Nazi heel. Again, assimilation to a non-Jewish world and its values not only helped prepare for the disaster, but accompanied and worsened it.

The Nazis picked a Polish Jew named Zalman Gradowski for the Sonderkommando, the Jews who dealt with the corpses—yes, yanking gold teeth, all that—and disposed of the ashes. Even worse, perhaps, they found themselves helping SS men reassure the still-clueless victims removing their clothes before the "disinfection" chambers. Naturally these men knew that they, too, would be killed—Sonderkommando inmates didn't keep their jobs for long—but meanwhile, they were granted food, liquor, a handful of cigarettes and however many more days of life. "You think that those working in Sonderkommandos are monsters?" one said to a regular inmate. "I'm telling you, they're like the rest, just much more unhappy." Some, though, like Gradowski, saw these truly demonic duties as a last opportunity to bear witness. He said kaddish for the dead after every gassing, and kept notebooks; in late 1944, when he was helping plan a rebellion in the camp, he buried them. He didn't survive, but later generations know what he saw with his own eyes<sup>1</sup>.

## **J Rescue Efforts**

## **J Orthodox Rescue Efforts**

## **American Jewry**

Rabbi Joseph Elias (in *The Jewish Observer*, October 1977):

Ben Hecht's *Perfidy* shook the Jewish world when it appeared; yet it was a toned-down version of the original. "If this had been published the world would have learned that the leaders of the Jewish people—t

### **Orthodox J Rescue Efforts**

---

<sup>1</sup> David Gates in *Newsweek*, April 13, 2007, reviewing Saul Friedländer's "The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945," following its 1997 precursor, "Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939."

One of the most inspiring stories of the Holocaust was the series of amazing Jewish rescue efforts planned and carried out by Torah-observant Jews, such as Vaad Hahatzala in the United States, led by HaRav Eliezer Silver *zt'l*, and Tzeirei Agudas Yisroel in the States (together with whom some people from the Revisionist movement worked). The two the representatives of the Vaad Hahatzala in Europe, Mrs. Recha Sternbuch *o'h* and Mr. Yaakov Griffel *z'l*, saved many Jews under the most impossible conditions. Amongst his other tireless rescue efforts Rav Weissmandel *zt'l* (who worked for part of the time together with the Zionist activist, Mrs. Gisi Fleishman, *Hy'd*), halted the destruction of Slovakian Jewry for a significant amount of time, via a bribe he gave to senior Nazis.<sup>2</sup> Incredibly, Rabbi Solomon Schonfeld succeeded in rescuing 4,000 Jews<sup>3</sup>.

In Israel, Rabbi Levine of the Agudas Yisroel was certainly one of the most active rescuers of anyone in that country. Benyamin Mintz, a journalist employed by the ultra-Orthodox newspaper, Hatzofeh, left his position at the paper to join the Rescue Committee and devoted all of his time to rescue efforts<sup>4</sup>.

Dr. Jacob Griffel, in Istanbul focused on obtaining documentation for European Jews, who would pass through Turkey on their way to Israel<sup>5</sup>. The British permitted refugees to stay for only a few days and required many documents before permitting entry. Griffel worked around the clock to prepare all the necessary documents. Chaim Yisrael Eiz, worked mainly worked in Geneva, providing forged passports to Polish Jews. Consulates of many (mainly South American) nations, that Eiz contacted, agreed to issue passports indicating that their carriers were citizens of those same nations. Eiz facilitated the issue of a few thousand passports, of this type, but "only" a few hundred were put to use, because, in many cases, the Germans ignored such passports<sup>6</sup>.

American Orthodox Jews were also the segment of American Jewry most involved in rescue. The "Orthodox response" of organizations such as Vaad Hahatzala in the United States, led by HaRav Eliezer Silver *zt'l*, and Tzeirei Agudas Yisroel in the States<sup>8</sup> (together

---

<sup>1</sup> In the first months after the outbreak of World War II, some of the yeshivas that were located in Lithuanian Poland moved to Vilna, home of HaRav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky *zt'l* who worked day and night to save them. This led to the founding of *Vaad Hahatzala Be'ad Hayeshivos Vehorabonim Negu'ei Hamilchomoh* (the Rescue Committee for Yeshivas and Rabbonim Affected by the War) suggested by Rav Chaim Ozer to his talmid, Rabbi Eliezer Silver *zt'l*, the chief rabbi of Cincinnati.

<sup>2</sup> Based on two articles by *Yisroel Spiegel* in the *Yated Neeman*

<sup>3</sup> See David Kranzler, *Holocaust Hero: the Untold Story of the Rescue Exploits of Rabbi Dr. Solomon Schonfeld, the Orthodox Rabbi Who Rescued 4,000 Jews During the Holocaust (Ktav, 2002)*.

<sup>4</sup> Mintz relentlessly pressed the leadership to take action and, shortly after joining the Rescue Committee's secretariat, he threatened to resign because he felt that the committee had failed to do enough. "Et La'asot Lehatzalat Yisrael" ("The Time to Rescue Israel") by Dr. Haim Shalem

<sup>5</sup> Griffel and Chaim Yisrael Eiz, in Geneva both quickly realized that operations to rescue entire Jewish communities would unfortunately not succeed, and they focused their efforts on rescuing individuals "Et La'asot Lehatzalat Yisrael" ("The Time to Rescue Israel") by Dr. Haim Shalem

<sup>6</sup> "Et La'asot Lehatzalat Yisrael" ("The Time to Rescue Israel") by Dr. Haim Shalem

<sup>7</sup> In the first months after the outbreak of World War II, some of the yeshivas that were located in Lithuanian Poland moved to Vilna, home of HaRav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky *zt'l* who worked day and night to save them. This led to the founding of *Vaad Hahatzala Be'ad Hayeshivos Vehorabonim Negu'ei Hamilchomoh* (the Rescue Committee for Yeshivas and Rabbonim Affected by the War) at the initiative of Rav Chaim Ozer's talmid, Rabbi Eliezer Silver *zt'l*, the chief rabbi of Cincinnati.

<sup>8</sup> As well, there were the two the representatives of the Vaad Hahatzala in Europe, Mrs. Recha Sternbuch *o'h* and Mr. Yaakov Griffel *z'l*, European activists who were especially well known for their heroic work for saving Jews from danger, and this under the most impossible conditions and other individual Swiss activists, who were also Chareidi. Rav Weissmandel *zt'l* (who worked for part of the time together with the Zionist activist, Mrs. Gisi Fleishman, *Hy'd*). One of his successes was in halting the destruction of Slovakian Jewry for a significant amount of time, via a bribe he gave to senior Nazis. (Based on two articles by *Yisroel Spiegel* in the

with the Revisionist movement) was in sharp contrast to what leading Holocaust historians have called the mainstream Jewish leadership's "complete paralysis" (Raul Hilberg) and inability "to break out of a business-as-usual pattern" (David Wyman)<sup>1</sup>. By contrast, the Vaad Hatzala's attitude that this was pikuach nefesh was reflected in the fact that they were Mechale Shabbos wherever the task at hand required this. For example, initial telegrams to Lithuania about visas to the United States were sent on Shabbat, and some rabbis traveled on Shabbat for urgent rescue-related activities<sup>2</sup>.

It was the Orthodox who first received and broke the news of the holocaust in the USA in September 3, 1942<sup>3</sup> and immediately organized an emergency meeting from all 34 major national American Jewish organizations, including Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, a leading Reform rabbi and president of the American Jewish Congress<sup>4</sup>. At that meeting, Wise accused the Orthodox of "spreading atrocity tales," via the Sternbuch cable, and adjured the Jewish leadership to silence until the State Department confirmed the facts.<sup>5</sup> The Orthodox—generally first generation Americans who lacked social, political and economic clout and had no access to the general media—broke the silence<sup>6</sup>.

A significant amount of effort went into saving Gedolei Yisroel. These included the Belzer and Boyaner Rebbes<sup>7</sup>, The Rebbe of Czechow<sup>8</sup>, and Rav Menachem Zamba, who was killed in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. It was felt that saving these great men was a matter of broad Jewish interest. A distinction was made in the provision of welfare and food, where no distinction was made amongst the beneficiaries, and rescue of life<sup>9</sup>. As the Rebbe of Modzitz said of the Belzer Rebbe, "Who would not feel a sacred duty to take this lily out from among

---

Yated Neeman.)

<sup>1</sup> In Hungary, where, as late as 1944, Jews with Hungarian citizenship were fairly free, but non-Hungarian Jews were in danger of their life, there were many groups that tried to help the refugees. Again, it was the Orthodox community, small compared to the Neologs and other groups, that provided the most aid. (Ester Farbstein, *Hidden in Thunder*, pg. 109)

<sup>2</sup> Ester Farbstein, pg 214

<sup>3</sup> The Polish underground sent news to leaders in Switzerland of the first mass deportations of Warsaw Jews to extermination camps. Dr. Julius Kuhl, an Agudist, received the Polish underground report and sent it on to Recha and Yitzchak Sternbuch, the Vaad representatives in Switzerland, as well as to other major Jewish leaders including Mayer of the JDC. Upon receiving the report, the Sternbuchs immediately sent cables to Rosenheim and Rabbi Abraham Kalmanowitz of the Vaad,

<sup>4</sup> This marked the first and only time representatives from all of the major national American Jewish organizations gathered in one room together to discuss the rescue of European Jewry.

<sup>5</sup> David Kranzler, in *Jewish Action* Fall 5763/2002

<sup>6</sup> David Kranzler, in *Jewish Action* Fall 5763/2002

<sup>7</sup> Rav Moshe Friedman

<sup>8</sup> Rav Yitzchak Yeshayahu Halberstam, son of the Diveri Chayim

<sup>9</sup> Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandl, one of the leading activists in Slovakia trying to save the Jews in a letter to Rabbi Moshe Bllau, one of the leaders of Agudat Yisroel in Israel as quoted in Mieslish, *Michtav Bilti Yadua*, 170, brought in Ester Farbstein, *Hidden in Thunder*, pg. 73.

the thistles and thorns?<sup>1</sup> Most of these attempts at rescue failed in the end<sup>2</sup> though the Belzer, Gerer and Satmar Rebbes were saved.

Giving priority to saving the lives of these great rabbis is a halchik principle as indicated in the Gemorrah:

מסכת הוריות, דף יג עמ ב: גמרא תנו רבנן היה הוא ואביו ורבו בשבי הוא קודם לרבו ורבו קודם לאביו אמו קודמת לכולם חכם קודם למלך ישראל חכם שמת אין לנו כיוצא בו מלך ישראל שמת כל ישראל ראויים למלכות מלך קודם לכהן גדול שנאמר ויאמר המלך (אליהם) [להם] קחו עמכם (או מעבדי) [את עבדי] אדוניכם וגו' כהן גדול קודם לנביא

This is not because of their intrinsic worth as human beings is any greater than anyone else's but rather because of their value to the community as a whole<sup>3</sup>. In fact, even though we normally don't ransom a kidnapped Jew for more than their value, for that would only encourage more kidnapping<sup>4</sup>, we do ransom a Talmid Chacham even if all the money in the world is being asked<sup>5</sup>. And a Talmid Chacham takes precedence over a king in being ransomed<sup>6</sup>.

Those greats who could be saved were faced with the tremendous issue of whether to abandon their communities or not. Certainly, the principle of הייך קודמים applies to a Talmid Chacham as much as anyone else, but a Talmid Chacham has the option of remaining with his community<sup>7</sup>.

The terrible decision to desert the community haunted those who left for the rest of their lives, but it also impelled them to rebuild their communities. Rav Yosef Shlomo Kehaneman, the Ponevizer Rov, was not only driven to rebuild Poneviz, but aimed to build a yeshiva for everyone that was destroyed in Europe<sup>8</sup>. Upon his death, Rav Shmuel Rozovsky quoted in his eulogy the Zohar, Parshas Noach, which quotes Moshe Rabbeinu as being greater than Noach because Moshe save himself and the whole generation, whereas Noach saved only himself.

Noach had to be ordered into the ark as he did not have the courage to save himself and his family when the whole world was being wiped out. Afterwards G-d had to command Noach to come out of the ark, for Noach lacked the courage to go out and see the whole world in ruins, and to start rebuilding the world. G-d had to order him, "Go out to the destroyed world. Start a new life." Just as Noach didn't enter the ark without permission so

<sup>1</sup> In Ester Farbstein, Hidden in Thunder, pg. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Often because the Rabbi was unwilling to cooperate feeling that he would thereby be abandoning his flock. Hence, when the war broke out the talmidim of the Slomimer Rebbe (Rabbi Shlomo Dovid Yehoshua Weinberg) begged him to join them in Eretz Yisroel, but he refused, saying: *I may have made a mistake by staying here, but what can I do? Small children are depending on me, and a word to the wise (i.e the Hasidim) is sufficient ...* In June, 1941, when eastern Poland was occupied, he was moved to the Baranowicze ghetto, where even the underground activists put their trust in him and were encouraged by him. In December 1942, he was taken to Koldyczewo camp where, despite the harsh regime and the news that his family had been murdered, he continued to boost the morale of the Jewish slave laborers, dancing with them on Friday nights, singing *Yesmechu ve'Malchutecha*. His prayers created a special spiritual atmosphere in the camp. On November 4, 1943, he was taken to a mass grave at the head of a procession, quiet and erect. (Ester Farbstein, Hidden in Thunder, pg. 116-117.)

<sup>3</sup> נצי"ב, מרומי שדה על היריות, שם

<sup>4</sup> מסכת גיטין פ"ד מש' ג

<sup>5</sup> חידושי הרמב"ן, גיטין דף מה עמ' א

<sup>6</sup> מאירי, גיטין דף מה עמ' א

<sup>7</sup> The Chazon Ish who told Rabbi Avraham Farbstein as reported by Ester Farbstein, pg. 221, note 106

<sup>8</sup> He succeeded in building two, Ponevez in Bnei Brak, and Grodno in Ashkelon

he wouldn't leave without permission. "I am not leaving" (I do not have the strength to see a world in ruins and rebuild it) "without permission." Noach felt and sensed the sorrow of his generation and the destruction of the world, but he was nevertheless accused of saving himself but not his generation to the point that the floodwaters were named for him: the waters of Noach.

Rav Shmuel Rozovsky then applied this to the Rav Kehaneman: His soul found no rest. He was frequently bothered and disturbed by the thought: I saved myself but not my ship. He would also say that he saved himself with the others. This thought is what gave him tremendous strength to create and build, to work day and night for many years without let-up and without a break, all for one goal: so that instead of having "saved myself but not my ship" he would also save his ship – his generation. He would rebuild the destroyed world of Torah, restoring the crown to its former glory, until, from the standpoint of the eternity of the nation, it would be as if he had saved the entire ship by extricating from the stormy ocean waves and bringing it to safe shores, by establishing charitable institutions to save Jewish children and to establish a world of loving-kindness in Israel<sup>1</sup>.

Ephraim Zuroff wrote a book claiming the Orthodox focused on saving their fellow Orthodox brethren and, in particular the leading Rabanim (the implication being Orthodox indifference to the non-Orthodox).<sup>2</sup> But, in an extensive review of Zuroff's book in Jewish action, David Kranzler made ten points conclusively refuting this<sup>3</sup>. The Agudah sent food packages until Lord Halifax threatened Yaakov Rosenheim, the president of the World Agudah, with the arrest of thousands of Jewish refugees in London<sup>4</sup>. By 1942, the Agudah discovered new legal channels, enabling them to send \$12,000 worth of food to Poland per month<sup>5</sup>. These packages did not discriminate at all between one Jew and another.

It is true that the Vaad Hatzola prioritized the saving of the great rabbis, and the yeshivas - for the future of the Jewish people lay with them<sup>6</sup>. (The Vaad ha-Hatzala, headed by Rabbi Elizer Silver, was initially formed for the purpose of rescuing 3,000 Torah scholars trapped in Vilna in 1939, a task in which no other group evinced more than a minimal

---

<sup>1</sup> Zichron Shmuel, pg. 570-572, quoted in Farbstein, 221-223

<sup>2</sup> Thy Brother's Blood: the Orthodox Jewish Response during the Holocaust (Brooklyn, NY, 1987) Zuroff writes, "For more than a year after the leaders of American Orthodoxy learned of the details of the Final Solution in September 1942, the Vaad ha-Hatzala allocated all its rescue funds to approximately 900 refugee rabbis and yeshiva students in Central Asia and 450 in Shanghai, all of whom were simultaneously being assisted by other Jewish organizations... Toward the end of 1943, the Vaad finally began to send funds for rescue work into occupied Europe, and did indeed attempt to promote a more activist rescue approach by the American Jewish community. .... During the period from January 1 to October 31, 1944, [however] the Orthodox rescue committee did indeed transfer \$420,000 to Switzerland for rescue work in Nazi-occupied Europe; but at the same time it spent \$265,000 on relief for the rabbis and yeshiva students in Central Asia and Shanghai" whom Zuroff considers not in danger of being murdered. (Hareidi Hagliography Vs. Holocaust History)

<sup>3</sup> David Kranzler Jewish Action Spring 2003

<sup>4</sup> (Interestingly, the British never stopped the International Red Cross from sending shiploads of grain to Nazi-occupied Greece and Yugoslavia.)

<sup>5</sup> David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945* (New York, 1985), 285.

<sup>6</sup> The Vaad's principles with respect to its rescue efforts were stated at its founding conference in New York on November 13, 1939:

*In the olden days of the destruction of the Temple, Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai pleaded for the great Academy of Yavneh and her scholars because he believed that the Torah was the Jewish citadel. In the tragedy that has befallen our people at the present day when complete destruction threatens the very life of the Jewish people, it should be our sacred duty to save our Yavneh of today – the Holy Yeshivot – in which the only salvation of Judaism and Jewish life lies.*



interest. The Jewish Agency, for instance, with nearly 70,000 Palestine certificates to distribute, did not issue even one to any of these Torah scholars.)

In order to rescue the Torah scholars, the Vaad sought to procure Above Quota Emergency Visitors' Visas. The special visas program came about as a result of the efforts of the Jewish Labor Committee, for instance, and succeeded in rescuing 2,000 elite personalities-Labor leaders, artists and intellectuals by procuring these visas, and the world Jewish Congress similarly saved 100 top Zionist leaders. At the same time, no more than forty Torah scholars were saved under the program<sup>1</sup>.

Certainly the Nazis understood that to target the rabbis was to break the spiritual life of the community, and, after invading a town would invariably seek out the rabbi to humiliate. Torture and sometimes kill him in public. There are hundreds of such recorded incidences, each with its own variation<sup>2</sup>.

The Vaad ha-Hatzala was only one aspect of the Orthodox response<sup>3</sup>. Many of the rabbis who led the Vaad-such as Rabbi Aharon Kotler and Rabbi Reuven Grozovsky were also active in Agudath Israel. In the latter capacities, each was involved in numerous general rescue initiatives.

Unlike the secular Jewish establishment, they were not hindered by fears of appearing “disloyal” to the American government, or by doing everything legally—their primary concern was saving lives. And save lives they did, not just from the Orthodox camp, as Zuroff contends, but from every segment of Jewish society. Indeed, the Orthodox followed a dual track for rescue: the first track involved the rescue of all *Klal Yisrael*, regardless of affiliation; the second track involved the specific rescue of Torah scholars and yeshiva students. These efforts, which began in 1940 and accelerated by mid- 1943, peaked in 1944-45<sup>4</sup>.

By contrast, many the non-Orthodox bodies decided, at this time that their priority would be not rescue but the establishment of the State of Israel<sup>5</sup>. In part, the creation of a Jewish homeland was seen as a haven for the Jews who could escape from the Nazis<sup>6</sup>; but it

---

<sup>1</sup> Zuroff sees nothing wrong with the elitism and particularism of secular groups. Yet, when the Orthodox are forced to redress the imbalance, he immediately pounces on them.

<sup>2</sup> Ester Farbstein, *Hidden in Thunder*, pg. 76-81.

<sup>3</sup> **A fact ignored by Zuroff**

<sup>4</sup> David Kranzler, in *Jewish Action* Fall 5763/2002

<sup>5</sup> During this time, the American Jewish Community was confronted with two issues: the foundation of a Jewish state and the rescue of European Jewry. David Ben-Gurion, the head of the Jewish Agency, along with most Zionists, felt that statehood superseded rescue. In fact, in May 1942, at a planning meeting for the American Jewish Conference (a meeting of all American Jewish organizations), Ben-Gurion succeeded in convincing all of the American Zionist organizations to support his goal of a postwar Jewish state. The tragedy of European Jewry was not on the agenda. At the planning meeting in January 1943 in Pittsburgh, it was decided that the entire American Jewish community should support the concept of a postwar Jewish state. Shockingly, until the Orthodox and the JLC pressured organizers of the meeting, the rescue of European Jewry was not even on the agenda. Because of the appalling indifference to rescue, the Orthodox, among other organizations, walked out of the Pittsburgh conference. Dr. Isaac Lewin of the Vaad and Agudah, bemoaned this fact in the *Yiddishe Shtimme: At the Pittsburgh Assembly which laid the basis for the American Jewish Assembly later changed to Conference*, *I proposed that it should preoccupy itself with rescue work for European Jewry. It was then that the chairman [Henry] Monsky, declared that he can't even permit a vote on this issue, because the Assembly was called for a different purpose.* (*Yiddishe Shtimme*, Nov. 23, 5.)

<sup>6</sup> "What was happening to the Jews in Europe in 1944 was an important factor in the Irgun's decision to launch its war for independence," Katz told me. "It helped shape [Irgun commander] Menachem Begin's thinking. It intensified our sense of urgency. Nobody knew how long World War Two and the slaughter of the Jews would continue. We were fighting to create a Jewish homeland that would be a haven for the Jews who could escape from the

was also seen as the ultimate solution to the whole problem of a weak and defenseless Galus Jew. "Never again" was seen by the new Israeli as a slogan that would be actualized by a new Jew emerging in a Jewish State.

The Zionism of some of the non-Orthodox Jewish leaders, combined with their lack of understanding of the special attention given to Torah scholars, their desire to maintain the party-line with the USA government and their aversion to using illegal means to save Jewish lives, led to hostility on their part to the Vaad Hatzala and there were even efforts made to deligitimize the Vaad<sup>1</sup>. Mainstream organizations were also worried by the "political and social implications: of transporting a whole mass of entire yeshivas to America<sup>2</sup>.

On October 6, 1943, some 400 rabbis marched to the White House to plead with President Franklin D. Roosevelt to rescue Jews from the Holocaust. It was the only [protest rally](#) held in Washington to urge the rescue of European Jewry. The Bergson Group, who organized the march, issued a news release listing 250 rabbis who intended to take part. The other 150 or so who participated were never publicly identified by name<sup>3</sup>. One of these was the late Bostoner Rebbe, Rabbi Levi Horowitz. So was Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik<sup>4</sup>.

In 1973 Rabbi Soloveitchik stated that in the Yom Kippur liturgy, 'For the sin that we have sinned before You by seeing the suffering of our Jewish brethren who called to us and we did not listen': *American Jews should add an Al Chet --a confession of sin-- to acknowledge the community's failure to respond adequately to news of the mass killing of European Jews during the Holocaust.*

In the lecture, given at Yeshiva University's Wurzweiler School of Social Work on December 24, 1973, Rabbi Soloveitchik remarked that "during the Holocaust period," many American Jews were not sufficiently concerned "with our brethren, with our fellow Jews, and we let millions of Jews go down the drain."

Therefore, he said, "to the list of *Al Chets* of the *chatayim* [sins] we enumerate on Yom Kippur, we should add another *Al Chet*. Perhaps it would be the worst, the most horrible one - *Al chet shechatanu lefanecha bera'inu tzoras nafshoseihem shel acheinu bais Yisroel shehischananu eileinu v'lo shamenu* ['For the sin that we have sinned before You by seeing the suffering of our Jewish brethren who called to us and we did not listen']."

Statements of this sort were unheard of in the first decades after the war. That began to change in the 1960s and 1970s, as a younger generation of American Jews started asking questions about the actions of their elders<sup>5</sup>. By 1981, there was sufficient interest in the topic to bring about the creation of the American Jewish Commission on the Holocaust, a

---

Nazis. We felt as if we were engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the entire Jewish people."

The above paragraphs in the text and this footnote are from Rafael Medoff, *The Jerusalem Post*, June, 10, 2008 reviewing Katz, *Days of Fire*, although on the history of the Irgun. It was also the first book to expose the Allies' failure to bomb Auschwitz.

<sup>1</sup> Zuroff, *Response of Orthodox Jewry*, pgs, 98-99

<sup>2</sup> Zuroff, *Ibid*, pg. 87

<sup>3</sup> They either joined the march at the last minute, or simply neglected to give their names to the organizers in advance.

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Chaim Gold, son of one of the march's leaders (Rabbi Wolf Gold) and a former student of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (1903-1993), shared a transcript of a lecture in which Rabbi Soloveitchik mentioned the march and added, "I, too, was among the rabbis who went to the White House" that day in 1943.

<sup>5</sup> Articles about the subject began appearing more frequently in Jewish periodicals. Activists in the Soviet Jewry movement cited American Jewry's lethargic response to the Holocaust as an impetus for their own protests. "We didn't want to repeat the mistakes of that generation," Glenn Richter, director of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, recalls.

committee of Jewish communal figures intending to produce the first comprehensive examination of US Jewry's Holocaust record<sup>1</sup>.

New scholarly research in the 1980s permanently reshaped the debate. Monty Penkower (*The Jews Were Expendable*, 1982), David Wyman (*The Abandonment of the Jews*, 1984), Haskel Lookstein (*Were We Our Brothers' Keepers?*, 1984) and others revealed unflattering new information about American Jewry and the Holocaust. They chronicled the missed opportunities to press for Allied rescue of refugees, the petty in-fighting between Jewish groups that sapped communal time and energy, the unsavory attacks by Jewish leaders against the activist Bergson Group. What the historians found essentially confirmed what the critics had suspected.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, remarks made by several prominent Jewish leaders have dramatically illustrated how much attitudes have changed over the years. At a Wyman Institute conference, Michael Miller, executive director of the New York Jewish Community Relations Council, and Seymour Reich, past president of B'nai B'rith and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, sharply criticized their predecessors' wartime record. Reich declared: "I have come here today, as a veteran of the Jewish establishment, to say unequivocally: the Jewish leaders in the 1940s were wrong."

Rabbi Dr. David Ellenson, president of Reform Judaism's Hebrew Union College, has gone so far as to assert that Rabbi Stephen Wise "failed miserably" in his response to the Holocaust. The news from Europe was certainly unprecedented, he said, but Jewish leaders such as Wise "had an obligation to be sufficiently flexible and imaginative to deal with unprecedented situations." Rabbi Ellenson's bold statement was significant not only because Wise was the most prominent American Jewish leader of the 1940s, but also because he was the founder and longtime leader of the very institution over which Ellenson himself now presides<sup>2</sup>.

Rabbi Leo Jung and Zeirei Agudath Israel, under the leadership of Mike Tress, were among the pioneers of securing affidavits of financial support and immigration visas. Those visas saved several thousand Jews, religious and non-religious alike, from the flames of Europe. Agudath Israel of America was the only organization to defy the British boycott of occupied Europe and continue to send food packages to religious and non-religious Jews in Polish ghettos through 1941, despite weeks of picketing by the entire American Jewish establishment.

In addition, it was the Orthodox who broke the silence on the Nazi extermination campaign in Europe and who pushed for a unified stand of all Jewish groups to pressure the American government to act. On August 28, 1942, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, the preeminent American Zionist leader, received a telegram from Gerhard Riegner of the World Jewish Congress detailing the Nazi plan to exterminate European Jewry. Wise did nothing other than send the information to the State Department for confirmation.

Jacob Rosenheim, head of World Agudah, received similar information from Orthodox representatives in Switzerland describing the deportation of 100,000 Jews from Warsaw to the crematoria. On the basis of this cable, Rabbi Abraham Kalmanowitz immediately pressured Wise into calling an emergency meeting of thirty-four American Jewish organizations. At that meeting, Wise accused the rabbis of spreading "atrocious tales," and did not divulge the Reigner cable that fully corroborated Rosenheim's information. In

---

<sup>1</sup> The acrimony that engulfed the commission's work and led to its dissolution revealed still-lingering sensitivities. Critics of the Jewish leadership cried whitewash, while defenders of the establishment circled the wagons. But the controversy did galvanize a healthy public discussion.

<sup>2</sup> The above paragraphs adapted from Rafael Medoff

addition, he adjured all present at the meeting to silence in order to avoid pressuring President Roosevelt.

In fact, of all the Jewish groups in the USA, only the Orthodox and the Revisionists, led by Peter Bergson, placed rescue at the top of the communal agenda. At the May 1942 Biltmore Conference of all American Zionist organizations, the rescue of European Jewry was not even on the agenda. At a January 1943 planning session for the forthcoming gathering of the American Jewish Conference, rescue again was not on the agenda. Only at the insistence of the Orthodox and the Jewish Labor Committee was it given a minor place. The resolutions of the American Jewish Conference-which took place a full year after Wise, received proof of the destruction of European Jewry-focused almost entirely on the creation of a post-war Jewish state in Palestine.

(Conventional wisdom holds that the State of Israel came into being as an outcome of the Holocaust, although well-known Holocaust historian Prof. Yehuda Bauer, contends the opposite, that the Holocaust almost prevented the creation of the State of Israel. The only person in the UN to mention Jewish suffering in the Holocaust was Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet Union's representative at the UN. The UNSCOP team, in making its recommendation, referred to Jewish suffering throughout the ages but not to the Holocaust.)<sup>1</sup>

Hillel Kook, a member of the Jabotinsky Revisionist school, was another Orthodox Jew whose style clashed with that of American Jewish leaders, as well as with the Jewish Agency, which was the governing body in pre-state of Israel was far more interested in the future establishment of a Jewish State than in getting involved in the rescue of European Jewry<sup>2</sup>.

Kook had traveled from Mandatory Palestine to the United States in 1940 to create a Jewish legion to fight against the Nazis. But when he arrived and found out about the mass slaughter of European Jewry, he devoted himself to informing the American public about what was happening and pressing for political action to stop it<sup>3</sup>.

The Orthodox groups, Bergson and Kook were central in raising awareness and pushing US President Franklin D. Roosevelt to create the War Refugee Board. That agency, in turn, tasked Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg with rescuing Hungarian Jews, some 100,000 of whom he was able to save<sup>4</sup>.

For the first 50 years after the war, the contribution of these people to the rescue effort was largely ignored by Yadvashem and other official bodies. There were no movies made about them and no streets named after them. They have not mentioned in Israel's holocaust curriculum for schools<sup>5</sup>. Recently, things began to change, though only a little.

In fact, the mainstream Zionists were so opposed to Bergson, (who led the Revisionist rescue effort<sup>6</sup>) urging the Roosevelt administration to deport or draft him, and pressuring politicians to avoid him. Nachum Goldman of the World Jewish Congress told the State Department that Wise "regarded Bergson as equally as great an enemy of the Jews as Hitler<sup>7</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> Greer Fay Cashman, *The Jerusalem Post*, December, 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008

<sup>2</sup> Hilary Leila Krieger, *The Jerusalem Post*, April, 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Peter Bergson was a nephew of Rav Kook. He, like the Orthodox, focused on rescue above all else. Wise condemned Bergson in the strongest terms. (Wyman, *Abandonment*, 144).

<sup>7</sup> An aide to Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau Jr. wrote that "every (Jewish) organization is more interested in their fight with some other organization than with the objective of saving Jews....I wouldn't be

The Orthodox, together with Bergson planned the extraordinary march of 400 rabbis on Washington, D.C., on October 6, 1943, the sole public protest of the Roosevelt administration's indifference to the fate of European Jewry.<sup>1</sup> The Rabbis' March was condemned by Wise and the entire Jewish establishment.

The march led to the introduction of the Bergson-sponsored Rescue Resolution in Congress. That Resolution, in turn, was the primary catalyst for the creation of the War Rescue Board (WRB). Historian David Wyman credits the WRB with saving between 100,000 and 200,000 Jews. Once the WRB was created, the rabbis and Orthodox lay leaders Irving Bunim and Mike Tress continually pressured it to participate in various "ransom" schemes developed by Orthodox Jews in Europe-Rabbi Michael Ber Weissmandl in Slovakia, Isaac and Recha Sternbuch in Switzerland and Dr. Yaakov Griffel in Turkey-by permitting the necessary money transfers.

Throughout the war, the Orthodox were willing to use any means, regardless of legality, to save Jewish lives-any Jewish life. Those illegal means, which were eschewed by mainstream Jewish groups, including using the diplomatic codes of the Polish-government-in-exile<sup>2</sup>, making illegal wire transfers to starving Jews in Axis-controlled territory, procuring fake South American passports for Jews in Nazi captivity (which eventually proved the difference between life and death for tens of thousands of Jews)<sup>3</sup> and engaging the Nazis in

---

surprised to see Bergson killed."

<sup>1</sup> "Make way for the rabbis." It was probably the first time the station master at Washington, D.C.'s Union Station had shouted these words. But the crowd before him was unlike any ever seen in the nation's capital. Four hundred rabbis converged on Union Station two days before Yom Kippur, 1943, in a stirring display of unity to rescue Jews from Nazi extermination.

The march was the brainchild of 33-year-old Hillel Kook (b. 1910), a Jerusalem-born nephew of Abraham Isaac Kook, former chief rabbi of Palestine, who arrived in the United States in 1940. For reasons known only to him, once here, Kook took the Americanized name Peter Bergson. Purchasing full-page ads in American newspapers criticizing British limitations on the number of Jews who could emigrate to Palestine, then under British rule, and pleading for Allied action to rescue European Jewry, Bergson and his associates known as the Bergson Group - used the mass media to rouse public interest and influence the Roosevelt administration to intervene against Hitler. Most provocatively, Bergson called for the formation of an international Jewish army, which would fight under Allied auspices to liberate European Jewry.

One of Bergson's most spectacular initiatives was the 1943 March of the Rabbis. Despite his Orthodox background, Bergson himself was not observant, nor were most of his followers. They understood, however, the powerful visual impact of hundreds of Orthodox rabbis with their beards, black coats and hats converging on Congress and the White House.... On the advice of his aides, FDR, who was scheduled to attend a military ceremony, intentionally avoided the rabbis by leaving the White House through a rear exit while they marched silently in front. When Roosevelt's decision not to encounter the rabbis became known to the press, reporters interpreted Roosevelt's actions as a snub, adding a dramatic flair that transformed the protest rally into a full-fledged clash between the rabbis and the administration.... Bergson's skillful appeal to American public conscience, including the rabbi's march, worked as nothing previously had to bring about a change in White House policy toward the Holocaust. Bergson's militancy, Morgenthau's insider access and the rabbis' willingness to take united political action combined to move FDR to action after three years of his insistence that only when the Allies defeated Hitler could European Jewry be saved. ([American Jewish Historical Society](#))

<sup>2</sup> to ensure the fastest possible information from Europe that was free of American government censorship.

<sup>3</sup> The protective Latin American Papers was an example of the Orthodox initiating a rescue approach subsequently emulated by other relief organizations. . The scheme was initiated by Eli Sternbuch (of the heroic Orthodox Sternbuch family that represented the Vaad in Switzerland). When Sternbuch heard that a Polish Jew with a Swiss passport had been exempt from wearing a yellow star and being incarcerated in the

ransom negotiations. Rabbi Weissmandl used such negotiations to delay the deportation of Slovakian Jewry for nearly two years and to halt the deportation of Hungarian Jewry. (See below)

In the summer of 1944, the Orthodox pressured the JDCC into paying for forty tractors demanded by the Nazis as the "ransom" for releasing the Kastner train (with its human cargo of nearly 1,700 people from Bergen-Belsen) to Switzerland<sup>1</sup>. In the last years of the war, the Sternbuch cooperated with Swiss fascist Jean-Marie Musy as an intermediary with Heinrich Himmler in order to ransom a train with 1,210 inmates from Theresienstadt. The Musy negotiations came to an end after Saly Mayer, the head of the JDC in Switzerland, and Natan Schwab of Hechalutz publicly condemned paying a price to the Nazis even to save Jewish lives.<sup>2</sup>

In April 1944, two inmates escaped from Auschwitz to the Slovak Jewish Underground headed by Rabbi Weissmandl and Gisi Fleischmann<sup>3</sup>.

---

ghetto, he realized that a passport from a neutral country would protect the holder. He acquired Paraguayan passports for his future fiancée, Guta Eisenzweig and her family. (Prior to the deportations from Warsaw, Guta Eisenzweig (and a group of 162 other Polish Jewish holders of such papers) was sent to Vittel, the detention camp in France, where she survived the war. Although all but six members of this group in Vittel were later deported to Auschwitz, this was due to a change in German policy vis-à-vis the recognition of such papers. This situation was rectified by the rabbis of the Vaad on Pesach 1944, too late for preventing the deportation from Vittel.) Subsequently, the Orthodox and other groups such as the Relief Organization for Polish Jews (RELICO), and even non-Jews, used Latin American passports to save tens of thousands of Jews of every affiliation. (George Mantello, the Jewish Salvadoran diplomat in Geneva, utilized Salvadoran citizenship papers to rescue about 30,000 Hungarian and other Jews during 1943-44.) But Saly Mayer, the Swiss representative of the JDC, refused to consider using Latin American passports since they were bogus.

<sup>1</sup> Originally, places on the train organized by Rudolph Kastner were limited to those with Zionist credentials.

Rezsó Kasztner undeniably saved the lives of more than 1,600 men, women and children during World War II when he negotiated with Nazi Adolf Eichmann to send a "rescue train" filled with Jews from Budapest to Switzerland in 1944. Yet he was also accused of the murder of many thousands by withholding information about the Auschwitz death camp, and branded, in a landmark libel case filed after the war, as a man who had "sold his soul to the devil" as a collaborator with Nazis. Kasztner defended several legendary Nazis in the Nuremberg trials (and lied about it in his libel trial) "Some have speculated whether that was not part of a gentlemen's agreement hammered out during the negotiations for the train. Kastner was murdered in 1957, outside his Tel Aviv home, by a young right-wing extremist. (Maira Macdonald in the *Seattle Times*, Thursday, July 15, 2010)

<sup>2</sup> Marie Musy was formerly president of Switzerland. In fall 1944, Sternbuch asked Musy, who had turned strongly pro-Nazi in the 1930's, to intercede with Himmler for release of the Jews in Nazi concentration camps. Musy agreed. Himmler agreed to release virtually all the Jews, in weekly trainloads of about 1,200, if a token payment of 5 million Swiss francs (\$1.25 million) were placed in a Swiss bank in Musy's name. The next day, a train arrived at the Swiss border carrying 1,210 Jews from Theresienstadt. In the meantime, in mid-February, Musy received word from Himmler's headquarters that the project would be halted unless articles appeared in the Swiss and American press giving credit to the Germans for releasing the Jews who had come out of Theresienstadt. Such reports were published. But if Himmler's purpose was to cultivate American opinion in preparation for a peace approach, his tactic backfired. The press reports came to Hitler's attention, and he snuffed out the project, ordering that not one more Jew was to leave German territory. More Jews did get out, but the Sternbuch-Musy-Himmler agreement was dead despite several weeks of determined effort by Musy to revive it.

The Brand, Mayer, and Sternbuch-Musy episodes all raised the troubling problem of ransom. The WRB adamantly opposed paying the Nazis to let Jews out. The primary reason, of course, was that the compensation could aid the Axis war effort. WRB policy allowed bribery of lower officials and border guards on the grounds that saving lives outweighed any tiny advantage the Nazis might gain from those transactions. But that was quite different from payments of millions of dollars or strategically important goods.

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Weissmandl was instrumental in originating numerous rescue schemes including negotiating with the Nazis, the Kastner Train and the Auschwitz Protocols; it was his constant efforts that succeeded in saving thousands of Hungarian Jews.

The escapees related that the Nazis were expanding the death camp to accommodate the Hungarian Jews. The report, which became known as the Auschwitz Protocols, was sent in the original and in Hebrew by Rabbi Weissmandl, together with a desperate plea to bomb the track to Auschwitz and the crematoria to Hungary and Switzerland. Rudolph Kastner, the representative of the Jewish Agency in Budapest and head of the Budapest rescue committee, was the first to receive the report. He never showed it to anyone.

From May 15, 1944, on, 12,000 Jews a day were deported to Auschwitz from Hungary. That same day, Weissmandl sent copies of the complete Protocols and his five page summary again via courier to key representatives in Switzerland, including Schwalb of Hechalutz; Mayer of the JDC; Riegner of the WJC and the Sternbuchs. Schwalb translated both reports into German and within 48 hours all the Zionist organizations in New York, London, Istanbul and Jerusalem had received copies. No one responded. In Istanbul, Dr. Yaakov Griffel, the Agudah representative on the Moetza, the Jewish Agency's rescue committee, received Weissmandl's plea and immediately informed the WRB through the US ambassador to Turkey, Laurence Steinhardt. When the Sternbuchs received the cable, despite the fact that it was Shabbat, they immediately traveled to Bern to see the American and British military attachés. But no help was forthcoming. Roswell McClelland of the WRB in Switzerland—who received the reports from all the Jewish factions—did not forward them to Washington<sup>1</sup>.

Finally, on June 12, Recha Sternbuch sent the reports via the Polish diplomatic code to Rosenheim and Rabbi Kalmanowitz in New York. On June 12, 1944, they received the Sternbuch cable and immediately pleaded with the WRB to bomb Auschwitz but were repeatedly ignored. It was only because of the efforts by George Mantello, the Jewish Salvadoran diplomat in Geneva, that the reports were publicized in the Swiss press, and succeeded in halting deportations by July 7. After he got his copy of the Auschwitz Protocols from Budapest, Mantello initiated an extraordinary Swiss church and press campaign that revealed the horrors of Auschwitz to the world for the first time. The international reaction forced Admiral Horthy, head of the Hungarian government under the Nazis, to halt the deportations<sup>2</sup>.

Although Eichmann attempted to continue the deportations, international interference prevented him from doing so, saving the lives of 140,000 Budapest Jews, Orthodox and non-Orthodox<sup>3</sup>.

## American Jewry

American Jewish leaders worked to publicize the European Jewish situation and pressed for government rescue steps. But their effectiveness was importantly diminished by their inability to mount a sustained or unified drive for government action, by diversion of energies into fighting among the several organizations<sup>4</sup>, and by failure to assign top priority

---

<sup>1</sup> David Kranzler, in *Jewish Action* Fall 5763/2002

<sup>2</sup> Kranzler, *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Kranzler, *ibid*

<sup>4</sup>For example, much of the American Jewish leadership had decried the Committee for a Jewish Army accessing it of recklessness and sensationalism as well as gross effrontery in presuming to speak to for an American constituency. Concern now arose that the Bergsonites would seize the leadership of the languishing effort for

to the rescue issue.<sup>1</sup> Some organizations seemed so automatically loyal to the President<sup>2</sup> or to the priority of Zionism<sup>3</sup> that they actually undermined some rescue efforts.<sup>4</sup>

In May 1942, the Bund (Jewish socialist party of Poland) in England reported the murder of 700,000 Polish Jews. Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, a leading Reform rabbi and president of the American Jewish Congress, was informed of this. He received a second and a third cable, this time from Sternbuch. On December 8, 1942 Wise accused the Orthodox of “spreading atrocity tales,” via the Sternbuch cable, and adjured the Jewish leadership to silence until the State Department confirmed the facts.<sup>5</sup> By November 24—nearly three months after the Sternbuch cable arrived—the State Department “confirmed Wise’s worst fears,” that two million Jews had perished<sup>6</sup>.

Acting to protect his close friend and confidant US President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) regardless of the cost to the Jews of Europe, Wise decided not to act on this

---

rescue. The inertia of the preceding several weeks dissolved rapidly. Aware of the CJA’s plan to hold a demonstration at Madison Square Garden on March 9, Wise and the American Jewish Congress scheduled a March 1 mass meeting at the same location. To complete this display of disunity and rivalry, the Jewish Labor Committee in late February held many smaller meetings of its own throughout the New York metropolitan area.

<sup>1</sup>In the end, the American Jewish Congress carried out very few of its plans. Why? For one thing, cooperation from non-Jews was meager. In addition, some Planning Committee members had reservations about marches and other mass action projects, fearing they “might make the wrong kind of impression on the non-Jewish community.” Probably most important, the American Jewish Congress was trying to do too many things with too few capable people.

<sup>2</sup>Wise’s autobiography, completed shortly before he died, shows that Roosevelt remained his hero until the end. It also leaves the clear impression that after about 1935 Wise was unable to be critical of, or even objective about, the President. Despite all evidence to the contrary, he was convinced that FDR was personally anxious about the persecuted European Jews in the 1930’s that he wanted to do everything possible to rescue Jews during the Holocaust years, and that he fully, though quietly, supported the Zionist movement. Wise’s myriad responsibilities, which attested to his importance in American Jewish life, may also have hampered his effectiveness. Reason indicates, and some observers at the time suggested that he should have passed some of them on to others.

<sup>3</sup>Throughout December 1942, the organization most active in developing rescue proposals and seeking support for them was the Zionist oriented American Jewish Congress, aided by its affiliate, the World Jewish Congress. A special Planning Committee was formed that designed an ambitious campaign to arouse public opinion. Effective pressure could then be brought on the government to induce it to act. The Office of War Information was to publicize the extermination news.

Most Zionist resources, however, continued to be concentrated on the postwar goal of a Jewish state in Palestine.

Besides direct rescue work, there were rallies, parades, newspaper advertisements, etc.

Because of this, Agudath Israel of America and the Union of Orthodox Rabbis withdrew from the conference before it convened. In its withdrawal statement, the Union of Orthodox Rabbis declared that the conference should raise a “powerful outcry over the destruction of the Jewish people and demand immediate means for the rescue of Jewish lives.” Rescue was added to the agenda only in late July, a month before the conference met, and then only after persistent hammering by the Jewish Labor committee. Even then, the conference’s executive committee turned down a Labor Committee appeal to make the extermination of the European Jews the central issue.

Dr. Abba Hillel Silver was probably the most militant of the front echelon of American Zionist leaders. By the time of the conference, he was engaged in a power struggle that would eventually see him supplant Stephen Wise as the leader of American Zionism. Silver had not participated in the Jewish leadership’s efforts for government rescue action. Goldman warned that the demand for a commonwealth would hurt the rescue effort because it would only harden British and Arab resistance to Jewish immigration into Palestine. And it would do nothing to save the European Jews.



information. Wise wanted to avoid pressuring the president and endangering the New Deal, at all costs<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, it was only because of the pressure from the Orthodox that Wise had the US president meet with an ad hoc committee of eight members. A press release issued by Wise on December 9 states that the president was “shocked” to hear of the loss of two million Jews. This was an outright lie. In fact, at the December 8 meeting, as Jacob Pat, the Jewish Labor Committee (JLC) representative on the committee attested, the president said no such thing but instead declared that he was “fully aware of your people’s tragedy<sup>2</sup>.”

In his original, pre-edited version of *Perfidy*, Ben Hecht stated that “the leaders of the Jewish people—the best known, most respected leaders of Zionism—were actually criminals.

---

In the end rescue was added to the agenda, but received little more attention. The conference had done no preparatory work on the rescue problem. Its Rescue Committee, which was not convened until halfway through the sessions, decided it could not formulate a program on such short notice. So, instead of plans for action, it discussed the proper contents of a resolution. This despite the admonitions by a leader of the World Jewish Congress that “unless we do our job, there may be no Jews for whom a postwar scheme of things is necessary.” A paper resolution is what emerged.

A Zionist victory had come at a high price. It ended the possibility of cooperation with the non-Zionist, Orthodox groups. And it eliminated or weakened the involvement of other important organizations. In addition, in many local Jewish communities it reawakened old Zionist versus non-Zionist animosities that had been dormant.

A Louisville rabbi asserted that the American Jewish Conference had

Wrecked Jewish unity in the United States. We were getting pretty close to harmony and genuine whole-hearted cooperation all over the country. We all wanted maximum help for Jews everywhere and were getting it. Was it imperative that just now the Jewish Commonwealth idea should have been pressed and everything else made secondary to it?

From the end of the war, then, until 1952, the Joint disbursed \$353 million in supplies and services to reconstruct the shattered lives of Jews overseas. It was a Jewish Marshall Plan. And like its counterpart, the aid supplied by American Jews was responsible for nothing less than the revival of Europe’s most cruelly mutilated people.

It was the Joint Distribution Committee...that accepted the task of supplying provisions...by the summer of 1947, that the Joint was providing succor to a vast commonwealth of 750,000 desperately impoverished Jews.

Rabbi Joseph Elias wrote the following article in *The Jewish Observer*, October 1977, *Dealing With “Churban Europa”*:

The failure of the Jewish establishment is well documented not only by Shonfeld but also by others. It was due partly to the love of its leaders for publicity and pronouncements, while, at the same time, showing incredible pettiness and lack of imagination or sensitivity in dealing with the immensely urgent demands of rescue. The handling of the St. Louis is one instance; and another is the failure to help Papanek to rescue most of his orphans from Europe—the picture of the American organizations and their attitudes, drawn in *Out of the Fire*, is truly devastating.

More fundamental, however, were two basic premises to which the secular establishment was firmly committed: (1) the only way to aid the Jews of Europe is to help the Allies win the war, and (2) nothing may be done for rescue which might in any way interfere with the efforts for a Jewish State in Palestine (Shonfeld, from who the passages quoted in the next few paragraphs are taken).

The first premise quoted was based on quasi-patriotic considerations—and (as explicit in the statements of Sali Meyer, in Switzerland, and Chief Rabbi Ehrenpreis in Sweden) on the fears of assimilated leaders that a wave of uncouth, backward Eastern European immigrants would sweep into the Western World and endanger the status of the acculturated modern Jews. These leaders resolutely closed their eyes to the fact that by the time of an Allied victory practically no Jews would be left to be saved. Stephen Wise in 1943 effectively blocked a promising chance to save 70,000 Roumanian Jews. In 1944, when public pressure built up for the creation of a

... One who fought with all his might against our rescue and publicity campaigns was Rabbi Stephen Wise, president of the various Jewish congresses.”<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Elias points out that the behavior of North American Jewry during the Holocaust is a result of the same psychology that underlies assimilation. The fact the American Jews were too busy being accepted by the non-Jews is what paralyzed the rescue efforts on behalf of Europe’s six million<sup>2</sup>.

But there was another consideration - the Zionist dream. The Zionist organizations’ top priority was not rescue; it was establishing a postwar Jewish state. The United Palestine Appeal, which received 40 percent of the UJA’s budget sent many millions (\$10 million in 1944) to build *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* for the Jews already safe in Eretz Yisrael. (From

---

special War Refugee Board, he testified before Congress against this proposal—and when 400 Rabbis led by Rabbi Eliezer Silver and Rabbi Avrohom Kalmanowitz marched on Washington in support of the idea, it was Stephen Wise and his associates who persuaded Roosevelt against receiving the Rabbis.

In his fine study of the Jewish community in Shanghai, D. Kranzler points out that the only place on Earth where German Jews could go without visa in the nineteen thirties was Shanghai—until the American government, with the active support of the Jewish organizations, asked the Nazi government in 1939 to stop emigration to Shanghai! Sali Meyer, representative of the Joint and the Zionist Organization in Switzerland, blocked efforts for admission of more Jews to Switzerland, and Ehrenpreis did the same in Sweden.

The second premise governing the policies of Jewish leaders was eloquently defined in 1943 by Yitzchak Greenbaum, member of the Jewish Agency—and curiously enough—chairman of its Rescue Committee in Jerusalem: “When they asked me, couldn’t you give money out of the United Jewish Appeal funds for the rescue of Jews in Europe, I said, No!, and I say again, No!...one must resist this wave which pushes the Zionist activities to secondary importance.” But it was not only a question of finances; in the words of Chayim Weizmann, in 1937, “The hopes of Europe’s six million Jews are centered on emigration. I was asked, can you bring six million Jews to Palestine? I replied, No...From the depths of the tragedy I want to save two million young people...The old ones will pass...They were dust, economic and moral dust in a cruel world...Only the young shall survive.”

There was enunciated the fateful policy of selective rescue which, for instance, led Henry Montor, executive director of the UJA, to refuse to support Revisionist efforts to bring any and all escapees to Eretz Yisrael: “Palestine cannot be flooded with old people...or with undesirables.” (We shall touch further upon some of the consequences of this policy in Nazi occupied Europe; here it only remains to point out that this policy, which also governed the partisan distribution of certificates before the war, was the major factor in limiting Orthodox aliyah, rather than rabbinic opposition.)

The abandonment of the diaspora, and the writing off of those considered useless to the future state, led to the actual rejection of rescue possibilities which might have lessened the pressure for the opening of the gates of Palestine. Rescue work suffered further from conflicts over how to react to the closing of the doors of Palestine by the British (Ruth Kluger describes the conflicts within the Zionist movement on whether illegal rescue work should be undertaken), and the American prohibition on transfers of funds to enemy territory (Kranzler and Trunk record the hesitation of the Joint to circumvent this law, in contrast to the Vaad Hatzalah which found ways of transferring needed funds even before the U.S. government officially approved). The sabotage of Joel Brand’s rescue mission, in deference to British wishes, is of course the most extreme instance of sacrificing Jewish lives to political considerations.

When the conference finally did address the rescue issue, two of its first steps were attacks on Bergsonite activities, and a third was elimination of the Joint Emergency Committee. During the same weeks, the American Jewish Conference interfered with the Rescue Resolution itself. First Stephen Wise, and Herman Schulman pressed leading senators to replace it with legislation more agreeable to the conference’s leadership. When that failed, conference officials attempted to have an amendment concerning Palestine attached to the resolution. After that fell through, they worked behind the scenes to frustrate the legislation. Above all the Rescue Commission could point to in its eighteen-month existence were a mass meeting in Carnegie Hall to commemorate the First anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto revolt, and an impressive outdoor demonstration. Although the American Jewish Conference had no role in rescue operation, various other Zionist groups were responsible for the larger part of the rescue activity that was carried out in Europe.

1942 on, the German army posed no threat to the Yishuv.) None of these funds were used to rescue Jews from Nazi-occupied Europe.

This was further illustrated by the two inmates escaped from Auschwitz April 1944 and reported that the Nazis were expanding the death camp to accommodate the Hungarian Jews. Rabbi Weissmandl debriefed the escapees and issued a report, which became known as the Auschwitz Protocols. Rudolph Kastner, the representative of the Jewish Agency in Budapest and head of the Budapest rescue committee, was the first to receive the report. He never showed it to anyone. Nor did the Jewish Agency ever publicize the reports in the Palestine press<sup>1</sup>.

From May 15, 1944, on, 12,000 Jews a day were deported to Auschwitz from Hungary. Within 48 hours all the Zionist organizations in New York, London, Istanbul and

---

Among the most effective were units of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, the World Jewish Congress, and the Hechaluz (labor Zionists). The JDC and some Orthodox committees were also importantly involved in rescue efforts.

In early 1944, the Jewish Labor Committee, hoping to join the fight against the White Paper without participating in the campaign for Jewish statehood, asked the conference's Interim Committee to divide the Palestine Commission into subcommittees. One would lead a united movement against the White Paper and for unlimited refugee immigration into Palestine; the other would carry on the Zionist drive for a Jewish commonwealth. Earlier, a similar suggestion had been submitted by a nonpartisan group within the conference. The Interim Committee refused, explaining that the two issues were too closely lined to be separated. Thus an opportunity was missed to broaden the struggle to end the White Paper, a rescue step that all Jewish groups could support.

Under Silver, the AZEC developed over 400 local councils, directed by volunteer leaders. They cultivated relations with their congressmen and senators as well as with local political leaders. They organized forums, provided speakers for Jewish and non-Jewish groups, obtained favorable editorials in the local press, mounted rallies, and when necessary send deputation's to Washington.

These local councils secured pro-Zionist resolutions from scores of city governments, dozens of state legislatures, large numbers of Jewish organizations, and thousands of non-Jewish groups, including churches, labor unions, business federations, and fraternal association. On a short notice from the AZEC national office, the locals were able to rain letters and telegrams to Congress, the White House, and the State Department, from non-Jews as well as Jews. Politicians expressed astonishment at the amount of public interest shown. By the fall of 1944, three quarters of the members of both the Senate and the House were on record in support of establishment of a Jewish commonwealth. The American Zionist Emergency Council proved that American Jewry could build a highly capable pressure organization, attract great energies, focus them on Washington, and provide the financing for a nationwide campaign. But no comparable drive for rescue was even attempted.

The Zionist leadership concluded that little hope for rescue existed. Reinforcing the Zionist's choice was their view of Jewish history through the centuries of the Diaspora. Abba Hillel silver clearly expressed the view in his speech to the American Jewish Conference. The chain of disasters that made up the history of the Dispersion, he reminded his listeners, extended far beyond Hitler and the present mass slaughter. It encompassed two thousand years of world hatred and murder of Jews. No end to "this persistent emergency in Jewish life" would come, Silver warned, until Jewish homelessness ceased. And that would occur only with the creation of a Jewish state. The state offered the only real solution to the ceaseless tragedies that dominated Jewish history. The Zionists made their choice. Events would show, however, that they had misread the signs concerning rescue. Substantially more was possible than they recognized. Their insight into the past and their dedication to the future hampered their vision of the present. A similar assessment was made in Palestine. A scholarly study based on the files of the Rescue Committee of the Jewish Agency has shown that the Zionists who controlled that body concluded in 1942 that almost no useful rescue action was possible. They decided that nearly all the limited funds available to the Jewish Agency should continue to go into the development of Palestine.

Rabbi Meyer Berlin publicly accused Zionist leaders of intentionally obstructing the Rescue Resolution. They asserted that the Zionists turned to indirect methods, such as bringing in the controversial Palestine, question, because they did not dare openly to oppose a measure to rescue Jews. This view took on added cogency I late December when the American Jewish Conference, in a stinging press release, disparaged the rescue resolution

Jerusalem had received copies of the Auschwitz Protocols. It was only because of the efforts by George Mantello, the Jewish Salvadoran diplomat in Geneva, that the reports were publicized in the Swiss press. The international reaction forced Admiral Horthy, head of the Hungarian government under the Nazis, to halt the deportations, saving the lives of 140,000 Budapest Jews.

## European Jewry

In Europe, for the actively secular Jewish sector, whose major groups were the socialists of various shades and the different Zionist organizations, to belong to the democratic Socialist International, previously an element of strength in the fight against “classic” anti-Semitism, was no source of aid. No effective help was forthcoming from members of the international during the Nazi period, neither from the socialist leaders in exile nor from socialist partners in some government in exile. Jewish Communists, having great difficulty in accepting Moscow’s characterization of the Nazis as “lovers of peace” prior to the invasion of the U.S.S.R., painfully returned to the Jewish fold after the invasion of the U.S.S.R.. Resentment toward them by other parties was intensified when the Soviet authorities murdered Jewish Socialist leaders.

---

but stopped short of outright opposition.

The key reason was their extreme animosity toward its sponsor, the emergency Committee. They recognized that success for the resolution would bring prestige, additional popular support, and more strength to the Bergsonite faction.

<sup>4</sup>It was not only American Jewry that did not do enough. One of the saddest cases is Sweden. Rescue efforts could not count on much help from the small, but comfortably situated Swedish Jewish community of about 7,000. The main Jewish communal organization was not very interested in rescue. Olsen believed the Swedish Jews feared that an influx of refugees would put a financial burden on them. They also worried that anti-Semitism, not then a problem, would develop if more Jews came in. Olsen reported that the Swedish Jews had been “most apathetic” to the rescue of the Danish Jews in October 1943. They had done nothing for the Norwegian Jews who managed to flee to Sweden. And even when thirty Jewish orphans reached Sweden from Central Europe in 1943, the Swedish Jews “did not want to be bothered.” The Children went into Christian homes. Olson persuaded the Swedish government to bring in the 150 Jewish refugees from Finland. He developed an aid program for needy refugees in Sweden, three fourths of whom were Jewish. From January 1944 until April 1945, Jewish refugees in Sweden numbered about 12,000, roughly 8,000 from Denmark, 1,000 from Norway, and 3,000 who had come from Central Europe before the war. In April 1945, two groups of concentration camp inmates were transferred to Sweden. Jews who the Nazis had deported from Denmark. Soon afterward, 7,000 women, half of them Jews, arrived in Sweden from the Wretched Ravensbruck camp.

<sup>5</sup> David Kranzler, in *Jewish Action* Fall 5763/2002

<sup>6</sup> Wyman, *Abandonment*, 51

<sup>1</sup> The New Deal was viewed by most Jews as the fulfillment of their vision for Tikun Olam

<sup>2</sup> Wyman, *Abandonment*, 72

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Joseph Elias (in *The Jewish Observer*, October 1977

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Joseph Elias (in *The Jewish Observer*, October 1977

<sup>1</sup> See *Der Kastener-Bericht*, ed. Ernest Landau (Kindler, 1961), 125, 345; Raphael Vago, *The Destruction of Hungarian Jewry as Reflected in the Palestine Press* (Hungarian Jewish Studies, vol. 3), ed. Randolph Braham, 291-324; and Randolph Braham, *Politics of Genocide* (New York, 1981), 715-18.

Inevitably there was a certain self-interest of all Jewish organizations. Zionists rescued Zionists, the JLC rescued Bundists, Natan Schwab rescued members of Hechalutz, the Marxist-Zionist youth group, and others tried to save their own as well. In fact, no Jewish group was more particularistic than the Zionists. For example, when 3,000 rabbis and scholars were stranded in Vilna, the Jewish Agency, in charge of over 90 percent of 75,000 Palestine certificates, did not issue a certificate to even one “unproductive” Torah scholar. Only Chief Rabbis Joseph P. Hertz of England and Isaac Halevy Herzog of the Yishuv were able to obtain Palestine certificates from the British Government for about two-dozen *roshei yeshivah*. Moshe Krausz, head of the Palestine Certificate Office in Budapest during the war years, reported that with one exception he never gave a certificate to any Jew unless he was a bona fide Zionist. The exception was a *rebbe* with six children, all of whom spoke Hebrew<sup>1</sup>.

## **CHAPTER F-JEWISH RESPONSES AFTER THE HOLOCAUST**

In Poland, Germany, and the bordering countries, the 3,000 *kehillot* with their intellectual elite was so depleted that the few struggling remnants were deprived of their traditional rabbinical, literary, scholarly and informed lay leaders.

The world Jewish population now would have reached or exceeded 20,000,000.

### **What Faith Was Lost?**

---

<sup>1</sup> David Kranzler, in *Jewish Action* Fall 5763/2002

And I prayed to the G-d in whom I no longer believed. (ElieWiesel, Night)

Viktor Frankl: The truth is that among those who went through the experience of Auschwitz, the number of those whose religious life was deepened...by far exceeds the number of those who gave up their belief. ... Just as the small fire is distinguished by the storm whereas a large fire is enhanced by it - likewise a weak faith is weakened by predicaments and catastrophes whereas a strong faith is strengthened by them. (The Unconscious G-d, p. 17)

Wiesel was raised as a Vishnitz Hassid and maintained his religious observance in Auschwitz, even to the extent of trading his precious few slices of bread for a set of phylacteries. Despite everything, Wiesel remained a man of faith. In September 2002, he declared: "I still believe that God is a God of justice and a God of mercy."

In this, Wiesel is not an isolated example. With him in the children's section in Auschwitz were some 100 youngsters from Orthodox and traditional homes who also kept their faith.

"I didn't become irreligious but more religious," Wiesel said. When asked how he remained sane, he said, the answer he always gives is, "What saved me was Torah study." Later, when he began to study philosophy, he had a crisis of faith and came to the conclusion that one cannot have absolute confidence in people. He did not, however, lose his trust in God.

Like Wiesel, Amital, the head of the Har Etzion Yeshiva in Alon Shvut and the founder of Meimad, the dovish religious political party, has many questions about the holocaust. Nothing in the world, not the State of Israel and not the Messiah, can justify the deaths of so many children," he said. Yet with all that he saw and experienced, he, too, retains his faith<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup>As reported by Greer Fay Cashman in the Jerusalem Post, Sep., 28, 2002

## Can it be Regained?

The following article appeared in *Ultimate Issues*, Winter 1986-87, *God and the Holocaust*:

Now, let us clearly understand the question. It means, first of all, that were it not for the Holocaust, the person who says, "I cannot believe in God because of the Holocaust," would in fact believe in God. ... Were it not for the Holocaust....

In 20 years of work in public Jewish life, I have never met a Jew who did not go through the Holocaust who firmly believed in God prior to the Holocaust and who stopped believing because of it. And for every religious Jew who lost his faith, there was an irreligious Jew for whom the Holocaust actually served as a catalyst to faith in God and in Judaism.

Nothing about the Holocaust renders it alone, as opposed to all other unjust suffering in history, an argument against faith in God.

In Elie Wiesel's oft-repeated words, "Not every victim was a Jew, but every Jew was a victim."

Why is faith in God possible though He allowed thousands of innocent Jews to die in the Russian pogroms, but not when he allowed 6 million to die under the Nazis? At what number does faith become impossible? At 3 million? At 265,000?

Since Judaism and human reason both insist that every human being is an entire world, the "number" argument against God is meaningless. What kind of reasoning is it that holds that if a Jewish family is killed by Nazis between 1939 and 1945, God does not exist, but if the same family were killed by any other anti-Semites, at any other time, then God does exist?

From a *human* standpoint, killing 6 million people is 6 million times more grievous a sin than killing one. But from the standpoint of a God who could stop the murder of one or 6 million equally easily and for whom every individual is sacred, the question of why He did not stop the murder is identical.<sup>1</sup> Either faith is destroyed the moment one innocent Jew is

---

<sup>1</sup> *Wrestling with Suffering*, Rabbi Nechemia Cooper Smith: Behind The Question "Why do bad things happen to good people?" This ancient question is built upon a number of unspoken axioms. Without positing the following three attributes about God, the inquirer really has no question. God must be: 1) all good, 2) all knowing, 3) all powerful. If you remove any one of these attributes, the question disappears. If God isn't all good, He can do evil and even enjoy inflicting pain. Is there any wonder why bad things happen to good people? If God isn't Omniscient, bad things occur because He doesn't know everything that is going on in the world. If He knew about it, He would certainly put a stop to it. If God isn't Omnipotent, bad things happen because there are forces in the world beyond God's control. Diseases and natural disasters are too mighty for God. We can only call God to task for events that are in His hands. If one believes in an Omnipotent Being who is all good and all knowing, then the question "Why do bad things happen to good people?" poses a real challenge. Our goal is trying to reach some kind of understanding of suffering without removing one of these three essential characteristics of God. Is it only in the aftermath of the Holocaust that we are justified in questioning God's fairness? Or after the death of a baby? Just how much pain must occur to legitimately raise the question "Why do bad things happen to good people?" The Talmud gives the example of a person who reaches into his pocket with the intention of getting a coin and instead pulls out a smaller coin. Forced to reach into his pocket a second time, he experiences minor discomfort. The Talmud declares that this added exertion is enough reason to necessitate asking, "Why is this happening to me? What did I do wrong to deserve this?"

Any amount of pain poses the same theological question, even the stubbing of a toe. Philosophically, the dull aches in life demand an explanation as much as the major crises. After all, if God is all good, all powerful and

killed, or it is not destroyed at any number—provided that, from a Jewish perspective, the Jewish people survives. Obviously if a holocaust were to kill all or so many Jews that the Jewish people died out, the question would be Jewishly valid.

Finally, even in terms of numbers, the Holocaust does not present the unique questions we think it does. For example, nearly one out of every three Jews was killed in Eastern Europe between 1648 and 1655 in the Chmielniczky pogroms.

The next objection to faith in God after the Holocaust is, “How can one believe in a God who allowed 6 million Jews—*His own people*—to be slaughtered?”

There are a number of responses.

First, I am unaware of any Jewish source that holds that God has ever saved, or promises to save, every Jewish individual from persecution. What God *has* promised is that the Jewish *people* will survive all attempts to destroy it.

Any Jew who believes that God took the Jews out of Egypt can say with equal validity that God took the Jews out of Hitler’s Europe. God did not take most of the Jews out of Egypt. Jewish belief does not hold that God saves every, or even most, Jews. He saves the Jewish people.

Second, only if one is unaware of—or tends to ignore because of our proximity to the Holocaust—how horribly Jews have suffered at the hands of Jew-haters in the past can he hold that it is the Holocaust that makes belief impossible.

The following is a contemporaneous description of a typical day during the Chmielniczky pogroms:

*Some of the Jews had their skins flayed off them and their flesh flung to the dogs. The hands and feet of others were cut off and they were flung onto the roadway where carts ran over them and they were trodden underfoot by horse...And many were buried alive. Children were slaughtered in their mothers’ bosoms and many children were torn apart like fish. They ripped up the bellies of pregnant women, took out the unborn children, and flung them in their faces. They tore open the bellies of some of them and placed a living cat within the belly and left them alive thus, first cutting their hands so that they should not be able to take the living cat out of the belly...And there was never an unnatural death in the world that they did not inflict upon them.*

Third, claiming to lose faith in God because of God’s allowing 6 million Jews to be killed can smack of racism. The Cambodian Communists murdered one out of every three Cambodians, just as the Nazis murdered one out of every three Jews. Yet I have never heard a Jew say, “I cannot believe in God because He allowed 2 million Cambodians to be murdered.”

Why does the murder of millions of innocent Jews challenge God more than the murders of millions of non-Jews? Does a Jew believe in a God who allowed the Soviets to murder ten million Ukrainians but not in one who allowed the Nazis to murder 6 million Jews?

How could God stand by and allow the Holocaust to occur?

God gives people freedom of moral choice.

If that leaves us unsatisfied, let us consider the alternative—that God prevents every bad act from ever taking place. Would we really want to live in such a world, where people had no freedom to do anything wrong?

---

all knowing, why should my daughter get a paper cut?

Furthermore, minor examples of discomfort are more conducive to delving into the issue of suffering since they diffuse the emotional tension, making it easier to focus on acquiring intellectual clarity.



If God should have stopped the Nazis from murdering Jews, should He not also stop each of the murders taking place today on the streets of America? And why stop at murder? Why should we believe in a God who lets rape take place? Or beatings? Or child abuse?

Would we prefer to live in a world where evil was impossible? Is being a 'good' automaton preferable to being a free human being? Would we rather be loved by freely choosing people or by love-robots?

On the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, we read the story of the Ten Martyrs, the ten great rabbis tortured to death. During their horrible tortures, the prayer book tells us, a voice screamed out from heaven, "Is this the Torah and its reward?" And God answers, "Keep silent, or I will destroy the world." God was right. If we want a world in which hurting good people is impossible, the world in which we live would indeed have to be destroyed.

"Where is God?" a Hassidic rebbe asked his followers. "Everywhere," one responded. "Wrong," said the rebbe. "Within us," called out another. "Wrong again," said the rebbe. "God is wherever we let Him in." The Nazis did not let Him in. Hence we experienced during the Holocaust what we perceive as *Hester Panim*, a hiding of God's face, an eclipse of the divine. But God no more hides when there is evil than the sun hides during a solar eclipse. The sun is exactly where it was the day before. It is we and the moon that have moved. So, too, it is people's behavior that hides God. He is always there, as is so clear when we are around people of goodness and purity.

Man, not God, poses the great Holocaust question. That is why abandoning faith in God while retaining faith in humanity is logically perverse. God never built a gas chamber, and He has begged us not to. Humans who loathed God built the gas chambers—to destroy the people who gave mankind the God who loathes evil.

## **What is the Appropriate Response to the Holocaust?**

"Five hundred years from now, it won't be Hitler we remember," says theologian Martin Marty. "... In five centuries, we'll look back and say the story of the century was ... the survival of the human spirit in the face of genocide."

WITNESS FOR LIFE, ELIE WIESEL, p. 174:

On June 6, 1972, Shlomo Elisha Wiesel is born. For Elie, the arrival of his son was an event of immense personal joy filled with profound spiritual meaning.

It was for Elie the ultimate expression of Jewish faith to have a child. It was an act of "supreme defiance"; it proclaims his hope in the future. He declared that he might not have dared to bring a new life into the world if he had not been Jewish. But he is a deeply religious man.

Now Elie's view of himself as a link in the long history the Jewish people also includes the next generation: "I was the only son. I cannot break the chain. It is impossible that 3,500 years should end with me, so I took these 3,500 years and put them on the shoulders of this little child."

*Understanding the Holocaust*, Rabbi Yitzchok Berkowitz

A central pillar of Jewish belief is that nothing happens in a vacuum. History has meaning, oppression has meaning, suffering has meaning. We are a people whose essence is meaning. It's the lifeblood of who we are and what we stand for as a nation.

If this is true – and the Jewish people have fought to preserve this truth for 3,500 years – then the Holocaust must have meaning as well. Beneath the suffering and pain of the Holocaust lie the seeds of understanding our unique mission as Jews even today.

This is not to suggest that any one explanation will ever fully help us to come to terms with the persecution and murder of millions of innocent people....

Still, it does mean that we must try to contend with the Holocaust on a number of levels. For with every victim an entire world was lost; with every survivor, a new lesson must be learned. In this light, the meaning of the Holocaust is as varied as the human heart itself.

But we must also wrestle with the Holocaust from a larger perspective, a perspective that includes the history of the Jewish people. For the Holocaust is the story of the Jewish nation under siege. It was a war to destroy the Jewish people and the message we have been trying to bring to mankind from time immemorial....

"You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." These are the words that describe the Jewish people's unique covenant with God. We have been chosen to be a light unto the nations, an eternal people bearing a message of God's morality: "Love your neighbor as yourself"... "Justice, justice shall you pursue..." "Do not afflict the widow and the orphan..." "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore..."

Being chosen means you are different. Your laws are different, your ways are different, your history is different. Being chosen means holding fast to that message through all the peaks and valleys of history for all the generations. It means living for the truth of that message and dying for the truth of that message. It means holding ourselves to a higher standard – in the way we think, the way we speak, the way we act, the way we dress, the way we eat.

It means honoring our Creator in the way we conduct ourselves in public as well as in the privacy of our home. In the way we raise our children and take care of our old. In the laws we live by and the values we are trying to impart to the people – and nations – around us.

When the Jewish people lives up to its potential as a light unto the nations, the moral fabric of the entire world is improved. The nations of the world will see the beauty of Jewish values and will praise us and want to emulate our ways.

At such times, anti-Semitism may still rear its ugly head, but no power in the world will be able to harm us. And the Almighty Himself will turn over heaven and earth to attest to the fact of this awesome truth....

But if that light is lacking, then the moral fabric of the world quickly sinks into decay. And then it is only a matter of time before the Jews are seen as little more than an irritating reminder of an old-fashioned, restrictive morality, an enemy of the "new world order" that wants nothing to do with the Chosen People and their God.

Where was God during the Holocaust? As a people, we declare that God was right there – pleading with us to pay attention, never letting us forget how much work remains to be done in this world.

After the Holocaust, is there a Jew on earth who would choose to be born a Nazi instead of a Jew? After the Holocaust, is there a Jew on earth who does not see the need for a nation of teachers? Who else will help mankind rise above its potential for such cruelty if not the Jews?

More than anything else, the Holocaust was a clarion call to the Jewish people: Remember your covenant, be a light unto the nations. Show the world what it means to be given the gift of life, what it means to be created in the image of God, what it means to live according to the values of justice and mercy, what it means to be a nation dedicated to those goals.

## What was learned from the Holocaust?

The following article appeared in *Ultimate Issues*, Jul.-Sep. 1989, *Lessons of the Holocaust*:

Nothing has actually been learned from the Holocaust.

There are at least two reasons for this. One is that just about everyone who writes or speaks about the Holocaust describes it as “incomprehensible” (an “eruption of the irrational” by “a nation gone mad”)—and it is not possible to derive any lessons from the incomprehensible.

The other reason is that the lessons of the Holocaust are too frightening, too disturbing to confront.

Historians, theologians, and others who call the Holocaust incomprehensible do so for a variety of reasons. One is that most of those who write about the Holocaust are essentially secular and humanist in their approach to understanding human nature. Such individuals tend to have a relatively optimistic view of human nature (humanists believe in humans). They see good as normal and rational, and evil as mad or irrational. If this is their view regarding daily evil, it is infinitely more so regarding the systematic torture and murder of millions of innocent men, women and children.

Another reason is that these writers regard the motivation for the Holocaust—anti-Semitism—as irrational. Therefore, for most observers, something irrational (anti-Semitism) caused something incomprehensible (the Holocaust).

But what if these two suppositions are wrong? What if evil is neither irrational nor incomprehensible? And what if anti-Semitism is neither irrational nor incomprehensible? In such cases, the Holocaust may be quite comprehensible.

And so it is.

Since evil is part of human nature—evil may be as “normal” as good—eruptions of evil are hardly incomprehensible. The questions historians and thinkers need to ask is not why men do evil but under what circumstances is evil likely to express itself, how can we work to prevent it, and why do the evil so often focus first on Jews?

As for anti-Semitism, throughout their history, Jews have regarded it as a quite comprehensible reaction against a people that brought God and universal moral law into the world. The Talmud explained Jew-hatred nearly 2,000 years ago by noting how similar the Hebrew words for hatred (*seelah*) and Sinai (*seenai*) sound. The great hatred of the Jews emanates from Sinai, where the Jews received God-based ethical laws to which all mankind is held accountable.

The Catholic historian of antisemitism, Father Edward Flannery, also understood this. “It was Judaism,” he wrote, “that brought the concept of a God-given universal moral law into the world... The Jew carries the burden of God in history, [and] for this has never been forgiven.” In *The Jewish Mystique*, Ernest van den Haag similarly summarized the root of anti-Semitism: “[The Jews’] invisible God not only insisted on being the one and only and all-powerful God... he also developed into a moral God... The Jews have suffered from their own invention ever since.”

Even anti-Semites have acknowledged this. The father of German racial theory, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, wrote, “The Jew came into our gay world and spoiled everything with his ominous concept of sin, his law, and his cross.” He was echoing Richard Wagner’s words: “Emancipation from the yoke of Judaism appears to us the foremost

necessity.” And Hitler defined his mission as the destruction of the “tyrannical God of the Jews [and His] life-denying Ten Commandments.”

The Nazi attempt to murder all the Jews was precisely what the Nazis called it: “The Final Solution to the Jewish Problem.” Hitler concluded that all previous solutions—assimilation, conversion, persecution, and expulsion—had failed to rid the world of the Jewish problem. Only the actual killing of every Jew would work. Consequently, as historian Lucy Davidowicz showed in The War Against the Jews, the Nazis were more interested in killing Jews than in winning World War II.

The most obvious, and perhaps the most important, lesson to be derived from the Holocaust is that the human being is not basically good.

To me, this is so obvious that I feel foolish noting it. Yet, few people—Jews included—have incorporated this basic principle into their views on life.

It is this lingering belief in human goodness that has led to the contemporary predilection for blaming anything except human nature—society, socio-economic forces, class warfare, weapons, parents, television—for the evil that people do.

Jews who are estranged from Judaism and its view of the human being locked in a permanent battle between his good and evil inclinations are among the most delinquent in this area. That is why the question I most frequently hear from Jews about the Holocaust is, How can I believe in God after the Holocaust? That question is surely worthy of a response, but it is a question that lets the real culprits—people—off the hook. God did not throw children onto pyres of fire; God did not build the gas chambers, or man the death camps’ or conduct freezing experiments on fully conscious men and women. People did.

Whenever I meet someone who claims to find faith in God impossible, but who persists in believing in the essential goodness of humanity, I know that I have met a person for whom evidence is irrelevant. Yet, those who continue to believe in humanity—after the Holocaust, Communist genocides in the Ukraine, Cambodia and elsewhere, black slavery and

so much more evil—are considered rational, while those of us who believe in God are dismissed as elevating faith over reason.

Only faith in man's innate goodness can explain why people are not obsessed with one issue—how to make good people. This is not simply some abstract moral question—it is an issue of pure self-interest: if we do not make good people, we or our children will be hurt. On purely selfish grounds, this ought to be our greatest concern.

All our other social preoccupations—better education, conquering poverty, fighting drugs—are less important than raising the next generation to be good people. Yet, instilling goodness in young people is for most individuals and societies, including our own, a lower priority than instilling brightness, talent, patriotism, happiness, religious faith, or some other value independent of goodness.

As absurd as most people's reluctance to learn this lesson is, the Jews' inability to learn it is beyond belief. If any group should be preoccupied—no, obsessed—with instilling good in people it ought to be the Jews, the targets of the Holocaust, and the most consistent targets of evil in history. Yet in America today, Jews, more than any other group, support *value-free* education; Jews, more than any other group (polls consistently indicate that Jews are the most secular group in America), believe that people need not feel morally accountable to God and religion; Jews, in short, more than any other group, believe in humanity.

Another unsettling conclusion from the Holocaust is that two of the most esteemed Western values—education and art—are morally irrelevant. The only education that can make people more moral is moral education.

Professor Peter Merkl of the University of California at Santa Barbara studied 581 Nazis and found that Germans with a high school education “or even university study” were *more likely to be anti-Semitic* than those with less education (*Political Violence Under the Swastika*, Princeton University Press, p. 503).

A study of the makeup of 24 leaders of Einsatzgruppen, the mobile killing units that killed nearly 2 million Jews prior to the use of gas chambers, showed that the great majority

were well-educated: “One of the most striking things about the Einsatzgruppen leadership makeup is the prevalence of educated people, professionals, especially lawyers, Ph.D.’s... (Irving Greenberg in Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Ktav, p. 17).

These findings should not surprise us. Almost the only support for the other great butcher—Joseph Stalin—also came from the well-educated.

For the many in our society who link Ph.D.’s and university education with human decency, these lessons are important indeed. And, again, if there is on group that needs to learn this lesson, it is the Jews. No group venerates education, degrees, titles and elite universities more than Jews—despite the fact, moreover, that some of the greatest hostility to Jews, today in the guise of anti-Zionism, is found at these universities.

The same holds true for art. It is very sobering that the most artistically cultivated society in Europe unleashed the Holocaust. The commandant of Auschwitz was an accomplished pianist who played Schubert *Lieder* on the piano each day after supervising the day’s gassing of thousands of Jewish families and the indescribable medical experiments on the Jews and Russian prisoners of war.

One of the greatest conductors of this century was the Berlin Philharmonic’s Herbert Von Karajan. His interpretations are noted for their beauty. Yet, Von Karajan had joined the Nazi Party in 1932, even before the Nazi Party came into power, and rose to *kappelmeister* under Hitler.

To cite one of many other possible examples, Norway, which suffered terribly at the hands of the Nazis, had almost no Nazi supporters. One of the very few who did support Nazism, even while the Nazis ruled over Norway, was that country’s most gifted writer, Knut Hamsun, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

The most common argument against religion is that it has been used to commit much evil, e.g., the Crusades, the Inquisition, Khomeini, and religious conflicts in Northern Ireland and Lebanon.

This is true, and religious people cannot explain it away by claiming that all these people were not really religious. People can be both religious and evil. Moreover, many

religious people who are not evil do not regard fighting evil and promoting goodness as important as promoting the right faith. And while all major religions seek the good, not all are equally concerned with good and evil. Salvation, faith, surrender to God, ego denial, attaining truth are some other, more important, concerns.

On the other hand, another lesson of the Holocaust is that the amount of evil committed by secular ideologies dwarfs religion-inspired evil. In this century alone, more innocent people have been murdered, tortured, and enslaved by secular ideologies—Nazism and Communism—than by all religions in history.

Yes, Christianity laid the foundations of Western Jew-hatred—foundations that were used well by Hitler and the Nazis. But it was Nazism, a secular and anti-Christian ideology, not Christianity, that built the gas chambers. That many Christians were either evil enough to actively support Nazism or merely foolish enough not to appreciate how anti-Christian—not to mention evil—Nazism tells us much about these Christians, but it does not negate the secular and anti-Christian nature of Nazism. (Even today, after all the revelations about Communist evils, including repeated attempts to destroy Christianity and other religions, there are Christians who refuse to see the evil and anti-Christian nature of Communism.)

Thus, centuries of Christian anti-Semitism on the one hand and the Nazi hostility to Jewish and Christian values on the other proved lethal to Jews. God without ethics and ethics without God are both dangerous to Jews—and to the world.

The Holocaust is far more a challenge to Christianity than to Judaism. To be the chosen victims of the greatest eruption of evil in history is a vindication of the moral truth of Judaism, and corroborates the Jewish role in history as bearing witness to God and His Commandments. As a Jew, I am proud to know that Hitler hated the Jews, just as I am proud to know that the Soviet Union hated the Jews, and that the Ayatollah Khomeini and the Muslims who follow his teachings hate the Jews before all others.

On the other hand, while the Holocaust was not catastrophic for Christians, it was for Christianity. Nazism was, in its essence, anti-Christian, but tens of millions of European Christians and their leaders—*after 1,500 years of Christianity*—did not see it that way.

The ability of millions of Protestant and Catholic Christians, with some blessed exceptions (whom Jews and Christians must study and forever recall), to view Nazism as a Christian ally; the rise of Nazism in the heart of Christendom; and the silence of the church during the Holocaust are serious problems for a serious Christian, and one reason why so few post-war West Europeans take Christianity seriously.

Moreover, the moral tragedy of the Holocaust may signify more than apathy or hostility to Jews. The Christian world has generally been silent in the face of evil even when fellow *Christians* have suffered. While just a few million Jews made the world aware of the plight of Soviet Jews, nearly a billion Christians left the world ignorant of the plight of Soviet Christians. Worse, while Soviet Christians were denied the right to teach their children Christianity, and other Christians languished in the gulag, the National Council of Churches *defended* the Soviets (see, for example, “U.S. Visitors Praise Church in Soviet,” *New York Times*, June 21, 1984) and the Rev. Billy Graham’s public reactions to Soviet oppression of fellow Baptists in the Soviet Union were worse than non-supportive; they were callous. Liberal Christians have supported the Sandinista repressors of *Christianity* in Nicaragua. And only in the last months has the Vatican finally come out vigorously in opposition to the decimation of the Maronite *Catholic* community in Lebanon. Recognizing evil and crying out against it do not seem to be as primary a Christian instinct as personal kindness or concern with salvation.

All this notwithstanding, both the Jews and the world need a vibrant and morally concerned Christianity. When Christianity fails, we get Nazism, Communism, secular emptiness, hedonism, cults, and conversion to religions far less sympathetic to Judaism and its values. Indeed, Christians remain the primary communicators of *our* Bible to the world.



Jews do not spread the Ten Commandments nearly as much as Christians do (the American Jewish Congress actually supported the U.S. Supreme Court decision banning the posting of the Ten Commandments in public schools.)

Moreover, the secular, democratic, liberal democracies were not one iota better than European Christendom. Had they opened their borders or bomb Auschwitz's gas chambers (they did bomb Auschwitz's manufacturing plant!), innumerable Jews would have been saved. Hitler had every right to believe that the democracies didn't care about the Jews. Therefore Jews who cite Pope Pius XII's silence, but do not cite the horrible record of their hero, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, are selective indeed in their condemnations, and open themselves to charges of preferring to attack the Catholics' leader rather than the liberal's leader.

Finally, while remembering Christian sins during the Holocaust, Jews should also remember much else about Christians. First, among those who did rescue Jews, believing Christians were disproportionately represented. Second, while nine out of ten Jews were murdered in Catholic Poland, five out of six Jews were saved in Catholic Italy. Third, epochal changes have taken place both within the Catholic church and in much of Protestantism regarding Jews and Judaism. Christians, especially in the United States, are among the Jews' greatest allies today. And, finally, it was an ideology that opposed Jewish and Christian values, not Christianity, that made the death camps.

I have never understood how a person could know the horrors of Auschwitz and yet embrace pacifism, the belief that all killing is wrong. The Allied soldiers who killed Nazis saved millions of innocent people from being murdered and from fates even worse than murder. Those soldiers engaged in the holiest, most moral behavior that men could have engaged in between 1939 and 1945. So long as there is evil that can only be stopped by killing, the Holocaust must forever banish pacifism from the vocabulary of moral people.

Of course, it is tragic that nations spend precious funds on armaments, but armaments are not the moral problem. Nations that do evil are the moral problem. The tanks, grenades,

and bombers that liberated Auschwitz were instruments of mercy as surely as bandages and medications.

In America today, Jews, thanks to our numbers and influence and to the society's unparalleled openness and freedom, have the greatest opportunity in 2,000 years to have an impact on a major—indeed the world's most influential—society. Instead, we have the pitiful spectacle of non-religious Jews trying to convert America to secular liberalism—thereby undermining Judaism and Christianity and opening up millions to other religions, extremist politics and cults.

Asked what the world has learned from the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel is reported to have said, "That you can get away with it."<sup>1</sup>

*Blanket of Trust:* Howard Schultz, Starbucks Chairman:

When I was in Israel, I went to Mea Shearim, the ultra-Orthodox area within Jerusalem. Along with a group of businessmen I was with, I had the opportunity to have an audience with Rabbi [Nosson Tzvi] Finkel, the head of a yeshiva there [Mir Yeshiva]. I had never heard of him and didn't know anything about him. We went into his study and waited ten to 15 minutes for him. Finally, the doors opened. What we did not know was that Rabbi Finkel was severely afflicted with Parkinson's disease. He sat down at the head of the table, and, naturally, our inclination was to look away. We didn't want to embarrass him. We were all looking away, and we heard this big bang on the table: "Gentlemen, look at me, and look at me right now." ... His speech affliction was worse than his physical shaking. It was really hard to listen to him and watch him. He said, "I have only a few minutes for you because I know you're all busy American businessmen." You know, just a little dig there. Then he asked, "Who can tell me what the lesson of the Holocaust is?" He called on one guy, who didn't know what to do—it was like being called on in the fifth grade without the answer. And

---

<sup>1</sup>Further, as Dennis Prager writes in Jewish World review, April 8, 2003: *Dear Germany: Have you Learned Anything? "There is no question that the vast majority of Germans are ashamed of Nazism and the Holocaust. But I am now as certain as I am sad that you learned nothing about good and evil from it, and that you are as confused morally today as you were when you supported Hitler. Not because you are evil, but because you cannot recognize evil.*

*"This is stunning. Unlike the Japanese, who have ignored their atrocities against the Chinese and Koreans, you confronted your evil. You taught the next generations of Germans about Nazism and about the Holocaust.*

*"It is therefore incredible that all that education about evil has produced a generation that shies away from judging, let alone confronting, evil. It boggles the mind that a nation that was liberated from Nazism solely by armies waging war should embrace pacifism, that a nation that saw what appeasement of evil leads to now embraces it.*

*"I was sure that some German leaders would stand up and say, "My fellow Germans, we know a Hitler when we see one, and Saddam Hussein is one." But no German stood up to say this. Instead one of your leaders compared the American president to Hitler.*

*"I was sure that some German leaders would stand up and say, "My fellow Germans, we know genocidal anti-Semitism when we see it, and we see it in the Arab world." But no German leader stood up to say this either. ... But I think that I speak in the name of many Americans in saying that we expected more of you. Because of what we did for you after World War II and during the Cold War. Because you, of all people, know that Americans are a decent people. And especially because of your experience with evil. How could you have produced a Hitler and not recognize another one just one generation later? How could you know firsthand about torture chambers and children's screams and not ache to end them in another country? How could you side with amoral France against your friend America?*

*"There is, it would seem, only one answer. Nazism taught you nothing. Instead of learning that evil must be fought, you learned that fighting is evil."*

the guy says something benign like, "We will never, ever forget." And the rabbi completely dismisses him. I felt terrible for the guy until I realized the rabbi was getting ready to call on someone else. All of us were sort of under the table, looking away - you know, please, not me. He did not call me. I was sweating. He called on another guy, who had such a fantastic answer: "We will never, ever again be a victim or bystander."

The rabbi said, "You guys just don't get it. Okay, gentlemen, let me tell you the essence of the human spirit. As you know, during the Holocaust, the people were transported in the worst possible, inhumane way by railcar. They thought they were going to a work camp. We all know they were going to a death camp. After hours and hours in this inhumane corral with no light, no bathroom, cold, they arrived at the camps. The doors were swung wide open, and they were blinded by the light. Men were separated from women, mothers from daughters, fathers from sons. They went off to the bunkers to sleep. As they went into the area to sleep, only one person was given a blanket for every six. The person who received the blanket, when he went to bed, had to decide, 'Am I going to push the blanket to the five other people who did not get one, or am I going to pull it toward myself to stay warm?'"

And Rabbi Finkel says, "It was during this defining moment that we learned the power of the human spirit, because we pushed the blanket to five others."

And with that, he stood up and said, "Take your blanket. Take it back to America and push it to five other people."

## Responses

### **As the Holocaust enters the larger domain, it ceases to be the particular inheritance of the Jewish people.**

Adapted from an article by Michael Berenbaum in *Moment Magazine*, December, 2000.

The past quarter century represents a major shift in Holocaust consciousness. Where identification with the Holocaust was once a particularly Jewish phenomenon, it is now a concept owned by the world. Where once the Holocaust was the driving force behind the Jewish community, it has now been relegated to the sidelines. Though all Jews must come to terms with the Holocaust, it is no longer the tie that binds. The Holocaust has gone mainstream, a sea change that affected film and art, literature and scholarship—and of course the creation of memorials and museums. Two examples:

- More than 14 million people visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC during its first seven years. About eight in ten visitors are non-Jews. That means more than 50 percent of the American Jewish community has visited the museum.
- Sixty-five million Americans saw *Schindler's List* when it first aired on network television in 1997. It was three hours and 15 minutes long, but it was broadcast without commercial interruption to one of the largest audiences in television history for a non-sports event—a tribute to both the power of the film and the event it depicted.

Today, nations have been dealing with Holocaust-related issues and apologizing for the past like never before. Corporations and banks have made monetary compensation. Churches have made theological and liturgical changes to reflect Holocaust sensitivities.

Scholarship is proliferating, teaching has intensified, and museum attendance is up not only in Washington, but in almost every city that has a Holocaust museum.

Forty years ago, publisher after publisher rejected Raul Hilberg's magisterial work The Destruction of the European Jews. Today so many books pour out that scholars find it difficult to keep up. Well-attended Holocaust courses are taught at virtually every major university. Jewish and non-Jewish students fill these courses. Millions of students study the Holocaust in high school; 22 states have mandated its study. Three of the last five documentaries to win Academy Awards deal with the Holocaust and include survivor testimony (*One Survivor Remembers: The Gerda Weismann Klein Story*, *The Last Day*, and *The Long Way Home*).

Last January, the Swedish prime minister convened an international conference of 21 heads of state and delegations representing 46 countries to consider Holocaust education. A changing Europe, increasingly heterogeneous and pluralistic, fearful of bigotry and hatred toward the foreigner and the outsider, chose the Holocaust as the historical event by which to transmit values to a new generation.

In March Pope John Paul II visited Yad Vashem, the Jerusalem Holocaust museum, and apologized for anti-Semitism by Christians. Even more striking, the 80-year-old pontiff inserted a note into the Western Wall, placing Roman Catholicism squarely against anti-Semitism. Surely, he did not say all that could be said about the church and the Holocaust, but in the modern world, gestures often outweigh words.

In April, the defeat of Holocaust denier David Irving in his libel suit against scholar (and former *Moment* columnist) Deborah Lipstadt, surely diminished what Lipstadt characterized as the growing assault on truth and memory, and may mean that we can finally focus less on Holocaust denial and more on Holocaust education.

There were more front-page stories in the *New York Times* relating to the Holocaust in the first six months of the 21st century than during the entire 12 years of the Third Reich.

The Holocaust has become a defining moment of 20th-century humanity, from which the world is learning about what we are as individuals, about the human capacity for good and evil, and about the power of states and institutions to shape the world in hideous ways.

In a world of moral relativism, the Holocaust has taken its place as an absolute. We may say we don't know what is good or what is bad. But we do know that the Holocaust was evil, absolute evil. The term "Holocaust" has been appropriated by many who are attempting to call attention to their suffering—the black holocaust, the holocaust of the American Indians, the holocaust in Kosovo, Rwanda, Bosnia. "Holocaust" is the nuclear bomb of moral epithets. And, the more we sense the relativism of values, the more we require the Holocaust as the foundation for a negative absolute, absolute wrong. And as relativism has increased over the past 25 years, having a negative absolute has become more critical. That is why so

many have rediscovered the importance of the Holocaust for contemporary moral education. And that is why Holocaust deniers refute an event that by all standards of rationality cannot be denied. It is in this function as negative absolute that the Holocaust may loom largest in the coming years.

The level of innovation in some of the programs at Holocaust museums and other educational institutions can be surprising. In Los Angeles's Museum of Tolerance, police officers are shown how the Holocaust was in part a police action against a civilian population. At the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, Naval Academy students are lectured on military ethics, and on just and unjust order. In San Francisco, the Anti-Defamation League holds sessions for lawyers to discuss not only the rule of law but the values that underlie our laws. Medical schools across the country teach not only about Nazi medical experiments, but also about the German medical community's participation in the T-4 program—the planned murder carried out by German physicians, of mentally retarded, physically disabled, and emotionally distraught Germans who were seen as an embarrassment to the myth of Aryan supremacy. Schoolchildren are taught about the Holocaust and the way we treat those who are not like us. The Catholic church continues to consider the role that Christianity has played in promulgating anti-Semitism. In short, the Holocaust is taught for its own sake, but also in an instrumental way, raising issues such as pluralism, tolerance, democracy, respect for human dignity and human rights, and medical and legal ethics. In Bosnia the Nuremberg trials are cited as a precedent. In France, the failure of the 1938 Evian Conference to help Jews fleeing Hitler became a means of rallying diplomatic support for the boat people escaping Cambodia and Vietnam. In Rwanda the government is using the Holocaust to learn how to retain the memory of the atrocities its people endured, and survivors of the genocide want to hear from Holocaust survivors about how to rebuild in the aftermath of mass murder. One need not approve of each instance of its invocation to understand how the Holocaust is regarded as morally significant throughout the world.

Within the Jewish community many who seldom agree with each other share the view that the Holocaust occupies too dominant a place in Jewish consciousness.

Those who want to emphasize the universal message of the Holocaust are angered by definitions of the Holocaust as a particular Jewish experience. They argue that we must deal with all the victims of Nazism and not just the Jews; that we must consider slavery and what my feminist friends call man's inhumanity to people in general, as well as genocide. Some Jews are embarrassed by Holocaust particularism. They see it as a covert way of proclaiming Jewish chosenness or an undisguised way of saying, as in Lamentations 1:12, "Is there any pain like mine?"

Some are concerned that a too-pervasive consciousness of the Holocaust portrays Jews as sufferers, as victims, not as independent actors. Yet visitors' responses to the U.S.

Holocaust Museum do not sustain this apprehension. Visitors report a deep respect for a people that can confront such suffering and transform it into testimony, into a call to conscience. They don't see the Jews as victims. They see the Jews as a people who have overcome suffering.

Left-wing Israeli critics are disturbed that the Holocaust has been used to support Israeli policies with which they disagree—regarding the occupation of the West Bank.

Middle-aged and younger Jews saw Lieberman's acceptance as a candidate for vice president mirroring their own experience in the workplace and in the community. Full acceptance of Jews is the reality they have experienced from birth.

Twenty-five years ago, the story of Holocaust and redemption resonated within the lives of many Jews. Today, the Jewish people enjoy the fruits of their empowerment and the freedom of the global universe. Many contemporary Jews—who have chosen to remain Jews—have internalized these messages. They don't believe that they need the Holocaust to reinforce these values.

## Rebuilding

The following article was adapted by an address by Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, and appeared in *The Jewish Observer-Our Generation: Churban Plus-One* (June 1976):

Churban Europe can be a natural, effective medium for *chinuch* (education) in our homes and schools. The more we study it, the deeper it will touch us, the better Jews we will be. It will imbue us with a sense of humility and unworthiness. It will refine our character, deepen our *Ahavas Yisroel*. It will uplift the quality of our *Yiddishkeit*. It will implore us to conduct ourselves with greater modesty, to curb the excesses of luxury and extravagance all too rampant today: When thousands are spent for flowers and other frills at *heimishe* Jewish weddings—sometimes by the very survivors of Auschwitz themselves—such conduct, aside from its moral arrogance, profanes the memory of the *Churban*, and is a betrayal of the ideals for which our parents and teachers lived and died.

Above all, the *Churban* must finally awaken within us—individually and as a community—a deep sense of history, an ever conscious feeling that we are part of the greatest enigma of Jewish history.

The worst of the Nazi fury was visited upon Polish Jewry; over 95% was wiped out. Yet soon after V-E Day in 1945 its greatest surviving leader, the Gerrer Rebbe זצ"ל—old, sick, alive only through miracles—wrote to his followers in America and Europe:

*Nation of G-d, be strong despite the suffering and be confident that He will be good to us. In the worst of days, look ahead to better times that once were and that will be again. We must hope that good times will come from now on.*

*The main thing is to know that, just as the curses of the Torah come to pass, so, too, its blessings and consolations will be fulfilled—as Rabbi Akiva remarked when he saw the ruins of the Bais Hamikdash. G-d is testing us by concealing His Divine Presence from us—He will reward us for withstanding this difficult test. Have faith in G-d and strengthen your Torah study and prayer. Then G-d will surely give you strength.*

His letters made no attempt to answer the question: “*Why did it happen?*” Instead he was concerned with: “*What are we to do now?*”

Rabbi Nosson Sherman, *Jewish Observer*: Our greatest saw no accidents in history. *History is G-d’s tool, not His master.* ...Look... backward, but only to identify the seeds of destruction so that they would not again take root. ...

## Teaching Our Children

For almost two generations, the ultra-Orthodox avoided dealing with the Holocaust, at least officially. Farbstein says this derives from the trauma they experienced after the great destruction, the need to rebuild their communities and to survive in the face of secular Israeli society and Zionism. It may also derive from the secular Zionists' appropriation of the subject. However, countless books were written and published privately by Orthodox survivors documenting their Holocaust experience and the miracles they experienced.

In 2007, there was a Chareidi conference on rabbinical writing in the Holocaust, organized by Jerusalem Municipality, as an evening for women. There is also today a database of prefaces to religious texts<sup>1</sup> - 100 mainly autobiographical introductions which document the story of the writer and his community - written from 1945 onward by rabbis who survived the Holocaust. The database project was initiated by ultra-Orthodox Holocaust researcher Esther Farbstein, director of the Holocaust Education Center at Jerusalem's Michlala Women's College in Jerusalem.

---

<sup>1</sup> Torah interpretations and meditative literature

### Teaching Churban Europa to our Children

Adapted from The Jewish Observer May 2003, By Rabbi Feitman:

Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, the Novomisker Rebbe, שליט"א has taught us that the *manhigei hador* (leaders of the generation) immediately after the *Churban* felt that explanations, *hashkafa* and interpretations of the *Churban* were a part of the rule of "*Hanistaros LaHashem Elokeinu*. The secrets of G-d must remain with Him." (*Devarim* 29:28) These answers will in truth not be known until *Moshiach* arrives. Therefore, the mandate of that generation was to concentrate on the things that fall under the rubric of "*Haniglos lanu ule'vaneinu*- That which has been revealed and given to man."

It was a time to rebuild, to start families, to engage in LIFE. And so, the *zekeinim* did not engage in theology or explication. They simply allowed the present to become the future without dwelling upon the painful past. In their wisdom, the *Gedolim* knew that too much preoccupation with death and the past would paralyze the colossal task which had to be undertaken-literally the recreation of the Jewish world. *Chazal* tell us that "there is a Heavenly decree that one forgets about the tragedy of a death so that life can go on."

In the late 1940's, my *Rebbe*, Rabbi Hutner שליט"א, once greeted a recently arrived survivor by standing up and declaring, "If you lived through the war and the camps and you still cover your head, you are truly a great *tzaddik*."

The events of the *Churban* had to be set aside temporarily but decisively so the Jewish world could be rebuilt. This is one explanation for the silence of the post-*Churban* generation.

I believe that another answer is based upon an insight taught to us by Rabbi Mordechai Gifter שליט"א, the Telzer Rosh HaYeshiva. The Midrash records that Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi explained a certain verse in *Eicha* twenty-four different ways. Just one generation later, Rabbi Yochanan was able to explain the same verse in sixty ways. Why the discrepancy? Our sages explain that *Rebbe*, who was one generation closer to the *Churban*, was only able to discuss the tragedy intellectually until he had derived twenty-four interpretations. He would then break down and weep. Rabbi Yochanan, just a generation later, was that much more removed from the sensations of the event and was able to discuss and analyze the same verse without such emotional upheaval.

Rabbi Gifter used this Midrash to criticize the "emotional bankruptcy" that permits us to speak to so casually about the *Churban Europa*. This Midrash, however, may also help us



understand the relative silence of our *Gedolim* during the two decades or so after the Holocaust. Their quiescence resulted from a profound state of *aveilus* for a lost world and the spiritual grandeur that disappeared with it. Aharon's response to the tragic death of his sons was silence (*Vayikra* 10,3), and *Yechezkel* (24,17) was commanded to "be silent from groaning" upon the sorrowful passing of his wife. Sometimes silence is the most eloquent of eulogies.

I recall one Torah Umesorah convention at the annual session when we were privileged to ask Rabbi Yaacov Kaminetzky ל"צ our hashkafa questions. One principal rose and inquired, "Rebbe, how do we explain the holocaust to our children?" Reb Yaakov responded sharply with a query of his own: "*Und ihr farshteit yeh?* (And you yourself do understand?)"

One of the most crucial reasons to teach about Churban Europa at the present time relates to the dangerous new trend in world anti-Semitism. Our children need to understand these phenomena in the ancient context of "*Halacha b'yadua sheEisav sonei l'Yaakov*-it is the Law that Eisav hates Yaakov."

They adopt new guises from generation to generation and from setting to setting. They may call it Pan-Arabism or anti-colonialism. They may be campus liberals or Bible-belt reactionaries. Their target, under whatever banner, is Jews, and we must learn to accept it as part of our destiny as the children of Yaakov. Most importantly, the metastasizing of anti-Semitism should be an impetus to Teshuva if we have the wisdom and courage to recognize what is happening before our eyes.

But there are other reasons to begin teaching Churban Europa now. The Holocaust deniers are growing in strength and numbers and those who misinterpret, distort and pervert its meaning and message are publishing and publicizing their dangerous fabrications at every opportunity.

Another reason to study the *Churban* is to teach children to be *mitzta'er b'tzarasem shel yisroel*-to share the pain and suffering of *Klal Yisroel*. The *Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva* 3,11) writes severely of those who "abandon the ways of the congregation of Israel,"

including in this category those who do not feel the anguish of the community. Our children have become disconnected from this catastrophic event and we must help them become aware of the scope of the tragedy, which befell us so recently, yet seems so distant to a generation largely unmoved by what is now known as the Holocaust. I have seen young people complete a Holocaust Museum tour without a tear or even a shudder.

It is well-known that a virtual Holocaust Industry has been created by this latest *Churban*. Thousands of books, numerous films, museums, lectures and experts vie for the attention of those who do express interest in this subject.

From the Torah standpoint, a great deal of this media onslaught is based upon misunderstanding of one of the most seminal events of Jewish history. Now that *Gedolei Yisroel* have indeed granted us insights into the *Churban*, a vehicle must be created to allow this generation to study and absorb their words.

Survivors abhor any exposition of the Holocaust even remotely using the terminology of reward and punishment, certainly considered cornerstone's of Torah philosophy. The reason for this abhorrence is that, of course, such talk hurts. We are not talking of someone who was killed in 1096, 1492 or 1648. We *seem* to be indicting someone's mother, husband or child.

In truth, we are doing no such thing, for even the approaches to the *Churban* that speaks of retribution, extinction, do not indict any individual. On the contrary, all Torah perspectives recognize that "when the Angel of Death is given free reign, he makes no distinction between the righteous and the wicked" (*Bava Kamma* 60a).

Our *Gedolim* have taught us that *Klal Yisroel* "was meant to go through world history and keep alive the teachings of *Hakadosh Boruch Hu*...When we fall short...the *middas hadin* of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* enters the scene to recall us to our noble task and make us rectify our failings." They have referred to the "indisputable decline" in *Klal Yisroel's* spiritual stature since the advent of the *Haskala* movement, and the prediction of its

consequences in writings such as the *Meshech Chachma* and the *Ramchal*. The details of this analysis of Jewish history are certainly beyond the scope of this limited article. Suffice it to say that our *Gedolim* have taught us that accepting some sense of responsibility for our fate in major events is unavoidable for the believing Jew. A more thorough exploration of this accountability actually forms the most essential part of the *hashkafa* portion of the Holocaust curriculum itself.

Studying Churban Europa in depth with a teacher properly trained in this sensitive subject provides many opportunities to disseminate fundamental teachings of Judaism.

***Tzidduk Hadin-*** Teaching children the elemental lesson of accepting the will of G-d. This applies both to personal events and to a decree upon *Klal Yisroel*. Whatever *Hashem* does is purposeful and for the best.

**The interconnection of all of Jewish history-** Learning that what had happened during World War II was not an isolated phenomenon or singular event, but part of the pattern of Jewish history.

**Appreciating the loss-** A Torah-true Holocaust curriculum details the horrific tragedy of losing a thousand-year tradition of *yeshivos*, *kehillos*, *minhagim* and family structure.

**Spiritual heroism-** While no one denigrates those who resisted the Nazis with whatever methods available, the world has until recently totally ignored the astonishing courage demonstrated by those who blew *shofar* in Auschwitz, lit Chanuka candles in Bergen-Belsen, and all those who maintained their faith in that purgatory. There are lessons here in *Kiddush Hashem* for a lifetime.

**Disappointment in the gentiles-** Rabbi Hutner זצ"ל taught us that one of the prime lessons of Jewish history is learning not to be enamored of the gentiles and their ways by recognizing their unreliability throughout the ages. The *Churban* is certainly an eloquent

template to discover and study the failure of western civilization to contain or even resist the Nazi genocide.

*Ashreichem*-R abbi Pam ל"צ insisted that study of the Holocaust end on the positive note of the greatness of *Klal Yisroel*. The astounding rebirth of Torah after the *Churban*, the miraculous and heartening resurgence of the *She'eiris Hapeleita* (the community of Survivors), the heroism of Rabbi Aharon Kotler and others in rebuilding is a story worthy of inspiring all future generation, but must be told in the context of the Churban.

*Never Again*, Rabbi Benjamin Blech (Aish HaTorah):

What is this seeming obsession Jews have to remember the Holocaust? Jews are a people of memory. In the Ten Commandments they are commanded to "remember the Sabbath day." In the Bible they are told to remember the exodus from Egypt, as well as the Amalekites who attacked them as they wandered in the desert. Memory is the key to

survival. Indeed, as the philosopher George Santanya so perceptively put it, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

That is why the Jews feel a special obligation today to add yet another commandment of "remember" to their liturgy. Remember the Holocaust - so that its millions of victims at least have the gift of living in our memories. Remember the Holocaust - so that as the philosopher Emil Fackenheim has demanded, we do not give Hitler a posthumous victory by having us forget our past and our heritage. Remember the Holocaust - because, in the words of Elie Wiesel at the dedication of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington in 1993, "To forget would mean to kill the victims a second time. We could not prevent their first death; we must not allow them to be killed again."

### ***Building Memorials<sup>1</sup>; Holocaust Studies***

---

<sup>1</sup>To date there are numerous Holocaust Memorials throughout North America: Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington D.C. (JTA: Holocaust Memorials in North America, by Jordana Rothstein)

Testimonies of Holocaust survivors collected at Yad Vashem, the Fortunoff Video Archives at Yale, and the Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education at the University of Southern California, will presumably all eventually be digitized and go online, where they will be universally available. Scholarly works of the holocaust continue to be produced, with no end in sight<sup>1</sup>.

Yet, for all that, Americans – including Jewish Americans - do not know how to relate to death and dying, let alone mass murder. This has led to a certain narrative of the Holocaust – the one with a happy ending. The most famous Holocaust movie, “Schindler’s List” is an example of this. Anne Frank’s diary is the most famous Holocaust text, but only a few also know, or want to know, about her miserable end — cold, starving, irritable, typhus-stricken (as reported by surviving eyewitnesses) in the camp at Bergen-Belsen. There are new books on the subject being written all the time, but less and less is actually known by the public. Some have called this “holocaust fatigue”<sup>2</sup>.

And, if the Holocaust is to be measured by the changes it made to the world, it was a failure. There has been more, not less violence in world affairs post WW II and anti-Semitism in Europe and the Arab countries rose. Dispirited by the amnesia of the Germans about the crimes of their forebears, Améry could ask in 1977, a year before his suicide, “what is the good of my attempt to reflect on the *conditio inhumana* of the Third Reich? Isn’t it all outdated,” while Kertész could assert in 1997 with equal gloom that “There is an ‘Auschwitz mode of existence’ . . . that continues to claim victims decades after the Nazi death camps themselves were destroyed.” There was growing resentment that Holocaust memory was principally concerned with prioritizing Jewish suffering at the expense of subsequent atrocities<sup>3</sup>.

Germany built a Holocaust memorial in Berlin in 2005, after many years of argument. A design by U.S. architect Peter Eisenman shows a maze the size of four soccer fields filled with 2,600 pillars and giving the impression of a huge graveyard. To build it, the Germans decided not to use the anti-graffiti chemicals of Degussa, a German affiliate of a company, Dagesch, that once supplied poison gas to the Nazis.

It happens that Degussa, a company based in Düsseldorf that is the world's largest maker of specialty chemicals, employing some 48,000 people worldwide, has had an exemplary record in examining its wartime past and making restitution to victims of the Nazis.

Most important in this regard, Degussa was one of the 17 German companies that created the Foundation for Remembrance, Responsibility and the Future, which raised millions of dollars for a special fund to be distributed to victims of concentration camp and slave labor during the Nazi period.

So the issue quickly seemed less than clear, and many questions have been raised: At what point, especially 60 years later, has a company earned exoneration for its past behavior?

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on Lawrence L. Langer, reviewing Alvin H. Rosenfeld’s *The End of the Holocaust*, in *The Forward* June 15, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Based on Lawrence L. Langer, reviewing Alvin H. Rosenfeld’s *The End of the Holocaust*, in *The Forward* June 15, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Based on Lawrence L. Langer, reviewing Alvin H. Rosenfeld’s *The End of the Holocaust*, in *The Forward* June 15, 2011.

Why should Degussa be singled out when so many other German companies — Daimler-Benz (now DaimlerChrysler), for instance, Siemens or even an American company, I.B.M. — also collaborated with the Nazis?

In an editorial to be published Thursday, Michael Naumann, co-editor of the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, expressed irritation at people who insist on a sort of eternal and insurmountable German guilt.

"After four decades of intensive research, after many Holocaust movies and books, nobody can accuse the Germans of remaining oblivious to their history," Mr. Naumann writes. "Some of the accusers and those who would educate us about history have turned into impersonators of their own righteousness. They have usurped the role of victim."

The competing principle is that, whatever the abstract rights and wrongs of the decision involving Degussa, the most important element in the picture is the feelings of the Holocaust survivors themselves.

"You can't say anything against this argument, in my opinion," Klaus Hillenbrand, editor of the newspaper *tageszeitung*, said. "You can't argue to the survivors that Degussa has become a very fine company, so you have to change your view of this case.

"It's a personal question," Mr. Hillenbrand said. "If there are survivors of the Holocaust who feel this way, you just have to accept it."

#### NOVEMBER 15, 1999 VOL.154 NO.20

The Presence of the Past History and the Holocaust still weigh heavily in contemporary Germany.

In May 2000, the Imperial War Museum in London opened a new, permanent exhibition devoted to the history of the Holocaust. This was the first effort of its kind by any national institution in Britain. The only previous national Holocaust memorials in Britain have been a stone inscription in Hyde Park, frequently the object of antisemitic daubing, and a voluntarily sponsored museum, Beth Shalom. The new exhibition is a British analogue of the National Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

Forward, April 11, 2003: *A Monumental Failure at Belzec*, by Rabbi Avi Weiss: Several years ago the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum decided to build a Holocaust memorial for the 600,000 Jews murdered at Belzec.

Last June, I warned on these pages that "Despite assurances by museum officials that 'we are being careful in construction not to disturb any human remains,' anyone familiar with the Belzec terrain, saturated in its depth and breadth with the ashes and bones of the Jewish dead, knows that this is well nigh impossible."

With the recent publication of Andrzej Kola's book "Belzec: The Nazi Camp for Jews in the Light of Archaeological Sources," no one involved with the memorial project can claim ignorance of the desecration that has occurred.

Kola documents how, in anticipation of creating the Belzec memorial, 2,227 very deep "bore holes" were sunk every 16.25 feet in a systematic grid encompassing the Belzec site. Former museum chairman Miles Lerman, whose organization co-published the book, writes in the foreword that "it was necessary to conduct archaeological research in order to thoroughly examine the topography of the former camp, so as to exclude areas with human remnants. So that we in commemorating, do not violate the memory of those whom we want to commemorate."

Yet countless violations did occur — as described in the book itself. Page after page of Kola's book describes what was found in the name of "archaeological research." In Grave



Pit Number One, at a "depth of about [6.5 feet] burnt human bones and charcoal were mixed together." In Grave Pit Number Thirteen "there was a layer of bodies in a wax-fat transformation." Grave Pit Number Sixteen "contained crematory ashes in layers with sand." A colored map with red circles indicates where remains were found. Red circles are everywhere.

One cannot read Kola's account without wondering what possessed the Holocaust museum to become involved in an effort that so blatantly desecrated the remains of the dead. What did the drillers do when they hit bone or "wax-fat"? How did they dispose of the disturbed remains? Why did they continue to systematically and obsessively drill every few yards when they knew full well what lay under their feet? And was there a rabbi standing by to monitor the treatment of the dead or even to whisper a prayer over their tortured remains?

In the end, the museum's new chairman, Bush-appointed Fred Zeidman, decided to transfer the project from his federal institution to the private American Jewish Committee. One can only hope this move heralds a new path for the museum, a path that focuses on its mandate of remembrance and education and refrains from involvement in international adventures. The museum's mandate does not include building memorials in death camps thousands of miles from Washington.

As for AJCommittee, if it intends to pursue the memorialization at Belzec with honor, it must completely reject the trench memorial. This huge trench, proposed by the museum, is being planned for the soil of the camp itself — soil suffused throughout with the remains of Holocaust victims. Similarly, AJCommittee must replace the secret, closed process that led to the decision to build this trench. In its place it should initiate a process that is completely transparent, and open to the input of all interested parties and constituencies. We believe that this would lead to a memorial adjacent to the sacred soil, not on top of it.

Furthermore, AJCommittee must sever all connections with those complicit in digging — or countenancing the digging of — holes into the victims' remains. This includes former museum officials, some of whom, according to the transfer agreement between the museum and AJCommittee, maintain their involvement in the project. Had any individual defiled the dead at, for example, the World Trade Center, that person would surely have been barred from continued involvement in the memorial effort there. The same must be true for Belzec.

BY MICHAEL BLUMENTHAL

My son, the 9-year-old grandson of grandparents who fled Nazi Germany just in the nick of time, has been slapped only once in his life. Just last week, for that matter, right here in Berlin, by a man we shall call Krauss.

A child being slapped--even, as here, by a stranger--is hardly a newsworthy item, but this is Germany, and this child is Jewish, and the slapper in question is a very German fellow indeed. So I find myself--against some of my own most heartfelt convictions and wishes--reflecting upon this incident in a way which, albeit unpleasant, is true to my actual feelings and, I believe, a testimony to the burdens and difficulties "innocent" Germans face, even today.

I have spent much time in my adult years--my family's experiences in Nazi Germany notwithstanding--speaking out on behalf of the innocence of Germans who had no part, and who could have had no part, in the horrors of the not-too-distant German past. I have said, on more than one occasion, that I find being anti-German to be a sin as grievous as being anti-Semitic--or anti-any other race, religion, ethnicity or belief system.

So it grieves me that Herr Krauss's slap of my son the other day--and I accept his word that it was a very light slap, aimed only at keeping the children in our building from playing in areas off limits to them--has an uncomfortable resonance for me, seeing as it is

also the first time in my son's entire life that anyone has physically struck him. That the slap was administered here, in Germany, by a German, forces me, reluctantly, to re-examine my own convictions.

What would have been my response had the same thing happened in our present home state of Texas, or in our previous home city of Boston--or even in Israel, where we resided for a year with our son? Yes, of course, I would have been--as I was with Krauss--outraged. And I would have responded in the very same way: by charging over to Krauss's apartment, yelling at him at the top of my voice in our communal yard to the effect that "Nobody, but nobody, hits my son," demanding that he come to my apartment and apologize (which he did), and then letting his superiors know what had taken place.

Yes, I would have done all that. And, then, I suppose, the incident would have disappeared, more or less, from my consciousness. The slap would have been forgiven, and life would have gone on, more or less (albeit more warily of Krauss), as it had before. But that isn't what happened this time--not here, not now, not with me. For this, something in my consciousness keeps repeating, is my Jewish child, being hit for the first time in his life here in Germany--and by a German who hardly knows him. Something in me--though it is not something I like, or admire, or would choose to have there--something in me wants to make more of this than merely an unfortunate event.

And here in the form of my own reluctantly participating person, I once again see the burdens the Germans--even utterly innocent Germans, those far more "innocent" than our Herr Krauss--are up against. They are up against history, up against a past which will not--and probably should not--go away. They are up against the sins of their fathers, whether they be their actual fathers or not.

Now, in the persons of myself and my son, I can once again see why Germans--and, I might add, Israelis--are held to a higher burden of proof when moral and racial matters are at stake: because even the actions of utterly "innocent" Germans, unborn in the Nazi period, today resonate backward into a past which, like it or not, is theirs as well. Like the wife beater who, raising a hand to caress his wife is already somehow under suspicion, contemporary Germans--Krauss included--are forced, often unjustly, to live with the burden of past horrors. Not even the most well-intentioned and enlightened non-Germans who live among them can avoid the human and natural tendency, when negative occasions such as this one arise, to remember and invoke that past.

Should I perhaps, as I considered doing, not write about this incident at all? Would the greater wisdom have been merely to let it pass, leave it behind and move on? Perhaps so, but to do so would also be to repudiate one of the sacred obligations of my writerly trade: the obligation to speak the truth, as the poet Matthew Arnold once put it, "of what we feel indeed," rather than of what we merely wish we felt. My writerly instincts also tell me that, had more people throughout history spoken that truth, many of history's tragedies might have been avoided.

"How do I know what I feel," said the writer E.M. Forster, "until I've seen what I've said?" And so I, too, the son of German Jews residing here in Germany once again, needed to write these words in order to articulate my true, albeit unpleasant, feelings. I have, in fact, forgiven Krauss. But what is harder to forgive--or overlook--is the reality this has forced me, once again, to face: not only the reality of the German past, but also the heavy human burden of helping not only Germany, but ourselves, to come to terms with it.

Michael Blumenthal is a writer and a visiting Fulbright professor of American literature at the Free University of Berlin.

In Israel today, the religious calendar is overlaid with a civil calendar. The Seventh of Adar, which marks Moses' birth and death, is now designated as the day of mourning for Israeli soldier whose final resting place is, like Moses; unknown. However, having said that, the secular Zionists wanted a redrawn calendar that would find its anchor in Yom HaAtzmaut, the birth of the State. Thus Yom Hazikaron was made one day before Yom HaAtzmaut, as there could be no better reason for dying than for the State. The government in effect nationalized the oldest of all Jewish paradigms: destruction and redemption.

When it came to the Shoah, it was clear that there had to be a day on which Yortzeit candles could be lit and Kaddish recited for those whose actual dates of death during the Shoah were unknown. For the rabbinate, there were already four fast days. So, in 1948, they adopted the 10<sup>th</sup> of Tevet as Yom Kaddish Klali. For the secular Zionists however, this was linking the Shoah to the fall of Jerusalem, which was unacceptable to them. It also suggested a reason for the Shoa – Mipnei Chataeinu – whereas the Zionists wished the reason for the day to be a reminder that the state was coming to protect them from just such a tragedy in the future. In the words of the *Davar* on Yom Hashoah in 1960: "the function of Holocaust Day is to remind the Jewish people of its own sin in not unequivocally having chosen Zion." Therefore, 3 years after the establishment of the State, the Knesset adopted "Yom Hashoah Umered Hagetaot" – Holocaust and Ghetto Uprising day - as "an eternal day of remembrance for the House. The implications were that this was a day which celebrated the heroism of the Warsaw ghetto as much as it was to remember those who were killed.

The only alternative date proposed was that of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1943, which would have been on Pesach<sup>1</sup>. That Rabbanut then requested that Nisan in its entirety not be considered for a day of mourning – a demand vociferously rejected by former ghetto fighters, who wanted to place the day as close as possible to the anniversary of their uprising. By choosing the 27<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, five days after Pesach and seven days before Yom Jaziakkaron, the committee dramatically emplotted the entire story of Israel's national rebirth.

As a result of this attitude, the survivors, were not well looked after in Israel, getting very little financial assistance. They were not regarded as heroes (except maybe for those who fought in the Warsaw ghetto uprising) – on the contrary, they were represented the "old Jew" whom the "new Israeli" came to replace. They were not made to feel that they were an authentic voice in Israel. As a result many holocaust survivors concealed the history of the dark days from their offspring.

In Israeli secular culture – drama, literature, cinema, music and dance – the Holocaust as an unparalleled human and collective tragedy is mainly ignored. The Israeli grew up on the myth of power, whereas the Holocaust was cataloged as weakness. "Like lambs to the slaughter."<sup>2</sup>

## Holocaust Judaism

---

<sup>1</sup> Many make the mistake of thinking that Yom Hashoa is the actual date of the Ghetto uprising.

<sup>2</sup> Only after several decades had passed, under pressure from the ghetto fighters, was any effort made to amend the concepts, and "heroism" was added to "Holocaust."

The above two paragraphs are from Yehudit Winkler, *Haaretz*, May, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008

Peter Novick, author of The Holocaust in American Life, claims that the Holocaust, not Israel, not religion, not culture, is what most unites American Jews. Since the Eichmann trial (1961) and the Six Day War, the case for a strong Israel became linked with the Holocaust. In 1978, for example, AIPAC sent a copy of the novelized version of the TV series "Holocaust" to every member of Congress. This made the case for Israel morally simple, black and white, although the events in Lebanon and the Intifada weakened that case somewhat.

Another Holocaust stress was introduced as a result of the rising concern of intermarriage and assimilation. For young Jews who were turned off to synagogues, Hebrew classes and mainstream Jewish organizations, "the Holocaust looked like the one item in stock with consumer appeal." A 1998 survey by the American Jewish Committee found the Holocaust far and away the most important "activity" in the Jewish identity of American Jewry.

Novick claims that whereas it is correct, in a sense "to say that for Jews to forget Hitler's victims would be to grant him a 'posthumous victory' ... it would be an even greater posthumous victory for Hitler were we to tacitly endorse his definition of ourselves as despised pariahs by making the Holocaust the emblematic Jewish experience."

Emil Fackenheim, the Hebrew University philosopher, was brazen enough to say that, after the Nazis, we have to add a 614<sup>th</sup> command: "It is forbidden to hand Hitler yet another, posthumous victory." But, as Rabbi Jonatahn Sacks points out, this is a completely negative formulation of being Jewish. "What is harmful about taking anti-Semitism as the basis of identity is that it is an *imposed* identity. ... As an identity it is, to use David Riesman's terminology, neither tradition-directed nor inner-directed, but other-directed. ... We cannot be defined by what others have attempted to do to us. Jewish identity cannot be built on such a foundation<sup>1</sup>."

Rabbi Sacks continues: "No Jewish thinker prior to modernity saw suffering as a source of Jewish identity. Even Judah Halevi, who was able to rescue a vestige of pride from persecution, nonetheless saw suffering as a trial of faith, not as a substitute for it. .... Michael Wyschogrod, in a penetrating critique of Fackenheim's work, has insisted that "There is no salvation to be extracted from the Holocaust, no faltering Judaism can be revived by it, no new reason for the continuation of the Jewish people can be found in it." Judaism survives *despite* Auschwitz, not *because* of it."<sup>2</sup>

"As a number of commentators have recently pointed out, the Holocaust points everywhere and nowhere. It has been used by secular Zionists to "refute" the Diaspora. It has been used by religious anti-Zionists to induct Zionism: the nations, they argue, would never have turned against Jews had Jews not sought prematurely to leave. It has been cited by Americans to justify democracy. It has been cited by Jewish activists, driven by the call of "Never again" to denounce democracy. The Holocaust has been taken as proof of Jewish uniqueness. It has been taken too, as proof that a sense of uniqueness, of the "chosen people", is a vicious concept and leads in the end of the idea to the "master race". As an instrument of Jewish survival, its value is deeply ambiguous. .... As Lucy Dawidowicz puts it: "If we're a people that gets murdered, the young will flee from us. We have something more than that."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Arguments for the Sake of Heaven*, Pages 99-104

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *ibid*

Rabbi Moshe Sherer wrote the following article in the *Jewish Tribune: The "Empty Plate" of Holocaust Judaism* (May 7, 1987):

It is hurtful to observe how out of all the 613 mitzvos only one has survived –*zochor aiss asher ossoh l'cho Amolek*.

And the truth is, a Judaism which is built solely on memories of the Holocaust is in fact not even a *ner tomid* for the *kedoshim*. It is no more than the flame of a match, which is extinguished only seconds after it has been struck...

Jews who settled in America decades ago...When the shuls started to empty there were those who consoled themselves with the *kaddish-zoggers* and *yortzeit-yidden*. At least they filled the empty seats. There were Rabbonim and baalei battim in the community who lived with the hope that the *yortzeit* and the *kaddish* would help to bring back the Jew to the Synagogue. This was not to be.

The *yortzeit* and *Kaddish-Jews* were a passing phase. It did not last more than a generation. The children of those Jews who never saw the inside of a Shul, either on Shabbos or Yom Tov, and certainly not on any other day of the year, who only used the Shul for *kaddish* and *yizkor*, for the most part didn't bother to even say the *kaddish* for their departed parents.

In this sense we can perhaps explain the above mentioned medrash which takes two *zochores* and places opposite the "*zochoe aiss asher ossoh l'cho amoleik*" the "*zochore ess yom hashabbos l'kadsho*." The medrash thereby underlines that although both demand from the Jew a "*zochor*," they are however "*ainon shovin*." The remembering of Shabbos is described as a "dish full of all good things" and the remembrance of Amolek as an "empty dish."

The children of those who survived the churban, the "children of the Holocaust," are still interested in the events of the last war. Their children, however, without the other "*zochor*" which is "full of all good things," the "*zochor*" of *Yom Hashabbos l'kadsho* and all the other mitzvos will not remember the "*zochor ess asher ossoh l'cho Amolek*" either.

Those who still follow the Demjanjuk trial and the renewed revelations of all the bitter terror of a Treblinka cannot suppress the thirst for *nekomoh*.

...Vengeance is not ours. Even if an "Ivan the Terrible" and all the other executioners of Treblinka and Auschwitz were hanged a thousand times, in what measure does it appease the innocent blood of six million *kedoshim*? And even this, as is quite evident, is not accomplishable.

The only meaningful *nekomoh* therefore against the Jew-haters who have attempted to destroy us is to build up and reinforce Klal Yisroel and ensure its continuity, to resuscitate the original Jewish lifestyle and spirit which was that of the *Kedoshim*.

The Gaon Rav Yitzchak Hutner *zt"l* once pointed out that the Jewish Nation is designated by two names: "*Am Seridei Cherev*" and "*Am Medushnei Oneg*." Those Jews who include themselves only in *yizkor* perpetuate our glory as "*Am Seridei Cherev*." It is only the "Shabbos-Jews", those who engross themselves in Torah, who can bring us to the aim of becoming once again an "*Am Medushnei Oneg*".

Eliahu Salpeter wrote the following article in Haaretz, July 19, 2000, *The Paradoxes of German Jewry*:

The first time since the Holocaust, matriculation examinations are being administered in a Hebrew day high school. Those looking for symbolism may be interested to know that the downtown Berlin building housing the high school was once a transit station for Berlin

Jews who were then sent to the death camps. There is another paradox in the fact that, while Germany is paying billions of deutsche marks in reparations to Holocaust survivors and their heirs, Germany's own Jewish communities are facing a serious financial crisis that threatens their ability to provide services.

Few Jewish Diaspora youths believe that the Holocaust has an impact on the shaping of their Jewish identity but many feel that it influenced their world view<sup>1</sup>. Some 37.6 percent of somewhat affiliated youth<sup>2</sup> said that the Holocaust was very influential in forming their world view, while another 54.5% said that it was influential. Only 7% said it was not. In contrast, only 20% said that symbols of the Holocaust helped form their Jewish identity while components such as family (96%); birth (90%); religion (72%) and culture (67%) contributed to the forming of their Jewish identity.

A study amongst Israeli respondents saw a strong connection between the Holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel<sup>3</sup>.

Jewish youths from Eastern Europe were the only ones who said in significant numbers (43%) that the Holocaust had helped form their Jewish identity<sup>4</sup>.

The survey also found that Orthodox Jewish youths were more sensitive to the Holocaust's affects on them than Conservative, Reform and secular Jews. Youths with a stronger connection to Israel were also more sensitive to the Holocaust than those who did not<sup>5</sup>.

## Can we forgive the Germans?

### Reaction of Israel to Germany

The Destruction of the European Jews by Raul Hilberg:

For a while, at least, Israel kept its distance from Germany. No diplomatic representatives were exchanged. Germans could not easily visit Israel, and the German language, as well as German music, was barred from public performance there.

Two factors were chiefly responsible for the emergence of these reactions: One was the concentration of survivors in Israel—every seventh inhabitant of Israel was incarcerated in a German concentration camp; every third Israeli lost one or more relatives in the destruction process.

---

<sup>1</sup> According to a survey conducted by Dr. Erik Cohen, of Bar-Ilan University which took place over the decade that spanned 1992 and 2002 among 60,000 youths aged 15 to 17 who came to Israel as part of an "Israel Experience" trip. The youths, who answered questionnaires, came from 20 different countries including the US, Canada, France, Hungary, the Former Soviet Union, South Africa, Australia, and South America. Cohen said that his findings were consistent with a similar survey he conducted between 2005 and 2007 of Jewish youths who attended Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jewish summer camps in America.

<sup>2</sup> The group was pre-selected in that it involved only those who had been exposed to an "Israel Experience" trip

<sup>3</sup> This study was also conducted by Cohen who revealed preliminary findings. It includes 300 principals of high schools, 520 teachers and 2,540 students.

<sup>4</sup> "This may be due to the fact that over the decades these young Jews did not receive Jewish education and their families were discouraged from identifying openly as Jews. As a result, one of the few components of their Jewish identity was the Holocaust," said Cohen. Moreover many of these families had been directly affected by the Holocaust.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Wagner, *The Jerusalem Post*, Dec. 16, 2008

Rabbi Meiselman:

***When you blame the victim, aren't you absolving the perpetrator of his guilt?***

*Chazal* say clearly that the enslavement in Egypt was a consequence of the Jewish people's attempt to assimilate. Nevertheless, the Egyptian people were punished very severely. The fact that God set us up as vulnerable to evil people does not excuse the people who perpetrate this evil. These are two separate issues.

There is no limit to the number of evil people that are trying to destroy us.

God creates our vulnerability, and once we are made vulnerable, the forces of history seem to dictate that there are people who will take advantage of that vulnerability.

Dennis Prager (Ultimate Issues, Winter 1986-87):

Arguments that we should "forgive and forget" since "it's already forty years," or as one caller to my radio show put it, "the war is over" are immoral. Who are we to appropriate the right to forgive such evil? Only the victims have that right, and they were permanently silenced. And why should we forget? This would be an outrage to the memory of the six million Jews and the other victims who ask that at least we not ignore them in death as we did in their agonized life. And as for the war being over, yes, surely the war is over. But we want the Nazis punished for gassing and burning millions of people. That has nothing to do with war.

## **Holocaust Claims**

A conservative estimate of Jewish material losses is 12 billion dollars at values of that time. Only a small part of the property was returned and only part of the damage caused by loss of life, health, liberty, and profession was compensated.

While the promises of restitution and compensation contained in the peace treaties of the Allies with former Nazi satellite in Eastern Europe remained paper promises, Germany concluded a separate "reparation agreement" with Israel in 1992 and enacted restitution and compensation legislation.

## **APPENDIX C:**

### **i - Reading List**

Peter Novack, *The Holocaust in American Life*, Houghton Mifflin, 1999

#### **d. *Overview***

*The Encyclopedia Judaica*. Its entry on the Holocaust - narrative, maps, and photographs - provides sufficient material for anyone who needs a solid basic overview of the subject.

Martin Gilbert's The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe During The Second World War (Holt Rinehart Winston).

Nora Levin's The Holocaust: The destruction of European Jewry 1933-1945 (Schocken)

The War Against The Jews 1933-1945 by Lucy Dawidowicz.

Leni Yahil's The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry 1932-1945 (Oxford), originally published in Hebrew.

The definitive three volume The Destruction of the European Jews by Raul Hilberg (Holmes & Meier).

Art Spiegelman's cartoon novel, Maus

**e.** *Hashkafa*

Rabbi Yoel Schwartz – השואה (in Hebrew, though it has also been translated) – Comprehensive treatment of why the holocaust happened and what our response ought to be from a Torah perspective.

The Nesivos Shalom also has a kuntres on the meaning of the holocaust.

**f.** *Heroism and Inspiration*

There is a vast Torah literature on this today, and it would be difficult to choose out some books from the other. CLS has a whole Holocaust series, and all the Torah publishers have Holocaust literature.

Esther Farbstein, *Hidden in Thunder*. Written originally in Hebrew and translated in two volumes in English, this is a densely-textured account of the tenacity of Jews to obey the Halacha in the camps, the psakim they got, the rescue attempts of Gedolim and more.

M. Prager, Sparks of Glory, (Shengold, 1974), and M.D. Weinstock, Light in the Darkness (Horizon Publ., 1972), Stories of Kiddush Hashem during the Holocaust.

Irving J Rosenbaum, The Holocaust and Halckhah (Ktav, 1976), Halachik questions asked and answered during the Holocaust especially quoting Rabbi Ephraim Oshry. Includes many inspirational stories.

M.R.D. Foot, Resistance 1940-1945 (McGraw Hill, 1977), *a survey of the resistance efforts against the Nazis*

David Kranzler, in *Jewish Action* Fall 5763/2002, a defence against Ephraim Zuroff's attack on the Orthodox for caring only for their own during the Holocaust.

David Kranzler, *Thy Brother's Blood: The Orthodox Jewish Response During the Holocaust* (ArtScroll, 1987): Orthodox rescue attempts.

**g.** *What did the Jews know:*

Ben Hecht, *Perfidy* (Julian Messner).

Alex Weisberg's Advocate for the Dead: The Story of Joel Brand (Andre Deutsch); also published by Criterion under the title Desperate Mission: Joel Brand's Story as told by Alex Weisberg;



The Summer That Bled: The Biography of Hannah Szenes by Anthony Masters (St. Martin's);  
Shake Heaven & Earth: Peter Bergson And the Struggle to Rescue the Jews of Europe by Louis Rapoport (Gefen).  
Shabtai Teveth's Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust (Harcourt Brace);  
The Seventh Million by Tom Segev (Hill and Wang);  
And Were We Our Brothers' Keepers: The Public Response of American Jews to the Holocaust 1938-1944 by Haskel Lookstein (Hartmore House).

***h. What did the Allies know?***

David Wyman, The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust 1941-1945.  
While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy by Arthur Morse (Random House), which tells the shocking story of what FDR didn't do to save the Jews from destruction.  
Martin Gilbert's Auschwitz and the Allies: A Devastating Account of How the Allies Responded to the News of Hitler's Mass Murder (Henry Holt);  
Walter Laqueur, The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth about Hitler's 'Final Solution' (Penguin);  
Beyond Belief, Deborah Lipstadt (Free Press).

***i. The Arabs and the Holocaust***

Joseph Schechtman's The Mufti and the Fuehrer: The Story of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and His Unholy Alliance with Nazism (Thomas Yoseloff).

***j. What did The Germans know?***

For what the average Germans knew, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's controversial book, Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust

The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans, Eric A. Johnson

(<http://www.randomhouse.com/vintage/read/executioners/>).

G. Sereny, Into that Darkness—From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder (McGraw Hill, 1974), *the story of the creation of the Nazi murder machine.*

Saul Friedlander, The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939 – 1945, HarperCollins, also shows how ordinary Germans – including citizens and especially soldiers, went along with the Nazi regime.

k.

### *What the Church Knew*

John Cornwell's Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII (Viking).

l.

### *Hungarian Jewry and the local population*

For decades now, Randolph Braham, distinguished professor emeritus of political science at City College (New York), has made a most significant contribution to the scientific historiography of the Holocaust in general and the tragedy of Hungarian Jewry in particular by publishing 24 books on the subject.

Braham's books include: The Days Of Woe And Destruction: The Tragedy Of Hungarian Jewry - Essays, Documents, Depositions, and the recently released The Nazis' Last Victims: The Holocaust in Hungary. (Rosenthal Institute of Holocaust Studies and the Graduate School of the City University of New York. They are distributed by Columbia University Press.

m.

### *Web Sites*

***Please note: Usage of the Web is by halachik authorization only.***

<http://www.ushmm.org/> has a good overview history of the holocaust (which we used heavily in our appendix).

The Jewish Student Online Resource Center's Holocaust pages (<http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/holo.html>), which feature an easily manageable list of useful topics. Informative and concise.

<http://www.yad-vashem.org.il/>

<http://www.wiesenthal.com/>

For young adults

<http://www.euronet.nl/users/jubo/holocaust.html> which discusses that question, while keeping tabs on books on subjects of interest to younger readers.

Art Spiegelman's cartoon novel, Maus, on the web: (<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Atlantis/2671/>)

Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's controversial book, Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust (<http://www.randomhouse.com/vintage/read/executioners/>). Random House's Web page for the book. The publisher's study guide and suggested discussion topics are thought-provoking and, in my opinion, should be printed out and included with the book.

The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous (<http://www.jfr.org/>) is an organization that provides recognition and thanks to these special people. Commendably, the JFR provides monthly financial assistance to 1,700 aged and needy Righteous Gentiles in 30 countries.

Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish humanitarian who helped protect thousands of Hungarian Jews (<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Academy/2393/>).

The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (<http://www.claimscon.org/>) has a guide to compensation which it says is designed to outline and clarify some of the major current programs.