

# THE JEWISH OBSERVER

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## **"Holocaust"**

— a leading Rosh Yeshiva examines the term and the tragic epoch it is meant to denote, offering the penetrating insights of a Daas Torah perspective on an era usually clouded with emotion and misconception.

## **"Holocaust Literature"**

— a noted Torah educator cuts a path through ever-mounting stacks of popular and scholarly works on "Churban Europe," highlighting the lessons to be learned and the pitfalls to be avoided.

# THE JEWISH OBSERVER

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# "Holocaust"

- 1) Is the term שואה "Shoah" (lit. "Holocaust") acceptable in describing the חורבן — the destruction of European Jewry during World War II?
- 2) Should the "Holocaust" be taught separately as many schools are now doing or planning to do, or incorporated into the regular courses on Jewish History and taught as part of the studies on this particular time period?
- 3) If the latter, where indeed does the Holocaust "fit in" with the rest of Jewish history?

*Yeshiva and dayschool principals from across the nation posed the above questions to RABBI YITZCHOK HUTNER שליט"א, Rosh HaYeshiva of Mesivta Rabbi Chaim Berlin-Kolel Gur Aryeh, and a member of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah (Council of Torah Sages) of Agudath Israel of America.*

*In response, the Rosh HaYeshiva delivered a discourse to a gathering of approximately 100 Menahelim assembled at the Yeshiva. In it, he focused on significant aspects of the Churban that were hitherto either little known or studiously avoided. On the pages that follow, is an authorized English rendition of Rabbi Hutner's discourse, prepared by Rabbis CHAIM FEUERMAN and YAAKOV FEITMAN. The Jewish Observer takes pride in publishing this major statement by a leading Torah thinker and teacher of our time.*

### Answer:

In order to determine the appropriateness of any term, one must first thoroughly understand what one is trying to define. Clarity of expression depends upon clarity of perception. Therefore, before we attempt to designate a name for the shattering events of 1939-1945, we must examine the significance of those events in their historical context. For our present purpose of identification only, we shall refer to the term "Holocaust" when we discuss the Nazi destruction of European Jewry during World War II. As we shall see, this in no way signifies the acceptability of this term.

It should be made clear at the outset that we shall not merely discuss history this evening. Our orientation toward Jewish history must reflect an attitude toward *kedusha* — approaching that which is most holy and sacred. This sanctity stems from the fact that ישראל הוא ואוריינתא חר הוא — "the Jewish people and the Torah are one" (*Zohar, Acharei Mos*, 73), thus intimately relating the proper study of Jewish history with the study of Torah. Yet, unfortunately, just as in the study of Torah itself we are familiar with the phenomenon of מגלה פנים בתורה שלא כהלכה — those who distort and misinterpret the meaning of the Torah (see *Avos* 3:11), so is there an even more subtle danger from those who distort the meaning of Jewish history. It will be our task this evening to untangle the web of distortions about recent Jewish history, which has already been woven, and uncover the Torah perspective which has been hidden from us.

To be sure, it will not be easy to regain this perspective. The thoughts which we will explore this evening will be difficult to digest because of our long subsistence upon the forced diet of public opinion. The creators of the powerful force of public opinion are beyond the realm of our control and the mind-numbing results of their influence are largely out of our hands. In order to achieve any hold upon the truth, we will first have to free ourselves from the iron-clad grip of their puissance and open our minds and hearts to the sometimes bitter pill of truth.

### The Origins of the Term

As in all quests for the truth, we must return to origins. The term *Shoah* was coined by the founders of Yad V'Shem in Jerusalem, since they were convinced that the tragedy of European Jewry was so unique in its proportions and dimensions that no previous phrase could encompass its meaning. Undoubtedly, to a certain degree they were correct, for indeed the destruction of hundreds of thousands of Jewish communities was uni-

que in its proportions and dimensions. Yet, by singling out the quantitative differences of this particular *churban*, those who sought a new terminology for these events missed the essence of their uniqueness. It is not just the proportions and dimensions of the Holocaust which define its quintessence, but its establishment of a new and significant pattern in Jewish history. Yet at the same time it must be stressed that this pattern, far from coincidental, is intricately related to the basic pattern of Jewish history itself and profoundly affects our entire vision of recent history and indeed current events.

By placing the Holocaust in its historical perspective, we shall uncover two new directions in recent Jewish history with reference to the gentile persecution of Jews. Whereas our entire history has been replete with various instances of persecution by different civilization, empires and nation — varying only in intensity, means and ferocity — recent history has shifted dramatically in two new areas.

### The Era of Disappointment

The first of these epochal changes involves the shift from generations of gentile mistreatment of Jews, which, if unwelcome, was nevertheless expected and indeed announced by our oppressors — to an era where promises of equality were made and then broken, rights were granted and then revoked, benevolence was anticipated, only to be crushed by cruel malevolence.

This change in our historical pattern, although it has hitherto gone largely unnoticed, is nevertheless a seminal movement in our progress toward אחרית הימים — the inevitable culmination of history in absolute redemption.

The recent examples of these disappointments may be readily brought to mind, and indeed some are yet fresh with the pain of unfulfilled anticipation.

The French Revolution, in that first 18th century burst of dedication to equality and freedom, had granted equal rights to Jews *as citizens*, although nothing to Jews *as Jews*. The Treaty of Versailles had gone even further and granted rights to minorities *as minorities*, including Jews *as Jews*. Of course, these promises were later nullified or retracted, and heard from no more.

In Russia, too, Lenin had signed in 1917 the Soviet Minority Rights Law, granting a kind of Jewish self-government in the form of a Jewish soviet. This, too, was soon abolished in the 1920's by Stalin, dashing those bright hopes that had been kindled.

England, too, entered the 20th century by revoking a promise made to Jews in the form of the Balfour Declaration. In November, 1917, Jews danced in the streets because Britain had declared that "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." The declaration was accepted at the Conference of San Remo in 1920; yet, by June, 1922, Winston Churchill,

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Rabbi Hutner delivered this discourse on 12 Sivan 5736 (June 10, '76). This English rendition was prepared by RABBI CHAIM FEURMAN, dean of The Jewish Foundation School (Staten Island, N.Y.), and RABBI YAAKOV FEITMAN, principal of Yeshiva Rabbi Jacob Joseph (also, Staten Island).

then British colonial secretary, was qualifying that the declaration did not mean the "imposition of a Jewish nationality upon the inhabitants of Palestine as a whole, but the further development of the existing Jewish community." Of course, a long and bitter period followed where a British hand held the gun of the age-old oppressor of Israel.

Thus it becomes clear that the trend of anti-Jewish phenomena of the first half of the twentieth century was characterized, not so much by persecutions and pogroms as in the past, but by the legalized retraction of existing laws granting sundry privileges. Although these reversals are dramatic and telling enough of themselves, they pale in the face of the retractions and total turnabouts made by the Germans in the 1920's and 30's.

On March 11, 1812, Prince Karl August von Hardenberg had issued his famous edict emancipating Prussian Jews, but by 1919, as a supplement to the German translation of the so-called *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Gottfried Zur Beek (Ludwig Miller) used Hardenberg's definition of a Jew in drafting proposals for anti-Jewish legislation. These proposals culminated in 1935 in the so-called "Nuremberg Laws" which legitimized antisemitism and legalized anti-Jewish bigotry. These *Rassengesetze*, which forbade marriage between Germans and Jews and disenfranchised non-Aryans, exactly paralleled earlier rights and privileges legally granted to Jews. Thus the cycle was diabolically complete. What had been given legally was equally as legally taken away, leaving the Jewish people with a growing and ultimately inexorable disillusionment with the promises and even legal enactments of the gentile world.<sup>1</sup>

Let us restate clearly the pattern we have discovered in recent Jewish history. Jews have always been beaten by gentiles; only the means and instruments of torment have varied. The innovation of recent times has been that for long periods, Jews were deluded into trust in the gentiles by a series of laws and regulations in their behalf, only to have that trust shattered by the rescision of those very laws. This historical period culminated in the Holocaust, the largest scale annihilation of a people

1. Of course many works have been devoted solely to the German anti-Jewish legislation which preceded and legalized the murder which was to follow. An idea of the vastness of the literature may be gotten from the fact that *Die Gesetzgebung Adolf Hitlers* (Hitler's Legislation) takes up 33 volumes (ed. Werner Hoche, 1933-39). As early as May 27, 1924, the Nazis introduced a motion to "place all members of the Jewish race under special legislation (*sonderrecht*)." And from then on, every bit of terror perpetrated against the Jews was, with German thoroughness, preceded by meticulously worded legislation. It is perhaps significant that where anti-Jewish violence broke out in German streets before laws had been enacted to that effect, Wilhelm Frick, Minister of the Interior and Reichsbank President Hjalmar Schacht condemned and ordered a stop to the "illegal actions" (see Lucy S. Dawidowicz's *The War Against the Jews*, New York: Bantam Books edition, 1976, p.83).

in history, yet resulting not from lawless hordes but flowing directly from legalized and formal governmental edicts. The end-result of this period for the Jewish psyche was a significant — indeed, crucial — one. From trust in the gentile world, the Jewish nation was cruelly brought to a repudiation of that trust. In a relatively short historical period, disappointment in the non-Jewish world was deeply imprinted upon the Jewish soul.

### Torah Source for the New Era

As we delve more deeply into the Torah view of these awesome events, we shall find that they certainly are not coincidental, but reflect the greater cosmic plan of the Creator of the universe. If we find in world history an era where Jews move from the expectation of persecution by gentiles to a period of disappointment in those very people, this change must be reflected in the Torah. As we said earlier, since the Jewish people and the Torah are one, what happens in one must have a counterpart in the other. Therefore, let us study together the passage where this monumental turn of events is reflected:

ויאמר ד' אל משה הנך שוכב עם אבותיך וקם העם הזה חזנה אחרי אלהי נכר הארץ וגו' והסתרתני פני מהם והיה לאכול ומצאהו רעות רבות וצרות ואמר ביום ההוא על כי אין אלקי בקרבי מצאונו הרעות האלה (דברים לא: טו"ז).

"And Hashem said to Moshe: Behold you will soon pass on and this nation will arise and fall prey to the lure of strange nations and trust in them... And I will hide My face from them and they will become as food for their enemies and great evils and troubles will come upon them. Then shall they declare: it is because my G-d has not been in my midst that these evils have befallen me" (*Devarim* 31:1-17).

We must first establish what is meant by the phrase *אלהי נכר הארץ*. It should be noted that we translated it as "the lure of strange nations and trust in them," and not as the "worship of strange gods." This interpretation follows *Unkelos*, who translates *ארעא*, literally "the temptation of the nations." This translation, rather than the more obvious one of "idol worship" reflects the sense of the passage, for we know (*Yuma* 69b) that the *yeitzer hora* — the evil inclination — for idolatry has long been eliminated by the *Anshei Knesses Hagadola* — the Men of the Great Assembly. We can only appreciate the gravity of the sin of straying after "the lure of strange nations" when we realize that only here does the Torah mention the terrifying punishment of becoming consumed by our enemies. Even the two *tochachos* — the portions of the Torah where G-d rebukes His nation for its sins and warns of the terrible consequences of evil — do not allude to such a dire punishment. The "great evils and troubles" which are the direct result of trusting and relying upon the gentile world signify the impetus for the next immediate stage in Jewish history, a unique point in the *teshuva*-repentance process: *Then shall they declare: it*

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*It has oft been noted that teshuva seems to "be in the air" . . . . This climate is the result of the disappointment in gentiles which demolished the first stumbling-block to teshuva, and forced the recognition that "it is because my G-d has not been in my midst" that the awesome events of recent times have occurred.*

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*is because my G-d has not been in my midst that these evils have befallen me.*

When we now carefully study the Torah passages quoted, we will be struck by the Jews' response to the great "evils and troubles" which befall them. We know that the *viduy* — enumeration of sins — associated with true repentance necessitates the declaration that "I have sinned" in addition to the specifics of the transgression. Here, there seems to be *teshuva* (repentance); yet, no real admission of wrongdoing has been made. In effect, what we encounter in this passage, unique in the Torah, is a kind of *teshuva*/non-*teshuva*, a leaning toward *teshuva*, yet not quite reaching the point of *teshuva gemura* — the complete penitence required by the Torah.

The *Ramban*, in his explication of this passage, grants us the key to this paradox. He explains that it reflects the very first stirrings of *teshuva* in its nascency. The lowest rung of evil is the disavowal of wrongdoing. Thus, as *Ramban* quotes, "Behold I do judgment with you for saying 'I have not sinned'" (*Yirmiyah* 2:35) because this is the total rejection of guilt. We know that the essence of *teshuva* is *viduy* — admission of wrongdoing and enumeration of sins. Yet, the prophet proclaims that punishment will not come because one has not said "I have sinned," but because — infinitely worse — one has declared "I have not sinned." Once the repudiation of innocence has been accomplished, the *teshuva* process has begun. Even if one has not yet arrived at the positive point of *viduy*, the implicit significance of no longer claiming innocence is that the road to repentance has been cleared and one is ready for formal acceptance of guilt and positive commitment of the future. This, then, is a stage of *teshuva*, a kind of *teshuva*-readiness that *Knesses Yisroel* will reach in future days before it achieves total repentance.

This stage of *teshuva* will come about as a direct result of the "great evils and troubles" which — as we interpreted according to *Unkelos* — come upon them because of their trust in the nations. The effect of the great calamities of those days, far from merely being a punishment for wrongdoing, will be to correct the previously misplaced trust and prepare the way for true *teshuva*. As we have seen, the "great evils and troubles" did indeed come upon us from those very gentile nations who had gained our confidence and trust.

Thus, there is revealed to us both the chronology and the impetus for the *teshuva* of *Acharis HaYamim* (the End of Days). The very first step will be reached by *Klal Yisroel* through their repudiation of their earlier infatuations with gentile ways. In our terms, this is when the Jewish people moves toward repentance because of disappointment in the gentiles. This can only come about through promises rescinded, rights revoked, and anticipations aborted. The pain and anguish at the time of these shattered illusions is all too real and tragic; yet the events themselves serve to bring us to the recognition that "it is because my G-d has not been in my midst that these evils have befallen me." This the *Ramban* sees as the necessary prerequisite to the final step of *teshuva* when "they will add to their earlier regret the complete confession and total penitence."

Our new understanding of the essence of our era allows us some comprehension of the phenomenon of our "age of *baalei-teshuva*." It has oft been noted that *teshuva* seems to "be in the air," and indeed the many movements currently succeeding to an unprecedented degree in bringing Jews closer to Judaism are but a reflection of the fact that the very climate is permeated with a kind of *teshuva*-readiness. This climate is the result of the disappointment in gentiles which demolished the first stumbling-block to *teshuva*, and forced the recognition that "it is because my G-d has not been in my midst" that the awesome events of recent times have occurred. Of course, this is not to say that each individual *baal teshuva* has experienced a personal disappointment in gentiles. There are characteristics and trends common to an entire epoch which eventually affect each individual in his own way.

I had occasion to elaborate on this point, when by a combination of circumstances I found myself in *Eretz Yisroel*, in the company of a group of extreme leftists on Ben Gurion's *yahrzeit*. I was asked to say a few words in honor of the day and felt it worthwhile to relate the following to them:

Ben Gurion often used to tell people that now was not the proper time to resolve the controversy between the religious and the anti-religious. When opportunities arose for resolving such issues, he made sure they were tabled until a future time. Undoubtedly, his reasoning — conscious or subconscious — was that time was on the side of the secularists. The experience of Ben

Gurion's generation was that the number of observant Jews was steadily decreasing, and a Judaism empty of Torah seemed on the ascent.

In so calculating, Ben Gurion made a grave error. In that group of leftists, there were representatives of many pre-war cities from various types of Jewish communities all over Europe. I asked each of the assembled in turn, "Do you recall a *mechalel Shabbos* — a non-observant Jew — in your city who had a son who became *Shomer Shabbos*?" Each of them answered with the same emphatic "No." Yet, I pointed out to them, today there are thousands of *baalei teshuva* whose parents knew virtually nothing of their faith. Ben Gurion in his time seemed to be correct, but he could only calculate chronological time and knew nothing of the eschatological movement of generations. The era of disappointment tore a generation from the clutches of the *טענה עממי ארעא* (*Targum* for *אלהי נכר* (הארץ) and prepared the way for an era of true *teshuva*.

So much for the first new direction in Jewish history in relation to gentile persecutions.

### Public Opinion vs. Truth

Before we explore the second of the new directions in detail, it is important to establish a clear distinction between any common approach to world events and *daas Torah* — a Torah view of the world. "Public opinion" and any but the Torah approach is by definition colored by outside forces, subjective considerations and the falsehood of secular perspective.

An example of how public opinion can be molded — indeed, warped — at the whim of powerful individuals can be taken from a study of Russian history textbooks published during the respective reigns of Lenin, Stalin and Khrushchev. During each period, the textbooks hail the then-current leader to the exclusion of all his predecessors as the savior of Russia and hero of his people. Undoubtedly, "public opinion" during each period, once children's minds had been suitably molded, reflected the thinking and wishes of the state. While more subtle in form, this ability to direct public opinion exists in democratic countries as well. Thus, we already pointed out at the beginning that we must make every effort to free ourselves from the powerful grip of public opinion, and must be ever on our guard that our opinions of the true nature of world events be shaped only by Torah views seen through Torah eyes.

Sadly, even in our own circles, the mold for shaping public opinion lies in the hands of the State of Israel. An appropriate example of this dangerous process of selectively "rewriting" history may be found in the extraordinary purging from the public record of all evidence of the culpability of the forerunners of the State in the tragedy of European Jewry, and the substitution in its place of factors inconsequential to the calamity which ultimately occurred.

*The Jewish Observer* / October, 1977

To cover its own contribution to the final catastrophic events, those of the State in a position to influence public opinion circulated the notorious canard that *Gedolei Yisroel* were responsible for the destruction of many communities because they did not urge immigration. This charge is, of course, a gross distortion of the truth, and need not be granted more dignity than it deserves by issuing a formal refutation. However, at the same time as the State made certain to include this charge as historical fact in every account of the war years, it successfully sought to omit any mention of its own contribution to the impending tragedy. What the State omitted in its own version of history is the second of the above-mentioned new directions in recent Jewish history. It is that phenomenon which we must now examine.

### East and West Meet

For centuries, indeed millennia, gentile persecution of Jews took one of two forms, but the two never worked simultaneously. Either Jewry had to contend with the "Yishmael" nations of the East or was persecuted and expelled by the nations of the West. Never in our history did the nations of the Occident join forces with those of the East for the purpose of destroying Jews.

With World War II, this long epoch was brought to a crude and malevolent close. In 1923 Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf* spelling out his belief that the Jewish people should be wiped out. This was read by Haj Amin el-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who found



*The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem reviewing Nazi troops.*

most significant alliances of modern times. There is ample documentation that not only did the Mufti visit Hitler and his top aides on a number of occasions, but indeed with Adolph Eichmann, he visited the Auschwitz gas chamber incognito to check on its efficiency.<sup>2</sup>

The extent of the Mufti's influence upon the Nazi forces may be seen in a crucial decision made by Hitler at the height of the war. Railroad trains were much in demand by the Axis, and Hitler's troops badly needed reinforcements in Russia. Yet, soon after he landed in Berlin in November 1941, the Mufti demanded that all available resources be used to annihilate Jews. The choice: *Juden nach Auschwitz* or *Soldaten nach Stalingrad* was to be resolved his way . . . Two months later (January 20, 1942 . . .) at the Wannsee Conference, the formal decision was made to annihilate all Jews who had survived the ghettos, forced labor, starvation, and disease.

Of course, the Mufti was serving his own perverted fears, which were the influx of millions of Jews into Palestine and the destruction of the Mufti's personal empire. Yet, there can be no doubt that through their symbiotic relationship, Hitler and the Mufti each helped the other accomplish his own evil goal. Eichmann simply wanted to kill Jews; the Mufti wanted to make sure they never reached Palestine. In the end, the "final solution" was the same. . . . At one point, Eichmann even seemed to blame the Mufti for the entire extermination plan, when he declared, "I am a personal friend of the Grand Mufti. We have promised that no European Jew would enter Palestine any more."<sup>3</sup>

The Mufti's trip to Berlin was the first ominous step in the joining of the anti-Jews of the East with those of the West to accomplish their diabolic design. This second of the new directions in Jewish history reached a climax of sorts last year (1975) when Yassir Arafat, avowed destroyer of the State of Israel, stood before the United Nations, and received a standing ovation by nations of East and West alike.

From the purely secular historical viewpoint, there is no connection between the two directions we have discussed. The Moslem world never granted privileges which it later retracted, and thus never disappointed the Jews in its midst. What, then, joins the two trends which seem to have coincided so significantly in our generation? A passage from the Torah can give us the answer:

וילך עשו אל ישמעאל ויקח את מחלת בת ישמעאל בן אברהם  
אחות נביות על נשיו לו לאשה (בראשית כ"ח. ט)

2. Detailed documentation of the Mufti's activities may be found in Simon Wiesenthal's *Grand Mufti - Agent Extraordinary of the Axis* (who relates that Haj Amin also visited Majdanek); Maurice Pearlman's *Mufti of Jerusalem* and, most recently (1965), Joseph B. Schechterman's *The Mufti and the Fuehrer* (translator's note, Y.F.)

3. Quoted by Pearlman, pp. 71-72 and Schechterman, p. 158.

"And Eisav went unto Yishmael and took Machlas the daughter of Yishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nevayos, in addition to his other wives, for a wife" (*Bereishis* 28:9).

Since the actions of the Patriarchs are a sign of what would happen later to the children and every action in *Chumash* is eternally significant, we may learn from this passage that it was inevitable for the forces of Eisav and Yishmael to combine. We are now living in the midst of that pivotal moment in Jewish history.

It should be manifest, however, that until the great public pressures for the establishment of a Jewish State, the Mufti had no interest in the Jews of Warsaw, Budapest, or Vilna. Once the Jews of Europe became a threat to the Mufti because of their imminent influx into the Holy Land, the Mufti in turn became for them the מלאך המות - the incarnation of the Angel of Death. Years ago, it was still easy to find old residents of Yerushalayim who remembered the cordial relations they had maintained with the Mufti in the years before the impending creation of a Jewish State. Once the looming reality of the State of Israel was before him, the Mufti spared no effort at influencing Hitler to murder as many Jews as possible in the shortest amount of time. This shameful episode, where the founders and early leaders of the State were clearly a factor in the destruction of many Jews, has been completely suppressed and expunged from the record. Thus it is that our children who study the history of that turbulent era are taught that *Gedolei Yisroel* share responsibility for the destruction of European Jewry and learn nothing of the guilt of others who are now enshrined as heroes.

### Coming to Terms

We may now return to the original questions. "Is the term *Shoah* acceptable?" The answer is CLEARLY NOT. The word *Shoah* in Hebrew, like "Holocaust" in English, implies an isolated catastrophe, unrelated to anything before or after it, such as an earthquake or tidal wave. As we have seen, this approach is far from the Torah view of Jewish history. The *churban* of European Jewry is an integral part of our history and we dare not isolate and deprive it of the monumental significance it has for us.

In truth, the isolation of one part of Jewish history from another, the separation of one part of the Torah from another, has caused much of the inability to deal with events such as *Churban* Europe. Much of our education has been permeated with the "sunny side of Judaism," resulting from a cowardice and failure of will to deal with the misfortunes of *Klal Yisroel*. Yet, here is one of the sources of our uniqueness. We are happy to teach our children of our "chosen-ness" in *mitzvos* and our closeness to G-d. Yet, at our peril, we ignore the fact that there are three different portions of תוכחה - rebuke and promise of punishment in the Torah

The following news story (from *Maariv*, August 12, 1977) strikingly illustrates how those who originated the term *Shoah* view the Holocaust as an event totally unrelated to Jewish history and therefore requiring a memorial day for itself. In contrast, if the European Churban is seen correctly in the light of Torah, Tisha B'Av is of course the day for remembering all Jewish suffering.

#### YAD V'SHEM OPPOSES THE COMMEMORATION OF YOM HASHOAH ON TISHAH B'AV

A call to the Prime Minister and the Knesset to reopen investigations into the transferring of Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Commemoration Day) from the month of Nisan to the ninth of Av was received yesterday at a meeting of the governing council of Yad V'Shem in Jerusalem.

According to the chairman of the council, M.K. Gideon Hausner, the vote was 16 against changing the day, 1 for the resolution, and 2 abstaining. The sole dissenter was Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Rabinowitz, vice-mayor of Jerusalem.

The council demanded that the government strengthen recognition and awareness of Holocaust and Heroism as a prime pedagogical and ethical force in education. Mr. Hausner was quoted as saying that "the removal of Yom HaShoah to any other date would destroy the unique character of Yom HaShoah which indeed commemorates an event unprecedented in Jewish history."

M.K. Chayka Grossman expressed the hope that it would still be possible to prevent the change of the Yom HaShoah date by galvanizing public support. "What amazes me most of all," said Mrs. Grossman, "is that the Prime Minister, who in the past had shown such sensitivity to the Holocaust should strangely lose his sense of Jewish history and current events specifically in this area."

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Rabinowitz, speaking for the minority viewpoint, asserted that Prime Minister's suggestion was a good one. He claimed that we had not succeeded in firmly establishing the 27th of Nisan as Yom HaShoah and this could be readily seen in the Diaspora.

(*Bechukosai, Ki Savo, and Nitzavim-Vayeilech*). We must learn these parts of the Torah with our children as well as the "sunnier" portions. These portions must become as much a part of the Jewish psyche as the *mitzvos* we strain so hard to imbue. Thus, when a Jewish child — or indeed, adult — hears for the first time of *Yiddishe tzaros* — the sufferings of Jewish people — he will not be shocked by a contradiction to what he has learned, but will see the living proof of the Torah he has absorbed.

Thus we have exposed graphically the mistake of the founders of *Yad V'Shem* who felt compelled to find a

new term for the destruction of European Jewry because of its proportions and dimensions. Ironically, the artificially contrived term they finally applied empties the *churban* of its profound meaning and significance. In appropriating a term which signifies isolation and detachment from history, they did not realize that the significance of the "Holocaust" is precisely in its intricate relationship with what will come after. The pattern of Jewish history throughout the ages is גלות — גאולה — חורבן — גלות — Destruction — Exile — Redemption, and no event requires new categories or definitions. The answers to questions 2 and 3 are therefore obvious and need no further elaboration.

#### Tochacha vs. Specific Guilt

It should be needless to say at this point that since the *churban* of European Jewry was a *tochacha* phenomenon, an enactment of the admonishment and rebuke which *Klal Yisroel* carries upon its shoulders as an integral part of being the *Am Hanivchar* — G-d's chosen ones — we have no right to interpret these events as any kind of *specific punishment for specific sins*. The *tochacha* is a built-in aspect of the character of *Klal Yisroel* until *Moshiach* comes and is visited upon *Klal Yisroel* at the Creator's will and for reasons known and comprehensible *only to Him*. One would have to be a *נביא* or *תנא* (a prophet or a Talmudic sage), to claim knowledge of the specific reasons for what befell us; anyone on a lesser plane claiming to do so tramples in vain upon the bodies of the *kedoshim* who died *על קידוש ה'* and misuses the power to interpret and understand Jewish history.

For other reasons, too, one must be careful of sudden and popular "awakenings" to different aspects of Jewish history, such as "Holocaust studies." Nachum Goldmann, head of the only international secular Jewish organization not directly subservient to the Jewish State, has stated that the weakening of sympathy for the State was the result of a lengthy period of time after the Holocaust having passed and the resultant forgetting by the world at large. Undoubtedly, the State, taking advantage of the arbitrary figure of thirty years, sought to reawaken interest in what it now termed the *Shoah* to regain some of that lost sympathy of the late 40's and 50's.

This aspect of the current wide-spread interest in the World War II years should only serve to alert us once more to the often duplicitous sources of public opinion. Of course, this in no way impugns the motives of those who have genuinely dedicated themselves to study of that epochal time — especially the *She'aris Hapleita* who feel the scars on their own bodies and who cry out in pain to the world not to forget. It does, however, give us an idea of the tremendous pitfalls on the road to a clear understanding of the true patterns of Jewish history. Only through a rededication to sole use of the Torah as guide through the byways of history will we be sure to arrive at the truth we all seek. 

Joseph Elias

# Dealing With "Churban Europa"



BEATE KLARSFELD WHEREVER THEY MAY BE

The last years have seen an ever-growing flood of publications centering on the Nazi era and the destruction of European Jewry: autobiographical accounts by survivors,<sup>1</sup> learned studies and surveys of the period,<sup>2</sup> monographs dealing with particular localities and episodes,<sup>3</sup> or specific aspects of what has come to be known as the Holocaust.<sup>4</sup> If we also think of the proliferation of courses and chairs in Holocaust studies, research centers and archives, it becomes quite clear that — thirty years after the event — there is a renewed concern with the Holocaust.

There are a number of reasons for this phenomenon, some of them not very laudable. Holocaust studies represent an academic "growth area," and opportunists have quickly grasped what this implies in prestige,

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status, and academic opportunities. There is an element of political expediency (as pointed out by Rabbi Hutner) in some of the harping on the events of 1939-1945, and also an obvious effort on the part of some to exploit them ideologically.

At the same time it is surely true that the terrible wounds of the Nazi era have not yet healed. (If any proof is needed, a recent story in the New York Times Magazine about the effect of the Holocaust survivors' trauma on their children amply provides it.) There is a need to come to grips with what happened — and some time had to pass after the event before efforts could really be made in this direction. Perhaps there applies on our level, too, what our Sages told about Rabbi Yehudah Hanassi and Rabbi Yochanan: Rabbi Yochanan explained a certain verse in *Eichah* in 60 ways, whilst Rabbi Yehudah Hanassi only had 24 interpretations — not because he, who lived much closer to the destruction of the Temple, had less to say, but because he remembered more and therefore was silenced by the intensity of his grief (*Yerushalmi Ta'anis* IV).

However, if we have really reached the point where the *Churban Europa* can be discussed meaningfully, and we must be grateful to those sincerely trying to do so, we must admit that a vast part of what has been written falls woefully short of this objective. Some years ago Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg pointed out that the Holocaust was unique in that it was the first overwhelming catastrophe in Jewish history where Jews asked, "Why

did G-d do this to us?", rather than, "What did G-d want us to learn from this experience?" (*Jewish Observer*, June '76). Challenging G-d, and sitting in judgment on Divine Justice, comes naturally to modern man who considers himself the measure of all things; but it is not only terribly wrong — it is an exercise in futility, and blinds man to the true meaning of what happened.

### The Inadequacy of Human Interpretation

It is obviously a futile effort, for man can never plumb the depths of Divine counsel. "Where were you

when I founded the earth?" G-d asks of Iyov, driving home to him the limitations of human insight (*Iyov* 38:4). In truth, the Jew — conscious of the infinite wisdom of the Creator — always accepted His judgment. He was sure in his conviction of the ultimate meaningfulness of all that happened — and therefore could concentrate on squeezing out of it whatever meaning he could discern in it.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, secular man, approaching the Holocaust with an anthropocentric perspective, is unable to cope with it. The political, social, and psychological concepts, which are the sum total of his intellectual equipment are insuf-

#### 1. Some examples:

J. Joffo, *A Bag of Marbles* (Houghton-Mifflin, 1974), the account of a French boy who saved himself by hiding out in unoccupied France;

B. Bar Oni, *The Vapor* (Visual Impact Inc., 1976), recounts the struggle for survival of a Polish girl, first in the ghetto and then among the partisans;

L. Richman, *Why? Extermination Camp Lwow* (Vantage Press, 1975), describes survival amidst the horrors of a doomed community;

G. Korman (ed.), *Hunter and Hunted* (Viking, 1973), is an anthology of autobiographical accounts of various phases of the Holocaust;

S.B. Unsorfer, *Stories of Simcha* (S.Z. Hoff, 1975); the first half of this book contains recollections and stories of the Holocaust largely drawn from the author's own experiences (an earlier book of his was *The Yellow Star*).

#### 2. Some works of this genre:

L.S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews* (Holt, Rinehart Winston, 1975) represents a comprehensive survey of "The Final Solution" and how it was put into effect;

R. Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jewry* (Quadrangle, 2nd ed., 1967), is a scientific study of the Nazi machinery for destroying the Jewish people;

L.L. Synder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (McGraw Hill, 1976), useful reference work, though much of its material inconsequential.

#### 3. Some recent examples:

D. Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis, and Jews* (Yeshiva University Press, 1976) deals with the Jewish refugee community of Shanghai;

G. Thomas and M.M. Witts, *Voyage of the Damned* (Fawcett, 1974) — the story of the refugee boat *St. Louis*;

R. Klueger — P. Mann, *The Last Escape* (Doubleday, 1973), describes the efforts to rescue Roumanian Jews through illegal emigration to Palestine;

M. Dank, *The French Against the French* (Lippincott, 1974) deals with the battle between the French underground and the French collaborators, only touches incidentally on Jewish aspects;

J. Garlinski, *Fighting Auschwitz* (Fawcett, 1975), the story of the resistance movement in Auschwitz;

E. Papanek, *Out of the Fire* (William Morrow, 1975), the rescue of refugee children from France to the USA.

#### 4. Recent examples:

Dr. H.J. Zimmels, *The Echoes of the Nazi Holocaust in Rabbinic Literature* (Ktav, 1975);

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;

M.R.D. Foot, *Resistance 1940-1945* (McGraw Hill, 1977), a survey of the resistance efforts against the Nazis;

A.D. Morse, *While Six Million Died* (Discovery Press, 1967), details the procrastination of the American government and its resistance to the rescue of Jews;

M. Shonfeld, *The Holocaust Victims Accuse* (Bnei Yeshivos Publications, New York City, 1977), deals with the guilt of the secular Jewish and Zionist leadership in the destruction of European Jewry;

B. Klarsfeld, *Wherever They May Be* (Vanguard, 1975) — hunting Nazis in the postwar world;

G. Sereny, *Into that Darkness — From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder* (McGraw Hill, 1974), the story of the creation of the Nazi murder machine;

I. Trunk, *Judenrat* (MacMillan, 1972), is the definitive study of the Jewish Councils established — and exploited — by the Nazis;

T. Des Pres, *The Survivors, an anatomy of life in the Death Camps* (Pocket Books, 1977) seeks to determine how some survived the camps.

#### 5. Cf. *A Thought for the Week*, vol. V, nos. 42-44 (the Lubavitcher Rebbe's comments on questions about the Holocaust).

ficient to deal with what happened — and if he is clear-sighted enough to perceive this, he must confess that the Holocaust is totally and uniquely unintelligible to him, since he cannot view it in the context of a Divinely guided history, and he will even assert that it has no meaning at all.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, it is not surprising that in most of the books that have appeared in recent years data are accumulated, experiences are recorded, theories are put forward — but there remains not only the unspeakable pain but the inability to penetrate below the surface of what happened. We are left with a riddle which challenges man's very ability to function (this is particularly noticeable in the studies of the survivors and the books written by them<sup>7</sup>). Yet, there are some works, written from a Torah perspective, that throw a penetrating light on the era of the Holocaust — and, even more interesting, when we dig deeper into the mass of the Holocaust literature, we find sparks of the truth in almost every place, which help us toward an understanding of what this era may have been meant to teach us.

To be sure, we are not able to say that the *Churban Europa* happened for this or that reason; just as in the case of individual bereavement we must silently bend our head, so too when it is multiplied not a thousand fold but six million fold. All we can affirm is that death — or suffering — is not meaningless, but finds its fulfillment in that world for which our life is only a preparation. Yet, having made this clear, we can and must not only remember what happened, but seek to learn from it what we can.

In searching for a clue to the meaning of events, *Gedolei Torah* have pointed to the coincidence between — on one hand — the rise of alien ideologies within the Jewish people and — on the other hand — the murderous hostility of the Nazis and the indifference of the other nations. Some have pointed to the fact that the *Churban Europa* began in Berlin, the birthplace of *Haskalah* and assimilation, and have seen in the Nazi rejection of the Jew the answer to the dream of being like our Gentile neighbors. Others have stressed the emergence of Jewish secular nationalism: when there arose the idea that Jews are a nation like all others, denying their Divine role, the other nations could rise against it with impunity.<sup>8</sup> These interpretations seek to provide some key to the disaster that befell us — when we now turn to the books that have appeared, we find evidence that the actual course of this disaster constantly manifested the factors we pointed to: the failure of secular Jewish leadership, whether assimilationist or nationalist, and the unrelenting hostility of the nations. We will try to illustrate this pattern by reference to the attitude of the non-Jewish world ... the policies of the Jewish leadership in the free world ... and the situation under the Nazis.

## 1. The Attitude of the Non-Jewish World

*While Six Million Died* has become the standard text on the perfidy of the American government in professing sympathy and solidarity with the cause of saving Europe's Jews while at the same time doing everything possible to play down and cover up the tragedy and block any effective rescue work. The author notes that over one million places on the U.S. immigration quotas were left unfilled in the years 1933 to 1945, and the role of Cordell Hull and his henchmen is fully aired. (Their attitude to rescue is also highlighted in *The Voyage of the Damned*, the tragic account of the odyssey of the *St. Louis* whose passengers were refused admission to Cuba and — refused a haven in the USA — finally found refuge in European countries where most of them were later seized by the Nazis.) Roosevelt's personal role is not adequately explored, however, and Stephen Wise and the Jewish establishment are portrayed as working loyally for the rescue of the European Jews — as we shall see, a picture far from the truth.

*Into That Darkness* is an extremely important book, both on account of its main theme, the creation of the extermination apparatus, and because of the various related topics explored by the author. Mrs. Sereny traces the life history of Franz Stangl and his rise from participation in the early Nazi euthanasia program to the command of the Treblinka extermination camp. She shows how the euthanasia project of the thirties served as a preparation for the later elaborate programs to destroy vast numbers of lives — and she shows how the Vatican's tolerance of Nazi "mercy killing" opened the door to the full horror of Nazi murder. Incidentally, she confirms what has widely been suspected — that the much ballyhooed official Vatican series of documents on the war, presently being published, deliberately omits documents incriminating the Pope and establishing his early knowledge of the "Final Solution"; the author herself saw these documents in Polish diplomatic archives. At the same time she throws light on the help given to fleeing Nazi war criminals in Rome after the war.

A point frequently made by Sereny — that the non-Jewish population in Eastern Europe constantly betrayed Jews to the Nazis — also emerges from many of the autobiographical accounts of survivors, such as Bryna Bar Oni's moving story of her effort to survive in hiding, threatened not only by the Nazis but also her Polish neighbors and even by many partisan units. (She became one of 23 survivors, out of 370 who had fled the ghetto of her hometown.) But this was not only a problem in Eastern Europe. In France extraordinary efforts were made by many Frenchmen, and particularly the *maquis*, to aid the Jews, as shown for instance in Joffo's account. Yet, at the same time — as shown in Dank's *The French Against the French* — there were sizeable elements that collaborated with the Nazis, es-

pecially the French police. This is particularly understandable if we remember that Petain obtained the consent of the Pope to the anti-Jewish legislation which he adopted and which formed the basis for the persecution of the Jews in France.

If the war years saw so much gentile callousness toward the "Final Solution," we should not be surprised about the post-war tolerance for Nazi criminals and neo-Nazis evident not only in Germany but also in the U.S.A. and other countries. Beate Klarsfeld's *Whoever They May Be* is the autobiography of a German who turned Nazi-hunter; from its pages there emerges a sense of futility which forces us to face the fact that neither the preaching of humanitarianism and enlightenment nor the fight against Jew-haters will solve the problem of the Jew. The fact that the wave of revulsion over Nazi crimes, which rose at the end of the war, spent itself so quickly, underlines the deeper significance of the perennial tension between the Jew and the nations: we are meant to recognize that we are different, and must shoulder the burden of our sacred mission. We must see the attitude of the nations as rooted in the depths of historical destiny — "It is a law that Esau hates Jacob" and serves as a scourging rod, to recall Jacob to a sense of his unique and lonely task as G-d's messenger. Not only the Nazi crimes, which are beyond all human understanding, but the betrayal of the Jews by most of the free nations can only be explained in this way.

## 2. The Role of the Jewish Establishment

It is easier to be enraged by the failure of the nations and churches than it is to face the facts about the Jewish role in the Holocaust. 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 — the best known, most respected leaders of Zionism — were actually criminals, said Ben Hecht. ... One who fought with all his might against our rescue and publicity campaigns was Rabbi Stephen Wise, president of the various Jewish congress-

ses." Since Elie Weisel recorded this interview in 1959, so much material has come to light that it is almost unbelievable that Stephen Wise's name is remembered anywhere with anything but shame (Korman's introduction to *Hunter and Hunted*, whose publication was sponsored by the Bnei Brith Commission on Jewish Adult Education, still presents him as the champion of rescue efforts — the sources gathered by Korman are of vastly greater value than his introduction).

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 whom 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 special War Refugee Board, he testified before Congress against this proposal — and

6. Wiesel's words (in *Legends of Our Time*) give expression to this: "What Auschwitz embodied has [no meaning]. The executioner killed for nothing, the victim died for nothing. No G-d ordered the one to prepare the stake, nor the other to mount it.... At Auschwitz the sacrifices were without point, without faith, without divine inspiration."
7. D. Rabinowitz, *New Lives* (Knopf, 1976), a study of survivors of the Holocaust living in America, reflects the multiplicity of feelings and the uncertainty and confusion of goals which characterize so many who have managed to survive and who have had no roots in Jewish tradition (the same impres-

sion emerges from G. Sereny's *Into That Darkness*, and from the above mentioned article in the *New York Times Magazine* of June 19, 1977, *Heirs of the Holocaust* by Helen Epstein).

In contrast, anybody familiar with the Orthodox communities created by Holocaust survivors in this country will readily agree that, however traumatic their war experiences were, they do not suffer from the same lack of purpose or uncertainty about the meaningfulness of their life.

8. See Rabbi A. Wolf, *Hatekufah Ubayosayha*, pp. 68-77, for a summary of different interpretations.

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

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*The secular Establishment feared a wave of uncouth Eastern European Jews, closing their eyes to the fact that after an Allied victory, no Jews would be left to save.*

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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 on 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 Klueger 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.

It is extremely painful to peruse a book like Moshe Shonfeld's *The Holocaust Victims Accuse*, which chronicles these and other instances of the failure of the Jewish establishment.<sup>9</sup> Yet it is most important that the true picture of what happened be faced up to — not only to keep the historical record straight but, much more importantly, because there are profound implications for present and future. With the exception of a few very rare individuals — such as Dr. Griffel in Turkey, Elemelech Tress and Julius Steinfeld in the U.S.A., and the organizations that they succeeded in inspiring — nobody did enough for *Hatzalah*, and therein lies a terrible lesson for us. At the same time, it is frightening to look back upon the failure of the big Jewish organizations, in their flawed approach to rescue work which so clearly emerges from our sources. If, as we said at the beginning, the Holocaust was to serve as a warning against our loss of Torah values in the process of assimilation, the failure to do adequate rescue work doubly and triply underlines this warning.

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We must do our utmost not to permit alien ideologies to dominate Jewish life — whether we think of American issues, the needs of Russian Jewry, or Eretz Yisrael.

### 3. Under Nazi Rule

Lastly, we must also face up to the fact that the inroads of such ideologies — whether assimilationist or nationalist — may not only have prepared the ground for the *Churban Europa*, but were also manifested in the way in which European Jewry faced its hour of tragedy.

D. Rabinowitz tells the story of the survivor who looked at the pictures of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising displayed in the office of a Jewish organization to illustrate death with honor — and mused, “I thought that everyone who died, died with honor.” Most of the books concerned with the Holocaust at one point or another come to grips with the question of resistance: did the six million go like sheep to slaughter? 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 question.<sup>10</sup> 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 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 — and, while there were many, from the most diverse

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*The survivor looked at the pictures of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising displayed to illustrate death with honor — and mused, “I thought that everyone who died, died with honor.”*

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backgrounds, who gave strength to others by their own fortitude, there is one note that is struck again and again in the accounts of the time, by secular writers as well as religious ones:

*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).*

*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 corpses.*

*All at 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*

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9. In *Blaming the Jews: The Charge of Perfidy* (in *The Jewish Presence, a collection of essays on identity and history, 1977*), L. Dawidowicz tries to clear the Jewish leadership of such charges. She argues that Kastner, the Zionist leader in Hungary, was not a traitor but “a self-deluded egotist, obsessed with the sense of his historic mission to save some Jews” (emphasis mine); and she claims that “timidity, miscalculation, and misjudgment” as the part of the leadership is not the same as betrayal — people merely realized too late what was happening. Faint as her defense is, it is still too kind to these leaders. Stephen Wise and others knew relatively early what was going on and acceded to a cover-up; they failed to put public pressure on the governments, tried to silence those who did, and at crucial moments actually opposed rescue projects. It is strange for a historian, in

belittling the work of the Irgunists, to write that “its one accomplishment ... was that it ... brought about the creation of the War Refugee Board,” as if this had been a small thing. She stresses that “Sali Meyer was authorized to keep negotiating” with the Germans after Brand had been sidetracked; yet she must know that Sali Meyer actually opposed removing Jews from Nazi-held territories. She mentions that in 1944, Weizman proposed the bombing of Auschwitz — ignoring the fact that this was urged much earlier by Rabbi M.B. Weissmandl, whom — unbelievably! — she totally ignores in all her writings — and that England, possibly on Russian instigation, refused; yet there is on record an English denial that such a proposal was ever made.

10. Cf. Dawidowicz, in *The Jewish Presence*;

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, an 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)*

DesPres, to be sure, at bottom, does not know how to evaluate such phenomena. He recognizes that survival in the camps was tied up with a man's essential humanity, the ability for caring and sharing; yet he sees this as merely an expression of innate and instinctive biological forms of basic behavior. Dawidowicz, too, stresses the role of the spirit. She writes:

*Morale was sustained by rabbis and pious Jews who, by their own resolute and exalted stance, provided a model of how Jews should encounter death.*

She points out that, while many gave up their loyalty to tradition, there was a mass sacrificial endeavor on the part of religious Jewry to cling to Torah observance, even though it was in effect made illegal by the Nazis. The faith and pride in one's Jewishness, despite everything, is reflected in the story of the child in the ghetto school who heard the story of Jacob and Esau and exclaimed: "Teacher, we are Jacob's descendants, and they are Esau's, right? It's good that way. I want to belong to Jacob and not to Esau." Yet Dawidowicz adds that "for believing Jews the conviction that their sacrifice was required as a testimony to Almighty G-d was more comforting than the supposition that He had abandoned them altogether" — this statement hardly does justice to the genuine faith in G-d's closeness of the true believer, and rather makes it appear to be a convenient psychological device.

In contrast, Prager, Weinstock, Unsderfer — and Shonfeld, in some of his vignettes — heart-rendingly capture on paper the true spiritual greatness and all-pervading humanity of so many men whom the awesome challenge turned into heroes. However, the light of Torah does not only shine through such people — compare the following lines by 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.*

The enormous strength of Torah, both in assuring the loyalty of its faithful followers and in giving them endurance and vitality, is shown in the rabbinic responsa of the time, many of which are collected by Dr. H.J. Zimmels.<sup>11</sup> Despite some ineptitude on the part of those who edited the volume (compare for instance the statement about Rabbi Abramsky's beard, p. 39), it is a remarkable and deeply upsetting work, reflecting the greatness of the Jew whose longing — even in the valley of death — was to do the will of his Father in heaven. The Torah Jew put himself in mortal danger by the *peyos* he wore, or by his attendance at a *minyán*; yet he acquired an inner strength that protected him from a fate worse than death — becoming a lackey or imitator of his oppressors.

In contrast, among those estranged from Torah, there was the possibility of some men emerging who chose such a life of shame. Shonfeld quotes Efröiken, 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. 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 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 own 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 exit to 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 Hashana!*

Of course, the Merins, Kovners, Greenbaums, *at 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.

Therein lies the particular importance of remembering the *Churban Europa* in all its aspects. We must not only seek to feel some echo of the pain and horror of those days; we must also learn from the *mesiras nefesh* of the ordinary Jew who, going to his death, would not have changed places with his murderers, and of his leaders who inspired him; also, however hurtful this is, we must be aware of the danger to *Klal Yisroel* which results from the forgetting of Torah and the emergence of leaders estranged from it; and, finally, we must remember that we must go our way without expecting anything from the world around us.

#### Jewish Historiography

Measured by these objectives of our study of the period, most of the books here touched upon must be judged superficial in their interpretation and understanding of the events — and in some cases outright misleading — even though a good many of the data they offer have proven most revealing to us.<sup>12</sup> The efforts by Schonfeld to set the record straight, are of course of great value; so are the accounts given by Prager, Undorfer, or Weinstock, among others, and such specialized works as Zimmel's. I would, however, like to single out Kranzler's work on Shanghai as an example of what a Jewish historical monograph should be like.

*Japanese, Nazis and Jews* is a thoroughly researched volume, complete with documentation, source references and bibliography. Unlike Trunk's volume,

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11. Trunk and Dawidowicz have stressed what they saw as a conflict between Rabbis over the permissibility of preparing lists for deportation. The Kovner *Rav*, when asked by the Judenrat to rule on this question, collapsed; when he had recovered, he replied, after careful consideration, that a list could be prepared. This ruling seems in conflict with that of all other Rabbis and the view of the Rambam; Zimmels, however, explains that the question in Kovno was different from the case in other localities.

for instance, it deals thoroughly also with all aspects of the themes that relate to Torah Jewry. Above all, however, it seeks to lead the reader to look deeper, behind the facts.

Only *neviim* (prophets) can uncover the hidden pathways of historic cause-and-effect relationships. But we can — and should — try to perceive history as an expression of Divine Providence. Thus, Dr. Kranzler points out how Jacob Schiff, the American financier, in 1905 helped the Japanese against Russia because of Russia's persecution of the Jews — and thereby he

prepared a haven of refuge a generation later. The Japanese not only remained grateful; they became so convinced of the world power of Jewish financiers (an idea usually conducive to Jew-hatred) that they decided to treat their Jewish refugees well, thereby hoping to gain sympathy from the Jewish-dominated world.

It is interesting in this connection that the Japanese repeatedly tried to enlist "their" Jews in establishing a better understanding of Japanese problems in America. It was crucial for the well-being of the Jews in China and Japan that they should not be rudely rebuffed — yet Stephen Wise once again played the patriotic statesman at the expense of the local Jews, providing a maximum of irritating words and a minimum of help. He expressed his hostility to the Japanese and gratuitously wrote that "Japan is bound to take an anti-Semitic attitude, and indeed has already done so" (Nov. 22, 1938). Fortunately for the Jews of Shanghai, this statement never reached the Japanese. In contrast, the role of the Vaad Hatzalah and, in particular, of Rabbi Kalmanowitz, the *Mirrer Rosh HaYeshiva*, shines brightly—yet another illustration of the thesis we have tried to develop in this review article. ✠

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(signed)

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(Mattersdorfer Rav)

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12. Attention should also be drawn to the fact that a great deal of material is presently published for school children and their teachers; here the absence of a Torah orientation is particularly dangerous. The Board of Jewish Education of New York has published **Program Materials for the Holocaust**, a kit stressing the observance of the "Day of the Holocaust" and defining the educational objective as "identification with the six million, and the immortality of Israel (נצח ישראל)"; the rise of the State of Israel is presented as the fulfillment of the *Ani Ma'amin* sung in the ghettos, and the historical material included (particularly an extract from *Abba Eban's My People*) is crudely slanted in its account of Jewish rescue efforts and its secularistic approach.

An article by Abraham I. Katsh recommends that the Holocaust should be included in the daily prayers just like the *Exodus* from Egypt, a *Zachor* sign be hung in every *Sukkah*, and a resistance story be added to the reading of *Megillath Esther*!

B. Stadler, *The Holocaust* (1973, *Anti Defamation League*) is meant as a history book for children but fails totally to convey the values of *Kiddush Hashem* with which we are concerned; there are many clichés — and a blunt statement that "Rabbis and community leaders were no more or less human than other people." More useful, because offered without interpretations, is a set of twenty posters for display purposes, published by the *Anti Defamation League*; when exhibiting them, we should, however, add pictures reflecting our particular concerns (*Gedolei Yisroel*, etc.).

## Thumb Prints

*The scope of the tragedy of the loss of six million lives — of the brutality of snuffing out so many lives — is more than the mind can deal with. — Is one million wanton murders less traumatic, less of a loss than six million? One man's experiences, such as recorded in the account that follows, can serve as a starting point from which the pain, the sorrow, and the anger can radiate to include the loss of an en-*

*tire family, a complete community, and a nation.*

*This article, written by the late SIMCHA BUNEM UNSDORFER ל"ו, had been found in the files of The Jewish Tribune, the Orthodox weekly newspaper published by Agudath Israel of Great Britain. It was written in 1959 and describes the writer's personal encounter with Dr. Joseph Mengele, who several weeks ago was reported to be living a life of luxury in Paraguay.*

### Three Times

*"Nazi Horror Man Seized!" "Auschwitz Doctor Captured!"* Once again headlines like these have appeared in various newspapers this week — and, once again, within hours of their publication, these reports were promptly denied. They were either a "complete fabrication," or a man was indeed arrested but it was not the hunted Dr. Joseph Mengele, "the fingerprints did not match..."

Having had the displeasure of facing Dr. Mengele at a time when he was the hunter and I the hunted, I follow these reports with great interest.

"It was thought he was Mengele," one Agency reported, but "the fingerprints didn't match!"

What kind of fingerprints, I wonder, would the thumb of Dr. Mengele produce? The thumb that motioned countless thousands, maybe millions, including my own parents, my sister and her five children, to their deaths? Would these prints, if looked at through a fine microscope, bear witness to the mass murder committed by the soulless Doctor of Annihilation?

I stood three times before that infamous left-hand thumb that swung like a pendulum between life and death. Three times my heart missed a beat as it waited

MR. UNSDORFER had been a dynamic leader of Agudath Israel in Great Britain following World War II, until his untimely death ten years ago. Stories of Simcha, a collection of his stories and essays, was recently published. This article was featured in a recent edition of The Jewish Tribune and is reprinted here with permission.

The Jewish Observer / October, 1977

for that thumb to move towards the right — life, or towards the left — and Auschwitz Gas Chambers.

### No Selection at Auschwitz

At 11 a.m., on Thursday 19th October 1944, a twelve-truck cattle train came to a halt at Auschwitz Extermination Camp. In it yet another load of a thousand Jewish victims to face judgment before that self-appointed master of life and death, Dr. Joseph Mengele. Amongst the victims were my parents and myself — my sister and her family having gone through the same ordeal a week earlier which ended in Mengele's thumb pointing towards the left...

One hour after our arrival, we found ourselves inside a huge wooden barrack, convinced that every single one of us was doomed for the gas chambers. Our conviction was based on two facts:

a) We were not subjected to the usual "selection" that normally took place on the platform; and

b) of the thousand people in our transport, nearly half were inmates of the only remaining Jewish Old Age Home in my native Slovakia. These old people, none of whom was below the age of 75, were assured by the Germans that they would never be deported. That assurance held good until Eichmann's Aide — S.S. Obersturmfuehrer A. Brunner, who is also still at large, allegedly in Egypt — had decided to rob them of this, their one and only desire on this earth, that is to be allowed to die in their own beds. He hauled them out and pushed them into our transport.

And just as we expected to be led into the gas

chambers, the huge barrack doors were flung open and in marched a troop of S.S., headed by a high ranking officer.

He stopped for a moment, as if to take a general view of the mass of panic-stricken white-faced newcomers. Then he gave a slight nod with his head, a signal which only his fellow S.S. men could interpret...

That officer, I learned later, was Mengele. Dr. Joseph Mengele, trained to cure the sick but practicing wholesale murder. He rested his right arm between the shining buttons of his smartly fitting S.S. tunic, in true Napoleonic style, and began to march forward to make his "selection."

Mengele was certainly a "specialist" in his job. He was looking for young, able-bodied men and women to be sent to Germany's labor camps; he was looking for the retarded, spastics, dwarfs, and even twins on whom to perform his "medical" experiments; and he was looking for the aged, the weak, and the ailing to feed them into his gas chambers.

What was a few minutes earlier a crowd of tired and silent people, suddenly turned into a mass of crying, screaming, pulling, and pushing men, women and children — a human stampede fighting for life. Women trying to pull back their "selected" daughters; sons were screaming to their fathers to follow them; hysterical mothers clutching their babies, old couples tightly holding on to each other — and all the time the S.S. lashing out mercilessly against them all.

Dr. Mengele who gave the signal for "action" went on with his "selection" quite undisturbed. To him this had become a normal, perhaps a boring, day-to-day routine. He swung his thumb from left to right — from life to death — leaving it to the S.S. guards behind him to do the rest.

Then the moment came. He gave one glance at me and his thumb motioned right. It was to be expected. I was then only nineteen and fit for work. I tried to turn round for a quick goodbye to my parents, one last word to father, one last kiss for my mother. But no. An S.S. hand grabbed me by the collar and pulled me away. In a flash my father's hand reached forward in a desperate effort to protect me from the murderous grip of that S.S. man. Mengele mistook it and thought that my father was trying to follow me. "*Dort bleiben!*" he yelled. "Stay there." My last moment with my parents — and my first encounter with Mengele was over....

### The Dead Filing Past the Living

Three mornings later as we stood assembled in another barrack waiting for transportation to one of Germany's many slave labor factories, the doors were pulled open again. In came Mengele and his escort. The sight of the man who had murdered my parents just 48 hours earlier made my blood boil but, within seconds, it froze again at the thought that he was here not to

apologize or to console us but to collect a fresh group of victims, more food for the ever-burning four huge crematoria of Auschwitz.

"Strip to the waist and form into a single column!" the barrack leader — himself an inmate — ordered.

Within minutes we were filing past the slow-moving thumb of Dr. Mengele again. Now and again he picked his new victims from the line — no reasons, no protests — just a flick of the thumb and a life was at an end. Ironically, this "selection" had the appearance of a crowd of mourners filing past the coffin of a departed friend. So solemn and so silent was the atmosphere. Yet, here you had the tragic difference of seeing the dead filing past the living....

Then it was my turn to face Mengele again; for a moment it seemed as if he was hesitating. I was always on the skinny side and his thumb remained still, as if paralyzed. And just as I thought that my end was in sight, a sudden push from the impatient column behind caused me to stumble forward and I was "through" for the second time.

The "selection" over, Mengele counted his catch, an unknown number of doomed men standing silently in a corner behind a line of S.S. He counted them slowly and then, in a flash, turned round again screaming and raving that one man had escaped! Escaped? Who could have got away from this column of fully armed six-foot tall S.S. men? — But nobody dared question him, not even his own men.

### "Line Them up Again!"

"Line them up again!" he yelled at the barrack leader. "I'll recognize that dark-haired skinny youngster. The tall boy with the glasses — I'll recognize him immediately."

My blood froze as I heard this description. It fitted me perfectly as, indeed, a good many others in the barrack. As the line began to move again, I took a deep breath to fill out my chest and lungs and in desperation I removed my glasses. Slowly I came nearer and nearer to him. Then, suddenly, the column stopped. For there, just about ten men ahead of me, he pulled out an 18-year-old youngster shouting jubilantly: "You! You are the one I picked out before."

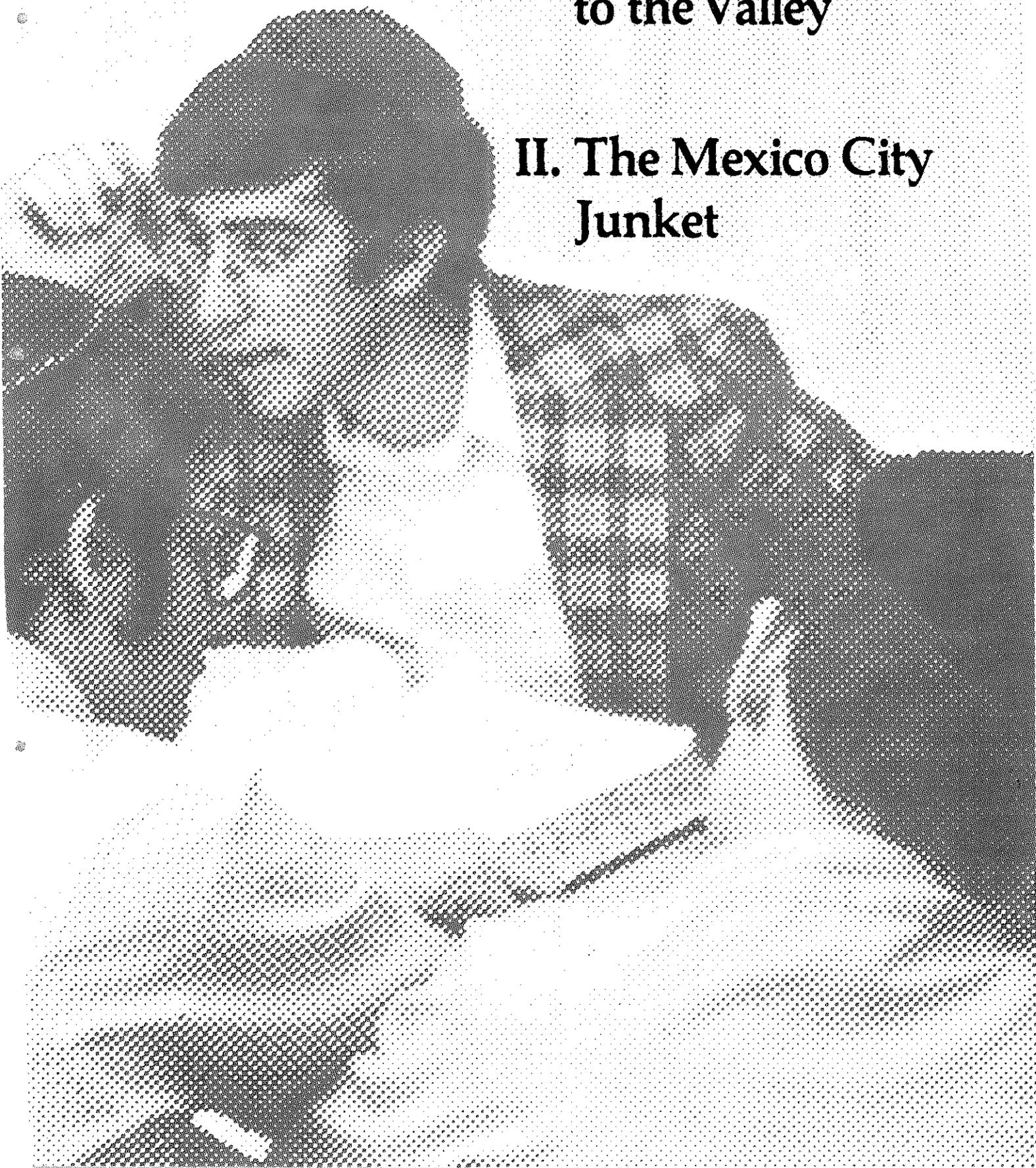
"No! No!" the boy, a former classmate of mine, cried: "It was not me, Sir. Look, my hair is red! I am short, and I never wear glasses...."

But Mengele was not interested. The "selection" was over, and so was my last and final encounter with him.

Now Mengele is a hunted man. Hunted by the living and haunted by the dead. And when the day of his capture will arrive, there should be no difficulty in identifying him. Those who, like myself, have stood in fear and terror before him will require no fingerprints.... I would recognize him by the mere sight of his thumb. 

# **I. Bringing Torah to the Valley**

## **II. The Mexico City Junket**



It has been said that, in terms of hedonism and the trend toward cultural assimilation which so mark American life, Los Angeles is the "America" of America. More than that, suburban San Fernando Valley has been called the "Los Angeles" of Los Angeles. This should be quite alarming to the Jewish reader, considering that Los Angeles is the U.S.'s second city in Jewish population, with over half a million Jews — close to 200,000 of them living in the Valley. Thus, an attempt to establish a Torah beachhead in North Hollywood (in the Valley) can be better understood for both the significance of the endeavor and the risks involved.

Note should also be taken, however, of the positive changes that have been taking place in the ugly stereotype of Los Angeles these past thirty years. First, an influx of she'aris hapleita (refugees) from Europe in the 40's and 50's gave the Los Angeles community a much-needed injection of religious vitality. Moreover, it is now close to twenty-five years since Rabbi Simcha Was-

serman opened the Yeshiva Ohr Elchonon in the Melrose section of Los Angeles. More recently, the Kollel founded by Beis Midrash Gevocha two years ago in the Beverly-Fairfax section of Los Angeles has been improving the religious complexion of the city in a most dramatic way. But out in the Valley, change has been minimal. Aside from the Emek Day School and High School, which serve the area, there had been little evidence of a full-bodied Torah presence in the Valley.

Then, in summer 1976, Torah Umesorah's Project SEED (an acronym for Summer Educational Environmental Development) brought a group of ten young men from the Beis Midrash of Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim of Forest Hills, N.Y., to North Hollywood for a six-week period . . . after which four stayed on to form the nucleus of a beis hamidrash — a full-time Torah-study program. The following is excerpted from a report on the North Hollywood experience by one of the beis midrash boys, MOSHE TURK. Moshe is currently with the Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim in Jerusalem.

## Bringing Torah to the Valley

by Moshe Turk

### SEED Summer

I was part of the group of ten who came to the Valley in summer '76. Although we were aware that Torah inroads had been made into the community, we were surprised by their extent. The people welcomed us with open arms, doing all that they could to help. More impressive, however, was their participation in our programs. They came with an enthusiasm which by no means indicated a complacently assimilated community. People who had spent most of their lives running from Torah were now embracing it. Children were coming home from Yeshiva with new ideas and they found their parents surprisingly receptive. For the first time in their lives people were consciously searching for more meaning.

From the start, we had as many people as we could handle. We were teaching *Gemora*, *halachos* and *mitzvos* . . . morning, afternoon and night. There were *chavrusos*, *shiurim*, lectures, *Shabbatonim* and *Melave Malke's*. A cross-section of people was always in attendance. Some "knew how to learn"; others once did, but had since forgotten what a *Gemora* looked like. But they all had one thing in common — a thirst for Torah

knowledge. They came, they learned, and it had a profound impact upon many of their lives.

Children changed plans to attend public school, collegiates signed up for *yeshivos gedolos*, and parents became more exacting in their observance of the *mitzvos*. I was particularly inspired by one child who decided, under his own volition, to forego the opportunity to attend a movie with his friends so he could save his allowance to buy *seforim*.

### Stranger at the Melave Malke

In the midst of one *Melave Malke*, a stranger walked in. Nobody seemed to know him. We introduced ourselves to him, but got little out of him except his first name — Michael. After the *Melave Malke*, he disappeared only to return the next morning with a suitcase. He asked if he could stay with us, and we, of course, consented, still not prying into his life. He stayed for an entire week, living and learning with us. Slowly, as the week slipped by, we found out more about him. Michael is a professional newscaster who interviews prominent entertainers and important personalities. His personal portfolio was a *Who's Who* in

show business. For one week, however, he was just another Jew sitting and learning Torah.

Before he left, he told us that the two most inspiring experiences of his life were his first reading of the Chofetz Chaim's *sefer "Ahavas Chessed"* (dealing with the laws of charity) and his contact with us.

### Too Early For "Goodbye"

We had all heard many *shmuessen* from our *rebbeim* on the importance and present-day potential of *chinuch* (Torah education) but after one actually experiences *chinuch* in practice, he is never the same. With this new-found perspective we prepared to return to New York. I soon found out, however, that for me the experience was not yet over.

Rabbi Shaya Cohen — who together with Rabbi Yochanan Stepen heads the Emek schools — decided that the time was ripe to start a *Beis Midrash* in the Valley. The community was ready, and the high school needed it. We were asked to stay an additional six months to form the nucleus of a *yeshiva gedola*. With the encouragement of our Rosh HaYeshiva (Rabbi Henach Liebowitz שליט"א), three of us remained. A fourth came from New York to join us and thus *Beis Midrash Zichron Aryeh* was born.

### Non-Growth Pains

*Rosh Chodesh Elul* marked the beginning of the *Beis Midrash*, four of us learning full *sedorim* (three sessions per day). A few collegiates from the area joined us part-time, but for months there was no sign of growth. We tried to attract more *talmidim* but for a while it looked as if it just was not meant to be. For months, Rabbi Cohen would comfort us, saying, "*Ver vais voss tut zich in Himmel?*" Then, slowly, the unexpected began to happen — to this day I cannot understand how. As if from nowhere, people came. Soon we understood. We had done our best, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* did the rest.

By *Pesach*, we had an established *Beis Midrash* with over twenty young men engrossed in the study of Torah, and the number continues to grow. The community has begun to appreciate that, ultimately, the success of Torah in the Valley can only be properly guaranteed through a strong, vibrant *Beis Midrash*.

### The Schedule

One or two periods every morning, and fifteen minutes after *Mincha* were set aside to work with high school students. Teaching them *Gemora* and *Mussar* (studies in Torah ethics), we presented Torah not merely as a subject, but as a way of life. We organized *Shabbatonim* and occasional overnight expeditions. As the year progressed, the bonds of our friendship deepened. The closer we became, the more they learned from us and we from them.

While a youngster obviously needs a *Rebbe* to guide and teach him, many areas of influence are inaccessible to a *Rebbe*. These avenues were open to us. We were single, young (21-22), and "one of them." They opened themselves up to us, but expected that we do the same. They carefully observed how we lived, how we behaved, how we thought, and even how we learned. And with the degree of flexibility and open-mindedness found only among youth, they strived to attain the standards which we attempted to set.

We demanded only that they listen — and they, in turn, responded. In fact, as we followed their progress, we had to constantly remind ourselves of the pressures they were going through. We could not honestly draw from our own pasts to relate to their present situation. Most of their families do not even observe *Shabbos*, yet almost all of them are *Shomrei Shabbos*. They are old enough to be caught in the throes of society, yet not old enough to easily detach themselves from these influences. In spite of everything, however, they overcame. There is hardly a student who did not develop significantly during our stay there. Unfortunately, in New York one sees so many youths who have been "turned-off" to religious Judaism. In Los Angeles, however, we were the first exposure these students have had to *bnei Torah*. They are not familiar with the many stigmas with which we in the East must unfortunately contend. Thus, in many ways, they proved even more receptive than members of more religious circles.

### "Within Every Jew . . ."

We discovered how within every Jew there dwells the desire and ability to accept Torah. "Council in the heart of man is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out" (*Mishlei* 20,3). Those clear waters of Torah, writes *Shlomo HaMelech*, are innately part of every Jewish heart. Regardless of how deeply they lie submerged, it only requires a man to apply his understanding nature to bring them to the surface.... How true this was!

*After graduating yeshiva day school, "Daniel" decide that he was finished with the study of Torah, and registered in a local public high school. Throughout the summer months he continually resisted the arguments of the Rebbeim. A week before the start of the school year, he finally consented, albeit reluctantly, to try yeshiva high school. It took less than five weeks for the essence of his neshama to break through. I watched in total amazement on Yom Kippur while this thirteen year old boy davened, shuckling intensely, without a single break the entire day. Davening with the all-encompassing involvement of a true ben Torah, the resisting child of the previous month was nowhere to be seen.*



We initiated a voluntary *Mishmar* on Thursday nights. We asked the boys to give up almost two hours of their free time to come and join us in study. We did not expect much of a turnout. After all, attendance was optional, it involved a trip of considerable distance for most of them, and it also competed with prime-time television. We were proved wrong. The vast majority of the student body showed up each week, ready and eager to study Torah. *Talmidim* who hardly *davened* or learned in the morning were going out of their way to come at night. Even boys who were still experiencing inner conflict over *Kashrus* and *Shmiras Shabbos* were committing themselves to come every Thursday night.

As the *Gemora* says, G-d told *Klal Yisroel*, "Better forsake Me and keep the learning of Torah, for its light will bring you back to Me" (*Yerushalmi, Chagiga I,7*). First came their dedication to learning, then invariably, at their own pace, adherence to *mitzvos* followed:

"Shelly" resisted for several months before finally consenting to attend a *Mishmar*. He had enough difficulty trying to pay attention during class, and had no interest in extending himself further. As a favor to us, he agreed at last to try it one time. I don't believe he paid attention the entire evening, but on the way home he made an interesting declaration: "I don't know why, but once I've seen what it is, I feel that I must attend from now on." To our surprise, he kept his word, coming almost every subsequent week. A far cry from your average "yeshivisha masmid," he still makes it his business to affirm his commitment every Thursday night.

Just a few weeks later, Shelly showed another aspect of his development. Hyper-active and volatile by nature, we expected to see fireworks when another student began to provoke him into

an argument. With obvious effort, however, he restrained himself and walked away. Later we found out that the previous night, before going to bed, he had thought over what his *Beis Midrash bachur* had told him during *Mussar* class. Whereas we thought he did not pay attention, the message had gotten through to him with such force that he was able to transform our thoughts into action. Still another case in point of how hidden responses to Torah can be brought to light.

As I observed all of this, my personal *Mussar* sessions grew more introspective: If they could achieve so much, how much greater were my own obligations? The older students were already establishing themselves as true *bnei Torah*. They were making plans to enter *yeshivos gedolos*, here and in Israel. The younger *talmidim* were also advancing: "Larry" who but last year was *mechallel Shabbos*, made sure that during this year's vacation he was awakened to say "Krias Shema" in its proper time.... "Stewy" came to us this year with almost no knowledge of *Yiddishkeit*. He recently prevailed upon his parents to make their home *Kosher*.... These incidents are not the exception, but rather the norm. Week after week, *shmuessen* I had heard in *Yeshiva* in New York continued came to life. *Chazal* (words of the Rabbis, of sainted memory) that I had read were reenacted in the lives of my students.

#### The Community Rises to the Occasion

While we were basically involved in Torah study, and our format of activity was mostly of a one-to-one interaction, the community as a whole was not unaffected. Permit me to share with you some of the changes which occurred in one single year: While the enrollment of the Day School continued to increase, in both the boys' and girls' high schools it virtually doubled, attracting many students from Los Angeles proper. The Emek Board of Directors (a lay-body) reaffirmed its commitment to Torah, submitting all aspects of policy and curriculum to *Daas Torah*. In addition, a full-time *Beis Midrash* as well as a half-day program for college students was established and an advanced seminary for girls was begun. Two *Talmud Torah's* (afternoon schools) for public high school students were set up in different parts of the Valley, meeting three times a week. An active Adult Education Program was initiated. And of course, the Torah Umesorah Project SEED was again in operation throughout the following summer.

What brought about this miraculous change? Why did members of a community, so removed from Torah values, suddenly re-evaluate their position? How could so much be accomplished so quickly?

When we "young Rabbis" (as we were affectionately called) first came to teach, and the *Beis Midrash bachurim* joined us to learn, the community took immediate notice. They saw young men with bright

futures in any of dozens of potentially lucrative fields dedicate themselves instead to a singular ideal — the study and spreading of Torah. The sight of *bnei Torah* bending over a *Gemora* for hours on end ... the sound of Torah study far into the night ... all these were contributing factors that helped in creating an indelible imprint upon the hearts and minds of the townspeople — perhaps a common sight in many areas, but a potent force, nonetheless, when viewed afresh from a new perspective.

Another contributing factor that surely bears more than passing mention is the unique leadership the Emek schools enjoy in the person of rabbis who were unbending, yet reasonable; presenting and representing Torah — straight, unadulterated, without compromise.

### At This Writing . . .

At this writing, I am back in New York, trying to put my thoughts and experiences into proper perspective. Although the prospect of staying on the West Coast was very tempting, the necessity to leave was also obvious. Foremost among all that I have learned from my experiences is that the amount one is able to transmit to others is directly proportionate to the amount one has absorbed within himself. I have now returned to my Yeshiva with renewed vigor. There is great potential, paralleled by great need, throughout the land. The success of Torah, *the miracle of Torah* in the San Fernando Valley can — with the help of G-d will — be repeated in communities all over this nation. I pray that I will have the *zechus* of sharing in this most worthy task. 

---

## The Mexico City Junket

by Suri Rosenberg and Rochel Zucker

*The concept behind Torah Umesorah's Project SEED — that of harnessing the fire, vitality, and purity of motive of Torah students to inspire others to come closer to Torah — has been emulated by others with appreciable success. RABBI YOEL KRAMER, who is President of National Conference of Yeshiva Principals, drew on the SEED concept to lead a group of students from the Prospect Park Yeshiva High School for Girls (where is is principal) on a surprisingly fruitful visit to Mexico City. In Rabbi Kramer's words:*

*The value of limudei kodesh (sacred studies) is self-evident. The purpose of acquiring certain basic secular skills for productive adult living is also obvious. But why should some of the more optional disciplines be included in school curricula? And after the subjects have been there, can they be justified? Understandably, the answer often varies, depending upon the orientation of the analyst. But there should be Torah reasons upon which decisions are based.*

*My quest revolved around the rationale for the study of foreign languages. The classic arguments of academia, stressing the need for comprehension of the construct of language, were perhaps reasonable. Yet wouldn't it be infinitely more meaningful if there were a Torah rationale for this activity?*

*A principal's convention and a chance introduction to a colleague from Mexico City with the fire of mesiras nefesh for the Torah in his eye answered my question. My years of studying Spanish facilitated our communication. We began sharing thoughts on chinuch habanos (girls' education), which was our common field of endeavor. We had been introduced by the Spanish-language teacher in our school who was a native of Mexico, and was also searching for a deeper purpose in her teaching Spanish. And as we sat, the answer emerged: If girls in New York saturated with a ruach haTorah could learn a foreign language, it was — it had to be — for the purpose of imparting some of this ruach (spirit) to those with whom they could now communicate.... Everything fit into place. Only the geographical barrier remained, and this was certainly surmountable.*

*As we planned, manifold advantages emerged. First, our students would gain an invaluable exposure to a world of Jews outside of New York City. Also, the experience of planning something on their own, without parents or head counselors doing it for them, would be maturing. They would be learning to give and to selflessly approach a project for the purpose of spreading Torah. Obviously, their knowledge of Spanish would be greatly enhanced, the purpose of which was now vividly clear.*

*The months ahead were filled with planning and self-preparation. The standard Spanish-language textbook was replaced with exercises in translating our*

popular nigunim (Hebrew songs) into Spanish — understandably, with the proper use of the preterite and subjunctive. One day a week was reserved for the presentation of a dvar Torah in Spanish. Each student was required to prepare a Chumash lesson to be taught in the Bais Yaakov or some other school in Mexico City. The songs sung on Shabbos afternoon to the residents of nursing homes in Boro Park and Flatbush were now being rendered in Spanish — as they would be in the

Aishel Home in Cuernavaca, 60 kilometers south of Mexico City.

The rest of the story is now history. The seed was planted, and although I watched it as it emerged from the ground in my few days in Mexico, it can best be told by those who really sowed and nurtured it, SURI ROSENBERG and ROCHEL ZUCKER, two of the sixteen participants.



### “What Are We Going to Do?”

We were excited about the trip from the moment we heard about it. Our teacher, \*Miss Holtz, our principal, Rabbi Kramer, and Rabbi David Masri of the Bais Yaakov of Mexico City, spent hours making arrangements for our stay.

Along with our excitement, however, we felt a degree of apprehension. Our songs and *shiurim* would not hold their attention for long. “What are we going to do?” we kept asking Miss Holtz. “What do we talk about? How do we approach them?”

“Just be yourselves,” she answered.

“But how will we get any message across to them?”

And she told us as she was to tell us often, “Girls, what is the point you’re trying to bring across? You’re not there to preach to them. You just have to show them what a *frum* girl is like — not only how you are different, but how you are the same. A *bas Yisroel* is normal, just like they are, not from the moon. That’s how you’ll get through to them. Be their friends, and soon they’ll trust you, and begin to imitate you. It’s really very simple. You just have to have your heart in it.”

### International Songs and Laughter

Finally, the day we had been waiting for arrived. We landed in Mexico, collected our luggage, and there were the girls from the Bais Yaakov, with bouquets of roses and warm smiles. The first few moments were awkward, as we nervously stumbled over our Spanish. As our bus started towards the house where we were to stay, we relaxed, and suddenly, talking to the girls was much easier.

Within an hour of our arrival, girls from the neighborhood began to drop into the house. Between our Spanish, Hebrew, and English, we soon had each other rolling on the floor in laughter. We talked about clothes and school. We discovered that some of them had been to Camp Bnos, so we discussed mutual friends. We danced and sang with them. It amazed us how easily we responded to each other, as if we had always been friends, and we were pleased when they in-

\* Since this writing: Mrs. Yosie Fischer, in Jerusalem with her husband, of the Kolel Chofetz Chaim.

sisted on following *Mincha* with us as we *davened*.

That evening, many more girls joined us, together with their parents — the entire Sephardi community seemed to be there. They brought food and drinks, and a hearty welcome.... It was hard to believe that our stay had just begun.

The girls seemed more knowledgeable about *frumkeit* than we expected, yet we were still unsure of what exactly we were going to do with them. Miss Holtz set us straight quite quickly.

The girls who we would have most contact with were girls of 8, 12, 13, and 14 years old. They were very lax in performance of *mitzvos*, which they were taught, but in which they received little reinforcement at home. At all opportunities we’d have to *daven*, wash, make *brachos* and *bench* with them.... Many harbored rather coarse attitudes towards authority. We’d have to demonstrate a proper one. As girls here married at 15 or 16, even these younger girls were preoccupied and involved with boys. We’d have to be influential in this area as well.

Of course, we noticed that all the girls wore pants. Although Rabbi Masri wanted the girls to wear skirts, especially to school, parental pressure was great, and he had received a *hetter* (lenient ruling) to allow pants, even in school, lest the girls not come at all. We would have to show them that it was possible to have the same amount of fun dressed modestly. If we could change this outward aspect in these girls it would surely indicate that we had touched their *p’nim* (interior), as well.

### New Life For Rina

There was one girl there who needed no convincing. We noticed immediately that Rina was very different from the others. She had gone to a Shabbaton in Denver the previous year, and had been so impressed that she immediately began to be more strict about *Kashrus* and *Shabbos*. Perhaps even more difficult for her, she stopped wearing pants. For an entire year she had persisted, feeling isolated from her friends at times. She had been awaiting our arrival more eagerly than any of the girls, and throughout the visit stuck close to us, finding comfort in those who could appreciate the enormity of her efforts.

Not all the girls were so easily impressed as was Rina. Yet over the two weeks, as we talked, made friends, exchanged addresses, we saw that the girls did begin to react positively.

The day we visited the Pyramids was hot and dusty, and we had 300 steps to climb. We were all in skirts, but all of the Mexican girls wore pants, except for two or three. Many had worn skirts when with us before, but could not understand not wearing pants for such a long climb. But we did it our way, holding down our blowing skirts until we reached the flat top of the Pyramids. There all sixty of us sat and sang — several hundred feet up in the air. It was an exhilarating experience for us.

That day seemed to make an impression on them, too. After that, they began not only to watch us but to really imitate us. While the girls all had *davened* when we were with them, now they were *davening* enthusiastically even if we were not with them. They began bringing things to Rabbi Masri to check if they were Kosher before they ate them. One by one, the girls stopped wearing pants. One girl came to us and asked us to help her make a skirt out of her jeans. Twin sisters, Gila and Nilly, each with only one skirt, forced their mother to buy them more, threatening to borrow from their aunt if she did not.

We talked about *Shabbos*, *tzniyus*, honoring parents — and they *listened*, asked questions, really wanting to *know*.

#### Our Little Miracle

We even had our own little “miracle.” All of us had secretly dreamed that we would encounter one girl so completely turned off to *Yiddishkeit* to whom our presence would be such a great influence that she’d change completely. We were not disappointed.

Before our arrival, and during our first few days, Rochelle dressed and acted very wildly. A big, almost intimidating girl, she was at first very cynical, making fun of us, sometimes even cursing at us. We learned that she was an only child of older parents, and though she was a basically nice girl she was quite mixed up. Even Rabbi Masri found it difficult to control her at times.

Yet after our trip to the Pyramids, where she had been as loud as ever, Rochelle began to change. Though we did not see all the changes, Rabbi Masri related them to us. She had begun quieting down in school. She stopped wearing pants. She showed more attention during *davening* and *benching*. By the time we had another trip with the Bais Yaakov, one week after the Pyramids, we realized that we were dealing with a different girl.

#### The Culminating Experience

All our efforts culminated in the last *Shabbos*, our last day there. All the Mexican girls arranged to sleep in

our neighborhood, and we ate all three *seudos* together. The community, whose money had housed us, fed us, and entertained us for two weeks, came out full force for one last time — making chickens, *kugels*, cakes, salads and innumerable *challos* for our three meals.

It’s hard to forget the image of that Friday night — laden tables spread from one end of the house to the other, all of us — fifty or sixty girls, sitting together with the Masri’s, having a real *Shabbos*.

Rabbi Masri spoke about how, by leaping into the *Yam Suf*, Nachshon ben Aminadav had caused the Sea to split, and thus all Israel could follow. He further explained that from this action the trait of *Nachshonus* was named: that of sacrificing one’s comfortable, safe position and forging new pathways, advancing and leading others with you.

This, he said, was what we of Prospect Park had done. We had left our comfortable, safe position and had come there to Mexico City, to help forge a new path of *Yiddishkeit* for the girls there. We had shown tremendous love of Torah and of *Am Yisroel* by coming to share with them all that we had to give, by sharing ourselves.

We looked around the table. Whereas they once would have been talking, they were listening attentively to their principal. For the first time, all were wearing skirts.... There was Rina, tears in her eyes ... Gila and Nilly in their new skirts ... Rochelle, her *Siddur* open to the *Birchas Hamazon* (Grace) we would soon be saying. We were shocked to realize how much of an effect we had had, and how these girls, by accepting what we had to give, had really given us so much. We were really going to miss them.

#### Sweet Sorrow

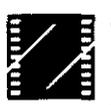
The entire *Shabbos* had a dream-like quality, until after *havdalla*. Then the hard reality of our departure hit us, and we began to cry to each other, not wanting to leave or be left.

Many of the girls accompanied us to the airport, and as the bus left to take them home, the crying began anew. “Thank you, thank you so much,” they were all saying — “you taught us so many things!”

We stood and realized the seeming incongruity of *them* thanking *us*. It was *we* who should be thanking *them*. They took us in and became our friends, and showed us many things about ourselves. “Thank you,” we kept answering.

No one was crying harder than Rochelle. She had come off the bus and was hugging each one of us, tears streaming, begging us not to leave. At first, she resisted all of Rabbi Masri’s efforts to lead her to the bus. Coming toward a group of us, he asked, “Do you know what Rashi says in regard to the words: ‘And the souls that he made in Charan?’” We nodded, understanding what he meant.

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"If this girl retains anything of what she has now, if she becomes anything, it's because of you. You gave her new life. I hope you'll write to her, so she'll stay that way. You are responsible. You did it." He then proceeded to lead Rochelle onto the bus. He seemed more upset at our leaving than any of his girls.

As the bus pulled away, we ran after it, waving wildly, crying, screaming — "Escriban! Write! Write!"

"No nos olviden! — Don't forget us!" They yelled back.

As if we ever would...

"... Yesterday we had a meeting with Rav Masri and we voted to wear skirts every day to school.... We sing your songs all the time and miss you very much. But most of all I miss you, and I thank you for the days you gave us in Mexico. Thank you, thank you, thank you..."\*

\* Translated from a letter recently received from a Mexican girl.

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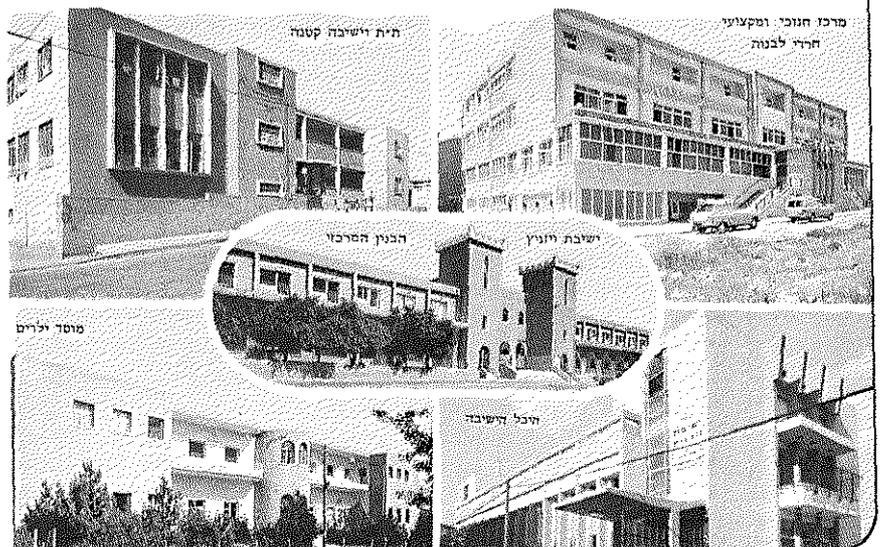
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## Letters to the Editor



### Re: Review of 'Rational Irrational Man'

To the Editor,

I feel compelled to respond to the  
book review of Avrohom Amsel's  
*Rational Irrational Man*, which ap-  
peared in the April '77 issue of *The  
Jewish Observer*.

The reviewer felt that "a few very  
minor errors," such as a spelling er-  
ror, deserved attention. A much  
more serious error, however, was  
totally accepted by the reviewer  
without comment or criticism.

The reviewer quoted from page  
15, "Individuals who lack faith and  
trust in G-d, and have not learnt to  
accept their lot, induce excessive  
anxiety which, in turn, can lead to  
emotional disturbance." The  
reviewer left this statement unchal-  
lenged and thereby presented it  
with an air of factual assertion.

If we are to accept the "causal  
relationship" between lack of  
*emuna* (faith) and *bitachon* (trust)  
and emotional disturbance, then we  
could expect to find a vast majority  
of atheists and agnostics on the  
caseloads of mental health and psy-  
chiatric clinics. In reality, however,  
this is no more plausible than ex-  
pecting to find a predominance of  
non-believers among the patients in  
a doctor's waiting room.

Shocking as it may seem to some,  
there are strictly Orthodox psy-  
chiatrists, psychologists, social  
workers, and mental health services  
whose entire caseloads are com-  
prised only of G-d fearing *bnei  
Torah*. This fact would not lead me  
to assume that *emuna* and *bitachon*

lead to emotional disturbance; but  
rather that emotional illness, like  
physical illness, has causes which  
are complex, numerous, and not  
directly translated into spiritual  
terms.

Furthermore, the assertion that,  
"anxiety can lead to emotional dis-  
turbance," is incorrect. Excessive  
bleeding, for example, does not lead  
to hemorrhaging, for example; it is the  
*consequence* of a hemorrhage.  
Similarly, "excessive anxiety,"  
which is not based on reality fac-  
tors, does not lead to emotional dis-  
turbance, but rather *demonstrates*  
the existence of emotional distur-  
bance.

Many emotional and psy-  
chological problems within our  
community have gone untreated  
until they reach crisis proportions  
because no one wants to be labeled a  
"sinner." When considering the  
possibility of professional help  
(with a strictly Torah-oriented  
professional) many needy in-  
dividuals, couples, and families wait  
until it is too late because they  
refuse to accept that their *Yid-  
dishkeit* is below par. These people  
can accept that they do have  
problems, but the community  
stigma resulting, in part, from the  
notion of a "causal relationship  
between sin and mental illness"  
destroys their chances of overcom-  
ing their problems with the tem-  
porary assistance of a professional.

Including the above mentioned  
quotation in the review without  
even raising question regarding its  
logic constitutes a gross disservice  
to your readers.

MARVIN WIKLER, A.C.S.W.  
Brooklyn, N.Y.

### Our reviewer replies:

Mr. Wikler did not read my review very carefully, it would seem. True enough, the last paragraph refers to minor errors (including spelling errors) that require correction — but the preceding paragraphs stressed that Rabbi Amsel's treatment of many topics left the reader with questions — or vague formulations — requiring clarification (one of the examples given bears on Mr. Wikler's main point).

Much more importantly, however, Mr. Wikler read a vastly oversimplified meaning into the remarks that he quotes. A "causal relationship" does not mean simple straight-line or exclusive causation. But it does mean a very definite and significant relationship. Long before Rabbi Amsel ever put pen to paper, it was understood as a matter of course by every Jew that a person's "faith and trust in G-d," or his ability to be satisfied with his lot in life, had a crucial bearing on his ability to cope with the strains and stresses of life, or — in other words — on his mental health. When *David Hamelech* proclaims that "G-d is my shepherd — I will not want"; when *Rabbeinu Bachyah*, in the *Chovos Halevovos*, speaks of the peace of mind that *bitachon* grants in the midst of a troubled world; when we daily say in our prayers, "G-d is with me, I shall not be afraid," this is surely not just pious talk, irrelevant to our actual situation in life.

Some years ago, when the inner cities of the U.S.A. were burning, a black psychiatrist explained the underlying pattern of black mass action as understandably paranoid — the result of three hundred years of enslavement and suffering. How have Jews preserved their sanity through almost two thousand years of pariah existence? How do you account for people making the kind of halachic enquiries recorded by Rabbi Oshry from the Vilna Ghetto — such as whether to recite a blessing for *Kiddush Hashem* before being

shot? At a time when so much of psychological counselling misreads the role of the spiritual in general, or of Torah, in particular, it seems to me very important to restate it. This is not just a theoretical matter; perusal of Rabbi Nachman Brazlover's *Meshivas Nefesh*, for instance, can be a profound therapeutic experience.

Now all this obviously does not mean that anybody without access to Torah must end up in a psychiatric ward. Nor does it mean that anybody committed to Torah is immune to mental sickness. There are a large number of factors — environmental and personal — that interact in affecting a person's ability to function as a healthy human being and to make full and proper use of the guidance provided by the Torah. In our *Golus* existence our ability to cope is significantly impaired — the inability to shake one's addiction to smoking, obesity as a direct result of overeating (compulsive?), *Loshon Horah* as a form of venting psychological pressures, and intense communal discord due to personal ambitions, are all recognized by us as manifestations of our human weakness which ought to be — but are not — checked by our adherence to Torah guidance. Mental illness represents, of course, a much more advanced stage of our inability to cope — not necessarily the result of greater weakness on the patient's part but of greater stresses, for instance.

In any case, however, I do not believe that it is a patient's sense of inadequacy (or "sinfulness," as long as we do not take this term in its usual sense, as emphasized in the review) which causes the deplorable

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widespread unwillingness to accept the fact of mental illness or to seek treatment for it. Rather, the refusal to face up to mental illness is due to the tragic social stigma and profound fear that have so long been attached to the disturbed — not as a sinner but as a mystifying and vaguely threatening element in society. And the refusal of so many within the Torah community to seek help has been nourished by the disastrous impact which has been had by so many psychiatrists

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## LETTERS CONTINUED

(sometimes even *mitzvah*-observant — but not understanding of Torah teachings).

If Mr. Wikler's comments will focus more public attention on this problem, I am glad to have provoked them. If he stresses that the causes of mental illness are complex and numerous, I am all with him. But when he argues that they cannot be directly translated into spiritual terms, I would like to warn against the danger of overlooking the central role of the spiritual in mental health.

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## Another Aspect of Reb Elya Meir

To the Editor:

In his fine article on Reb Eliyahu Meir Bloch, זצ"ל, Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller omitted one aspect of his *Rebbe's* personality which provides an important lesson for our time.

We are suffering today from a failure to understand each other's significance. Many a group thinks that it alone will bring the redemption for *Klal Yisroel*.

Aware of his own obligation and task, Reb Eliyahu Meir זצ"ל also recognized in every individual his latent talent and abilities to further our mutual goal: In a letter to Rabbi Schochet of Basel, Switzerland, just before World War II, he stressed the significance of each segment in the Torah camp to develop constantly and continuously its unique characteristics and ways.

While still in Lithuania he was very appreciative of Western European students. Although they were often limited in Jewish knowledge, he valued their general education and utilized it for the Yavne educational institutions (under Telshe auspices). He was convinced that German Orthodoxy had made an important contribution to Torah Jewry.

Here in America, he was very

enthusiastic about the K'hal Adath Yeshurun in Washington Heights, and had the highest respect and reverence for its venerable *Rav* and leader, Rabbi Joseph Breuer שליט"א whose great historic accomplishments and achievements he considered unparalleled in the annals of *Kehilla* life in the United States.

When invited to participate in the journal of the K'hal Adath Yeshurun, he concluded his warm greetings with the words: "לכו בנחמכם זה והושעתם את ישראל — Go forth with this, your strength, and you will help Israel."

A great person recognizes greatness in others.

TOVIYA LASDUN  
New York City

## Regarding "Reb Elya Meir"

To the Editor:

The article by Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller about the Rosh Hayeshiva, Reb Elya Meir Bloch זצ"ל, is a masterpiece. For those who do not know the Telshe Yeshiva and its rich history, it is quite an eye-opener.

I found, however, three mistakes in this article. I am sure that they are not on the part of Reb Chaim Dov, but rather of a typographical or copy nature.... I am confident that if Reb Chaim Dov had seen the proofs, he would have corrected them.

Please keep publishing biographical articles and do consider printing them in a book form.

DANIEL Y. CARLEBACH  
Brooklyn, New York

(Mr. Carlebach's corrections are printed elsewhere on the page. Many other readers also called our attention to the errors, which were, indeed, not of Rabbi Keller's doing. — Editor)

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פאר פרייע  
עבוירדזשענטי אקסירזשען

The Jewish Observer / October, 1977

## Correction

The article on Reb Elya Meir Bloch שליט, by Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller, featured in last month's issue, had several typographical errors that resulted in misinformation. Please make note of the following:

- 1) Rabbi Bloch's first marriage took place in 5679 (1919).
- 2) His Yahrzeit is on Teves 28.
- 3) Reb Avrohom Yitzchok שליט was the *second* oldest son of Reb Yosef Leib. Reb Zalmen, the eldest son, in his *hesped* for his father said that he was giving the "right of the firstborn" to his younger brother who had been the assistant to the father both in the *rabbonus* and the leadership of the yeshiva of Telshe.

## Pre "Confrontation" Misgivings

To the Editor:

Aaron Twerski's discussion of the failure of yeshiva graduates to maintain their student-day standards in later life ("In Flight From Confrontation," April '77) gave this reader much pause. Yes, the maelstrom of professional growth and business development sucks down the best of us, but I don't think that it alone accounts for the total picture.

I often think back to my own yeshiva years, remembering them with a strange mixture of feelings — based on my yeshiva's maximal goals and my own performance. I had found our Rosh Yeshiva's weekly *shiurim* highly stimulating,

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even dizzying in their complexity. Sometimes he would take us along in the intricate tracing of various approaches to understanding the concepts at hand; other times he would lose me on the way. But never — never! — did I lose my awe over his scholarship and his obvious joy in Torah. If there was ever a gap between the yeshiva's strivings, as epitomized by the Rosh Yeshiva's *shiurim*, and my attainments, I knew well where the fault lay. I had tried to be the "one" who justified the effort to educate "a thousand", but if I failed, at least I suppose that I should find solace in that I was part of the thousand.

Now, in retrospect, I have some misgivings. One — personal regret for settling for an "also ran" position. — But that's not your burden. More significant are my misgivings with the way in which I had structured my entire educational career as well as some of its day-to-day aspects. And, after musing about my own omissions and how they affect me in later life, it brought me to wonder about my more eminent colleagues and how they shared my lapses. First allow me to point to where our shortcomings initially appeared.

Our primary concern was to capture "the *derech*" — that elusive,

but quintessential approach to delving into our studies to the point where we knew the topic on hand in all its aspects. It was a stimulating, heady pursuit, and it was ours. But when it was over — the part under discussion, the *Gemora* page at hand, the year, our stay in yeshiva — what were we left with? A finely honed approach to thinking but no where to go, and not too much to fall back on.

Our Roshei Yeshiva had helped us analyze — yes. But they also had prodded us on in other directions,

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**LETTERS CONTINUED**

too: "There are other *mesechtos* in *Shas* .... There are more *bletter* in this *mesechta* .... Stay where you are and you'll be ignorant — *amhoratzim* — the rest of your lives." Why didn't we listen? Why did we think we knew better? Why didn't we develop a taste for exploring more, in a structured fashion? Why did we look askance at those who did follow the Rosh Yeshiva's directions? Why were all of us (but for certain rare exceptions) so oblivious to our teachers' pleadings that we review and review and review — so, besides knowing "how," we'd also know "what"?

Once I'm on the topic of exceptions to the rule, did every class have a *halacha* expert who was ashamed of his specialty? Did his peculiar bent of personality drive him into lonely pursuits, or did his interest in an area of Torah study

outside of yeshiva conventions drive him into the closet? Why were we so uneasy with *dikduk* experts, the historian, the compulsive novelist, the writer, the 'Nach nut? Who had ever defined Torah in such constricting terms?

So here we are today. With fond memories of pursuit of a *derech* and not too much to show for it. How can I respond to Aaron Twerski's exhortations that I wake up with thoughts of how I'm going to better serve my Creator today, when my tools are rusting, and I don't have the endless hours to ponder a *svora* to test it for the ring of truth? If it had taken me all of a twenty-two week *zman* (semester) to cover all sides of twenty-three *blatt Gemora* (folios) in yeshiva, you can be sure that it took me the same Succos-to-Pesach in later life to deal with no more than six *blatt*. A palette-full of grays and blues cannot adequately paint the shades of frustration and self-worth-lessness I suffered. — Six *blatt!* covering less, with less comprehension than ever!

I hate T.V. and I detest beer, but at least I understand my former colleagues who opt to look at the former, guzzling the latter. At least they're not beset with the full panoply of their own inadequacies. Would we have developed a taste for seriously gathering knowledge with a sense of purpose (*bekiyus*) during my schooling years, we would be better equipped to do the same today — both in terms of skills and requisite knowledge.

Now, I still remember my role as just one of "the thousand" or perhaps one of "the hundred," and I know full well that yeshiva curricula are designed for best production of the *one*, not all thousand. But I suspect that even the stars of my era would not have suffered any loss in their luster if they, too, had explored the further shores of *Babba Kama*, or tested themselves in the unknown hazards of *Taharos*. Our Torah is vast, and the greatest of our leaders — then and today — are at home in all its nooks and crannies.



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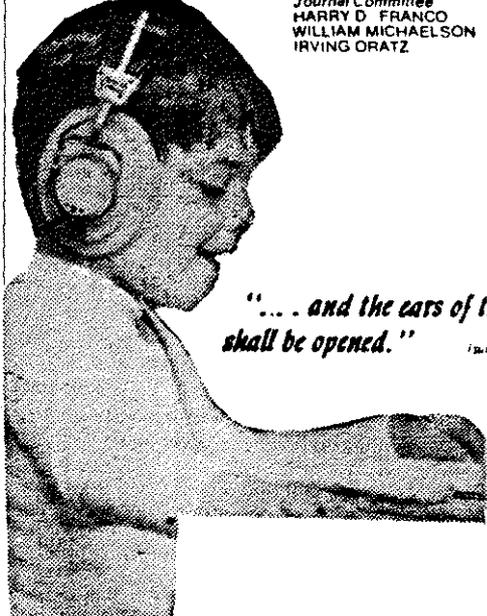
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Dr. Twerski has pricked my conscience and opened my heart in yearning. And he has stirred a hornet's nest of regrets in the process. I would like to be the *ben Torah-baal habayis* he idealizes. I hope I'm not too late.

I'm sure you understand why I insist on signing:

NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST

### Why Criticize Reform Jews?

To the Editor:

I find it difficult to understand how your June issue could begin by creating a strong feeling for our fellow Jews who unfortunately are weak in their Jewishness, and then proceed to write three full pages strongly condemning the new Reform siddur; as you yourself indicated, the new siddur is at least a positive move towards personal prayer, and to criticize Jews who do not observe *Shabbos* or *Kashrus* or much else because they failed to

reach the understanding of Reb Chaim Volozhiner seems a bit incongruous to me.

I am wondering — would you show your magazine to a Reform Jew as part of your efforts which were inspired by Reb Noach Weinberg?

A.M. KOHN  
Los Angeles, California

### Editorial Response:

The criticism was not aimed at the Reform Jew who has "stepped up" to personal prayer through the new Reform "siddur." For him we have compassion, love, and pity. Our criticism — indeed, our anger — is directed against the leaders of the Reform movement who are perpetrating a fraud against our searching brethren by presenting *ersatz* Judaism in the guise of the genuine article.

Concern for one's fellow involves exposing hazards as much as pointing to worthwhile goals. A

closer reading of the other articles in the June JO will reveal that Reb Noach Weinberg, like all who have true *Ahavos Yisroel*, engages in both.

N.W.



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### Further Correction on "Novardok"

To the Editor:

In re-reading my letter to the Editor in the past issue of the Jewish Observer I was much dismayed to find that I inadvertently attributed the death of the Alter of Navaradok to an outbreak of cholera when it was in fact an outbreak of typhus. Kindly print this correction.

Rabbi JECHIEL I. PERR  
Far Rockaway, New York

### A "Reb Noach" For Boro Park?

To the Editor:

Your recent article by Rabbi Noach Weinberg was inspiring. No less than total praise is due him for his selfless work for *Yiddishkeit* — even more so for having developed a professional, workable system to achieve his lofty goals.

There is, however, another (albeit less romantic) side of the coin. What would be were a Reb Noach to apply his professionalism to the "have's" instead of the "have not's"?

Who needs a Reb Noach the most? His system would be much more fruitful in, let's say, Boro Park. How many of the thousands of Orthodox in this "frum" community have taken the trouble to see if they believe in G-d? Could we find more than ten or twenty who know even two or three of the seven proofs to G-d's existence? Forty eight prerequisites for acquiring the Torah? Is one of them holding down two or three jobs to be able to keep up with the neighbor's style of affluence?

Let's face it! A Reb Noach would show a gratifying percentage of return for his effort, were he saving former yeshiva students and their families. We in Boro Park are almost there. We have just become a bit misdirected. A Reb Noach could

save an *Am Rav* — getting a place like Boro Park's priorities in order might well give all of *Klal Yisroel* a big push towards *Biyas Hamoshiach*. CHASKELL GOLDBERG  
Brooklyn, New York

### Agudath Israel Expands Programs for Russian Jews

An intensified effort was launched this month, to coordinate and expand different programs for Russian Jewish immigrants, sponsored by the various divisions of Agudath Israel of America, it was announced by the organization's administrative cabinet. The program will be administered by a new division within Agudath Israel, Project RISE (Russian Immigrants Services and Education), which will tie together the broad range of services currently being provided by the American Agudah.

Agudath Israel's various ongoing activities for Russian Jews include: extensive career guidance and job training, the publication of a Russian language monthly newsletter, the dissemination of information in the Russian language on Jewish culture, and educational programs for Russian Jewish youth:

- Agudath Israel's career guidance and job training agency, Project COPE, has since 1975 trained, found jobs, or provided other services to 1600 Russian Jews. To facilitate this program, Project COPE's staff includes a Russian speaking counselor.
- Agudath Israel publishes a monthly newsletter in the Russian language which contains Jewish community information, brief essays, commentaries and anecdotes about Jewish laws and customs. A recent supplement of the newsletter in advance of the *Yomim Noraim* contained a calendar listing the holidays, times for candle lighting and the end of the Yom Tov — all in Russian.
- In yet another program during the past few years, Russian Jews have received special packages in advance of Jewish holidays and are given the opportunity to participate in the traditional *seder* on Pesach, arranged through the community senior citizen's centers sponsored by the Commission on Senior Citizens of Agudath Israel of America.
- In its latest effort, Agudath Israel has recently launched a special after-school project for Russian Jewish youngsters living in the Brighton-Coney Island area. The program, which was made possible by a special grant from New York City, is operated by the Jewish Education Program of Agudath Israel and is under the supervision of Yosef Chaim Golding.

## Religious Gains Result From Begin-Agudah Coalition

The initial steps taken by Prime Minister Menachem Begin and his administration to implement the coalition agreement between the Likud and Agudath Israel on a broad range of religious issues indicate a serious intention to fulfill its demands during the coming months, Rabbi Moshe Sherer, executive president of Agudath Israel of America, reported to a meeting of the organization's Executive Board upon his return from a three week mission in Israel.

The American Agudath Israel leader based his findings upon extensive discussions with the heads of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah (Council of Torah Sages of Agudath Israel), the Agudah leaders, and Prime Minister Begin and his aides. He emphasized, however, that despite the evident religious gains and good will, the situation requires Orthodox Jewry to be constantly vigilant and on the alert to thwart the efforts of extremist anti-religious elements in Israel to abort this agreement.

He cited a formal letter which Begin presented to the Agudath Israel leadership in Israel recently, clearly stating that despite his new coalition partners (The Democratic Movement for Change), "there will be no change in the relationship between the government and Agudath Israel, and all the obligations which we (the government) assumed are in full force and will be implemented". A special inter-agency commission has been appointed by Begin to work with the Knesset members of Agudath Israel to implement the provisions of the agreements, some of which can be solved through governmental regulations while others require the passage of new laws.

Meanwhile, a number of agencies have begun to honor the spirit of the agreement, in advance of the legal steps which have to be taken, in order to help ameliorate a few of these religious problems. The following are several examples:

A new regulation is currently being drafted, which would permit the exemption of a religious girl from Army service purely on the strength of her declaration, without the necessity of appearing before any investigate committees. While the legalities are being worked out, the Ministry of Defense has already exempted hundreds of religious girls for whom Agudath Israel intervened, postponed the induction of other girls who had complicated situations, and set aside the legal processes which had begun against others — all in anticipation of the promulgation of the new regulations.

New legislation banning autopsies without the family's permission is also in the drafting

stage, and in the interim every case brought by Agudath Israel representatives to the Ministry of Health since the agreement was signed has been satisfactorily settled.

"Baalei Tshuva" can now study in yeshivos without being inducted into the Army, whereas in the past they were drafted because they had not studied in an elementary Torah institution. Also, the machinery is being established to cut down on the abused special governmental work permits for Shabbos; in a number of instances where Agudath Israel intervened, such as for the workers at the Lud Airport, the Ministry of Transportation put a halt to the discrimination which Sabbath observers suffered. Prime Minister Begin, during his conference with Rabbi Sherer, expressed confidence that he would in the coming months be able to work out the points of the agreement, and declared that he will work zealously to win a majority of the Knesset members for the passage of a revised "Who is a Jew" law to conform with Halacha.

The Agudath Israel executive president emphasized that his cautious optimism is based on the new mood within government circles, which are now displaying greater sensitivity than before to the needs of religious Jewry. He also placed great hopes on the monitoring by the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah in Israel of the coalition agreement, and the dedication of the Agudist Knesset deputies who are working with determination for the implementation of the points guaranteed by the Begin government.

He concluded: "The Likud-Agudah coalition agreement, even after all its clauses will have become operative, will not change in the slightest the deep chasm which separates Agudath Israel from secular Zionism. An ideology which seeks to build a Jewish state 'like all other nations' devoid of Torah is on a direct collision course with the weltanschauung of Agudath Israel, which has inscribed on its banner that we are not a nation without Torah. Nevertheless, once the coalition agreement with Agudath Israel goes into effect, it will help write a new page in the history of Israel, because at long last numerous discriminatory acts against Orthodox Jewry will have been altered. The entire Orthodox community in Israel is deeply grateful to the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah for its inspiring leadership during these highly sensitive months, as well as to the representatives of Agudath Israel in the Knesset, who chose religious principles as the reward for entering Prime Minister Begin's Knesset coalition, instead of the political spoils of ministerial posts".

## N.Y. State Mezuzah Fraud Law Now in Effect Vendors Warned

The law in New York State to protect Jewish consumers from being victimized by unscrupulous vendors who sell non-kosher *mezuzos* and *tefillin* took effect as of October 6, it was announced by the Commission on Legislation of Agudath Israel of America, which had initiated the measure. A prominent attorney, Moshe (Marc) Newman, has been named chairman of the Religious Articles Consumer Protection Task Force which will monitor the observance of this law.

According to the new law, every *mezuzah* or pair of *tefillin* sold in New York State must have a packaging upon which the name and address of the manufacturer, fabricator or importer of that religious article is clearly set forth. In the event that the *mezuzah* or *tefillin* fails to conform with "Orthodox Jewish religious law," the wrapping must be clearly labeled "non-kosher." The bill was signed into law by Governor Hugh L. Carey on July 6, taking effect ninety days later.

Mr. Newman, who heads the Consumer Protection Task Force on these religious articles, sent a memorandum several weeks ago to all vendors of Jewish religious articles in New York with a copy of the new law explaining the importance of conforming with its details. Mr. Newman also issued a call to the Jewish public for anyone with information about the sale of non-kosher *mezuzos* or *tefillin* to write to his attention to: Commission on Legislation and Civic Action, Agudath Israel of America, 5 Beekman St., New York, N.Y. 10038.

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### Vizhnitzer Rebbe of Bnei Brak in America

The Vizhnitzer Rebbe of Bnei Brak, Rabbi Moshe Yehoshua Hager, spiritual leader to tens of thousands of followers, is scheduled to arrive in New York City Tuesday, November 1, for a month-long visit. He will spend successive Sabbaths with the Jewish communities in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, Montreal, Los Angeles and Boro Park.

Rabbi Hager is the scion of a noble Chasidic lineage, notably his late father, Rabbi Chaim Meir Hager ז"ל who, as the previous Vizhnitzer Rebbe, led the rehabilitation of hundreds of his followers after the destruction of his Roumanian community in World War II. Under his direction, Shikun Vizhnitz, a settlement in Israel of 5,000 souls, was founded, as well as a network of charitable and educational institutions in the Holy Land — over which his son, the current Rebbe, presides. Rabbi Moshe Yehoshua Hager, like his father before him, is a member of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah (Council of Torah Sages) of the Agudath Israel of Israel.

### Agudath Israel at State Dept. Mid East Dialogue

Agudath Israel of America was represented by its executive president, Rabbi Moshe Sherer, at a dialogue convened at the State Department on October 26 by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance with key American Jewish leaders in the wake of recent criticisms of the Administration for its policies in the Middle East. The heads of the Jewish organizations were invited directly by the Secretary of State who asked for a candid discussion about the policy of the American government in its efforts for peace in that area.

Rabbi Sherer stressed that the security of Israel unifies the American Jewish community as no other issue. He appealed to Sec. Vance to convey to President Carter the deep sensitivity of the Jewish people, which had suffered so much from the nations of the world, to any steps that reintroduce Soviet Russia as a major power factor in the Middle East, and that would give the PLO the ability to endanger Israel's survival.

The Agudath Israel leader pointed out that while concessions and compromises must be made by all sides, the Jewish community is profoundly troubled when the American government — despite the unquestioned good will and friendship of Pres. Carter — is apparently seeking to impose through subtle pressure peace terms that are rejected by the overwhelming majority of the Jewish people.



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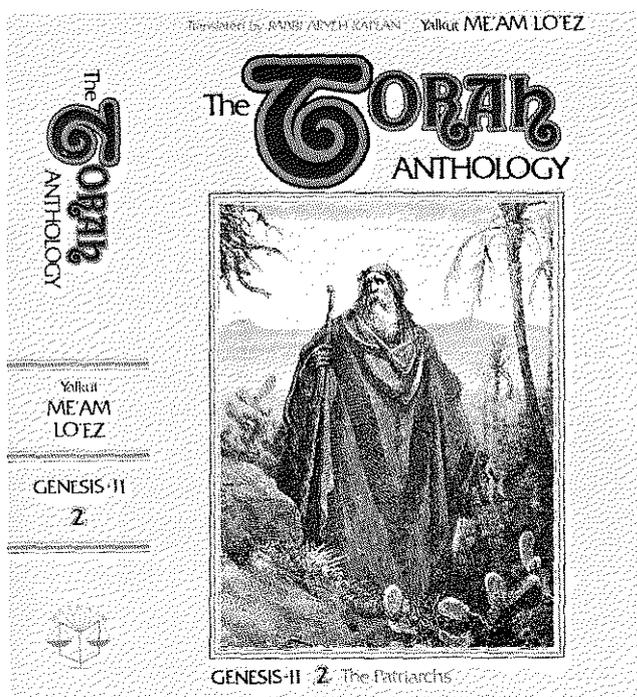
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