

JUDAISM AND THE HOLOCAUST THROUGH THE EYES OF A SURVIVOR

Isaac C. Avigdor

$18.00 CHAI

One of the Holy Cast

BY

ISAAC C. AVIGDOR

The 60 essays in this volume offer a unique insight into the history of the Jewish people, with special emphasis on the sufferings of European Jewry during World War II.

The author deals with questions and issues of the Jewish faith from various points of view. He tries to understand the miraculous survival of the Jew who, despite the continuous efforts of Greeks, Romans, Inquisitions and Nazis to eradicate him, still survives. The Jew has survived because of his stubborn refusal to discard his belief in one God and he endures because of his adherence to the law of his people.

The book is divided into several parts which allow the reader to look into the six horrible years of the destruction of European Jewry. The description of the experiences during the thousand and one nights of the Holocaust are in vivid narrative. They are told to us by a religious Jew, who despite tortures and enslavement has not lost his faith, but emerged from near death at liberation to rise again to a renewed and vigorous new life in America.

In a very unique and colorful way, we are introduced to Rabbi Avigdor's family, as he and his wife Esther build their home upon the spiritual views of a survivor as a husband and father. Rabbi Avigdor is given a chance to become reborn and to restore the broken family chain of a hundred generations of Rabbis. The essays of the chapter "Milestones in the Family," though strictly personal, all have a homiletical content of interest to the general public (the same is true about the chapter "Memorable People"). Otherwise they would not be published.

The vast material about the Holocaust period consists of stories that are a fusion of fact and fiction, a description of the author's own experiences in his fight for survival.

Rabbi Avigdor's book contributes much to our better understanding of the saddest chapter in Jewish history, which unfortunately, not only destroyed one-third of our people but along with it, a vast archive of memoirs, books, annals and diaries that many of the victims recorded up to the last minute of their lives.



TO MY BELOVED WIFE

Esther

Who has been my true Ezer. A constant, loving, loyal source of support, encouragement and inspiration.

ONE OF THE HOLY CAST

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BY

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FROM A MARTYR'S LAST WILL

יבוא יום, וחשמש תאיר
שוכני גיטו יצאו לחפשם,
אז נבוא לקברים ונוקיר
היחודים שמסרו את נפשם.

וכשתצאו לחפשי, יחודים,
ספרו לבנים, בני בנים
על סבלות ותלאות שבאונו
על רצח וכאב ידעונו,
חראו הקברים,
בכל מקום פח פזורים

ס'וועט קומען א צייט און די זון וועט אויפשיינען
און באפרייען די אידען פון געטא און נויט,
דאן באערען וועלען מיר די קברים
וואו עס זענען געפאלען אידען מיט א הייליקען טויט!

און אז איהר וועט באפרייט ווערען, אידעלעך,
זאלט איהר דערציילען די קינדערלעך
פון אונזער פיין און ניהנום,
פון אונזערע ליידען און מארד,
ווייזען די קברים, די נעמען דארט,
וואו עס איז נור דא א ארט...

There will come a time and the sun will rise
To free us from Ghettoes and death camps demise
Then we will honor the graves without signs
Where our martyrs fell in a mass of lines.
And when my brothers, you will break the chain
Please tell your children big and small
The suffering, murder and unbearable pain
About that hell as bitter as gall.
Show them the graves and give them the name
To carry the memory to remain the same.

(Ghetto song of unknown origin translated by author)





אחד מחבורה קדישא

✡

ONE OF THE HOLY CAST

✡

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"Kol Yitzchok" "The Voice of Isaac", Talmudic discourse
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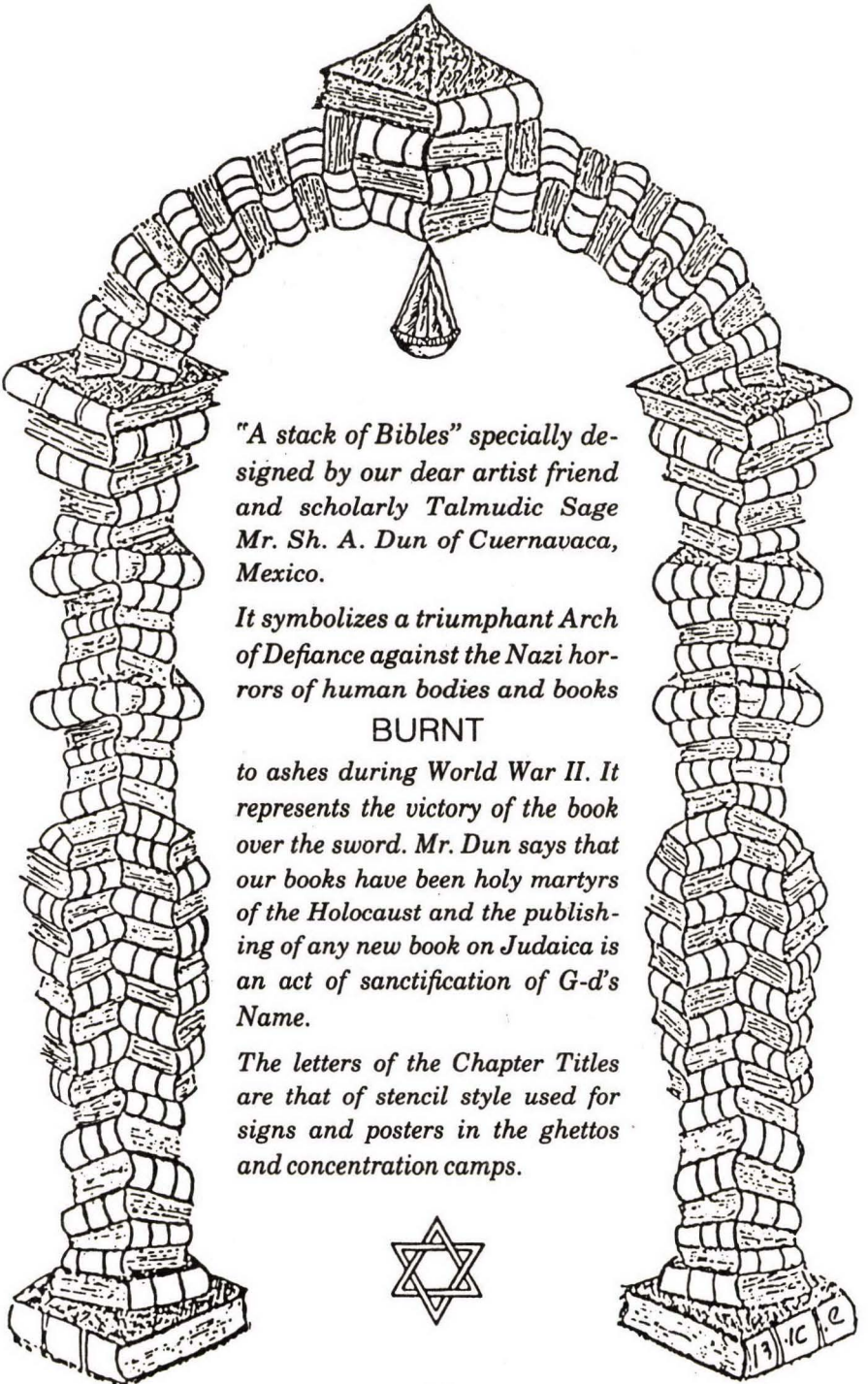
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"A stack of Bibles" specially designed by our dear artist friend and scholarly Talmudic Sage Mr. Sh. A. Dun of Cuernavaca, Mexico.

It symbolizes a triumphant Arch of Defiance against the Nazi horrors of human bodies and books

BURNT

to ashes during World War II. It represents the victory of the book over the sword. Mr. Dun says that our books have been holy martyrs of the Holocaust and the publishing of any new book on Judaica is an act of sanctification of G-d's Name.

The letters of the Chapter Titles are that of stencil style used for signs and posters in the ghettos and concentration camps.



Special thanks and appreciation are expressed to the individual friends, whose assistance and encouragement, have enabled me to publish this book in spite of the tremendous expenditures involved nowadays in printing such a volume.

God bless them all.

The Author

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Letter to the Author

MENACHEM BEGIN
Jerusalem

July 17, 1986

Dear Rabbi Avigdor,

Thank you for your kindness in sending me a pre-printed copy of your book, "One of the Holy Cast." I have read it with enraptured attention and deep feelings, which it is difficult, perhaps impossible to describe – no wonder.

In the various chapters you prove not only learning and knowledge, but also experience. The simple term, "experience", does not refer to conventional events in one's life with its ups and downs, successes and failures. You were there. . . . You were thrown into the abyss of the Holocaust, the greatest disaster in the annals of our ancient people. Therefore your book is, in fact, a living testimony to the six million Jews put to a wanton death by an implacable enemy-destroyer.

It should be read by everybody in any country that wants to know the truth of the persecution, of the suffering and also of the resistance of our people during those years of mass destruction.

You survived the Holocaust; you also helped, as long as you could, your saintly father and teacher, Rabbi Jacob Avigdor and other members of your family to go on living, under the most difficult conditions.

MENACHEM BEGIN
Jerusalem

JULY 17, 1986.

RABBI DR. ISAAC C AVIGDOR
25 OVERHILL ROAD
WEST HARTFORD CONN. 06117
U S A

DEAR RABBI AVIGDOR,

THANK YOU FOR YOUR KINDNESS IN SENDING ME A PRE-PRINTED COPY OF YOUR BOOK, "ONE OF THE HOLY CAST". I HAVE READ IT WITH ENRAPTURED ATTENTION AND DEEP FEELINGS, WHICH IT IS DIFFICULT, PERHAPS IMPOSSIBLE TO DESCRIBE - NO WONDER.

IN THE VARIOUS CHAPTERS YOU PROVE NOT ONLY LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE, BUT ALSO EXPERIENCE. THE SIMPLE TERM, "EXPERIENCE", DOES NOT REFER TO CONVENTIONAL EVENTS IN ONE'S LIFE WITH ITS UPS AND DOWNS, SUCCESSES AND FAILURES. YOU WERE THERE .... YOU WERE THROWN INTO THE ABYSS OF THE HOLOCAUST, THE GREATEST DISASTER IN THE ANNALS OF OUR ANCIENT PEOPLE. THEREFORE YOUR BOOK IS, IN FACT, A LIVING TESTIMONY TO THE SIX MILLION JEWS PUT TO A WANTON DEATH BY AN IMPLACABLE ENEMY-DESTROYER.

IT SHOULD BE READ BY EVERYBODY IN ANY COUNTRY THAT WANTS TO KNOW THE TRUTH OF THE PERSECUTION, OF THE SUFFERING AND ALSO OF THE RESISTANCE OF OUR PEOPLE DURING THOSE YEARS OF MASS DESTRUCTION.

YOU SURVIVED THE HOLOCAUST; YOU ALSO HELPED, AS LONG AS YOU COULD, YOUR SAINTLY FATHER AND TEACHER, RABBI JACOB AVIGDOR AND OTHER MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY TO GO ON LIVING, UNDER THE MOST DIFFICULT CONDITIONS.

FEW OF YOUR DEAREST AND NEAREST WERE SAVED; OTHERS WERE PUT TO DEATH. AMONG THEM WAS YOUR MOTHER. THE CHAPTER YOU DEVOTED TO HER AND THE EXPLANATION YOU GAVE TO YOUR DEAR WIFE OF THE PROLONGED SILENCE, REFERRING TO YOUR MOTHER, IS ONE OF THE MOST MOVING DESCRIPTIONS OF HUMAN LOVE AND SORROW.

MANY OTHER CHAPTERS ARE DEVOTED TO YOUR FATHER - WHO LIKE YOURSELF CAME OUT OF THE PIT, AND THEN CONTINUED WITH HIS LEARNING AND TEACHING, HAVING WRITTEN THIRTY BOOKS ON PROBLEMS OF HALACHA.

OF COURSE I REMEMBER YOUR FATHER OF BLESSED MEMORY: HE OFFICIATED AT OUR WEDDING, DURING THE LAST SPRING BEFORE THE GREAT CATASTROPHE. ZE'EV JABOTINSKY WAS STILL WITH US AND PARTICIPATED IN OUR JOY. WHAT CAN I ADD TO THOSE REMINISCENCES WHICH WILL LIVE FOREVER IN OUR HEARTS.

YOU FOLLOW, DEAR RABBI, IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF YOUR GREAT FATHER. THIS IS YOUR THIRD BOOK, AND HAVING READ YOUR WORDS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF WRITING, I AM SURE THAT IN THE YEARS TO COME YOU WILL ENRICH JUDAISM WITH MORE OF YOUR THOUGHTS, LEARNING AND WISDOM.

SUCH, INDEED, IS MY WISH TO YOU, AND ALSO TO ALL THOSE WHO WILL READ YOUR IMPORTANT WRITINGS.

YOURS, RESPECTFULLY AND WHOLEHEARTEDLY,

M. Begin

M. BEGIN

Copy of Original Letter

Few of your dearest and nearest were saved; others were put to death. Among them was your mother. The chapter you devoted to her and the explanation you gave to your dear wife of the prolonged silence, referring to your mother, is one of the most moving descriptions of human love and sorrow.

Many other chapters are devoted to your father, who like yourself came out of the pit, and then continued with his learning and teaching, having written thirty books on problems of Halacha.

Of course I remember your father of blessed memory: He officiated at our wedding, during the last spring before the great catastrophe. Ze'ev Jabotinsky was still with us and participated in our joy. What can I add to those reminiscences which will live forever in our hearts.

You follow, dear Rabbi, in the footsteps of your great father. This is your third book, and having read your words about the importance of writing, I am sure that in the years to come you will enrich Judaism with more of your thoughts, learning and wisdom.

Such, indeed, is my wish to you, and also to all those who will read your important writings.

Yours, respectfully and wholeheartedly,

M. Begin

Excerpts from Selected Letters

מכתבי עידוד

. . . Over the years I have come to admire your vigorous qualities of leadership and your impressive literary talents. I am familiar with the books you have published and the articles you have written in various newspapers and journals around the world. I know of your administrative skills, which you demonstrated in merging several smaller congregations, and culminated in the construction of the sanctuary for the United Synagogues of greater Hartford. . . .

Norman Lamm, President
Yeshiva University, New York

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

. . . Indeed, you have served with distinction, not only in that area, but virtually in all of North America, where your splendid writings in English and Yiddish are read by tens of thousands. . . .

Emanuel Rackman, President
Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

. . . A respected Talmudic scholar, offers a lucid and profound examination of Judaism and Holocaust through the eyes of a survivor. He sheds light on the conflict between national and traditional views of faith. His insights on the problem of evil and the implication of faith in daily life make his book, "One of the Holy Cast" particularly interesting, historical and heartening.

Dr. Bernard Lander, President
Touro College, N.Y.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

LETTERS TO THE AUTHOR

מכתבי עידוד

. . . Thank you so much for allowing me to read the manuscript of your book, "One of the Holy Cast".

I found it provoking, informative, scholarly and compassionate. The essays describing your Holocaust experiences are of historical value amidst the vast library of Shoah literature. I am particularly impressed with your relation to your late father, Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor, who no doubt has been fortunate to have a son succeed him in the field of Torah and Judaic literature.

There is something about your life and work as a Rabbi, and son of a Rabbi, that ought to be shared. . . .

Elie Wiesel, Professor
Boston University, Boston

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

. . . Rabbi Avigdor is the unique rabbi who brought with him the very best of Jewish tradition when the tragic vagaries of modern Jewish history brought him to this country. His activity here has inscribed American Jewish life far beyond your own community in W. Hartford. His boundless wisdom radiates to all vital areas of Jewish life. His contribution to the American Rabbinate and to the Rabbinical Council of America, now celebrating its jubilee, have helped translate Orthodoxy into a viable way of life in America. He has been a pillar of support to religious Zionism. . . .

Rabbi Louis Bernstein, President
Rabbinical Council of America, N.Y.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

LETTERS TO THE AUTHOR

מכתבי עידוד

. . . I thankfully acknowledge receipt of your manuscript and I was deeply impressed by your description of Holocaust experiences and especially your admirable relation with your late Father, OB"M. . . .

Dr. Joseph Burg, Minister of Interior
State of Israel

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

. . . I remember you very well from the time after Mauthausen; our acquaintance was a very pleasant one. I was very impressed with what I read and I compliment you on your talent and memory to record our experiences for posterity. . . .

Simon Wiesenthal
Dokumentationszentrum, Vienna, Austria

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

. . . I saw in it a mirror of the saga of the Eternal Jew, exemplified in the life of a single individual and his family. . . .

Rabbi Charles B. Chavel (OB"M)
Noted scholar and author, New York

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

. . . May I compliment you for your deep sensitivity, profound humanity, and most remarkable and analytical approach to major issues confronting Jews and Judaism. . .

Rabbi Dr. Bernard A. Poupko
Editor, R.C.A. Manual, Shaare Torah, Pittsburgh, PA

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆



Foreword

Many years ago, I asked my revered Father, OB"M, who had authored over thirty books (see essay, "My Father, The Perennial Author"), what it was that made him such a compulsory writer-holic, and he answered me abruptly: "Only when you will publish a book of your own, will you begin to understand me!"

I looked at him startled and amazed . . . me, being an author? I didn't think I could fill the pages of a pamphlet, never mind a book. If I were to write a book, it would exhaust the contents of all my thoughts, down to the bottom of the barrel. (In those days, Holocaust was a forbidden, forsaken topic no one wanted to touch, it was considered redundant by both the general public and even the Holocaust survivors.)

Reading my thoughts, my father cautioned with a smile, "I believed so too, when I started, but I learned that with the eating, the appetite grows . . . The human mind is expandable and always reproductive 100 fold. With each new book I published, new ideas and opinions never thought of, arose in me, like fledglings from a bird nest. The appearance of one volume only increased the desire for more to follow. It always felt like an unfininshed sym-

phony." "The birth of each book," he said "is like the birth of a baby. First comes the conception of an idea, then a difficult period of pregnancy. The embryo grows and becomes heavier, followed with the delivery often by a Caesarean . . . when the boy (book is grammatically masculine) is finally born, it goes through 'circumcision' by the publishers, editors, and critics. It is often rewritten, again and again, for ten or more times. When eventually it reaches the public, nobody knows what will become of it, and like a baby it needs 'Mazel' to be a success. In spite of it all, the author wants to continue writing."

So here I am with my third major book of the literary biographical and homiletical category – a labor of love and hard work. I developed an addiction to write, just as my father OB"M predicted I would.

Along with the books I published in the past, during the last 10 years some essays of mine appeared in local, national and international newspapers and magazines, especially in Israel and Mexico. A number of my articles were reprinted in various countries around the world, without my even knowing about it.

Born and educated, both in Rabbinics and in secular scholarship in Poland, I arrived in the United States about 40 years ago, a true nomad and wandering Jew. I crossed not only the Atlantic, but also many oceans of the European Holocaust and terror during the preceding decades.

We were called "displaced persons" and so we were, not only physically, but spiritually as well. Finding a haven was the overriding goal and hope of all the myriads who miraculously survived the Hitler epoch. And to re-

place the displaced involved more than merely securing a visa. Rehabilitation and adjustment to new surroundings and conditions were far more difficult for all of us. To transplant a new tree requires more than merely a piece of ground in which to take root. Climate, environment and many other factors are of primary importance.

One of the main obstacles on my road to adjustment here in America was the barrier of language. I knew Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Italian, German, Czech, Hungarian and a little French and Spanish, in addition, of course, to my basic languages, Hebrew and Yiddish. Now I had to learn English which I found the most difficult of all.

They say that when you have one million, the second million is easy. This is not so with languages, and especially the way I acquired them. Many may envy me this gift of tongues but I do not wish this accomplishment, under my circumstances, on anyone. The languages I learned were merely idioms for cursing, begging, and politeness, consisting mainly of nouns and numbers. Somehow, six or seven of these languages combined to form an Esperanto-like jargon, woven with many accents and dialects. Thus, as I dragged from land to land, I learned to communicate with all kinds of people in order to survive.

Upon my arrival in the United States, I was a veritable personification of a Biblical "Babel-Citizen." Even Polish, my mother tongue and the language in which I had begun all my secular studies, had become garbled.

In search of employment, I quickly realized that unless I learn to master the English language, I would never

be able to enter successfully into the profession of being a Rabbi in the United States.

The English language was the major factor in the American pulpit. Here in the New World, it was not scholarship, but elocution that determined the hiring of a spiritual leader for a new position.

In the beginning, I occupied organizational and educational posts and not a Rabbinic pulpit, for which I had been reared since my earliest days as the son of Rabbis for almost one hundred generations. As the Executive Director of the Yeshiva Rabbi Solomon Kluger, Principal of the Yeshiva Academy of Long Island and Executive Vice-President of the Greater New York Council of Hapoel Hamizrachi, I worked very hard to master English without "exposing" myself too much.

It was not hard for me to learn new words, most of which I was able to recognize from my knowledge of other languages. But this very familiarity was a liability, in that it colored my pronunciation of these words.

While working from the first week of my arrival, I registered at Brooklyn College for courses in English and American History. I received credits for other secular subjects, especially languages, by taking equivalency tests given to me by various professors in the different departments. My English class consisted of refugees like myself and the teacher was a lady of Italian ancestry. She was excellent, and she took a personal interest in each one of her students. She favored me especially, I guess because of my knowledge of Italian. Upon the conclusion of the second semester, she called me over and talked to me privately. "Rabbi," she said, "Remember two things that may decide

the future of your career in English! First and most important, forget all other languages – don't think in them, and don't you dare speak them for a period of 5 to 6 years. Get them out of your system. Talk and think English only, mistakes don't count, as long as you speak it. Otherwise, you will wind up like millions of Americans, 40-50 years in the country and still unable to read or write or even make up a correct sentence. And yes, one more thing of major importance – marry an American-born girl and speak only English at home!"

I listened to both suggestions of my esteemed teacher, and though I have forgotten her name, I have, nevertheless, always expressed in my heart a gratitude to her. By now, since she was, 40 years ago, an elderly lady, she must be departed, yet I wish to extend to her my respect and tribute post humously. I owe her a lot.

On June 14, 1949, I married the former Esther Horowitz, my dearly beloved wife of 36 years, the American New York born girl, who shared with me the vicissitudes of these years as my devoted companion.

To her, I dedicate this book (my previous ones, the first, was dedicated to the memory of my Mother, and the second to my Father). Esther has been my constant moral support, and to her belongs the credit for whatever I have achieved and for whatever progress I made and am still striving to make today. Step by step, she has guided me, at great personal sacrifice. For she is not only a "woman of valor" as wife and homemaker, but a most devoted mother to our four sons, David, Morty, Meir (all three ordained Rabbis), and Yonky, our youngest, 17 years old, who still attends the seminary. She also was my typist-secretary

and full time teacher in our Hebrew School for almost 30 years. Last but not least, she is a well respected Rebetzin in the Hartford community.

My previous books appeared on anniversaries of my association as Rabbi of my Synagogue, and this new one also marks my 30th year of being the spiritual leader of the United Synagogues of Greater Hartford.

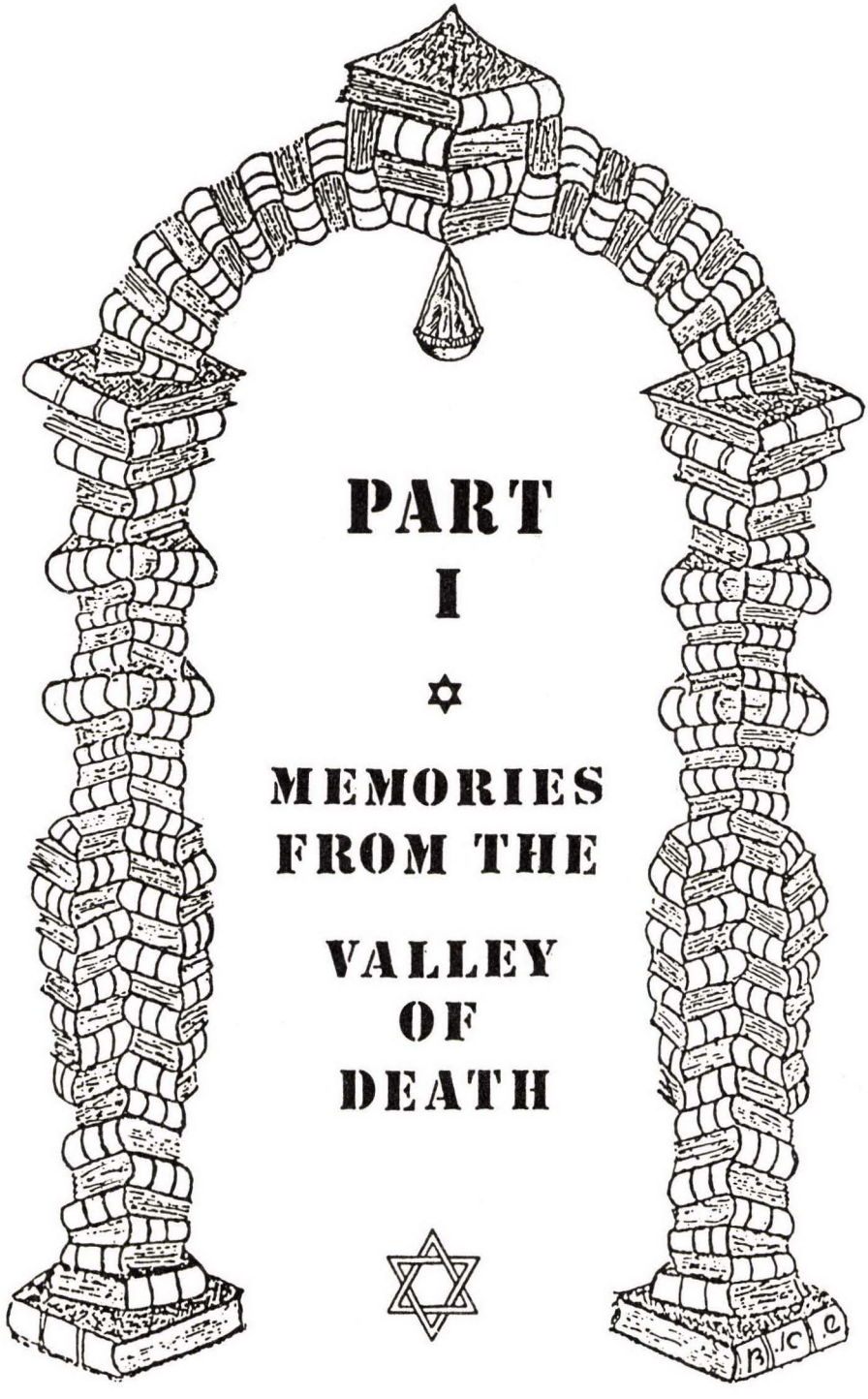
In many ways, these three decades have been years of trials and tribulations, mergers and milestones that would have been a great challenge to any Rabbi, especially to one with a Holocaust experience.

I wish to express my gratitude to my esteemed colleague, Moshe Kohn of Jerusalem, to our dear sons and daughters-in-law, with special mention of Mordechai and Rifky Avigdor, to Mary Klein of Belle Typesetting Co., along with many other friends, whose skills of editorial assistance, proofreading and typing, have made this publication possible.

I am grateful and indebted to all for their consistent patience, kindness and willingness to help.

נודה לה' חסדו שהחיינו וקימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה

Humbly, I thank the gracious G-d for having reached this day. "Shehechyanu, Ve'kiymanu, V'higianu, Lazman Hazeh!"



PART I

✡

MEMORIES FROM THE VALLEY OF DEATH

"הנאהבים והנעימים בחייהם ובמותם לא נפרדו..." שמ"ב א', 23

"THE LOVELY AND DEAR ONES ARE IN LIFE AND IN DEATH INSEPARABLE" SAMUEL II – 1:23

ON THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION FROM THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS

Holocaust Survivors, A Holy Cast of Martyrs

Why write? Hasn't enough been written, published, studied and preached about the death of our Six Million brothers and sisters?

A Hassidic Rebbe is quoted as saying: "If I could, I would abolish all the fasts except Yom Kippur and Tisha B'av. As for Yom Kippur – who can even think about food on such a holy day? And as for Tisha B'av – who could swallow as much as a single bite on such a sad day?"

That Rebbe was right. If you really want to do a proper job of atoning for all your sins of the entire year in the course of one Yom Kippur day, surely there is no appetite for eating. As for Tisha B'av – the reading of the Book of Lamentations and the chanting of the dirges and elegies are so heart-rending that they take away all desire for any physical pleasure. On Tisha B'av we are like little children whose mother has just died on them – swallowing tears and clenching the lips in deep sorrow and pain.

Is there any need to go on writing? There exist large libraries with exhibits, archives full of historical documents and testimonies of thousands of living persons containing details of

our national tragedy. Numerous books in all languages, both documentary and fictional, have been published in recent years. So why repeat again and again the accounts, which, getting right down to it, really duplicate each other in so many respects?

Do we do it, in order to remind ourselves? Do we need it so that we should not, G-d forbid, forget the ghetto and concentration-camp years? Frankly, none of us survivors, as ardently as we may wish and try to erase the memory of that terrible past, can succeed in doing so.

Some say that it all must be written down for posterity, for our children and grandchildren to read and know what we underwent. I think that this, too, is not very necessary, for two reasons. First, because, as I have said, enough has been written. Secondly, notwithstanding all the books and diaries that have been written, there is still no language that is up to the task of clearly expressing the suffering and pain of the martyrs and of those of us who survived. Anybody who was not there could never comprehend it.

So again the question arises: If so much has been written already, if it cannot really be described adequately, and if in any event nobody can comprehend it, then why write?

Today, forty years later, everybody says that the Six Million were "Kdoshim", martyrs who sanctified G-d's Name. No other term is used. But at the beginning it was not so easy to gain this recognition. Not so readily were we granted the title of *Kdoshim* – holy ones, martyrs.

The world, besides remaining silent, also tried with all its might to ignore and deprecate the survivors as well as the dead victims. This served the world as a means of cleansing its conscience for not having done anything to save us.

The nations of the Free World, and the Jews of America, England, and the other countries that did not come under the German heel sought to defend their own failure to act by accus-

ing us of passivity regarding Hitler. We were regarded as worthless, base cowards, who fled with our tails between our legs instead of heroically standing up to the enemy. People spoke to us scornfully: Why didn't you put up any resistance against the Nazis? Why did you let them do it to you?

I remember. I remember those first years after I came to America, how I used to feel ashamed about having survived. Bitterly I kept my memories to myself, burying them deep inside me, where they kept burrowing away at my innards: Why talk about it? And to whom? The world was probably right: It was a disgrace to have survived! So I remained silent. . . .

I remained silent, and I got married. We had children, and I remained silent. I became a rabbi, and I lectured and taught the public – on everything and about all, only not a word, heaven forfend, about the Holocaust.

I remained silent, even though the pain of silence was tremendous and the nightmarish nights of terror without sleep were unbearable. Only in those dreams did those experiences come back, and the next morning everything was sealed tight again. Silence . . .

And the people of the Free World didn't accuse only us, survivors, of cowardice, but also the Six Million dead victims. The dead, people said, were not martyrs. They did not heroically defend Jewish honor, but let themselves be led to the gas chambers like blind, foolish sheep. Many people said this openly and most people did not lose an opportunity to give us that feeling.

Everywhere the theme of Kiddush Hashem – Sanctification of G-d's Name – was being discussed and argued. The designation "Kdoshim" – "holy ones", or "martyrs", people insisted, rightly applies only to such Jews who have a choice between apostasy and death, between remaining alive by renouncing Judaism and sanctifying G-d's Name, by remaining a Jew even though this means death. The ten Sages who were

put to death by the Romans, those put to death by the Inquisition – they sanctified the Name. They had the choice of renouncing G-d and Judaism and saving their lives, but they chose death. That, it was said, is the sole meaning of Kiddush Hashem.

Of course the highest form of "Kiddush Hashem" is that of a Jew offered the choice of remaining alive by renouncing his Jewishness or remaining a Jew and dying, and he chooses the latter. But there are other kinds of martyrs who are no less holy and whose Kiddush Hashem is as great, sometimes even greater. Kiddush Hashem should be measured according to the time, place and person involved. As the circumstances differ, so does the nature and extent of the Kiddush Hashem.

The chronicle of Jewish martyrology begins with Akedat Yitzhak, the Binding of Isaac. Our Patriarch Isaac was the first Jew to offer himself for Kiddush Hashem, willingly going for what, he and his father Abraham thought, was to be sacrificed to G-d. No coercion was involved. No enemy bound his hands. It was not an enemy who raised the slaughtering knife to slit his throat. And in the end, nothing happened to him. Nevertheless, he performed Kiddush Hashem, he sanctified G-d's Name. Isaac was the first Kadosh, the first holy martyr-witness to the way of Judaism. The Jewish people and Judaism are proud of Isaac, and he and his act occupy a place of honor in all our prayers.

Isaac's fright on his way to the sacrifice and while he was being bound – this fright was his main Kiddush Hashem, even though it was the entire extent of his Kiddush Hashem.

The Zohar tells us that if one is mentally and spiritually ready to offer his life for G-d – even if it does not come to that, he is deemed to have actually given his life, and is considered on a par with our Patriarch Isaac.

Kiddush Hashem has always been measured in relation to the time in which the foes of the Jewish people acted against us. For example, we find in the Talmud such statements as

"Observing the commandment to circumcise one's son is equivalent to observing the whole Torah," or "Observing the Sabbath is equivalent to observing all the commandments." This does not mean that if one observes the Sabbath or is circumcised, one is exempt from observing all the other commandments. These statements only indicate the extent of the trouble afflicting the Jewish people at the time. The Roman authorities had banned circumcision and Sabbath observance on pain of death, and whoever kept these commandments was regarded as performing Kiddush Hashem. There is even a theory that Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi got the sobriquet "Rabbeynu Hakadosh", "the Holy Rabbi", because he was circumcised at the time of the Roman ban, and his circumcision was ranked as an act of Kiddush Hashem.

It is true that the Nazis did not offer their victims any alternative. They sentenced all the Jews to death, with no alternative. The only possible way out was resistance. This was conducted in various ways. In many cities and towns, the outcome was horrendous. As soon as the slightest resistance was shown, the Germans promptly took savage revenge. The SS looked for the slightest pretext to liquidate whole towns, to exterminate thousands of Jews at a time. Some towns were made *Judenrein* – right at the outset on minor, real or fictitious pretext, while other ghettos and camps existed for several years.

Because of some petty incident the Germans would seize whole populations in the middle of the night, march them outside town and mow them down with machine guns. These reprisals deterred the young people from mounting resistance. That was precisely the purpose of the SS murderers, and in most places they succeeded – except in Warsaw, Vilna, and a few other towns and camps where acts of resistance did occur. When young people – and there were quite a few such incidents – decided on some act of sabotage, they tried to cover the tracks, and they would leave false clues leading away from the Jewish ghettos to the forests, where there were armed partisans.

The option of open or even underground struggle did not have a chance against Hitler's armed juggernaut. There was only one other choice: to flee, to hide, to evade the death sentence hovering over us.

This choice always involved great risk, and not every one had a chance to even try it. Most of those who did so perished because when a Jew was found hiding he was subjected to hideous torture that was worse than death. If a Jew was caught being hidden by a Gentile, the Gentile was also murdered.

Acting on the option of remaining alive despite the Nazis, the entire struggle for life in forests and fields, in bunkers, on forged Aryan documents, was a true act of Kiddush Hashem.

Those who saved themselves waged a long struggle against a barbaric, cruel enemy – the Germans – as well as their anti-Semitic Polish, Ukranian and Lithuanian collaborators, who sometimes were more savage to the Jews than the Germans themselves. Survival required struggle, endurance, perseverance, hope, trust in G-d, and considerable luck. And with all this the chances were 1 in 100: of those who fled and hid, one out of a hundred lived to tell the tale.

If Kiddush Hashem is measured according to how long one suffered under the Nazis, then we are not only as entitled to the designation of martyr as those who perished in the crematoriums and in the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt, but perhaps even more. Undergoing all that hell required more strength and courage than getting killed. We underwent torment from the very beginning to the very end, and the end was not even really an end.

For those who perished – death put an end to their suffering. For us, the survivors, the suffering continued long after our liberation. Many of us were virtually dead, and our survival was a resurrection. Is not the miracle of coming back to life to be reckoned as Kiddush Hashem?

Today we know that our psychic and physical sores will never heal, our wounds will remain forever.

In spite of the extraordinary pain, many of us went about our lives filled with pride and hope. There was no suicidal despair. We struggled with the idea. Some of us even possessed poison and carried it with us everywhere. But we were repelled by the image of psychic weakness involved in suicide.

We sanctified the Name of G-d by sanctifying life, by our stubborn will to live and refusal to help Hitler in his design to eliminate the Jewish people by committing suicide. There were practically no suicides, not in the ghettos nor in the camps. The motto of faith on the lips of all the martyrs was: "Aushalten" – "Endure!" There isn't another people on earth that, under the same circumstances, could have displayed such strength and courage in sanctifying life as we Jews did under the Nazis.

We made survival the highest goal in life. Every day we faced new threats to us remaining alive. We did everything we could in a life-or-death challenge.

Yes, all of us are Kdoshim, Holy Ones, martyrs! If when we were children our teachers could call us "holy lambs," then today we are surely entitled to recognition as holy, purified and sanctified by that blood and fire and smoke of the crematoriums, surviving by having sanctified life for Kiddush Hashem. In the face of horrendous trials, we survivors vanquished Hitler and the Nazis by virtue of the fact that we are here!

If today there are learned professors who, despite our living testimony, dare to call the Holocaust a fabrication, one can imagine what the world would have done if, G-d forbid, Hitler had succeeded in carrying out his diabolical plan, and not a single Jew – not a single witness – had remained alive. No one would have believed the gruesome accounts of what the Nazis had done. It would have been regarded as a piece of atrocity propaganda, not as an historical event without parallel in the annals of mankind.

The very mission that has devolved upon us, refuting the

lies that the world might have accepted as truth – this mission alone, which we hear by dint of the mere fact that we survived, is the greatest act of Kiddush Hashem. We must write and speak, publish books and articles without cease. Because if our survival is holy, then everything we write is holy, and by writing it we are carrying out the last will and testament of the Six Million who right up to their dying breath pleaded not to be forgotten, begged the rest of us not to be silent. This will and testament obligates all the generations of Jewish children, wherever they may live in this malicious world – today and centuries from now – to read attentively the history of the Holocaust.

We have to write about the gruesome past for the sake of the Jews who will come after us. Even as we honor the martyrs, something that cannot really be expressed in words, we must also learn from the catastrophe not only how to die a martyr's death, in Sanctification of the Name, but also how to live in time of trouble. We must take every measure against a recurrence of such a national tragedy.

The horror of those years is not just what was done to us, but the fact that a plan to exterminate an entire people could be put into operation at all. Hitler was not the first enemy of the Jews who wanted to destroy all of us – men, women and children. But he was the first to prove able to implement his wish. This possibility of loading us into freight wagons and transporting us to extermination centers that he built especially for this diabolical purpose – in this lies the great novelty of Hitler's achievement. It transpired that in the 20th century it is possible to massacre millions of people while the world stands by indifferently, seeing, hearing, but saying nothing.

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To all those who put the victims and the survivors in the defense docket and ask them: "Why were you so impotent on the threshhold of oblivion? Why didn't you fight back?" . . .

Here is the answer:

It is not with a sense of shame that we remember the fallen, but with all due respect and honor. Among all the nations subjugated by the Nazis, there wasn't a single one that displayed as much heroism and self-sacrifice as the Jewish people. We performed courageous acts of active struggle and resistance, and also acts of passive heroism, and valiant struggle to preserve the image of G-d in Man in the face of the cruelest tyranny of all time, the courageous act of remaining true to our Jewish destiny, and accepting it proudly, fearlessly.

"Why write, and for whom?"

The answer is: In the first instance, we write for ourselves. Secondly, we write to testify about the Holocaust, about the Kiddush Hashem that all of us – the dead and the survivors – performed. Finally, we write for the future, for our posterity, in the hope that they will know what we endured and try to understand the meaning of Kiddush Hashem. In our generation a Jew is one who suffers merely because he has Jewish parents, regardless of whether or not he suffers willingly. The Jews in the Soviet gulags, the "Prisoners of Zion" in other countries, the Jews in Ethiopia – all of them, all of them are Kdoshim on the millenia-old altar of Kiddush Hashem, of the Sanctification of the Name of our G-d.

SURVIVAL AS WELL AS DEATH, WERE ALL IN THE CATEGORY OF "KIDUSH HASHEM", "SANCTIFYING G-D'S NAME." TO REMAIN ALIVE DEMANDED EVEN MORE ENDURANCE AND PASSIVE RESISTANCE THAN TO GIVE IN TO THE SYSTEM OF LIQUIDATION SET UP BY THE NAZIS. OUR CONTINUOUSLY REPEATED PHRASE WAS "AUSHALTEN" . . . HOLD IN THERE. OUR HISTORICAL DUTIES AS SURVIVORS IS TO NEVER FORGET OURSELVES AND, AS WITNESSES TO GENOCIDE, TO LEAVE A TESTIMONY FOR POSTERITY TO REMEMBER AND UNDERSTAND THE PERIOD OF THE HOLOCAUST.

THE CHASSIDIC MOVEMENT AT THE TURN OF THE 18th CENTURY, HAS ADOPTED A CUSTOM OF WEARING TUBE-LIKE, CIRCULAR FUR HATS. IT WAS CALLED BY ITS RUSSIAN-POLISH NAMES OF A SPODIK OR KOLPAK. SUCH FUR HATS WERE WORN IN EASTERN EUROPE BY KINGS, PRINCES AND NOTABLES.



The Metamorphosis of a Spodik

There is a Yiddish saying: "Don't twist my spodik" – meaning: Stop bothering me with your talk! But most people today, if asked, couldn't explain what a "spodik" is.

When there was a thriving Jewish life in Eastern Europe, Chassidic Rabbis and their sons would wear a hat known as a "spodik" on weekdays. On the Sabbath and on religious holidays, most East European Jews covered their heads with a 13-cornered fur-lined hat known as a "shtreimel". This originated with the Catholic Church's fiendish anti-Jewish decrees in the 13th century. The fanatical Pope Innocent III ordered the Jews to wear such a hat, lined on the outside with animal tails, so that they could be a visible object of scorn. The "shtreimel" was another form of a "yellow patch" which Jews were forced to wear in the ghettos of the Middle Ages.

But what the Church had intended as a mark of humilia-

tion and scorn, those Jews transformed into a badge of honor, a sacred vestment with which to adorn themselves on their holy days. They wore the "shtreimel" proudly, and over the generations, they came to interpret the number 13 (of the 13 corners), intended as a mark of bad luck on their heads, as representing the 13 Tribes that sprang from Patriarch Jacob.

Well-to-do Jews lined their "shtreimels" with more expensive sable furs, and poorer Jews could afford no more than squirrel tails. All "shtreimels" had to have exactly 13 corners, but some of them were very heavy or very light, large and wide or small and skimpy, brown or reddish, depending on the class and quality of the "shtreimel's" fur.

It was the custom for young men to start wearing a "shtreimel" on getting married. And when a new groom wore his "shtreimel" to the Synagogue on the first Sabbath after his marriage it was an outward manifestation to the community of how much of a dowry he had received. For the "shtreimel" was provided by the bride's father, and sometimes it was more important than the actual cash dowry. The "shtreimel" was the first conspicuous sign of how well the father-in-law had done by his son-in-law, and how well the groom had done for himself.

But this 13-cornered "shtreimel" did not catch on everywhere. In some parts of Poland, especially in Warsaw and Lodz, the Jew's Sabbath and festival hat, was a fur "spodik" – a tallish, round headpiece of the sort the Cossacks in the Tsar's army wore. This headpiece was a symbol of royalty, worn by the Polish aristocracy and nobility of the time, and it was called by its Russian-Polish name, "kolpak."

In the district where I grew up, Chassidic Rabbis and lay dignitaries wore the "spodik" or "kolpak" on weekdays, and the 13-cornered "shtreimel" on the Sabbath and holidays. Sons of Chassidic Rabbis would start wearing a "kolpak" on becoming a Bar Mitzvah.

This "spodik" has again become fashionable in Jerusalem's Me'ah She'arim quarter, and it can frequently be

seen at the Western Wall.

I should like to tell about the metamorphosis of one such "kolpak" that forms a chapter in the colorful biography of my great father, Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor, of blessed memory.

I

In 1908, as a boy, my father went to the wedding of his cousin, Lippe Galler, the son of his mother's brother, who was the famous Rabbi Binyamin Ze'ev Galler of Boiberik, a small town near Lemberg.

According to custom, the groom was delivering a pilpul, a learned discourse at the Sabbath table, while my father, seemingly not paying attention, was chatting with another boy. When the Groom had finished, the Rabbi of Boiberik called my father over and said: "Yankel, my nephew, why didn't you listen to the groom's discourse?"

"Uncle, what will you give me if I repeat the whole discourse word for word?"

"If you do that" the Rabbi said, "I'll give you anything you ask for!"

"I want the groom's 'kolpak'," my father retorted.

And get the "kolpak" he did, for he repeated the groom's discourse word for word, and the Rabbi kept *his* word.

II

When World War I broke out in 1914, the Cossacks entered the hamlet of Tyrawa Woloska (it didn't even appear on the map), where my grandfather, Rabbi Avraham Issachar Ber Avigdor, of blessed memory, was Rabbi.

The family had fled to the famous city of Prague several days earlier, taking along only a few small possessions, leaving their poor home in the charge of the Christian woman who had been working with the family for many years. Her name was Kaszke, and she was virtually a member of the family, for she had practically raised the children. She was even able to an-

swer Halachick religious questions, "sheilis", better than many a Jewish daughter...

When the Cossacks entered my grandfather's home, one of them noticed my father's "kolpak" in the closet, and wanted to help himself to it. Kaszke pounced on it and told him: "You can take anything you want, but not my Yankel's "spodik." She was well along in years, but – according to my father's account – strong, and she wrangled with the Cossack, from whom she took a bloody beating, but she saved my father's "spodik." When the family returned home after the war, Kaszke greeted them proudly holding my father's "kolpak" in her hands.

In 1921, my father was appointed Rabbi of Drohobycz-Borislaw. The community "kehila" presented him with an elegant new sable "kolpak", which he wore at weddings and official receptions. Tall, handsome, distinguished-looking as he was in any case, in his "kolpak" my father was all the more an object of admiration of Jews and Gentiles alike. It had been made by the best craftsman in town, the furrier Reb Ephraim Brazelitten.

Thus, we had two "kolpaks" at home; the new one, which the community had given my father, and the old one, which we called "Kaszke's kolpak."

One of the first orders the Germans issued when they occupied our city following their invasion of Russia in June 1941, was that all Jews turn over all the furs they possessed to the German army.

Terrified, the Jews delivered their furs to the collection center at the Judenrat (Jewish community council) building, in order to avoid the wrath of the Germans. Everything proceeded with German order and precision, and each Jew got an itemized receipt from the Germans, who took everything – except "shtreimels". They had no use for them.

I brought all the furs from our home. As everyone knew that my father owned a "kolpak", I turned one in: the old one,

my father had received from his uncle, the Rabbi of Boiberik, and that Kaszke had saved. I didn't have the heart to hand the new one, the one my father had been given by the Jewish community, over to the murderers. It was more than just another "spodik", it was a symbol, a regal crown, a crown of a glorious Rabbinate in a Jewish community. I folded it up as much as possible, squeezed it into a tin container, and buried it in the cellar in a spot that I did not reveal even to anybody in the family.

III

It was late in 1943, after the first and most difficult three years under the Germans passed. They were at war with the Russians, but at the same time, the S.S. did not for a single moment relax their campaign against the Jews. The ghetto was liquidated stage by stage, until only a few hundred of us remained – as slave-laborers for the oil refinery in town: the Germans needed oil for their tanks.

My mother, my grandmother and most of our large family had been shot by the Germans in previous "actions." There is no describing the suffering, the hunger, the terror: only those who experienced it can know what it is.

At the time, several of us banded together to build a bunker for 30 people in a cellar outside the slave labor camp. After three months of painstaking work, we had the bunker nearly ready, except that we didn't have at least a couple of month's provisions to store away in it. It was winter, and we were starving, as it was, in the camp. Furthermore, many types of provisions wouldn't last long in a damp cellar. Few Gentiles cared to sell food to Jews, and those that might have, were afraid of getting caught dealing with the Jews of the slave-labor camp.

The situation seemed hopeless, especially in view of the rumor that our camp was about to be liquidated within the next few weeks.



Rabbi Benjamin Galler, Rabbi of the famous town of Boiberik, Poland; My Father's uncle and teacher; an outstanding Talmudical scholar at the turn of the centry.

One day, while at work in the refinery, a German inspector I had befriended asked my if I knew where he could buy some fur for his wife. I remembered by father's "kolpak" buried somewhere under the ruins of the ghetto, but I was too frightened to tell the German. A few days later, however, I told him I could get a sable "kolpak", from which a stole could be made, or a handbag, or a muff.

Much to my surprise, he immediately expressed interest, saying he would have a muff made, and asked how much the "kolpak" would cost. The next day, I proposed to him the price of a sack of dry chickpeas, and he agreed.

That night, I went into the ghetto, recovered the tin container with the "kolpak", and the transaction was safely consummated. Every day, we smuggled some of the chickpeas into the labor camp, and at night, we hid it in the bunker. That sack of chickpeas sustained us later for two full months.

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When I recall that deal of a "kolpak" for a sack of chickpeas, there comes to mind the biblical story of Esau selling his birthright for a bowl of lentils. I had sold a "birthright" as it were – a symbol or royalty – for some chickpeas . . . Unfortunately, we were the starving, naked, accursed ones, while the Esaus gorged themselves and wore our furs on their hands, hairy Esau-hands.

A new twist on a "spodik" which the world provided.

FATHER AND SONS, AFTER SEPARATION AT PLASHOW CONCENTRATION CAMP IN 1943, MEET IN MILANO, ITALY, SIX MONTHS AFTER LIBERATION. THE NOSTALGIA AND EMOTIONS OF THE ANTICIPATED REUNION. AN INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLICAL SCENE IN THE REUNION OF PATRIARCH JACOB WITH HIS SON JOSEPH.

The Reunion

It was 1946, the Sabbath when the portion "Beshalach" was read in the Synagogues. The place was Abiatte, a small village near Milan, Italy. To help you understand this reminiscence, I shall tell you something about our general situation in that period after World War II.

Nine months earlier, on May 5, 1945, the infamous Mauthausen concentration camp had been liberated. From there, the people of the Jewish Brigade, a formation of Eretz Yisrael Jews in the framework of the British army, had smuggled us through the Tyrol Mountains across the Austro-Italian border in the middle of the night to Tarvisio. From there, they had taken us to a collection center in the town of Modena.

The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) had taken over the huge buildings of what had been one of Mussolini's Italian military schools, and housed more than 10,000 refugees in them. Modena thus became a haven for former katzetniks (concentration-camp inmates) and prisoners of war from various countries and of various tongues, Jews and Gentiles, young and old, physically and

mentally ill, broken men and women. The situation was intolerable.

Following our liberation, we became rootless vagabonds, desolate, lost, famished, orphaned, desperate, and hopeless. The quarreling among us, the chaos and anarchy, and various illnesses and epidemics took a huge toll of lives among the "displaced persons." Many thousands who had been liberated from the camps perished thus in the first months after their liberation.

Of course, there is no comparison between Mauthausen under the Germans and Modena. Nevertheless, Modena was a new kind of concentration camp in which we found ourselves after our so-called liberation.

We were looked after by group leaders from Eretz Yisrael, members of the Jewish Brigade organized as a special unit called the "Vaad Habricha" (Escape Committee). Their task was to organize the "illegal" immigration of Jews to Eretz Yisrael, the so-called "Aliya Bet." They kept reassuring us that we would not have to remain in Modena much longer, and that any day now the nations of the world would make it possible for us to enter the Holy Land freely.

As is known, however, England didn't want it that way, and her mighty Mediterranean fleet kept capturing "illegal" ships carrying Holocaust survivors and sending them back to Italy.

I was active in the Aliya Bet operation, and I realized that we couldn't just go on wasting away there in Modena while we waited for an opportunity to get to Eretz Yisrael. We decided to organize a kibbutz in Italy for the purpose of preparing the Jews for life in Eretz Yisrael. We were helped by a rich Italian Jew, Vittorio Mayer and his son. They turned over to us a summer estate that they owned in the town of Abiatte, half an hour from Milan. The estate consisted of a huge mansion with many rooms, terraces, and spacious grounds, all built and laid out in

posh Italian style. Compared to the barracks of Modena, Abiatte was a real paradise.

Very quickly, 100 of us – young men and women – set up a religious Torah Va'avoda (Torah and labor) kibbutz at the Mayer's summer estate. As initiator of the kibbutz idea, and as the person who had befriended the Mayers and prevailed upon them to make this generous gesture, I was elected secretary of the kibbutz. This was a difficult, responsible job. Besides concerning myself with the economic side of things, I also had to organize cultural and educational programs for the several hundred orphans who came to stay with us temporarily on their "illegal" way to Eretz Yisrael. At first, the Jewish organizations – the Joint, the Vaad Hahatzala, etc. – didn't even know about us, and we were helped by the UNRRA and private sources, notably the Mayer family. We were also, of course, in constant touch with the Jewish Brigade's "Escape Committee", which every few weeks brought us a new batch of kibbutzniks and took present members to the secret ports from which ships sailed off to Eretz Yisrael in the dark.

Six months had gone by, and I had not had any news about my father, Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor. My heart told me that he had survived the camps, and I had said as much to my younger brother when that American tank crashed through the barbed wire of Mauthausen and liberated us on May 5. I weighed no more than 75 pounds, and could hardly move, and my lips were parched, but with the little strength I could muster, I murmured: "Papa is alive." My brother laughed at me.

One day in November, an English army chaplain named Rappaport came riding into our kibbutz in Abiatte in a jeep with the news that Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor was alive. He was liberated at the Buchenwald concentration camp, and was now a chaplain with the rank of major in the Polish army commanded by General Anders. He was looking for his children; he knew we were alive, but did not know where we were.

The following week, a Jew named Reb Yitzhak Grippel,

working for the Vaad Hatzala arrived with a letter and a $20 check from my father, his personal regards, and an address to which we were to write to him immediately.

It is impossible to describe the feelings of those two surviving sons that day on which they found their lost father. Nearly three months later, on January 17, 1946 – on Tu B'Shvat – we met in the Milan railway station where my father had come from Brussels. In his Polish officer's uniform and with his drastically changed face, I hardly recognized him. But when I heard his voice, I broke into weeping.

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The Sabbath of the Torah portion "Beshalach", that Sabbath when the Song of the Crossing of the Red Sea is read in the Torah, was truly a Sabbath of Song – with my father the honored guest of the Torah Va-avoda kibbutz at Abiatte of which I, his son, was the leader, the chief provider of the group's material and spiritual needs.

In the large hall containing the kibbutz's synagogue, were gathered all the members of the kibbutz and many guests from Milan led by the Mayer family. My father was in a festive mood, whereas I was still in a state of emotional shock from our meeting the previous Thursday.

Suddenly my well of tears, which had been dried up by the experience of the previous 6½ years opened up, and I burst into an uncontrollable paroxysm of continuing weeping and sobbing. I felt so ashamed at doing that in public.

Before the Mussaf service, my father stood up to give his sermon – the first I and my brother were to hear since we left home.

My father opened this sermon of his by reciting the full Shehecheyanu blessing, and then cried out:

"Shma Yisrael, Hashen Elokenu, Hashem Echad!" – "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our G-d, the Lord is one!"

And he continued:

Do not be surprised at my reciting the "Shma." For me, it is now the portion "Vayigash" and not "Beshalach." In describing Jacob's meeting with his son Joseph after their separation of many years, during which Jacob thought that his son was dead, the Torah tells us (Genesis 46:29) that Joseph "wept on his (Jacob's) neck a good while." Meanwhile, Rashi quotes earlier commentators that Jacob recited the Shma.

I never understood this passage. If it was time to recite the Shma, Joseph should have also recited it. If the saying of the Shma could have been postponed, why was Jacob in a hurry to say it just then? Why did Jacob have to choose that tense, emotion-laden moment to recite the Shma? Where were Jacob's tears? Was he not moved at all by this encounter with Joseph?

Neither was I able to understand the next verse, in which Jacob is quoted as saying: "Now I can die, having seen your face again." Instead of rejoicing, Jacob speaks about death.

But today, my dear children, I am able to understand our Patriarch Jacob's sense of loss and recovery. Joy can lead to fatal results, just as much as grief. Human nerves are too delicate to be able to bear sudden extremes. Medical science knows that extraordinary, unexpected joy can cause people to collapse and die just as much as sorrow can.

Our matriarch Sarah, some say, passed away of the shock of joy upon the sudden news that Isaac escaped death on the altar, the fact that her only son almost perished, killed her.

I confess that I did not believe that at my age, I would survive the Hitler period, and I certainly did not believe that three of us – I and my two sons – would live to be reunited after the war. Just as our Patriarch Joseph did, so did I say "Shma Yisrael," because I was afraid that our meeting might have a fatal culmination, that my soul would depart from me because of my ecstasy of joy, and a Jew must not die without the words "Shma Yisrael" on his lips.

Your tears, too, are a simple matter (my father turned to me as he said this). Joseph, too, was unable to keep himself from crying for joy when he met his father. His father's image had always been before him, filling him with hope and courage, enabling him to survive all those terrible trials. His heart had always told him that his father was alive, so that the encounter was no surprise for Joseph, but rather the realization of his dreams. So it was quite natural for him to express his feelings of victory and success with tears.

Joseph saw the fulfillment of his plans for his father and his brothers, something he was looking forward to most of his life, so death did not even enter his mind at the moment. That is why he did not have to say the Shma, but cry he did with tears of victory.

It seems that you, too, my son (my father continued to address me), like Joseph, never gave up hope that we would see each other again. That is why you are crying and not obligated to say the Shma.

I thank Almighty G-d, my father continued, not only for having enabled us to meet again, but also for guiding you in the way of your forebears and making you a leader of Jewish children of the orphaned Holocaust generation of the Jewish People."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Having finished his sermon, my father, of blessed memory, burst into weeping. Everybody in that Synagogue wept along with him – children, whose parents had perished in the ghettos, had been burnt in the crematoriums, had left no graves, no tombstones, not a trace, not a sign that once they had lived – vanished as though they had never been, and left them orphans forever.

More than 40 years have passed since that Reunion Address, but whenever it comes to my mind, my heart still cries today.

THE ABBIATE VILLAGE IN ITALY BECOMES A CENTER FOR ORPHANED BOYS AND GIRLS ON THEIR WAY TO ISRAEL. A GRACIOUS AND GENEROUS GIFT OF AN ITALIAN JEWISH FAMILY.

Italy's "Little Israel" in 1945-46

Abbiate Guazzone is a small village near Milano, where hundreds of orphaned teenagers found a temporary shelter while en route to Israel (then Palestine), via the illegal emigration from ports in Italy, during 1945-46.

Thanks to the intervention of a high officer in the United States Army, Mr. Dave Pine (we called him Dziunek Tannenbaum, originally from Drohobycz), I obtained permission from the illustrious family of Ing. Astore Mayer, to use their summer home in Abbiate Guazzone as a transient station for about 100 youngsters. Officer Pine was a very influential man in Milano since he served as the supplying agent for most of the purchases of the United States Army stationed in Italy. He had befriended the Mayers, who were of Jewish Sephardic ancestry, for many generations distinguished residents of Milano, and the owners of a large International Paper Mill in Abbiate.

The summer home turned out to be a huge mansion, with stately Italian type gardens and a swimming pool. The place was an ideal location, away from the Milano metropolis, very quiet and clean with an all year around mild climate. I named it "Kibutz Torah Veavoda", a collective study and work settlement, the type like those existing in Israel. Within two weeks transports of trucks, loaded with teenagers having crossed over

the Italian-Austrian border, were arriving with the help of the Israeli Brigade.

They were gathered from different countries in Europe, all of them orphans, some of them rescued from Non-Jewish homes and Monasteries, where they were hidden during the war. Our Kibutz became their first home in the free post-war world.

As the originator and founder, I had to take upon myself all duties of managing the Kibutz, gathering all the supplies needed and preparing for the spiritual needs as well.

Food and other necessities, I was able to get from the U.N.R.A. (United Nations Relief Association) and the Israeli Brigade. My Landsman, officer David Pine did not abandon us after his initial good deed, and the Mayer Family continuously and most generously assisted us by filling in the gaps.

Amongst the Kibutzniks were some who had a good background in Judaism and I organized a very successful educational program with a variety of courses in Torah, Talmud, Hebrew, history, agriculture and training in self-defense for any possible physical encounter that might come about. There was a multitude of talents within our ranks and we utilized them all. Within less than a months time, we had a solid organization, teaching, learning, singing and dancing with a unified ideal goal, of getting to Israel through any means.

No one was ever hungry and some meals were really delicious, cooked by the kids themselves in the kitchen of the mansion. The building hummed like a beehive all day long with constant activity.

Guests from Milano, (The Zippels, several military chaplains and wandering refugees) having heard of our success and the wonderful spirit which existed in Abbiate, began to visit us for a dignified Sabbath "to remember." Kibutz Torah Veavoda became literally, "Little Israel" on Italian soil. We were the first such religious Youth Hostel in Italy, setting an example for another one that was later established near Rome.

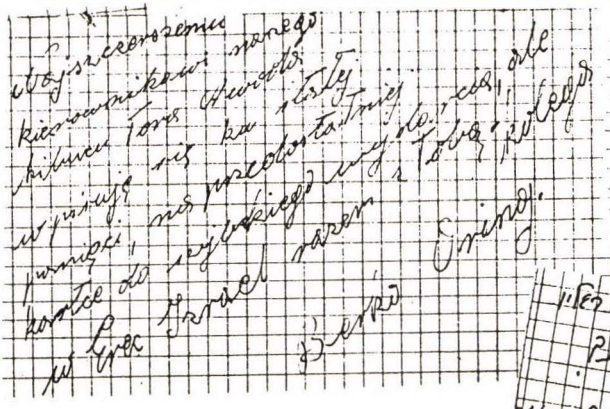
On the political scene, the situation of illegal sailings across the Mediterranean for Palestine, became more and more difficult in 1946. The English Navy stopped small boats on the Sea and turned them back to the Italian ports. Later they arrested refugees, caught in the illegal journeys, and imprisoned them in Detention Camps in Cyprus. (What an irony to have England carry on the Nazi tactics of putting Jews in Concentration Camps after the Holocaust.) Due to those restrictions on free navigation, by the British Government, our Kibutz which was originally organized to be occupied for short periods of time, like two or three weeks, became more permanent and the youngsters had to spend months, waiting impatiently with little hope for the fulfillment of their dream to get to Israel soon.

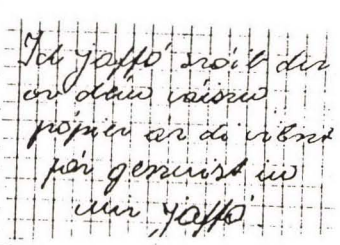
Living and working together, the kids became very attached to each other and especially to me personally. I developed a very close relationship with each one of them and they were like my own children, my students, my dearest friends . . . my new family.

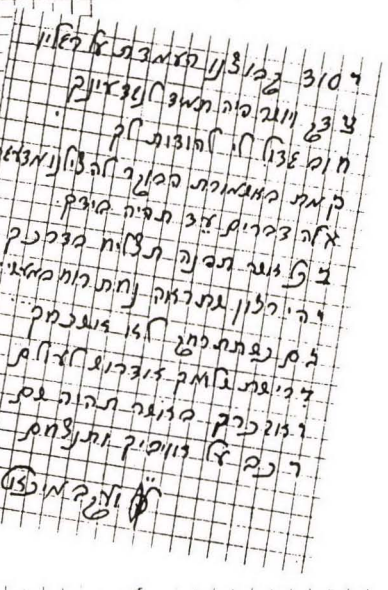
It was during these months that I discovered that my Father had survived and we were reunited in Italy (See essay "Reunion"). We decided to leave Italy for Belgium (The Israeli Brigade was transferred there too) and the boys and girls of the Kibutz became extremely sad and upset by the news of my departure.

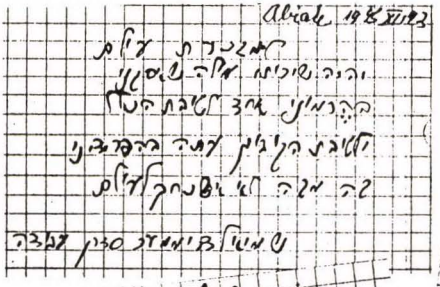
On the day of my leaving, we all gathered to take a picture together and a small autograph album, with some sentimental poems and prose, was handed to me as a memento of my one year's Kibutz life in Italy.

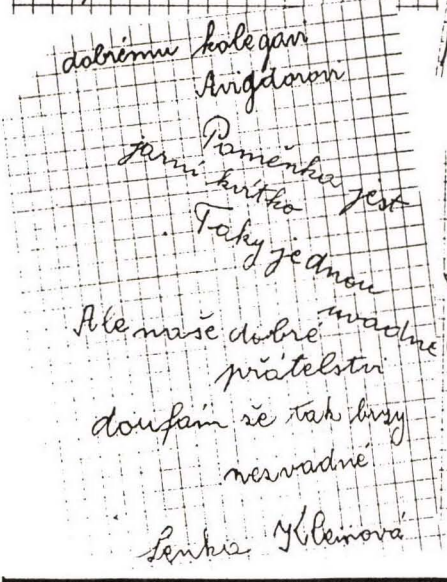
The following pages partially describe the feelings of the Kibutz kids and their attachment to me, expressed in their own words and handwriting in various languages of their origin.

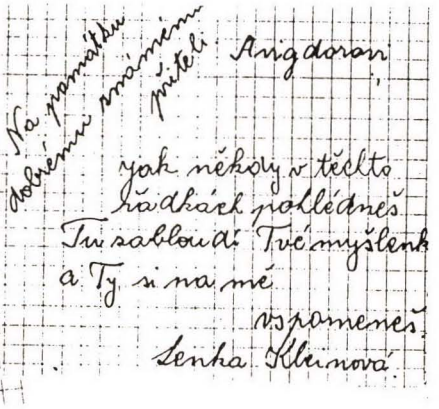


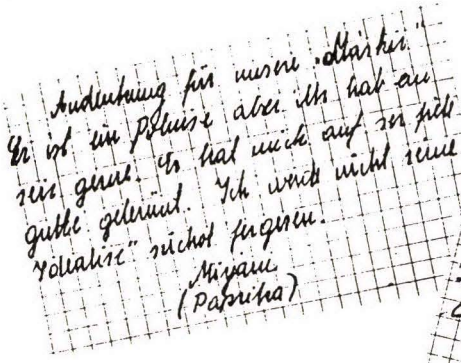


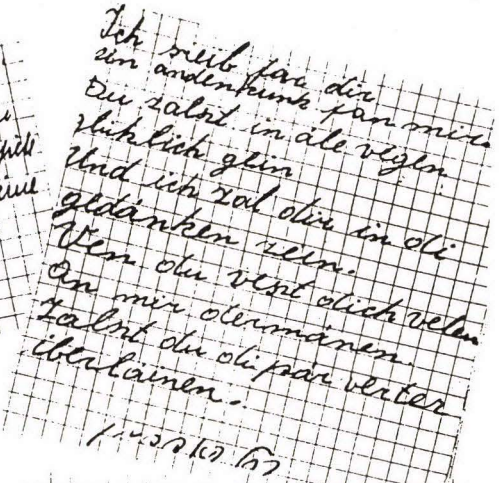


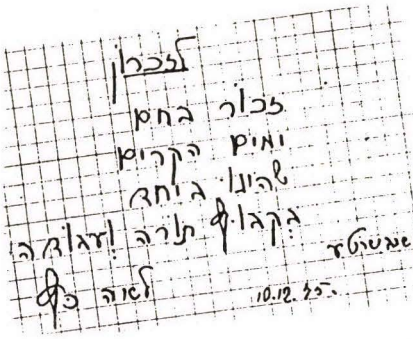




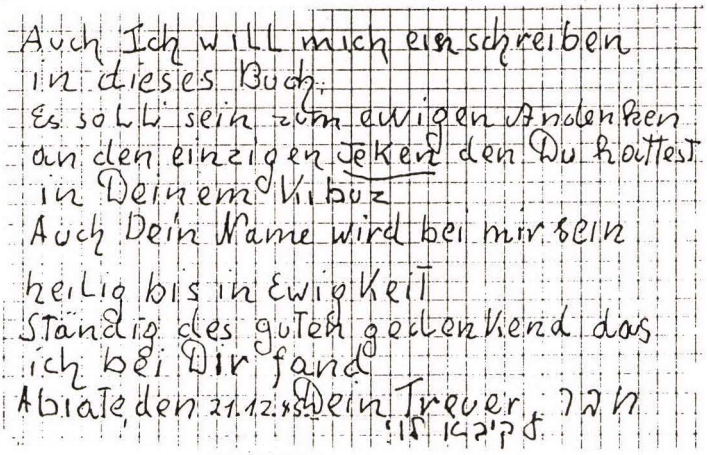



Andenken für meine Mutter
Er ist im Pflaume aber ich hab an
reis gemacht. es hat mich auf so viele
gutte gekommt. Ich werde nicht meine
"vollaire" nicht fergessen.
Miryam
(Patricia)

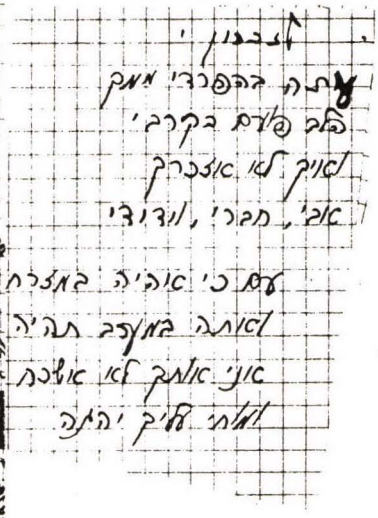

Ich schreib für dir
ein andenkens für mich
Du zahlst in alle vigln
glücklich sein
und ich zal alle in di
gedänken sein.
Wen du vest glich velen
an mir erinnänen
zalst du ein für vaten
überlainen.

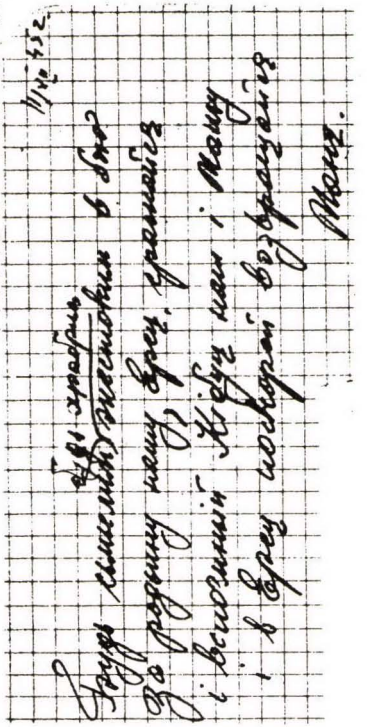

לזכרון
כבור בחם
ואוץ הקרוש
שהיו ביחד
בקבוץ תרפ ושלוחה
שמעטער
לכוד כ"ף

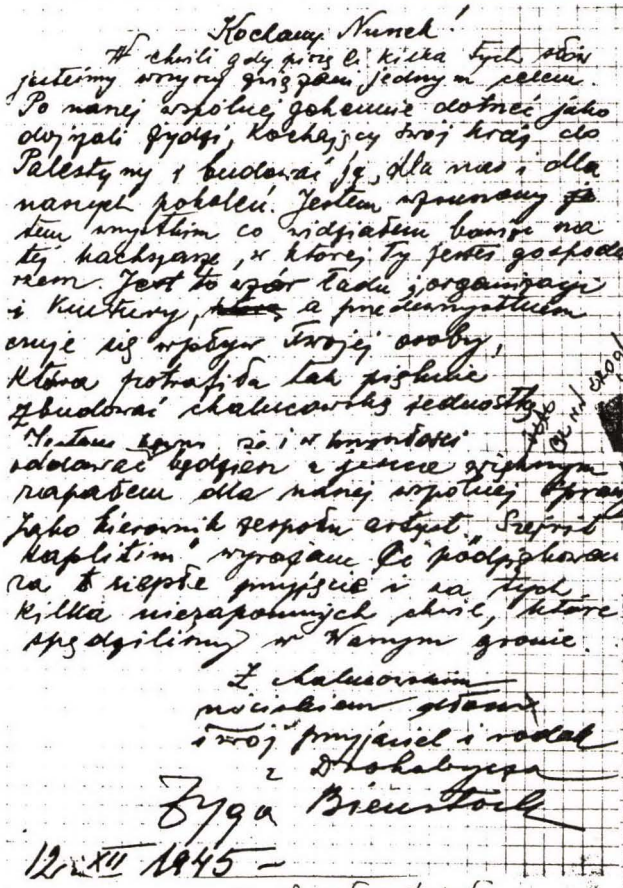

יהי לך למזכרת ניצח
צ ירוך הימים שהיית עמי
ח וב עליך בכל זמן לזכר אתי
ק בוץ תורה ועבודה תזכר לעולם
א זדיר ב כל יום ג ם ד ברין ו שיחתין שדבר ת
ח ותם פ לרשם

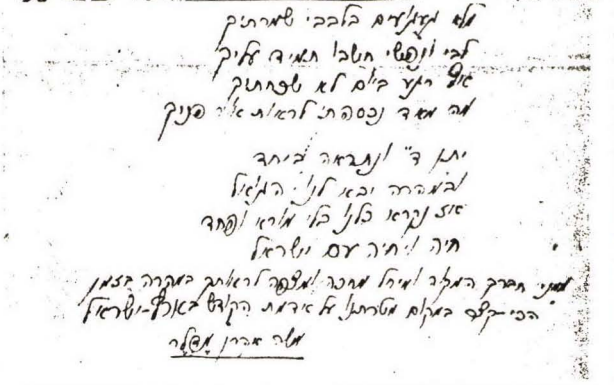

Auch Ich will mich einschreiben
in dieses Buch.
Es soll sein zum ewigen Andenken
an den einzigen Jeken den Du hattest
in Deinem Kibuz
Auch Dein Name wird bei mir sein
heilig bis in Ewigkeit
Ständig des guten gedenkend das
ich bei Dir fand
Abiate den 21.12.88 Dein Treuer חגי
קיבוץ גלויות













בס"ד, יום ג' אחר ר' השנה, לה' ספירה.

לכבוד אביגדור יקיר, השם יאיר
פניו עמך!

אני יודע אם אתה בכלל מתעניין שאכתוב לך בדיוק באותו שם הזמן
לך על הקורות ומהקורות שלנו פה. כאן אנו, עם מאדלן ומהקורות
שלנו. בינתים ירדנו מהגבעה ועברנו לגור בעיר אבלנה. שם נמצאים
הקורות הללו שאתה יודע עליהם. אך כל הקורות הללו הם
בדיעבד, כך שאפשר לומר שכל המעשים שעשינו עד אליה "שבה"
הפלוגה. מזה כ' שהגענו אז כי, שעשינו כל מעשים טובים בעיני
המארגנים הפלוגתיים. אבל הקורות הללו תאבה שאירגן הלל, אחר-אחרונה לפלוגתינו.

אך אם אתה יכול לקבל כאלו לך על מאזן אחוז
זה מה שאנו מכיר אחוז, ובאר אנו שיש לנו אחוז גדול מאוד
יהיה אחוז בלעדי זו. ובאיזה חקלה זאת שמאוד שמח שם אך שלמים אחוזים.
יום היהה הראשי אחוז לנו גדולה ובאה, אחה אלה שלמים אחוזים.
ומאוד, יש שיבה בקשי מאוחרי - אלמוני הקשה אחוזים אך בלתי הפלוגתי.

מברכת לבבות

שלמה

ה' יום ג' יום ההולדת

Jewish Chaplain's
Welfare Office.
HQ 59 Area, CMF.

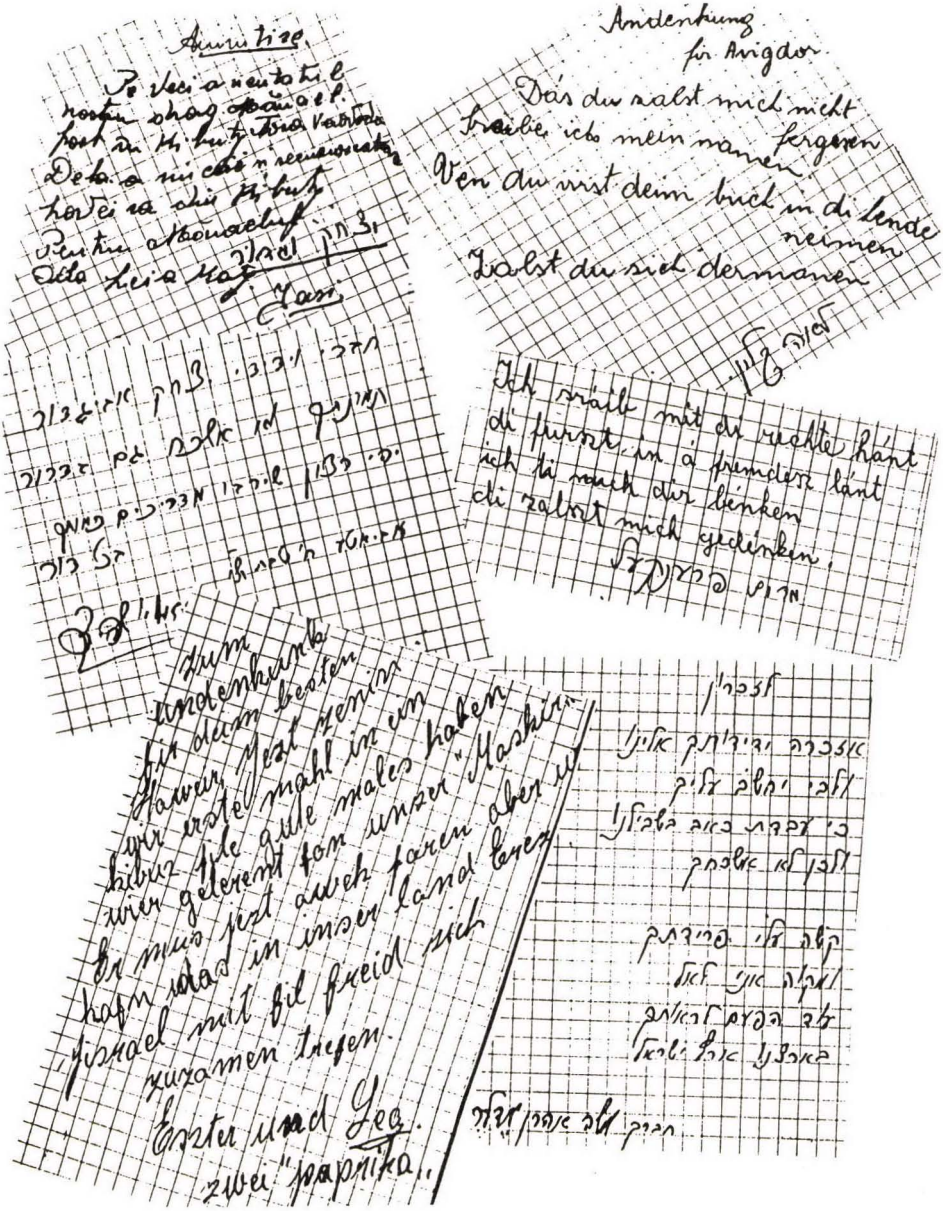
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that Isaac AWIGDOR, of Abbiate Guazzone, is attached to the above-mentioned office for welfare purposes.

It is requested that all assistance may be given to him to carry out his work.

16 Dec 45.

REV. MICHA[illegible] ELTON, C.F.
JEWISH CHAPLAIN



אב"אטע שבט תשו

ה' עמנו !

לזכרון

ברגשי כבוד מוקדישים
אנחנו את התמונה הזאת להרב
הצבאי דר' יעקב אביגדור נ"י
אביו של חברנו יצחק מיסד קבוצנו

בשם המוזכירות :
קבוץ "תורה ועבודה"

החברים :

The text on the back of the group Kibutz picture reads: Presented to Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor the proud Father of our Chaver Yitchok, the founder of our Kibutz. Signed by the members of the Administration.



Group picture taken at farewell party before the author's leaving the Kibbutz in ITALY. Author in military uniform seated left of center.





Abbiate revisited in 1950. Picture on left shows author, Mr. Vitorio Mayer, Mrs. Avigdor. Relaxing in front of the mansion, the home through which hundreds of orphans entered its portals, en route to Israel.

AN OUTCRY OF DESPAIR AND DEPRESSION DURING THE YEARS OF THE GHETTO HORRORS. THE ETERNAL QUESTION: "ARE WE A CHOSEN PEOPLE OR FOREVER FORSAKEN BY G-D?" REFLECTIONS ON THE STORY OF ESTHER AND MORDECHAI.

Eli Eli . . . .My G-d, My G-d Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me? (Psalm 22)

More than once did it happen that even the greatest believers among us fell into despair. Before our very eyes, there constantly took place the most gruesome scenes of bestial savagery, hideous terror, pain and suffering. In addition to everything else, the Germans used to force us to watch them torture their wretched victims to death.

While it was all going on, we were tormented by the question: Is there really no justice in the world? Isn't there some place on earth where our outcries of pain are being heard? Silently we looked heavenward and asked the ancient questions: Is there no justice, no Judge? Where is Divine Providence? Why are the gates of heaven shut, at such a time of misfortune for God's chosen people, Israel?

Queen Esther already asked, "My G-d, my G-d why hast thou forsaken me?" (Tractate Megilla 15). But now everybody asked the question, non-religious and pious Jews alike.

Had G-d somehow placed Himself on the side of the Hitler murderers? We sought all kinds of explanations for what was happening.

Some thought to find the answer in the pages of Jewish history, somewhere between the time of the Patriarch Abraham and our own time, seeking some parallel. Not one single one of our enemies – from Pharaoh through Amalek, Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus, Titus the Roman, the Spanish Inquisition, the Russian Tsars, the Chmielnickys – not one of them succeeded in perpetrating a diabolical plan like that of Hitler and his Nazi Bandits. Hitler was a riddle in the history of the ancient Jewish people. Nobody could understand it or explain it.

There was a joke about a German Jew listening to a speech by Hitler on the radio on Purim, holding a Hamantasch in one hand. As Hitler ranted on, about the Jews being to blame for everything in the world, the Jew laughed uproariously. The more Hitler raved, the more hysterically the Jew laughed. Asked why he was laughing so much, he replied: "Don't you see? If we Jews make such a happy occasion of Purim, over the episode of Haman, who merely "wanted" to do the Jews harm but didn't succeed, then imagine what kind of celebration we'll make after Hitler meets his end! What a feast of kreplach and Hitlertaschen we'll have then . . .!

When we saw that Hitler was not only holding his own politically but was even growing from day to day, from week to week, we started imagining all sorts of things. One day we detected a change in his voice and decided that he had throat cancer. The next day we made it stomach cancer, and "knew" that So-and-So, the famous stomach specialist, had been summoned to attend to Hitler. Our fantasies even went so far as to invent a report that the world famous Jewish throat specialist, Professor Neumann, had been asked to examine Hitler and had refused to come!

I remember when Hitler annexed Austria, which was the beginning of the end for European Jewry, in 1934, there was a boxing match in America between the Nazi representative, Max Schmeling, and the Jew Max Baer. According to European

time, the bout was scheduled for 3 a.m. I'll never forget how we Jews sat there with our ears glued to our radios, whispering prayers that the Nazi, "Esau's hands," should be vanquished. When the Nazi Schmeling in fact lost, we were overjoyed and wished each other Mazel Tov. We believed that now, that his pet, Schmeling, had been smelted down, Hitler wouldn't dare start up with the Jews anymore. As it turned out, the Schmeling-Baer match infuriated the German beasts and made them even more murderous.

The slightest rumor promptly turned into a great sensation and people snatched at it, the way a drowning person might snatch at a straw. Hitler had no cancer. Our dreams burst like so many bubbles.

In one such moment, my great Father, of blessed memory, in leading the synagogue service once, wept when he came to the passage: "Haget mishomayim – Look down from heaven and see Ki Hoyinu Laag – what a mockery we have become." Here I mumbled the words of "Ki Hoyinu Laag – Un du machst a Shwag" – a song which rhymes with this passage and speaks of G-d's silence. My Father overheard me. After the service, realizing that what I had done was an expression of despair, not of scorn, opened a Chumash (Pentateuch) and showed me in Deuteronomy 31:17:18: "Then My anger will flare up against them and I will abandon them and have My countenance hidden from them. They shall be ready prey . . . Yet I will keep my countenance hidden on that day . . ."

And my Father said: There are times when G-d deliberately hides His countenance so that the impression should be created that He doesn't exist at all. This usually happens when G-d has been angry with us for a long time and has withheld his anger. This happened in our Persian Exile, when Haman schemed to destroy the Jews, G-d was so angry that he said sarcastically to the Jews: "You enjoy that wicked man's banquet? You're tired of my yoke? Well, then, I'll liberate you from it. I'll let you taste a world without G-d, without a guardian." G-d hid

Himself, hid His countenance. Haman was busy persuading the king to let him destroy all the Jews living under the Persian democratic regime of Achashverosh in 127 provinces.

My Father continued: "All languages were recognized, all national and ethnic traditions respected. Nevertheless, the Book of Esther doesn't say a word about any "outsider" protesting or demanding the annulment of the decree against the Jews. Neither did we hear a single word of comfort from the Jews' neighbors, when they saw the Jews in sackcloth and ashes. Finally as if that weren't enough, G-d's name is not even mentioned in the Book of Esther, as though heaven was silent throughout leaving the Jews to drown in their mortal fear."

The Talmud (Hulin 139b) tells us that the Haman epoch was predicted in the passage, "I will hide My countenance" – "Ve'anochi hastair asteer panai," and that is why the name of the central figure in the drama is "Esther." Not only G-d was hidden, but Esther too: Her identity was unknown. It is out of the depths of her heart that she lets out her cry of pain: "My G-d, my G-d, Eli, Eli, . . . why hast thou forsaken me?" "Loma Azavtani" . . .

Jews of other generations asked the same question when they were in a state of great religious doubt, and even despair, when attacked by an Amalek-type enemy who wished to destroy them for no good reason. The Talmudic Sages tell us that in Hebrew, "Amalek" is the numerical equivalent of "safek" – doubt. This is the meaning of the Biblical passage (Deuteronomy 25:18): "And you were tired and weary." The Jewish people was weak, because the Jews had begun to doubt G-d. The moment the Jews raised their hands heavenward, they prevailed. But if they fell into doubt, dropping their hands and head, Amelek prevailed.

"True," my Father continued, "G-d is hiding. G-d is looking on and remaining silent. But He is present. What is more important: He has His considerations. We are in the Messianic

Era. We are living in great times. No one can grasp it intellectually. I think that this is the War of Gog and Magog, foretold by the Prophets. The world will drown itself in a deluge of blood, but something will come out of it all. It cannot be otherwise. The Jewish Exile will end once and for all, in spite or because, of God's "face-hiding."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

But my Father, Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor (Post-War Chief Rabbi of Mexico and in Poland, Rabbi of Drohobycz-Borislaw) was in for a big disappointment when the war ended and it transpired that nothing had changed as far as the Jews were concerned – the Six Million notwithstanding. People told me how, in a synagogue in Brussels, Belgium, on Yom Kippur Eve in 1945, the first Yom Kippur after the liberation, he had carried on an argument with G-d.

In his sermon that evening, my Father, may he rest in peace, cried out: "G-d, we don't owe You a thing today. It isn't we who have to ask forgiveness. It is You, who have to ask us to forgive You – for remaining silent, for turning Your face away from us, for hiding in the clouded heavens, while the blood of Your innocent children was flowing, while yeshivot and synagogues were being razed to the ground; for looking on silently while the Jewish name was made, "Laag", being made a mockery of."

He was a broken man at that time, perhaps more than he had been in the time of the ghettos and camps.

Only later, in 1948, after the Jewish State had been reestablished, my Father once said to me: "Do you remember my telling you that something great, something exceptionally important, would happen? Perhaps the war was not the War of Gog and Magog, but this is surely the Messianic Era. The Exile ended the moment the State of Israel was proclaimed. That was no light matter. We underwent the birth pangs. And even though we do not see the Messiah yet, this is the Beginning of

the Redemption. We hear the Messiah's footsteps. He is coming, he is surely coming. We shall live to receive him. We have well earned the privilege, we have paid a high price for it! . . . ."

THE ENDURANCE TO SURVIVE – AN EPISODE FROM A HIDE-OUT DURING THE GHETTO TIMES. THE PATIENCE TO OVER-COME LONELINESS AS A SPIRITUAL HEROISM FROM WITH-IN.

Operation Hide and Seek

In order to live through the years of the Nazi hell, every one of us survivors had to have a bunch of special qualities.

One needed common sense, good intuition, rapid adaptability, courage and hope, resoluteness and fight, a sound body, money or valuables, the possibility to get help from relatives and friends, a profound faith in G-d and His Providence, and confidence that you would definitely be one of the few to survive. On top of all those qualities, however, you also needed luck, and plenty of it. Mazel!

The luck of my Father, may he rest in peace, was such that early in the beginning of the war – from September 18, 1939 – until 1943, when we were taken to the big labor camps in Germany, he was usually hidden some place. "Tucked away," as we used to put it. Whenever he had to put in an appearance, he was totally incognito, completely disguised. No one could recognize him without his beard and sidelocks, so gaunt, and bent as though he were carrying a tremendous load on his back. Instead of the elegant clothes for which he was famous, he wore an old cap and some tatters.

First the Russians and later the Germans searched for him. Since he was the town rabbi and especially because he

was also an officer in the Polish Army, we knew at the outset that he had to vanish from sight, to make it as difficult as possible to find him.

Dozens of times he was hidden away in different places – among Jews, among Christians, in town and village, in forest and field, in the ghetto, outside the ghetto, in the Drohobycz labor camp and, finally, for fully four months in an underground bunker on the Aryan side.

Many times he was hidden away together with my mother and sisters, may G-d avenge their blood. But mostly he had to hide out alone, because it was always easier to find a hiding place for one person than for a group.

Usually I was my Father's contact with the outside world. I used to worry about finding a suitable hideaway, and, at least once a week, I would bring food, news, letters from Mother when she wasn't hiding with him and also messages from various people – requests for advice, questions of Jewish law.

A few times I was detained on the way to or from the hideaway, but I almost always got out of it, as a worker at the petroleum refinery, which was classified as "essential" by the German Ministry of War. In addition to the Star of David label on my chest, I also wore a big letter "R" indicating that I was employed in "Ristung", meaning "the war industry." A few times I was given 10 lashes for being outside the ghetto and the labor camp.

In February 1943, while the ghetto was being liquidated and the SS were transporting thousands of men, women and children to the Janowa camp at Lemberg, a Ukrainian militiaman caught me as I was on my way to Father and took me in a freight truck to the assembly point. After several trials, I succeeded in escaping from the "Sammelstelle", the gathering point of the Jews to be transported away from town. It was in the middle of the night and from the distance I heard some shots coming from the police guards chasing me. They luckily did not catch me. I knew the in's and out's of the town and they

did not. In my pocket I had the key to my father's hide-out.

While the German roundup was still going on, I was afraid to go right out to visit my Father. I spent two nights and a day in the fields and on Christian farms outside town. There were plenty of potatoes and beets, which I would bake and eat; and, even unsalted and without chicken fat, they were absolutely delicious. Stuffing as much as I could into the inside of my trousers (not into the pockets), I set out on the third night to visit my Father.

I was amazed at his patience and endurance. Once I asked him: "Isn't it boring for you? Don't you feel lonely?" By way of reply he told me, somewhat jocularly, of the saying of a rabbi (I forgot his name) that the three greatest qualities of a pious Jew are to weep voicelessly, to dance standing still and to be silent while talking things over with oneself . . . When he went to a hideaway, he always took along a few books and writing equipment for passing the time. Unfortunately, all his writings were lost, burned or confiscated along the desolate roads through the camp years. After the liberation he wrote down from memory many of his ideas and thoughts of that period, and they were published in several dozen of his books.

Father would perk up quite a bit, both physically and psychologically – he literally rejoiced – whenever he saw me, after a few days' separation, and eagerly asked me all sorts of usual questions chatting about various matters. He would always thank me warmly, saying that I was fulfilling the commandment "Honor thy father" above and beyond the call of duty. He repeated this about 10 years later in public, when installing me as a rabbi in Hartford.

I felt that besides fulfilling the commandment "Honor thy father," I was also fighting the Germans by doing all I could to keep my Father alive despite their evil decrees. When Jews would ask me, "Where is your Father?" I would reply, "He's alive." They would then say, "Good. It's important that he sur-

vive." That was the feeling and ardent wish of every Jew in town.

Our meetings were usually emotional, sentimental ones, but they were also heroic, inspiring experiences. But this time, opening the door while standing on a ladder, the face I saw was entirely different. My Father looked as though he were wearing a mask; he looked like an utterly different person. His eyes were glazed as though he were hypnotized. He seemed like a robot, or like a person possessed by another being. It seems that because I had come three days later than I said I would come, he had fallen into such despondency, causing his mind to wander so far, that I literally did not recognize him.

I was frightened and I asked him if he were ill. He did not reply. After a while, when I told him what had happened to me, he calmed down somewhat and said he had had a premonition that I was in danger. He had always had an extraordinary intuition, and of course one didn't have to be a prophet at that time to suspect that something might be wrong.

That dramatic scene of my Father's petrified face on seeing me, remains etched in my memory, and I shall never in my life forget it. There were moments of doubt and despair that required tremendous spiritual heroism to overcome and to give oneself answers as to why we were undergoing all that.

This heroism was the stuff of which my Father, may he rest in peace, was made.

WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF LONELINESS? FROM ONE HIDE-OUT TO ANOTHER. ALONE BUT NOT LONELY. RABBI SIMON BEN YOCHAI IN HIS CAVE AUTHORING THE ZOHAR. BOOKS AS MONUMENTS AND MONUMENTS FOR BOOKS THAT WERE LOST IN FLAMES FOREVER.

Jacob Was Alone, But Not Lonely

It appears that pragmatic historians will record the 20th century as not only the most brutal but also the loneliest period in history. Apart from the local wars, the two world wars, and all the brutal crimes being committed day in and day out, ours is the loneliest generation in the history of mankind.

It should not have been so. There are quite a few factors that should have had precisely the opposite effect on the human race. Modern Man should have been happier, more content, than all the generations of his forebears.

First of all, it seems irrelevant to speak of loneliness considering the tremendous number of people on earth. There have never been as many human beings as there are today. The world, to be sure, has shrunk, is shrinking, while the number of people is constantly increasing.

New York and Shanghai today are closer than New York and Washington were 50 years ago. Radio, television and the newspapers report the latest news from the farthest reaches of the globe in a matter of seconds. We can speak to another person on the opposite side of the world by telephone, with our voices coming through as clearly as though we were sitting be-

side each other. The wide world has become just one little neighborhood.

One is lonely when one is alone, without society, without fellow humans. Adam was lonely, so G-d provided him with a comrade. But how can one be lonely among billions of fellow human beings?

Our ancestors didn't even dream of the things we possess and the things we can do. Medical science is constantly coming up with miracles. People are living longer than they used to. Why doesn't this progress in all branches of science suffice to banish the gloom, the loneliness, the despondency into which so many millions of people have sunk?

In one year alone Americans drink $10,000,000,000 worth of hard liquor, wine and beer in order to quench the despair and gloom that possess much of the general population. Moreover, not only the poor, but also those born in luxury, those in a position to satisfy their every whim, to keep seeking the means of driving away boredom, commit suicide.

Thousands of books have been written, and continue to be written, on the subject of banishing boredom. There is a long list of prescriptions: buy a dog, join a bridge club, take a trip, play golf, and all sorts of other expensive medicines.

A little while ago, a newspaper told of a woman who used to call a radio station every night to find out what time it was. Once the switchboard operator angrily said to the woman: "My dear lady, can't you buy yourself a clock instead of pestering us every night?" The woman replied: "Please don't be angry with me. I have a few clocks in the house, but I call you just to hear a human voice before I go to sleep. I live by myself, and I'm lonely. Please forgive me."

We learn from the Torah that people are lonely not as a result of poverty but for precisely the opposite reason, and that the wealthy are more bored than the poor. Adam lived in the Garden of Eden. He lacked for nothing. The food he needed

grew on trees. He needed no clothing. So why was he so despondent? He was so depressed that G-d Himself felt sorry for him, seeing that "It is not good for man to be alone." Only after G-d gives him Eve as a life's companion, does he calm down.

Together with Eve, Adam lovingly accepted the punishment of being expelled from the Garden of Eden. He preferred to labor by the sweat of his brow in order to obtain his sustenance. Anything was better than being alone even in the Garden of Eden.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

When the Germans entered our city, Drohobycz, in Poland, our friends said that my Father, of blessed memory, had to hide. As the city's chief rabbi and a former Polish army officer, the Germans had him at the very top of the list of those to be promptly liquidated.

We kept moving Father from hiding place to hiding place. Every week or two, in the dark of night, we would transfer him from the home of one friend to that of another. He shaved off his beard and sidelocks, so that it was difficult to recognize him. This went on for a full year.

When the ghetto was erected, the Germans looked high and low for him. Whenever they took someone into custody they tried to get Father's whereabouts out of him. When we learned of this, we became very frightened. We decided to find him a place outside the ghetto, on the Aryan side, at any price.

After a long search, we found a hideaway just a few days before the Germans staged a big roundup in the ghetto. On Mickiewicz Street in a very posh neighborhood, there was a building known as "The Eagle," which had an auditorium and a number of sports rooms. It was a club house for the town's Polish aristocracy. In the fighting at the outbreak of the war, the building had been badly damaged. The Russians, who had occupied the town before the Germans, had ripped everything they could out of The Eagle. When the Germans took over, they

promptly set about restoring both the exterior and the interior of the building.

The workers were mostly Jews. A friend and I were among them, and we were assigned to work on the paintings and decorations. I had a key to the building, and one night I smuggled Father into the building and took him into an attic cubby hole that was no bigger than a dresser. It was possible to stand or sit in it, but there was no room to lie down. One got into it by climbing a narrow spiral ladder that led up into a kind of tower in the center of The Eagle's roof. It was five stories high and had round windows, like those in ships' cabins. There was enough light during the day, and at night Father would come down to get water and use the other facilities. I brought him food three times a week. This went on for nearly a month.

During one of my visits to father in his hideaway, I asked him: "Father, aren't you bored? Isn't it depressing for you to be all alone for such long periods of time?"

Smiling, he showed me the books he had taken along with him – a volume of Maimonides, Tractate Shabbat of the Talmud, and a few others. Then he said: "Don't be silly! How can one possibly be bored in the company of such spiritual giants as Maimonides, the Vilno Gaon, the Minchat Chinuch? If you want to know whether I'm afraid – yes, I confess that I am! I'm afraid for you in the ghetto, and I'm afraid for myself when there are people working down below. But I'm never bored."

He continued: "Our Patriarch Jacob was alone more than once. The Torah tells us that he was left alone at night in the wilderness with enemies and wild beasts all around. Then he was alone again just before his meeting with Esau. But the Torah never tells us that Jacob was lonely or bored. It may be assumed that he was truly afraid. In his heart, however, he knew and had faith that G-d was with him, and that the merit of his fathers would protect him against evil. That is exactly how I feel. Yes, I'm afraid, but by no means am I lonely, bored or depressed. Never! I study, I write, and my mind is constantly occupied."

Whenever I read about the illnesses of our modern generation and about the thousands of psychologists and doctors who are preoccupied with gloom and depression, I think about that conversation in the attic with my great Father, of blessed memory, and only then do I begin to understand those great scholars and righteous Jews of earlier times – in the Roman catacombs, in the dungeons of the Inquisition, and, in our own times, the new Marranos in Communist Russia – I understand how they survived their constant isolation. None of them resorted to liquor, and certainly not to suicide.

That, apparently, is how Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai hid from the Romans for 13 years and emerged from the dark cave with the bright "Zohar" (light). At that time, Father, of blessed memory, wrote an essay commenting on a discussion of the source and meaning of certain commandments in the "Michat Chinuch." Unfortunately, the manuscript was burned in the Plashow's camp, after 32 of us were taken there from a bunker in which we had hidden for three whole months. There, too, Father wrote articles and kept diaries, all of which were lost.

When I came to Mexico and saw Father sitting and writing night after night, I asked him once why he worked so hard, publishing a new book every year. His reply was that he was creating his own tombstone and epitaph. "Every person has the possibility of building his own tombstone in his lifetime. A person can be remembered and immortalized by his deeds far better than by the finest marble monument that his family might place on his tomb. By writing a book of Torah content, one creates a monument for oneself both in this world and in the world to come. If anyone learns anything from the book, the author has that to his credit in the world to come and he is certainly remembered as a teacher in this world. Furthermore, I have to build monuments to my lost books that didn't have the privilege of surviving the camps. That is why I must keep on writing so long as I am able."

My father never forgave himself for not having hidden his

writings in a place where they would not be burned. "A treasure of ideas," he would say. "And I can't recreate it. Not only are the manuscripts lost; I've simply forgotten everything. All I can do is build monuments to them."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Psychologists and scientists everywhere keep straining their ingenuity to come up with new antidotes to loneliness and boredom. They don't know that a true human being has inside his soul and mind an apothecary capable of producing the best tranquilizers. One only has to know how to use them.

THE TRICKS AND GIMMICKS IN THE GERMAN PLAN FOR THE TOTAL LIQUIDATION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE. THE NAIVETE AND THE DISBELIEF OF THE PEOPLE IN GHETTO. THE FIRST REPORTS ABOUT CREMATORIA AND BELZEC CONCENTRATION CAMP. HAMAN FORGED THE DECREE OF THE KING.

Hitler's Bluff
Following Haman's Footsteps

It was the period of Purim, 1943 in the Drohobycz ghetto. The only synagogue into which people could still sneak in unnoticed for a prayer service, was the "Yishray Lev" Synagogue (built by the well-known scholar and philanthropist, Zelig Lauterbach). From the outside there was no telling that this was a Beit Midrash, as the building was tucked away in a forsaken side street and the entrance to the synagogue was through a courtyard.

Our family of 12 lived in the women's gallery after the Germans had confiscated our apartment in Sobieska Street. We slept on the hard synagogue benches, and despite all the discomforts we were quite satisfied. As soon as we moved into the synagogue we started making a bunker. Through a concealed hole in the wall we were able to place a ladder which we used to go down into a deep cellar and from there, through a second opening, crawl through the town's sewage canal and get out into the street. My Father, may he rest in peace, hid in this bunker.

As the official town rabbi and a major in the Polish Army,

Father was Number 1 on the SS liquidation list. As soon as we learned about this we decided that Father had to disappear from public view. He cut off his majestic beard and sidecurls and went down to the cellar, emerging from there only just before the liquidation of the ghetto. Down in his hideaway he had books and continued to study and write. As is usual in a cellar, it was damp down there, but it was also warm. For illumination Father had a kerosene lamp.

Only a few intimate friends knew that the Rabbi was in town and how he could be reached. The Jews were in a deep depression at that time over the May "action" in which the Germans took 4,000 people away in freight trucks, loaded them into railway cattle cars and sent them off to an unknown destination.

The Germans said that they were taking people to work at the front. The Jews believed this, because it never occurred to anyone that right in the middle of a war, with nearly the whole world, the Germans would take a train with dozens of cars to transport thousands of people to some remote place in order to kill them.

Many people were so naive that they voluntarily reported to the assembly points and even followed the Germans' instructions to take along as much baggage as they could carry. Some went to say goodbye to near and dear ones who were hiding. People talked themselves into saying that if one had to go to work, then "We'll go to work. It's no picnic in the ghetto."

After that black day of the "action" we waited on tenterhooks for some news about the deported people, but the entire transport had vanished like a stone dropped in the middle of a lake. Weeks passed without a word. Some Gentiles told the Jews, with whom they worked outside the ghetto, horror stories to the effect that all the Jews had been murdered.

But nobody took these stories seriously. "It's impossible to mass-murder thousands of people. If they *did* want to massacre

them, why should they send them far away? Why wouldn't the Germans kill them off outside the city, the way they handled smaller groups in previous "actions"? These stories are concoctions of the Goyim, anti-Semitic provocations that Goyim cook "up to torment the Jews."

That night a Jewish young man, Mundek Badian, came stealthily into the "Yishray Lev" synagogue. He was a tall, broad-shouldered fellow who very early had gone to work for the SS. Coming from a family of horse dealers, he became the supplier for the stables of the riding school the Germans had set up for their sports activities and for military purposes.

Because of his contacts, Badian had permission to travel through the countryside among the Gentiles for the purpose of supplying the Germans' needs. Badian dressed elegantly, wearing tall, polished boots such as other ghetto Jews did not possess, or at least certainly did not wear. He rarely came into the ghetto and when the terrible "actions" took place he was on the Aryan side, under the protection of the SS, where he supervised the breeding and grooming of horses and bulls in German stables and barns.

Badian asked me to step aside with him and he told me the horrible news that the Germans had taken the entire transport of Drohobycz Jews, together with other Jews from the surrounding towns, to Belzec, where they had been gassed to death. He had overheard two SS officers talking about it, laughing uproariously as they did so, in his presence. Belzec was not a labor camp, but a death camp. "Mundek," I asked him, shocked, "Belz, the famous city of the Belzer Rebbe, has become a camp with gas chambers!?" "No," he replied, "Not Belz, but Belzeç. That's another place. The Germans built a big camp there with crematoria to burn thousands of people down to ashes. There is no chance that any of them are still alive. Tell your father and let him do what he thinks necessary."

My grandmother, the Terever Rebbetzin, may G-d avenge her blood, my Father's mother, had been on that train. The Germans had grabbed her on the street, the way dog catchers

nab roaming dogs, and we didn't find out about it until a few days later.

"How can I tell my Father such news Badian?" I asked. "Come down to the bunker with me and tell him personally everything you told me." Badian did me a favor and repeated to my Father what he had reported to me.

My Father was all incongruous. He said: "Is it possible that the Germans burned thousands of people to ashes? But the Germans said they were sending those unfortunate people to work at the front! In other words, they told a cock-and-bull story in order to lull everybody and avoid resistance. The whole ghetto must be told about Badian's report and everybody must try to save themselves – run away and find a hideaway somewhere. All of us must do everything possible to stay alive. The greatest Kiddush Hashem, the greatest act of glorification of G-d's Name, will be outliving Hitler."

The news spread quickly, and a pall of gloom settled on the ghetto; the Jews of Drohobycz were frantic.

About two weeks later, at Purim time, when I came back from work, I saw that my Father looked encouraged, practically cheerful. "What's happening?" I asked. "Is there some good news?" "No, but I've found it," my Father exclaimed with great satisfaction.

"What is this great thing you've found?" I asked.

"You should know," my Father replied, "that the Germans are doing exactly what Haman planned a long time ago. I never understood that passage in the Scroll of Esther about how Haman bought the Jews from Achasuerus for 10,000 pieces of silver. Persia was a democracy then. The constitution guaranteed civil liberties and permitted the different nationalities to speak their respective languages. Suddenly that same king promulgated a law permitting the slaughter of an entire nation. True, Achasuerus was a fool, but it is incomprehensible how such a turnabout could occur in such a short time. And

how could this same king, after Esther exposed Haman's nefarious scheme, play dumb and ask, 'Who is the man who planned this murderous plot?' In other words, Achasuerus supposedly remembered nothing, knew nothing!"

"It is even more difficult," Father continued excitedly, "to understand Esther's statement, 'If we had been sold for slaves and maidservants, I would have remained silent.' Does that mean that Esther would not have minded if Jews had been incarcerated in labor camps? She would have accepted that?! That is unbelievable!"

"It must be that Haman had devised a scheme for bluffing King Achasuerus into getting his agreement to annihilate the Jews. In the contract he wrote 'le-'ovdan,' with an 'ayin,' meaning 'to enslave them.' After the king signed the agreement, Haman changed the 'ayin' to an 'alef,' so that 'to enslave them' became 'to annihilate them.' The decree was quickly published throughout the land without anyone's noticing the forgery.

"Once Mordechai caught onto Haman's swindle he informed Esther. That is why Esther tearfully pleaded with Achasuerus saying that she would have remained silent if only enslavement had been involved. When Achasuerus realized that an illegally altered document was involved here, he furiously shouted, 'Who is the man who dared to do such a thing behind my back?' The rest of the story is well known."

"It seems," my Father continued, "that Hitler's SS men are using Haman's method. They say 'work' while they mean 'slaughter,' in order to deceive their victims and all the rest of the world."

Hitler succeeded where Haman did not. Nearly all the 50,000 Jews of our town and region perished: the area today is Jewless. The lands of Drohobycz, which were bought by Don Isaac Abarbanel for settling the Jews expelled from Spain, are today inhabited by Ukrainian peasants. The town that was the residence of Reb Itzikel of Drohobycz, where the holy Baal

Shem Tov visited him, the chair in which he sat and the mikva in which he did his ritual immersions – all this has been eradicated. Gone is the famous Jewish cemetery to which hundreds of "Stolin" Chassidim used to come every year on a pilgrimage to the grave of Rabbi Chaim of Karlin, of blessed memory, or that of Rabbi Eleazar Nissan Teitelbaum. Gone are the dozens of shtieblech, synagogues, study houses, the rabbis, rabbinical judges, and Torah students and maskillim. The institutions are all gone today, erased from the map of Poland of yesteryear, as though they never existed. May G-d avenge the spilled blood of His servants and judge the nations that caused it to be spilled!

FATHER SURVIVED WHILE MOTHER PERISHED. I HEARD THE SHOOTING AND THE CRIES FROM THE EXECUTION PLACE AT A SHORT DISTANCE FROM US AND I ESCAPED. MY SILENCE AND DISABILITY TO WRITE ANYTHING ABOUT MY MOTHER, WHILE ALL MY THOUGHTS CONTINUED TO REVOLVE ONLY ON MY FATHER'S PERSONALITY, MAY BE SUBJECT TO THE SUBCONSCIENCE PAIN IN THE RECOLLECTIONS OF THE HORRIBLE FINAL HOURS BEFORE HER DEATH IN THE BRONICA FOREST ON JUNE 10, 1943.



Mother Rechel Braindel Avigdor
הו"ד ות. נ. צ. ב. ה.

Mother, Please Forgive Me

My wife would often reprimand me: "Are you made out of stone?" – "Didn't you have a mother?" – "For years, you continue to write about your father, of blessed memory, his greatness, his influence upon you, his ethical attributes, his brilliance of both general and theological scholarship. All this may be true, but how does one forget everything about a mother?" – "Don't you have anything to relate about her?"

I must admit that I have sinned, and perhaps, according to Jewish Law, I must ask forgiveness for keeping silent for 35 long years.

Why did I act so instinctively in such a manner? This ques-

tion has been plaguing me for a long time. I searched the depths of my soul for the cause of my psychological conflict that resulted in the ignoring of the memories of my sacred mother, may she rest in peace.

The answer I found is also the secret, hidden reason as to why so many of the survivors from the "Sheerit Hapleta", even those who possessed the literary talent to write, have kept silent about the Holocaust and their experiences of it.

Yes, there is a rich literature about the "Shoah", the Holocaust, but primarily it was created by professional writers who interviewed and listened to the stories of the handful of remaining individuals, lucky to outlive the Hitler Hell. But personal biographies written by those who were there are indeed rare, and very few are available. Responsible for this odd behavior is the tormented mental condition of all of us who survived.

Why have I not written about my mother?

Not because I did not have, nor could remember anything about her to write, but because the memories were so bitter, and so deeply engraved within my heart that it has been practically impossible until now for me to do so.

My Father, Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor, may his memory be for a blessing, experienced horrible years in bunkers, concentration camps, ghettos, but he *survived.* Not only was he resurrected from a physical and mental state of death, but later after his liberation, he had his most productive 20 years of creativity with recognition, prestige and full honors.

He became the Chief Rabbi of Mexico where they appreciated him as a giant of his generation, both in Torah and in wisdom. With thirst, hundreds of people literally swallowed his words whenever he preached, lectured and expounded on secular and rabbinic themes. There he published an impressive number of books and left manuscripts enough to furnish an entire library with his works and inexhaustible thoughts. For me,

his son, as well as "Klal Yisrael", the Jewish people at large, he was a symbol of victory in defiance of Hitler. He represented the unchallenged proof that Judaism cannot perish. Secular and religious books could have been burned, but no one has ever been able to destroy our spiritual treasures.

Finally, the much anticipated and longed-for Hitler's defeat came and we the individual survivors started to reconstruct what the enemy had destroyed. We built again in Israel and in Diaspora, new spiritual centers, even bigger and infinitely more beautiful than those of the past, which were turned into rubble and ashes. We published new secular and religious books, scholastic and literary. We constructed new Synagogues with hundreds of Yeshivot, academies of learning.

When I used to write about my Father, of blessed memory, even after his death, it was with a feeling of revenge over our enemies, with pride about the eternity of the Jewish people, that can rise phoenix-like from the ashes.

No other people was able to do this in the history of mankind. In my heart, I sang "Am Yisrael Chai" – The Jewish People is alive – "Od Avinu Chai" Our Father is still alive. That's how I wrote even after his natural death.

Totally different are the memories concerning my sacred mother.

Every thought about her pains me, every recollection of her rips off the scab of a wound that has never fully healed. She was torn away from us on a Monday, the fourth day of Sivan, 5703. Two days before Shevuot, early in the morning, at dawn, a German truck with Ukrainian soldiers pulled out, from the concentration camp barracks on Zupna Street, over a hundred men and women, amongst which were my mother and I. They took us to Bronica, a village a few miles outside of the city of Drohobycz.

The truck stopped near a wooded area of the forest, where we had already found a few hundred Jews taken from other

concentration camps and from uncovered bunkers. Here we were all gathered in this open place, fenced around with barbed wire. Soon, the SS came and started to separate the men from the women, after which a group of the women, including my mother, were led away closer into the woods.

In the tumult of the shouting and the confusion, I decided to escape as soon as possible. Some did it sooner, while the Ukrainian militia was shooting after them. My instinct of self-preservation warned me that it was "not good," that our fate was sealed and that I had nothing to lose.

While sitting near the barbed fence, with my hands behind my back, I secretly kept digging a cavity with my bare hands under the wires, making a hole big enough for a body to squirm through. When the guard turned aside, I, later followed by another young lad, crawled on all fours, on our bellies through the hole. With the last strength we possessed, we ran toward the nearby forest. It was only a few hundred meters away from the gathering place. We heard the militia shooting after us, but their bullets missed. All I felt was the burning of the broken skin on my hands, feet and shoulders, which had been lacerated by the sharp edges of the barbed wire. We reached the forest and hid ourselves in the spring season's high-blossoming brush.

We waited until night, so that under the cover of darkness, we could go deeper into the woods. Towards dawn, we heard shooting and the cries of the women from the other edge of the forest. My companion and I climbed to the top of a tall tree and we were able to see the smoke from the machine guns.

Amongst the victims was my mother, may G-d revenge her blood. It was on the second day of Shavuot, Thursday, the seventh of Sivan 5703 (1942). After a week of wandering around and subsisting on grass and beets, I decided to return to the camp where my father, two sisters, and a younger brother still remained.

Returning to the camp, approximately ten days later, a Jew, who had worked in the storehouse of the "clothing magazine", showed me my mother's dress. He recognized it, because who in our town did not know Rebbetzin Avigdor?

I never related this Bronica experience to my Father, nor did I tell him anything about seeing my mother's dress. We didn't talk about it, even after the liberation. I kept the secret locked in my heart for 35 years, but whenever I recollected the memories of that early morning in the forest, I felt sure that I had definitely heard and recognized, from amongst the yammering and lamentations, my mother's voice exclaiming the words of "Shma Yisrael."

Now do you understand, my dear wife, why I have not written anything in memory of my dear mother? Because, even today, so many years later, as I am writing these lines, my body is covered with perspiration from head to toe, due to the anxiety of relating this story.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Every mother is a righteous woman in the eyes of her children. But my mother who was destroyed "Al Kidush Hashem", by the German beasts, lived her entire life as a saintly person, few equal to her.

Her nature was rather quiet, soft-spoken. She used to conceal her emotions and feelings, but she was the true heroine of my father's entire career.

Right from the very beginning, before they were married, they had reached an agreement. Mother made it a pre-nuptial condition that Father must devote himself to secular studies. He was only 22 years old, a Chassidic young Rabbi, truly brilliant in Talmud and Halachic codes, ordained by the greatest scholars of those days, but secular knowledge, he did not possess at all. He never attended public school, was barely able to write an address in Polish, and was otherwise totally illiterate. My mother, on the other hand, had attended gymnasium (high

school), spoke an excellent Polish, and besides being unusually beautiful, was very educated and well-read. She wanted a man who should not only be a scholar in Judaism, but should also be acquainted with secular and general culture.

Apparently, my father must have agreed to such an arrangement, and immediately after the wedding, began to prepare himself to enter as an externist (self-taught, subject to tests) in the gymnasium of the famous city of Sanz.

It didn't take long, a bit more than a year, and he qualified for "matura", matriculation, with excellent grades. He exhibited a tremendous expertise for languages, such as Greek, Latin, German, and Russian, to the amazement of all professors.

While Father studied day and night, my mother opened a store for ladies' hats, which she used to make herself. She took the yoke of earning a livelihood on her shoulders, and throughout the years my parents became as compatible a pair as one could ever hope to find.

Meanwhile, a law was passed by the Polish Government that a recognized Jewish community cannot engage a Rabbi who did not possess a gymnasium graduation. Jews regarded that as an "evil decree" of apostacy. Conferences of Rabbis and lay leaders were held all over Poland to see how to repeal this law.

In 1921, the community, known as "Kehila", of Drohobycz, announced in the Jewish press the search for a Rabbi who should be a scholar in the Jewish law and in secular culture, and who should have a perfect command of the Yiddish language. Upon application, my father's candidacy was immediately accepted.

The installation was regal, with a great parade because Drohobycz was already famous for its unique natural resources of oil, sulphur, salt and wax mines. Jews did good business there, and the Kehila was one of the richest in the land. The

years of my father's reign as Chief Rabbi of the twin towns of Drohobycz and Borislaw are known and I have written about them on many occasions.

What people don't know is the role my mother played behind the curtain. She never gave up her battle for her husband's continued studies. Father's schedule was busy with all kinds of communal affairs. Besides his day-to-day duties of lectures and sermons, he served also as the Chaplain of the Polish Army in the rank of Major, and Rabbi of the largest jail in Poland, known as the "Brigittkis", located on top of a hill overlooking the city. Despite all these time-consuming duties, after 13 years, fathering four children, having published 3 books of Talmudic responsa, and homiletics, he continued diligently with his studies, and in 1933, he received his doctorate from the University of Lvov, in Philosophy and Philology.

All the newspapers of that day were full with the sensational story of a Rabbi in a "spodik" (fur hat) who received his doctorate from a government university.

At the festive graduation exercises in Lvov (Lemberg), I sat together with my mother and the most prominent members of the Kehila in the large auditorium of the University. I will never forget how her face shone with pride, joy, and a sense of victory. It was her achievement and fulfillment of a lifetime dream.

When they called out my father's name to receive the diploma, he turned backward throwing a radiant glance to her as if he were silently saying the words of Rabbi Akiva: "Sheli vishalchem shelo he," the entire credit, mine and yours, belongs to her, thanks to her, all that came to reality.

I was then a Bar Mitzvah boy, and I could understand quite clearly the exchange of those glances between the two of them. So many years have passed and this picture stands before my eyes as if it occurred only yesterday.

Until now, I described just a small part of the greatness

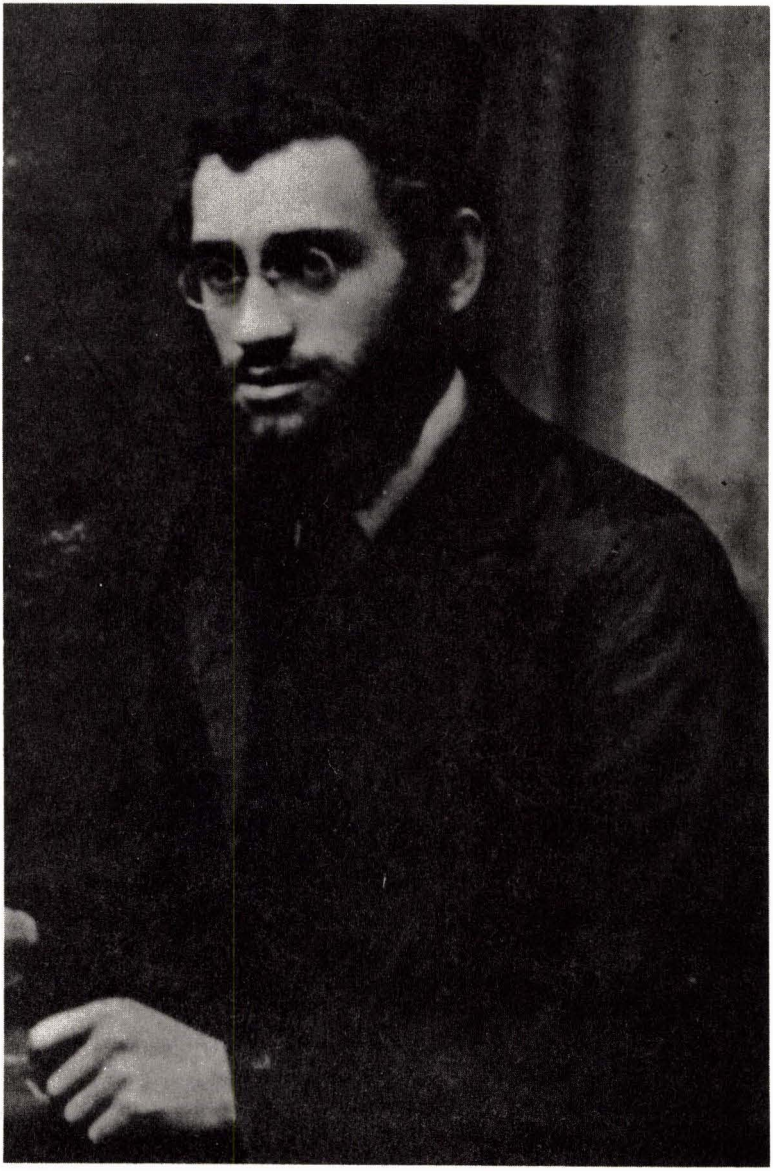
and the influence of my sacred mother, but now something briefly about her unusual kindness and charity.

My father, of blessed memory, with all his unusual characteristic traits, was also unique in the fact that he was a "Ben Zekunim", a child born to my aged grandfather of 70 years, Rabbi Abraham Avigdor of Tereva (a small village on the San River). It was his second marriage to the Krivcher Rabbi's daughter, a young, childless widow. Besides my father, they had two other children, an older daughter, and a younger son.

Two years after my father's wedding, my grandfather passed away. He was then deep in the 90's, leaving my grandmother widowed for the second time with nowhere to go. At precisely that moment, my mother invited grandmother and Uncle David, then still unmarried, to come to us and live with us. Accepting the offer, she could not afford to refuse, most thankfully, grandmother and Uncle David came to Drohobycz and established residence with us. Soon the Uncle got married to a young lady from Sonik, and a few years later, became the Rabbi of Andrichov, a city situated near the German border.

My grandmother remained with us over 20 years, until the Germans took her away in one of the first actions in Poland in 1942. I loved my "Terever Bubby" very much, she practically raised me. She possessed a treasure-house of stories, and no one could tell a joke as well as she did. She was famous in the entire city as the "woman of wisdom".

Recalling today various episodes concerning my mother, of blessed memory, I now know how great her piety was, as she shared the house with a mother-in-law throughout her entire married life. How great was her understanding to cope with the situation and more than once I noticed her shedding tears in hiding. Never, though, had anyone heard a word of complaint from her concerning my grandmother. It wasn't easy for her to run a communal kitchen. There was the eternal competition between the "old and the young Rebbetzins" in cooking and in baking. She never had a private corner of her own, despite the



Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor, Father OB"M, on his wedding day in 1918.





Paternal Grandparents
Rabbi Abraham Issachar Ber and Rachel Avigdor





Maternal Grandparents
Rabbi Naftali Zvi and Hena Horowitz

fact that the house was quite large.

Grandmother would, once a year, travel to visit her daughter or Uncle David's family, but never for more than a week or two. She would always come back to us, to my mother's house, where she was at home.

Now I appreciate my mother, how good she was, how tolerant and clever, how patient with all of us. She was as a flowering tree in bloom until the last day, when the brutal German forces tore her away from our midst.

There is no grave, no monument. I wouldn't even know where to look for her remains, in the mass graves of Bronica – everything has been plowed away and sown into farmlands – all signs and traces of the massacre totally erased.

"Hey Yood Dalet", Hashem Yinkom Domo!"

BIRTHDAYS IN JEWISH TRADITION. BIRTH AND DEATH ARE TWO INVOLUNTARY EVENTS IN OUR LIFE. NO ONE ASKS OUR CONSENT. THOSE THAT WANT TO LIVE, DIE AND THOSE WHO WISH UPON THEMSELVES DEATH, LIVE AND SUFFER. THE DAY OF A SURVIVOR'S LIBERATION "YOM HAGEULA" SHOULD BE CELEBRATED AS OUR REAL BIRTHDAY, AS SOMETHING WE HAD A GREAT DEAL TO DO WITH.

May 5th, 1945, the Day I Was Born Again

We Jews don't make a fuss over birthdays. What is so great about being born? In the discussion between the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel about whether it is worthwhile being born, the two sides agreed after 2½ years of debate that "It is better not to be born than to be born" (Eruvin 63b).

Life is a risky matter. It is not worthwhile. There is no profit in it; in fact, it usually ends in bankruptcy. The bundle of good acts one has performed in one's lifetime is almost invariably smaller and lighter than the pack full of sins that one carries into the next world. Instead of arriving there proudly and dignifiedly, we come shamefaced. Only with Torah and good deeds can one pass through this world safely and sometimes even make a little profit.

Judaism traditionally observes the anniversary of a person's death rather than the birthday for when a baby is born, one has no idea what kind of adult it will grow up to be.

A man can be wicked all his life and repent at the very end,

thereby becoming a righteous Tzaddik as far as the Heavenly Court is concerned. "One can acquire one's place in the World-to-Come in an hour," the Talmud tells us (Avoda Zara 10b). The opposite is also true: A Tzaddick can lose his place in the World-to-Come because of one ugly transgression, despite the fact that all his life he was a perfectly righteous person.

That is why King Solomon, the wisest of all people said: "The day of death is better than the day of birth." There is nothing great about being born, nothing to boast about. But the day of death ought to be celebrated, because by then one knows what kind of life the person lived.

The Gentiles may celebrate birthdays, but we Jews don't. For the Gentiles, the anniversary of a person's death is a day of mourning, of misfortune, an experience to be forgotten. Not so with the Jews.

There is only one birthday that we Jews celebrate, and very reverently so, through our laws and customs. That day is Rosh Hashanah. In the Rosh Hashanah prayer service we read in the piyut *Upad me'az:* "This is the day You began Your works, the day on which the first man was created." On that day, the sixth day of Creation, the first day of the month of Tishri, Adam, the first man, came into the world. So Rosh Hashanah is Adam's birthday. Human history and the Jewish calendar began on that Friday.

Among the Gentiles, New Year's Day is an occasion for drunkenness and revelry. For us Jews, Rosh Hashana is a serious moment, a Day of Judgment. It is not a day of forgetting oneself, but a day of earnestness and remembrance. We spend Rosh Hashanah in the synagogue, reciting such heartrending prayers as: "Man stems from the dust and ends up in the dust" – birth and death are no more than dust and earth, food for the worms.

Even those Jews who do not come near a synagogue all year – at Rosh Hashanah time they begin to worry and they

come to pray. They want to ask G-d for a good year, together with all the rest of the Jews.

Now, besides the historical significance of Rosh Hashanah as Adam's birthday, Rosh Hashanah has a twofold theological significance. We end the old year and begin the new one; we say goodbye to last year's troubles and curses and hope for a new year full of blessings. Thus Rosh Hashanah is both a birthday and a death anniversary. The old year dies and the new one is born. Rosh Hashanah is a day of judgment regarding the year ahead and a memorial day for the year just departed.

That is the difference between our Rosh Hashanah and the Gentile "New Year's Day." For them the main thing is the birthday, and for us the main thing is the spiritual stocktaking and penitence for the sins of the outgoing year. The awareness of Adam's birthday has been almost totally ignored, and few people are aware that also the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah were all born on Rosh Hashanah. The latter fact is not mentioned in the Rosh Hashanah Mahzor (prayerbook); it is only hinted at in the above-mentioned piyut, in the words: "Yaldu bo merosh tzurim."

The Talmudic Sages tell us (Rosh Hashanah 11a): "The Blessed Holy One fills the years of the righteous to the day" – that is, He arranges it so that they die on their birthday. Thus Rosh Hashanah is both Adam's birthday and the anniversary of his death (for he repented). The same is true of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs: they died on their birthdays. It is no wonder, then, that on Rosh Hashanah Jews are as earnest as on the day they are observing the yahrzeit (death anniversary) of a near one.

There is another birthday that is of little significance except for the fact that it is also a Yahrzeit. The Jews observe the anniversary of Moses' death on the 7th day of the month of Adar, but that is also his birth date. Foolish Haman sought, what he thought would be, a lucky day for carrying out his fien-

dish plan against the Jews. When the lot fell on Adar 7, he was delighted, knowing it was Moses' yahrzeit.

The Talmud mocks him, however (Megilla 13), for being an ignoramus and not knowing it was also Moses' birthday just as he had learned that it was his yahrzeit.

The Talmudic Sages emphasized the yahrzeit, not the birthday. Nevertheless, once in a lifetime Jewish custom does call for a gala, ceremonious birthday celebration. When a boy turns 13, he becomes a Bar Mitzvah, and it is the happiest day of his life. On that day a Jewish boy becomes a fully fledged member of the Jewish people, assuming responsibility for fulfilling all the precepts of our Torah. A Jewish child's physical birthday is the day he was born, but he is born spiritually, as a Jew, 13 years later, and that day is regarded as a Rosh Hashanah, a new beginning for him as a "son of mitzvot," as one responsible for the precepts. That is the only birthday the Jews celebrate.

If we Jews do not go in much for celebrating our natural, biological births, we have another kind of personal holiday. This is called "Day of Deliverance – Chag Hageula" and marks an occasion when a miracle came to pass for an individual, such as the day on which he was released from captivity or delivered from some serious trouble or suffering. Each individual is obligated to celebrate such a day. On such a day we make a thanksgiving meal at which we give thanks to the Master-of-the-Universe for His loving kindness and mercy. That is what happened with Chanukah: to commemorate the miracles, they decided in later years to declare an annual holiday of thanksgiving and praise.

Pesach is based entirely on our ancestors' deliverance from slavery and the Exodus from Egypt, and the miracles that G-d wrought for our forefathers at that time in redeeming them from exile and leading them from bondage to freedom. Nissan, the month of Pesach, is the first month, the Jewish people's new year, the birthday of the People Israel.

No other generation has seen as many miracles of redemption as we, the Holocaust survivors who experienced the Nazi years. Without miracles we could not have survived the ghetto and concentration camp years. If Jews are supposed to remember and celebrate as "Days of Deliverance", days on which some miracle came to pass for them, then it seems to me that we survivors ought to celebrate every day of the year. In the six Holocaust years, every day was a day of miracles for Jews. Every day was a birthday for us. The threat of death hovered over us constantly. Every moment was fraught with peril. Every day that passed on which one was still alive was a day of rescue, a day of rebirth.

Of the hundreds of miracles by which Providence rescued me, two special moments will always remain in my memory. These are two days that were Days of Deliverance for me, and as long as I live I shall remember them and celebrate them as holidays – celebrate them with great joy and full of thanks to the Master-of-the-Universe.

The first was in 1943, when in the ghetto of my home town, Drohobycz, Poland, the Jews expected a German liquidation operation. Everyone made whatever arrangements he could to conceal himself or flee from the ghetto.

Fortunately, I was able to buy from a Polish soldier a military identity card, which was a document with a photograph, like a passport. The document was an original, authentic one, not a forged one such as many others had. I even resembled the man in the photograph. I memorized all the information, so that when called upon to do so, I would be able to identify myself without hesitation. Besides a new name, the document also gave me a new birthday, December 2, 1920.

Having the document gave me courage to leave the ghetto and go over to the "Aryan side." I wandered among the fields, woods and villages among the Gentiles. I spoke Polish fluently and I was not recognizable, because I had shaved the beard and sidecurls I had had before the war.

I suffered a great deal in the rainy and cold weather. But it was worthwhile, because I could move around freely and I was able to remain in touch with my family in a hideaway in the ghetto. Nevertheless, I could not accept the fact that I might be saving only myself so I started digging a bunker outside the ghetto. It took me seven months to complete. When it was done, I longed to be with Jews again, especially with my Father, of blessed memory, and I went back into the sealed ghetto in order to wait for the opportunity to take my entire family out of the ghetto to the bunker.

On going back to the ghetto I gave my right name. But when I was asked my birth date I automatically gave the one I had memorized from my false identification paper, December 2, instead of the correct date. And so it has remained to this day. Thanks to the miracle of that false document I was able to save 32 people in the bunker later. We escaped the main liquidation action in the newly established camp in which nearly all the older people perished. Because of that piece of paper, which for at least a little while freed me from the ghetto and the camp and made it possible for me to build the bunker, December 2 became my birthday and a personal Day of Deliverance that I have celebrated every year since my liberation.

Two years later, on May 5, 1945, I was liberated at the Mauthausen camp by the U.S. Army. Barely alive, weighing no more than 78 pounds, I came back to life from the dead. Is that not a miraculous rebirth? It was a veritable resurrection. May 5th, therefore, became my second miraculous birthday, a Liberation Day that I celebrate every year.

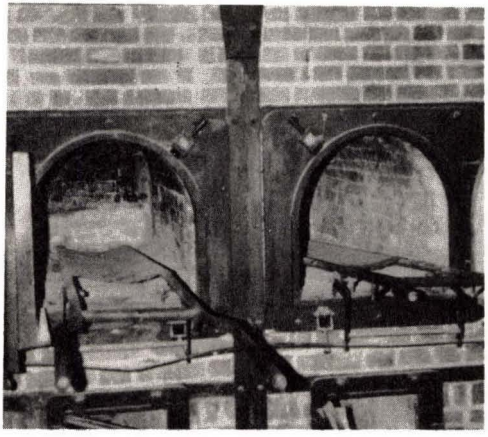
What happened with my real birthday, the day on which I was really born, became a Bar Mitzvah, and even published a sermon?

Av 18 is missing from my book. I completely ignore it. What is so special about having been born in such a time of Jewish suffering and tribulation? Perhaps the School of Shammai was right about it being better not to be born than to see

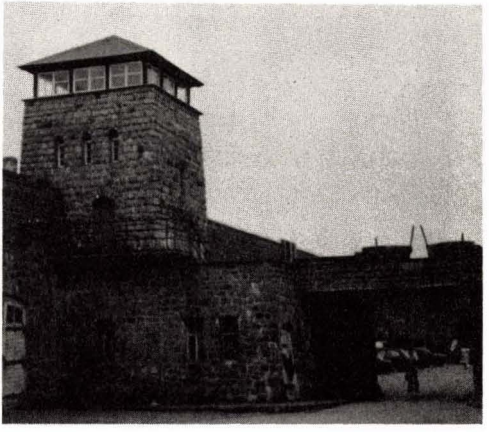
the historic catastrophe and the miracles that our eyes beheld. Unfortunately, I was not asked. As our Sages put it, "You are born whether you like it or not."



Reprint from a newspaper in Poland showing a picture of children in Aushwitz, in which I recognized my younger sister (Lila) Chana Gitel *(second from right to left in lower line)*



The Ovens



Watchtower and Gate to the Appelplatz

Mauthausen Today



Plaque honoring the American Army for liberation on May 5, 1945.

Mauthausen Today

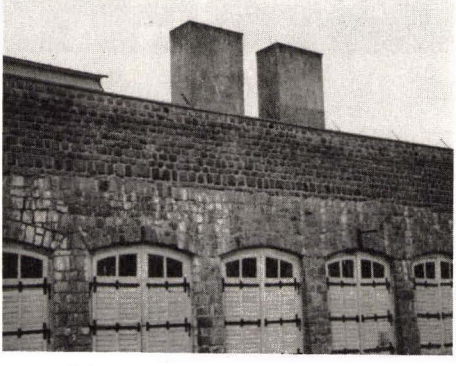




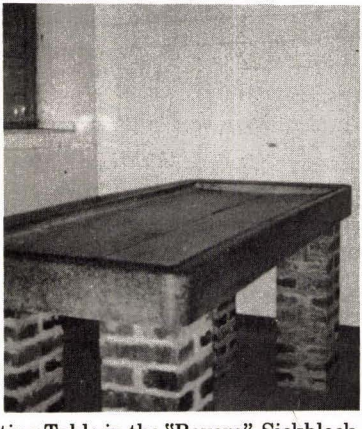
Rows of Barracks (Blocks)



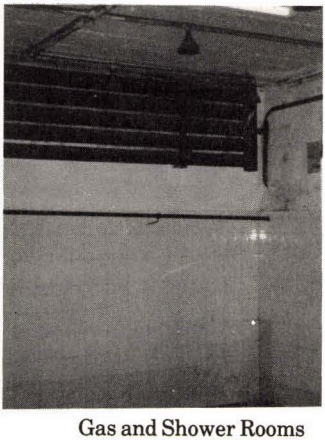
Road to Gas Chambers and Crematoria



The Crematoria Chimneys



Operating Table in the "Revere" Sickblock



Gas and Shower Rooms

THE EXODUS OF 3,000 YEARS AGO IS REMEMBERED ALL YEAR AROUND BUT ESPECIALLY ON PASSOVER. EACH ONE MUST CONSIDER HIMSELF AS HAVING BEEN THERE IN THE EGYPTIAN BONDAGE AND LIBERATED BY MOSES. WILL THE HOLOCAUST BE FORGOTTEN OR SHALL IT REMAIN WITHIN THE HEARTS OF FUTURE GENERATIONS FOREVER?

Can the Holocaust Be Remembered Like the Exodus?

Pesach is different from all the other Jewish holidays. The other holidays also have their laws and customs, their ceremonies, and references to the events they commemorate. But they do not require such detailed recounting of the history of the holiday as we do at the Passover Seder. And we are encouraged to devote ever more time to recounting the story of our liberation from Egyptian bondage: "the more time we spend doing this, the more credit we get for the mitzvah."

It is no wonder, then, that children ask, "Ma Nishtana – Why is this night different from all other nights?" and fathers struggle to answer the questions on something that happened nearly 3,500 years ago.

On top of it all, along comes Rabbi Gamliel and cautions us that preparing and even eating the Paschal offering, the matzo and the bitterherb at the Seder are still not enough. We must utter with our mouth the three words, "Pesach (Paschal offering), Matzo, Maror (bitterherb)," or we have not properly observed Passover. According to Rabbi Gamliel, the command-

ment to remember can be properly observed only by speech. We are commanded to remember our departure from Egypt all our lives, and we can properly fulfill this command only by explaining the different symbols separately in the manner detailed by Rabbi Gamliel, unlike the other commandments, which do not require this kind of verbalization.

There is yet another feature of the Pesach celebration that we do not find in any other holiday. The editor of the Haggada tells us that "every person must consider himself as if he personally had come out of Egypt." Each of us must cause himself to feel as if he were personally, physically in Egypt, counting and placing the bricks, and then personally and physically delivered by G-d from Pharaoh's enslavement.

It is not enough to remove all the chametz-leavening from the house, to bake the matzo, drink the four cups of wine, eat the bitterherb, conduct a Seder, speak the words "Pesach, Matzo, Maror" and explain their significance according to Rabbi Gamliel. All this does not suffice. We must also imagine that we were personally present there in Egypt. With our imagination we must leap across a span of thousands of years into the past and feel the yoke of the fetters of Exile, the blows of the Egyptian truncheons on our backs, the sweet savor of liberation. The Passover Seder must be more than a symbolic abstraction; we must consider it a living experience.

The editor of the Haggada knew that forgetfulness is a natural phenomenon, without which life is unliveable. It is in the nature of human existence that a good day makes it possible to forget a bad day, that a bad day causes a good day to be forgotten: today blots out yesterday.

According to the editor of the Haggada, it is not enough to remember our Exodus from Egypt only by observing the Sabbath, putting on Tefillin, kissing the Tzitzit and Mezuzot, and reciting the Kiddush throughout the year – all in remembrance of the Exodus. Even the fact that G-d Himself, in the First Commandment, presents Himself as "I am the Lord your

G-d Who took you out of Egypt" rather than as "Creator and Master of the Universe" – even this does not suffice to impress upon us Jews not to forget the historic moment when we were freed from slavery.

In order to attain a hypnotic illusion of this sort, the Haggada created the Seder program, which is a kind of script for the fantasy to be enacted before our eyes. The Seder is the "Passover play" of the great drama of the Exodus from Egypt.

We have various symbols to help us create the scenario that will enable us to recreate the events of antiquity. We are supposed to make the past into a living present, turn "once upon a time" into "today." We become the actors playing the role of the liberated slaves three thousand years ago on the stage of world history. With the exodus from Egypt, liberty was born. Passover is the birthday not only of the Jewish people, but of all human equality and democracy.

According to the law, it is not enough merely to swallow the bitterherb. You are supposed to chew it well, and then cough and sneeze, because of the strength of the horseradish. We must eat the matzo no matter how hard it is and no matter how weak our teeth are; we may not even crumble the matzo into small pieces. The author of the Haggada wants us to feel with all our senses the taste of the sorrow and the joy, just as those who were there felt it. The command to consider ourselves as if we had personally been there and to feel what our ancestors felt is valid for all time, and every generation must experience it physically and spiritually.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

If the exodus from Egypt and those 600,000 liberated Jewish slaves are so important, how much more important must it be not to forget the Six Million martyrs of our generation! If it is an eternal mitzva to remember Amalek and Haman, how much greater must be the mitzva to remember

what Hitler, blasted be his name and fame, did to us! What must we do in order not to forget Germany and its Nazis and what they did to us? What can be done so that the remembrance shall endure forever?

Right after the war, the world did not know, or did not wish to know, about the destruction of European Jewry. Today everybody knows. Thousands of books have been published, exhibitions have been held, monuments have been erected and memorials established in Israel and all over the world. The question, however, is whether such symbols can commemorate the Sanctification of G-d's Name, the struggle and the heroism of the Jews in the Holocaust.

The great Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz expressed it beautifully in his work *Pan Tadeusz;* "My fatherland, you are like health; only those who have lost you can appreciate you." People appreciate good health only when they become sick. The happiest person is one who has found something he lost.

Our young generation, born free and never having suffered slavery, bestial torment and the cruel pangs of starvation, who don't even know the expression "Musulman" (a half-dead person waiting to be taken to the gas chamber), will never understand what it was like to be there, and will certainly never be able to feel as though they had personally, physically been there in Auschwitz, Mauthausen or any of the other camps. There isn't even a language for informing oneself about and scientifically investigating what the Holocaust actually meant, and what we survivors felt in that inferno. One who was not there cannot possibly imagine what it was like, not even in his most savage nightmarish dreams.

We, the surviving remnant, have to admit that there are times when we no longer believe ourselves that all that actually happened to us. More than once I have asked myself whether it is true, whether it is not really some wild nightmare I am having, about somebody else, rather than something that actually happened to me.

The passage of 40 years has somewhat dimmed the recollections and diminished the pain of what we went through in those years. The memories gradually fade. It seems that at my second birth, at my liberation from Mauthausen, the Angel of Forgetfulness gave me another flick on my lip and I forgot nearly everything I learned from the murderous Nazi lessons in the ghettos and camps. I find it extremely difficult to recall the details. (Tradition tells us that a baby in the mother's womb is taught all of G-d's laws by an angel. At birth the angel flicks his finger over the upper lip of the baby and as a result, it forgets all that it has learned. Hence the mark of indentation in the center of the upper lip. After birth, each one of us must relearn the studies from the schooling during mother's pregnancy.)

That being the case, how will it be possible for the coming generations to feel, know and remember what we ourselves are hardly able to recall?

We have to compose a sort of Seder for the memorial projects. There is a need for some sort of uniform program that, like the Passover holiday and its forms, should be accepted by all Jewry. Is it possible to accomplish this in our day and age? Why are we waiting for the generation of the Holocaust to die out?

I don't know how many cups ought to be drunk. I do know that we were afflicted with all the Ten Plagues of Egypt. This time we Jews suffered blood, worms, lice, pestilence, typhus, cholera, darkness and the death of the firstborn. No plague skipped us. The plague of the death of the firstborn was perhaps the worst of all, for it took the lives of all our great rabbis, Hassidic leaders, pious men and scholars, artists, writers and teachers. These were the "firstborn" of European Jewry.

Should we have our children tattoo our camp numbers on their arms? Should they make themselves striped concentration camp uniforms and wear them at least once a year? Or should they have a "louse promenade" shaved down the top, in the center of their heads?

What should be done so future generations should be able to feel as though they themselves had personally been there? Since only one son in four is categorized as wise, will that suffice to make sure that he passes the remembrance on to the next generation?

What will happen to the wicked son's progeny? Will he jeer his father or grandfather, and will we answer him, as the Haggada does, that if he had been there in Mauthausen he would not have been redeemed? And what shall we do with the simple son, and with the son who doesn't know how to ask or is not interested in asking?

Will our destruction remain forever an unbelievable, abstract fiction, or will it be remembered as a true, factual, most tragic period in the annals of mankind?

Our Martyrs Died In Despair
With Only One Prayer
Not To Be Forgotten.
Let Us Be Worthy Of Their Memory

WHAT WERE THE MISTAKES EUROPEAN JEWRY MADE THAT ENABLED THE HOLOCAUST TO TAKE PLACE AND THE GERMAN PLAN TO SUCCEED? THE PASSIVE SILENCE AND THE LIES THAT THE FREE WORLD HAS BEEN TELLING AND CONTINUES TO DO SO TO THIS VERY DAY.

The Holocaust, a Result of Fatal Errors and False Lies

It is over 47 years since the Holocaust, the extermination of Jewish life in Europe started getting into high gear.

"Remember the history of the world, understand the events of each generation," (Deut. 3217) Moses said in his parting words to the Israelites after leading them through the wilderness for 40 years. Moses gives an accounting of those 40 years of generational metamorphosis. Those who were delivered from Egyptian bondage become a "wilderness generation" and they die out in the wilderness, never entering the Holy Land. The departing generation has to give posterity a precise accounting of itself. "Ask your father – he will inform you; your elders – they will tell you." Children have to know what their ancestors went through, they have to ask their parents and grandparents about their roots, their origins. That is what Moses commanded the Jews for all eternity.

Time flies. The 47 years since that black day on which the war broke out have passed like a nightmare. It is the duty of each and every Holocaust survivor, so long as a single breath of life remains in us, to tell what we remember of that horrendous

period, so that future generations shall know and understand, investigate and study, so that the greatest tragedy our people has ever experienced shall never be forgotten.

Unfortunately, many survivors are no longer with us. They have passed on and taken along with them secrets that no one shall ever know, knowledge that is forever lost to history.

We, that still live and remember, the "remnants of the remnants," therefore, dare not remain silent. We have the obligation to relate every detail of that period that we can recall. More important than that, however, is our solemn duty to refute the disgraceful lies that have been spread about European Jewry in general, and especially about the Six Million martyrs, who were massacred by that madman Hitler and his Nazi minions. That period is richly documented – in books, photographs, documents, and movie film. All over the world monuments have been erected and symposiums are held on the subject during the period, in which the memory of the Warsaw Ghetto heroes and all the other martyrs, are honored.

In spite of all that, it has already been established by many researchers, scientists, historians and fiction writers that it is impossible to understand how and why the Holocaust occurred, unless one was there and experienced it on one's own flesh.

The truth, however, is that even we, the survivors, who did experience it and see it with our own eyes, are to this day unable to comprehend it. When we analyze the past and refresh our memories in an effort to understand the causes of our catastrophe, to understand why it happened to us, it is almost impossible to believe that it really happened and wasn't actually a nightmare. The passage of over 47 years has blurred the details of the thousands of incidents, and now it requires tremendous concentration, effort, and heartache, to revive dormant memories and reopen healed wounds. but, however, much suffering and pain it may cost us, and as long as we live and have our eyes open, the very eyes that witnessed it all, we must record in the annals of that horrible period, everything that hap-

pened to us. We must do so in order that the Holocaust Scroll shall be filled with all the details of the Destruction, and be a record for posterity. That was our martyrs' last wish. If there was anyone in the camps who kept a diary, everybody cherished and protected that inmate, often giving up their own food and risking their very lives. I myself am a witness to the unknown truth. I was told: Write, write. Do not be afraid. Let it be written down so that the world shall know. Write it down for posterity.

While I was writing diary notes on pieces of brown paper, torn from a cement sack, a few friends from my concentration-camp block stood guard so that I should not get caught at my illegal undertaking. They would say: "Let him write. Maybe those slips of paper will survive, even if we don't. That's the only way the world will know what happened to us."

After a long physical and psychological struggle with despondency and despair, generated by the experiences that the Holocaust inflicted on me, and after recovering from the various illnesses and pains I incurred, I began to sort out my memories and crystallize my thoughts. My mind spun with various questions to which I was unable to find any answers. To this day, no one has explained how and why it all happened.

Forty-seven years after, I have come to the following conclusion: We Jews have committed four fatal mistakes, and the nations of the world have spread four disgraceful lies about us.

Our mistakes were naive errors of shortsightedness and childish insensibility, while the lies and fabrications of the nations of the world, were a reaction of the pangs of conscience and shame that bothered them in the first few months after the war. They applied the old principle that the best defense is offense, and instead of asking forgiveness, they started attacking the Jews with lies, aimed at covering up their own sins.

Our four innocent mistakes and their four deliberate lies together, took a tremendous toll of victims. I believe that at least one million Jews could have saved themselves if cir-

cumstances had been different. This thought plagues me every time I think about the Holocaust, the destruction of European Jewry.

OUR FATAL ERRORS

1. **Disbelief**

Our first and greatest mistake, right at the outset, was our refusal to believe that such a catastrophe was at all possible in the 20th century.

We heard Hitler's speeches, his outpourings of fire and brimstone. Hitler made no secret of his intentions to wipe out the Jewish people, but nobody believed him. People joked about him, and said that he was only a barking dog without any bite and that he didn't really mean it.

Whoever dreamt that Germany, Europe's most advanced nation, would embark on the mass murder of innocent people? Germany, one of the very few countries in Europe where the Jews enjoyed some liberty and equality in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th – who could imagine that this Germany would build cannibalistic camps with gas chambers and crematoriums?

There was a time when Germany was the only country on the European continent that admitted refugees from other lands. In Berlin and Vienna Jews studied medicine, law, engineering, when other universities did not admit Jews. We shared a language with the Germans, and Jews felt quite at home in Leipzig and Hamburg. How could such a nation, with such a high level of culture and such elegance, turn so anti-Semitic overnight?

The Jewish intellectuals, so prominent in German literature and all the arts, were convinced that even if Hitler himself was a terrible anti-Semite, the German nation as a whole would not allow the Jews to be harmed. Thus the blind, naive intellectuals preached in the various cities. And the ordinary

Jews believed – because that is what they wished to believe – that everything was, indeed, going to be all right.

2. **False Hopes**

We committed another error that was no less responsible for our national tragedy. Nearly eveybody believed that even if Germany turned fascist and Hitler succeeded in turning the Germans into barbarians, the world would not sit silently by.

Jews argued: Would nations like America, France, Russia, England, let Hitler and Germany get away with it?! Demonstrations and protest rallies would be held, and if that didn't help, they would even bomb the Nazi beast. Politically active Jews agitated in the synagogues and *shtiblech* and truly believed that world Jewry could influence the governments and leaders of the world and would not leave a stone unturned if Hitler dared to lift a finger against a single Jew in Poland, Hungary, Rumania or Austria.

The Jewish ability to unite, the idea that all Jews consider themselves responsible for each other, has been known all through history. Jews would raise such a fuss that Hitler would be overwhelmed by the noise, like Haman was.

It was easy to assume – and rely on the assumption – that such a united Jewish world front would cut Hitler short. Why, Hitler himself was not ashamed to repeat in every speech: "The Jews are to blame for everything." Optimists smugly patted themselves on hearing this and said: "You see? Even Hitler admits that he's afraid of the Jews. Don't worry, we're a power that can't be ignored. Hitler will come to a bitter end for starting up with us." This is what people dreamt and hoped – till it was too late.

3. **Miscalculation**

The third mistake of world Jewry was underestimating German power after overestimating the initial strength and intentions of the other nations. I remember how overjoyed the Jews in Poland were when Russia entered the war in June

1941, and then when America entered the war six months later. Now, we thought, Germany was opposed by the whole world, and the war would be over within a month, three months at the most. How would Hitler be able to wage a three-front war? Where would he get the fuel, the armaments, money, butter? Mighty America would strangle him alive!

Some Jewish hotheads spread the message that now, that the Germans were going to be busy conducting a war on land and at sea, on so many fronts, they would have to forget about the Jews. They simply wouldn't have the time to bother about a little ethnic group, a tiny, insignificant minority as compared to the 500 million people of the nations Germany was fighting.

All that was needed, the Jews told themselves, was a little patience. A few more months, and all our troubles would be over. Many Jews in Poland really believed that, and they took to the fields and forests, concealed themselves in bunkers and attics, taking along enough food for a short time, thinking that while they had a brief hibernation, Hitler would be defeated – just as the warm sun melts the snow.

4. **Family Bonds**

And then one of the major reasons why we paid so dearly was our ancient tradition, which is almost a second nature with us, of family loyalty. Jews have always been ready to sacrifice themselves for their parents, their wives, their children. Because of this devotion, there were many more victims than there would have been if, instead of sticking together, families had acted on the principle of "every man for himself." What happened was that if, for example, the Germans took a girl prisoner, her father, her brother or her mother promptly showed up to find out what was happening, or to try to rescue her, instead of running away or going into hiding in an effort to save their own skins. Whole families went, as though its members were chained to each other. They simply didn't want to leave each other. One often heard parents pleading with their children to run for their lives, to save themselves, and not

to think of their parents. But the children remained loyal and would not forsake their fathers and mothers.

I estimate that at least one million more Jews could have saved themselves if they had not been so stubborn about protecting their loved ones and had thought only of themselves.

One illustration of this sort of family bond is what happened to us while we were constructing a bunker. There was a spate of bunker building in the ghetto, during the above-mentioned period when everybody thought the war would soon be over. Whoever knew anyone outside the ghetto got busy arranging a hideaway, – underground, in an attic, in some ruin, or in a forest.

Our family and two friends worked out plans to build a bunker that would hold all our families, 13 people all told. In the course of four months, three of us would steal out every night, to excavate a cellar and equip it with certain minimal conveniences. It was a very complicated affair, and professional help was needed to arrange a water supply and other technical matters. The profession of Bunker Builder came into being. I found two such specialists, and we finally finished the bunker. The two men said that they had long since fixed up bunkers for themselves and we didn't have to fear that they would want to come to our bunker or that they would tell anyone about it. We began accumulating provisions and storing them in the bunker. Everything had been figured out in advance to the inch – the entrance and exit, the ventilation system, water supply, toilet and garbage (the most difficult problems in the bunker) – in terms of our group of 13 persons for six months.

What a shock it was to come there on the appointed day and find 32 people in the bunker instead of the prearranged 13. The uninvited guests were the two above-mentioned bunker-building specialists and their families. They explained that their families didn't want to separate and go to two bunkers.

The outcome, however, was tragic. The food lasted only six weeks instead of six months. We fairly suffocated from the smell of our excretions and the garbage in that hot, dense air. The ventilation was inadequate for such a crowd.

When the Germans discovered us and dragged us out of there, with a sigh of relief, every one of us thanked God, because it had become intolerable. Thus did the matter of family ties bring an end to the colossal project, "Bunker." But even with only 13 people we could not have held out, for the war dragged on and on. The Germans found us with the help of police dogs, and perhaps even of an informer – someone who had heard the sounds of the bickering and arguing that went on in there, 24 hours daily, every day for six weeks. There were hundreds of similar instances. The family element, the desire to stick together also prevented some bunkers with a little spare room from being used to save one or two "outsiders."

There were many other factors besides the above four main reasons why the Jewish people suffered such losses in the Holocaust. One was the lack of a strong, united leadership instead of the traitorous Judenrats – Jewish councils – so many of whose people collaborated with the Germans in that tragic period. Gangsters of that sort are present in all societies, and we weren't able to do anything about them. The fact is, however, that the Germans liquidated those toadies, too. Those informers knew too much about their bosses, and in the end the SS men wiped out those shameless lickspittles. They made sure that those Jews wouldn't survive the war and live to testify about their horrendous deeds.

When we were finally liberated after six years of terrible suffering, when the long-awaited moment came and the gates of the camps opened, when the mass graves were dug up, when the allied armies found the crematorium furnaces still hot with the ashes of the victims – only then did the world realize what heinous deeds had been committed while it remained silent.

Six million innocent Jewish men, women, and children had been exterminated for no good reason at all. The world suffered certain twinges of conscience over having said nothing, while it was all happening. But as soon as the war was over the leaders of the free world started looking for excuses to explain why they had stood by and done nothing to try and stop the Hitler beast's campaign to destroy the Jews.

"Silence gives consent," goes the old saying. The free world's leaders felt a little guilty because they realized that their silence had encouraged the Nazis to carry on with their diabolical program to liquidate the Jewish people. At the outset, the Germans were somewhat hesitant, lest the world react. But when they saw that the world was silent, the annihilation machinery was put into high gear. The world was silent. Stalin, Roosevelt, Churchill, the Pope, the scientific community – none of them saw or heard a thing.

This epidemic of silence infected us, the survivors, too. For years we wouldn't speak of what happened in the Holocaust. There were two reasons for this. First of all, nobody wanted to hear the horror stories, not even our own spouses or relatives, who had not experienced it. Everybody told us, even warned us, to forget that "bad dream." Right after I became a rabbi in Hartford, on my first "Kol Nidre" night there, in the course of my sermon I told a brief story about something that had happened in the Mauthausen concentration camp. The next morning, the president of the synagogue had a heart-to-heart talk with me in which he told me that he did not wish to hear any more such stories. "Rabbi," he said, "forget what happened there across the ocean. This is America."

Secondly, we weren't physically or psychologically able to talk. It took a great deal of strength in both categories to sit and tell about those years in the camps. The wounds were too fresh. The very thought of it caused the throat to lump up, brought tears to the eyes, constricted the heart.

Today, 47 years later, things are quite different. Today's

younger generation of Jews wants to know. They ask questions. Jews and Gentiles are reading about and discussing the Holocaust. Many major universities teach courses about the Hitler period and the Nazi crimes. That is why it is our sacred duty to tell all. We, especially the Holocaust survivors, must take every opportunity to refute the lies, to tell the truth as we ourselves saw and experienced it. I believe that that is the purpose of our survival, our mission on behalf of the martyrs, to remember and to tell the world about what was done to us. That was the last will of all Six Million Jewish men, women and children, may God avenge their blood.

FALSE LIES

1. The Lie of Ignorance

The primary and biggest lie of the world was the excuse that it did not know. This was the official explanation of the leaders of the democracies, and even of the Pope. When Eisenhower entered the Buchenwald camp, he declared with great pathos: "I didn't know a thing."

Today there are plenty of documents and photographs to refute that gross lie. In 1980, four decades later, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency published detailed photographs of Auschwitz and other camps taken from reconnaissance aircraft in 1943 and 1944. The photographs, published by newspapers all over the world, show quite a few details of Hitler's diabolic enterprise – ghettos, camps, gas chambers.

There were surely such photographs on the desks of Roosevelt and Churchill, and certainly that of the then General Eisenhower. These were official documents of the Allied high command. The excuse of ignorance is a scandalous lie.

And what of the Warsaw Ghetto? Was that also a deep, dark secret? Did the world not know about that either? Who helped the Jews there when they revolted? The Warsaw Ghetto had no one it could count on for help, and it received none, even though the insurgents radioed to the world reports

of what was happening and emissaries reached London describing the heroic struggle of the ghetto's empty-handed denizens against the heavily armed German forces.

2. The Lie of Innocence

The Germans themselves used the lie of ignorance in order to defend themselves as innocent, good-hearted people. The hundreds of SS people and other collaborators brought to trial, in the past 35 years, have all used the twin argument of ignorance and innocence. Their explanation was that if they did participate in the liquidation of the Jews, in the plundering and killing, they did so because they were staunch patriots, carrying out the orders of their superiors. Even Eichmann used this "explanation." The trials of the war criminals were a farce. In many instances, the Jewish witnesses were insulted and mocked by shrewd German lawyers who twisted things around so that the victims found themselves in the defense dock. The witnesses were turned into accused, and the murderers were presented as loyal citizens who in classic German fashion had merely carried out orders. The families of those German defendants sometimes even threatened the Jewish witnesses with bodily harm. We – those who testified in the German courts had to endure still another terror campaign. Those trials were a brutal experience for the Jewish witness, and we thanked God when we got out of there in one piece and arrived home safely.

The world also accepted the lie that only a few Germans were responsible for the atrocities, while the vast majority of the German nation were as innocent as newborn babes. The lie of innocence is the basest canard ever. The fact is that the entire German nation sympathized with Hitler and cooperated with him in carrying out all his diabolical plans.

Besides the professional SS men and women, many thousands of other Germans participated in the extermination of the Jews – the armed forces, civilians, hundreds of industrial companies like Messerschmidt and I.G. Farben. Physicians,

engineers, chemists, scientists of every variety, from all the universities, the whole intelligentzia were at the service of Hitler and Eichmann, in their hideous implementation of the "final solution of the Jewish problem."

There isn't a single German adult who was alive in Germany during World War II who did not have some part in our catastrophe. All the newspapers published articles and photographs promoting the extermination of European Jewry. Everyone knew about it and one of the favorite pastimes of German soldiers was to photograph scenes of the Jewish "enemy" being terrorized.

It is interesting to note that the term "extermination" is conventionally used in reference to mice, lice, bugs, roaches and the like, but never where human beings are concerned. The Germans, however, did not consider the Jews as human beings, and in their reports they continuously used the term "extermination" as the ultimate means used against the "damn Jews." To them, the Jews were not creatures with souls, hearts, feelings, but "vermin" and "parasites."

German technologists took part in Hitler's genocide – some to a greater extent, some less so. But nobody was totally innocent. Any plea of ignorance or innocence is a brazen lie.

It is our duty to keep reminding the German people and the world in general of the above facts. Because there are already Germans, and even Americans, who have the gall to deny that any of it ever happened. They say there never were any such things as ghettos, camps, gas chambers; no such thing as the Six Million. It's all a Jewish lie to besmirch the cultured German nation.

3. The Lie of Cowardice

There was a third lie that was even more shameful and baser than the lies of ignorance and innocence.

Right after the war a rumor got started, a rumor that still

has not died, that the Jews of Europe went "as sheep to the slaughter." There is no greater insult to the martyrs than to accuse them of cowardice.

First of all, it is a historical fact that in the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt, the Jews put up a fiercer fight and held out longer than the whole Polish army and any other army on the European continent, except the Red Army. No other ethnic minority put up such a resistance as the Jews of Warsaw did.

But besides Warsaw and Vilna, there were hundreds of cities and towns, and even some concentration camps, where individual Jews and groups of them clandestinely or openly resisted the Germans.

Unfortunately, the facts of the Jewish struggle against the enemy are not adequately recorded and documented. There are three reasons for this.

First, every act of sabotage or resistance by Jews was promptly countered by an act of mass vengeance, which almost everywhere only hastened the liquidation process. The Germans seized every excuse to exterminate Jews. There were places where because of a very minor incident, the SS people dragged almost all the Jews of the town to the outskirts and shot them all down, or packed them all into the synagogue which they then set on fire.

So when we did commit some act of sabotage, we tried to do it in such a way that suspicion would not fall on Jews. We tried to obliterate any sign that might give the Nazis a pretext for blaming the Jews. In the guise of general partisans or of Poles, we blew up railroad beds, set fire to petroleum tanks, poured sand into the fuel tanks of German trucks, and committed various other acts to hinder their war effort.

A second reason why not very much is known about acts of resistance by Jews is that German officers were often ashamed to report to their superiors that a "filthy Jew" had spat in their face or punctured their tires – acts that were in fact committed

daily in hundreds of places.

Furthermore, in very many instances all the people of some partisan band were killed by the Germans, so that nobody lived to tell the tale for posterity.

In many places, the local Christians – Poles, Ukrainians, etc. – saw Jews putting up a stiff fight, but were afraid to report what they had seen, not wanting to get involved in what they considered the war between the Germans and the Jews. Many of them, in fact, people with whom the Jews had been living for 600 years, actually enjoyed seeing the Jews being harassed.

I remember how a clever SS man once got himself a few hundred workers to unload coal from a freight train that had arrived unexpectedly. It was winter. There wasn't an able-bodied Jew in the ghetto, because every morning hundreds of work teams were sent from the ghetto to various work places. The SS men exploited the Gentiles' ancient hatred of the Jews and dragged two old men out of the ghetto and took them to the Arbeitsamt Square where they ordered them to dance. Hearing about the great show, several hundred Poles and Ukrainians gathered to enjoy the tragi-comic spectacle. Promptly the Germans surrounded the area, and loaded up several trucks with those stunned Gentiles, who didn't know what hit them. The coal was unloaded by Gentile hands instead of Jewish ones. This trick seems to have been part of the official system of SS operation in many other communities.

Today, 47 years later, there exists in the Polish language a thick book containing hundreds of eyewitness accounts by Polish non-Jews of how Jews fought the Germans. Of course, since this is an official state publication, the Polish authorities saw to it that it would contain a good supply of fairy tales about the help the Jews supposedly got from the Poles. Now, a lot of people want to be heroes and they concoct stories about Polish heroism in defense of Jews.

The main reason why the world doesn't know about the resistance struggle carried on by Jews, in places besides Warsaw and Vilna and why history hasn't recorded it, is that we ourselves have neglected the matter. We, the survivors, remained silent long after the liberation just as the world remained silent during the war, while the inferno raged. The story of the Holocaust has always suffered from silence.

Every Jew who kept himself alive is a hero or heroine who fought valiantly and miraculously survived. Every moment was a perilous one, and the struggle against the enemy went on continuously on all fronts. Everyone of them has a story to tell. One had to be lucky, of course, but one had to keep fighting. Luck alone did not keep anyone alive.

Today the world knows what terror is capable of perpetrating. See how doughty young Israelis were shot in cold blood by Arab terrorists at the Munich Olympic games. See how 190 people committed suicide by order of a mad cult leader in Guyana. How stunned was the world with the 441 days of American hostages in Iran. Now the world can understand a little better the valor of both the martyrs who perished and the survivors.

4. The Lie about Jewish Heresy

Finally, there is the great lie that was spread after the war. This is the lie that the Jews of the ghettos and concentration camps were not religious, did not beieve in G-d.

One feels like crying out to high Heaven at such a slander. How can people concoct such lies?! Not only in the ghetto, but even in the camps people used to come to my father of blessed memory with questions of a religious nature. They wanted to know whether it was permissible, in the effort to survive, to try to pass for Aryans, live with Christians, go to church, make the sign of the Cross. Questions about whether one was permitted to save oneself if it involved endangering the life of another fellow Jew. I remember a question put by one Jew who had posed as a German and joined the German army. Questions about

kashrut. Many people in our camp starved because they wouldn't touch the soup, which contained horse meat. The soup was much more nourishing than the bread ration, for which they exchanged it. It was a dry, shrunken ration that crumbled in the mouth as though made of sand. Sometimes there was a decent Jew in the camp kitchen. He would boil up a vat of soup containing only potatoes and beets, and no meat or bones. Whoever wanted a kosher dish like this would find it later under his strawsack. The people involved in this kashrut project risked their lives daily, both in preparing the food and in serving the treasure to those desiring it. There was a kind of clandestine kashrut conspiracy in several camps.

In my block, prayer services were held daily. Whoever knew the prayers by heart said them aloud, while the others listened and answered "Amen." During Chanuka, we lit Chanuka candles, making wicks out of thin cord and using horsemeat fat from the trefa soup. Once we built a succa booth for the Succot holiday. And we always found a way of making at least a few matzoh for Passover. Such undertakings were carried on in practically all the camps, and certainly, before that, in the ghettos. It was easier in the ghettos, because there we still had some contact with the outside world. But even in the ghettos it involved risk of life, because the Germans were always watching.

The editor of the New York Yiddish newspaper, *"Yiddishn Vort,"* Mr. Joseph Friedenson had been in Buchenwald with my father. He has written of how my father used to lead a daily Talmud-study group, kept track of the Jewish date in order to know when Jewish holidays were coming up, and, most important of all, kept a diary.

In Gusen II, the camp where I was, a Jew from the Lodz Ghetto arrived just a few weeks before the liberation, smuggling in with him a tiny head Tefillin (Phylactery), with a thong barely long enough to hold the Tefillin on the head. During the few weeks before we were taken from Gusen to Gunzkirchen,

about 50 of us endangered our lives, early every morning, by putting that Phylactery on our heads, each in turn, and reciting the blessing.

Before we were taken to Mauthausen, we had been at the Plaschow camp on the outskirts of Cracow. The place had a collection center for books and Torah scrolls that the Germans had confiscated in many cities. We learned that the scrolls, made of parchment, were being taken to a shoe factory. A friend and I decided to try and rescue one of the Torah scrolls. We selected a small one, and bit by bit, two or three sheets at a time, we smuggled it into the camp. We slept with it, wore the sheets under our clothing. We don't know what finally happened to that Scroll, because two months later we were transferred from Plaschow.

Such Jews weren't religious?! People were ready to sacrifice their lives in order to feel, for at least a few minutes, the inspiration of Kiddush Hashem, of sanctifying G-d's Name; to perform mitzvot, observe G-d's commands, in spite of the enemy.

The best refutation of that libel is the fact that all historians and scholars have accepted the authenticity of the songs of that period.

What was the main hymn in practically every camp and ghetto? What were the words on the lips of hundreds of thousands of Jews being led to the gas chambers? What song was sung on the barricades of the Warsaw Ghetto?

Everywhere one heard the melody and the words of "Ani maamin," "I believe with perfect faith" in the One-G-d, and that He will send the Messiah to redeem us. And even if his coming is delayed, I shall continue to believe that he will come.

Isn't that enough proof about a people's profound faith under those hellish circumstances? Has there been another such faithful people in all history?

That libel against those pure martyrs is not only a lie, but also an insult. The fact is that even some non-believers became believers in the camps. Disappointed by the world and modern civilization, they came back to Judaism. They envied the believing Jews who were able to accept lovingly the indescribable suffering.

And what was the song of the Jews in the forests and fields, of the partisans? "Never say that you have reached the very end, Though leaden skies a bitter future may portend. The hour that we yearned for will appear, And our marching step will thunder: We are here!"

Are these not words of hope and faith, of profound belief?

Concerning the above-mentioned four fatal errors and disgraceful lies, I say today unequivocally, that we ourselves are guilty. King Solomon long ago declared (Proverbs 14:34) "Chessed le'umim chattat", that it is sinful to rely on the good graces of other nations. In general, it is foolish to count blindly on others coming to your aid, no matter who the others may be, friend or foe. I am also sincerely convinced that if we had only remembered one of Hillel's basic philosophies in life which is that, "If I am not for myself, then who will be for me?" (Avot 1:14), many more Jews would have survived.

IMPRESSIONS FROM A SURVIVOR GATHERING IN WASHINGTON. THE HONOR OF DELIVERING THE INVOCATION AT THE SITE OF THE FUTURE NATIONAL HOLOCAUST MUSEUM IN WASHINGTON, D.C. APRIL 13, 1983.

At the Washington Gathering Of Holocaust Survivors

For several months I could not make up my mind whether or not to go. We wondered whether as many people would come as had come to the Jerusalem gathering of Holocaust survivors two years before. I wanted very much to participate but I felt somewhat uneasy about going to Washington. My wife was afraid that it might revive the nightmarish memories of the ghettos and camps. Nobody knows, as well as she, how we survivors became lifelong psychic and physical invalids.

Nightmares tear me out of sleep especially in periods when I have to speak or write about those Churban (destruction) years. My wife was born in America and she suffers because of her husband's taut nerves. I think it has already been established that people who were not "there" will never understand us, not even our spouses. I agreed to a compromise: my wife would accompany me and look after me. So we were in Washington together, and I am glad that I went, and now even my wife is happy about it.

The three days in Washington were sublime moments that provided me spiritual comfort personally, as a survivor, as a

rabbi and as a Jew. I believe it would be worthwhile for me to relate my impressions while they are still fresh.

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First of all, bringing nearly 20,000 Jews together in one place is an achievement of colossal importance, especially for the Holocaust survivors. Numerous people went hither and thither looking for each other and many indeed found relatives and old-countrymen. I myself found three Jews from my hometown, Drohobycz, whom I had not seen for 40 years. One of them had been a real friend, with whom I had gone to Cheder (religious school) together and had played as a child. He had lived a few houses from us. We fell into each other's arms, kissed each other and wept, as we recalled various personal episodes of long ago.

We would never have recognized each other, because besides the physical changes in appearance and voice, my friend had changed his name. Then, his name had been Chaim Bokser; now his name is John Stempler. He lives in Los Angeles. One does not ask a Holocaust survivor why he changed his name. One's name, birthdate and other personal details have always depended on the circumstances in which one tried to save oneself or the documents one used in the effort.

Chaim Bokser had come to Washington with his two sons, one a psychologist and the second in business with his father. As soon as the sons noticed the word "Drohobycz" on my tag, they hurried to find their father and brought him to me.

Who can comprehend the joy, the emotions of such an encounter? There is an old saying: "When is a pauper happy? When he finds something valuable that he lost." Our families, friends, homes, towns, countries, languages – all lost; we had become like poor orphans. Who can understand the joy of finding a dear friend again? For that alone the trip had been worth my while. Dozens of similar scenes took place at the gathering.

The encounters with two other old-countrymen were also moving experiences, but not like the one with Chaim Bokser. Besides these three, who I didn't even know were alive, I also met a group of former Drohobycz-Borislow people of whom I knew and who knew about me, but we rarely got together. In the "golden America" we had all found things that we hadn't even dreamt of in the old country, but one thing we don't have is time or patience to keep in touch. Relatives and acquaintances meet at a funeral and say, "Let's meet again . . ."

I went to Washington as the official representative of the Rabbinical Council of America. But that did not mean much to the organizers. What did make an impression was the fact that I write for the *Algemeiner Journal* and the *Jewish Press*. When I showed them my articles, they gave me a press card, which gained me access to events and places that would otherwise have been barred to me.

The colossal opening ceremony at the Capital Theater made a tremendous impression on everyone. If a king's honor depends on the size of the throng that comes to pay him homage, then the assemblage of 20,000 Jews under one roof was the most imposing scene of those three days. When the throng sang *Hatikva,* tears came to everybody's eyes. It was a colorful scene that anyone who did not see it with his own eyes cannot visualize.

President Reagan's remarks were very nice, but they lacked enthusiasm. I had the impression that he had a slight cold. His voice was not too clear. If only he would fulfill a fourth of what he promised, the Jews could count him among the "Righteous Gentiles". He was applauded a few dozen times, and there were two interjections from the audience. When he spoke of his "true friendship" for the State of Israel, he must have heard the interjection, "Give us the jets!"

Elie Wiesel spoke like a Biblical Prophet, without notes, with half-closed eyes, as though he were in a trance, but his every word was like balm to our unhealed wounds. His talk

was a "Sanctification of G-d's Name" and an inspiration that electrified that entire assemblage. He reminded and demanded, warned and rebuked. He is the great chastiser of our time. Reagan's and Wiesel's speeches were of immeasurable significance not for the Jews alone but for all the world, espcially America. The mere setting up of a forum from which those words could be heard made the gathering worthwhile.

On Monday evening the program, which lasted until 1 a.m., included my good friend Rabbi Herschel Schechter and Rabbi Yisrael Lau, the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Netanya. Rabbi Schechter was the first American Jewish chaplain to enter Buchenwald just a few hours after the U.S. Army liberated the camp. There Rabbi Schechter found Rabbi Lau as an eight-year-old boy, and now, 38 years later to the day, Rabbi Lau expressed his gratitude to his liberator, Rabbi Herschel Schechter. I was especially moved by this scene. It was Rabbi Schechter who, on April 11, 1945, found my father Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor, of blessed memory, in Buchenwald. He was the only surviving Polish rabbi who had lived through all the stages of hell. Rabbi Schechter photographed my father, the "Musulman" who weighed only 80 pounds.

My father, of blessed memory, later (we had not been together; I had been sent to Mauthausen) told me the joke that he had told Rabbi Schechter. At that moment of liberation, my father did not have trousers and was wearing a camp coat. Rabbi Schechter, on beholding this figure of a formerly majestic Torah personality, ran out to his jeep and brought my father his own spare trousers. Whoever knew my father remembers his six-foot frame; Rabbi Schechter is of small build, "a great mind in a small body." My father said to Rabbi Schechter: "An American rabbi's outfit is a bit short on a rabbi from Poland . . ."

This episode shows the greatness of Jews who, even in the most extreme moments, did not lose that eternal Jewish sense of humor.

I could describe many emotions and experiences from that Monday opening night. Tuesday and Wednesday, Rosh Chodesh, were packed with panels and discussions on various Holocaust topics, with the participation of professors – members of the new profession of Holocaust studies, medical people, psychologists, writers, teachers, and community-center directors from all the big American cities.

The Yiddish language was accorded great honor at all the sessions. Yiddish was spoken constantly. Especially impressive was the long lecture by our Connecticut Congressman Sam Gaidjenson. His Yiddish was declaimed from the steps of Capitol Hill in the presence of most of the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, led by Vice-President George Bush. Elie Wiesel also spoke, in accepting the key to the donated museum. As usual – great, tall, prophetic, expressing thanks to America but at the same time also evaluating the past and issuing a warning about the future.

I have tremendous respect for Wiesel's majestic-poetic powers, both orally and literally. The Washington assembly unanimously felt that Wiesel is the greatest spokesman of our generation. His influence will yet be felt on behalf of the State of Israel, Zionism and Soviet Jewry, and it will be especially potent in countering the powerful new wave of anti-Semitism emerging in America.

Let me also praise Benjamin Mead and the caterers for providing the marvelous kosher food – tens of thousands of meals, three times a day, with a Jewish flavor and reasonably priced: $30 for nine meals over three days. This I – as a rabbi – believe was a"Sanctification of G-d's Name", because it showed once more that where there is a will, there is a way. Benjamin Mead possesses superhuman energy and stamina.

Your humble servant was given the honor of delivering the invocation at the closing session. At this session, two friends from Connecticut, Leon Weinberg and Abraham Rosenholz, honored the thousands of participants with a gift of a little box,

containing a bread, kosher cheese, a bottle of wine and an apple, in order to help us all forget the hunger we had suffered under the German Nazis. It was my duty to thank our hosts in the name of the thousands of former camp inmates who were so delighted by the gift.

I don't like invocations, so I quickly came up with the following:

When a Jew survives a dangerous traumatic experience, in humility, he recites a personal prayer of gratitude to the Almighty, we call it "BENCHEN GOYMEL". Whisper it with me please . . . Baruch Ata . . . HAGOMEL L'CHAYAVIM TOVOS SHEGMALANI KOL TOV. Blessed be our G-d King of the universe, who grants favors and who saved my life from this dangerous encounter.

Tonight, we are going to break bread together. Our life or death, depended upon the size of the daily bread ration. "Pat Charaiva." Dos bitter, zoer, zamdik shtikaleh broit.

Bread was the official currency in Camps and Ghettos. There were some foolish people who exchanged it for cigarettes and there were many like myself, who because of Kashruth, traded the bowl of soup for a slice, or even a few stale crumbs of bread.

The letters of "Lechem" *also spell the word* "Mochail", *forgiveness. No other people in history, has ever forgiven its enemies and tormentors, as the Jewish people did. We forgave the Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans and Spaniards. "MIR ZENEN MOCHAL."*

In our vocabulary, "Lechem", bread, offered to us, is the secret ingredient for survival. The Hebrew word "Lechem", with only one vowel change, becomes "Lochem" *the term for a FIGHTER. All of us fought, one way or another. There is no survivor who is here today by miracle, mazel or magic only. It required a struggle of mind and body. A "Milchamah", a war.*

Reshuffling the same three letters, "Lamed, Chet, Mem", *we coin another word* "Cholem", *meaning a Dreamer. All dreamt about survival, even those that perished, but only the dream of the few came true.*

That is the main message of our survivors gathering in Washington. Forgive, Yes . . . Forget . . . NEVER. And there is one more word composed with the same letters, it is "Chomale" meaning kindness. "Chamole" be generous. What a greater act of defiance and consolation can there be for us, than the knowledge that two survivors, our dear friends Leo Weinberg and Abraham Rosenholtz, who were there in the Holocaust at the chimnies of the crematoria, used their plants in New Haven, Connecticut, to bake bread to feed us all tonight. Thousands of mouths will share the "Pat Ashira" bread of the rich to erase the taste of "Lechem Oni" the bread of affliction from our pallets. We thank you, our hosts Leo and Abraham for this most generous gift.

"LOCHAME, CHOLAME, MOCHALE, CHOMAIL"
But when you take the "Lechem" please put two "Yidalech" into it, and you will get the word "L'chayim" . . . to Life "L'chayim". . . . "Brider un shvester, est gezunterheit, zol eich voil bekumen."

The objective of the gathering was nicely summed up by our friend Eli Zborowsky (his wife is from Drohobycz, where her name was Dianne Wilf). Among Jews, Zborowsky said, the nuclear family consists of seven kinships: father, mother, brother, sister, children, husband, wife. The Talmudic Sages include "a brother in suffering" in the brotherhood category. Two total strangers, who live through some trouble together, develop a brotherly closeness that is sometimes stronger than blood brotherhood. There is the "brotherhood of ideas," of people united by an ideal, a sacred purpose. This is also hard to break. We are all "brothers in suffering" – people whom suffering has linked in an unbreakable chain. We lost our brothers and sisters but we are bound together for life as brothers and sisters "in suffering."

Now, Zborowsky continued, we are also "brothers in ideal." We have to forge a link between us and the generations to come, so that the Churban – the Holocaust – shall never be forgotten. We must transmit this brotherhood of ideal to our children and thus become their brothers, so that they shall be able to carry on with their mission of observing the precept, "Remember!"



With Mr. David T. Chase



With the Hon. Senator Criss Dodd

At the Washington Gathering Of Holocaust Survivors



With Mr. Benjamin Meed



With Leon Weinberg and Lou Lerer

ONE OF THE MAJOR AND MOST COMPLICATED HALACHIC ISSUES AFTER THE LIBERATION WAS THE PROBLEM OF AGUNOTH. HUNDREDS OF WOMEN WERE PREVENTED FROM REMARRYING, SINCE THEY HAD NO PROOF ABOUT THE DEATH OF THEIR ORIGINAL HUSBANDS. THE JEWISH LAW BARS THEM FROM ESTABLISHING A NEW LIFE AND FAMILY, AND THEY ARE CALLED AGUNAH MEANING "SHUT OFF", "RESTRAINED" OR "TIED UP". A UNIQUE FIRST HALACHIC RESPONSA ON THE SUBJECT.

Basic Information About AGUNAH

AGUNAH (Hebrew for "tied"), refers to a married woman who, for whatever reason, is separated from her husband and cannot remarry, either because she cannot obtain a divorce from him, or because it is unknown whether he is still alive.

The problem of the Agunah is one of the most complex in Halachic discussions and is treated with great detail in Rabbinic literature. No less than six volumes of "Ozar Ha-Poskim" ("A treasure of legislators" – Jerusalem 1954), legal Encyclopedia are devoted to it.

The HALACHAH prescribes that a marriage can only be dissolved by divorce or the death of either spouse. According to Jewish law, divorce is effected not by decree of the court, but by the parties themselves, i.e., by the husband's delivery of a GET ("bill of divorce"). Similarly, the mere disappearance of the husband, where there is no proof of his death, is not sufficient

for a declaration by the court to the effect that a wife is a widow and her marriage thus dissolved. The state of an Agunah results from uncertainty about the husband's fate, caused by conditions of war or persecution – particularly in recent times, as a result of the Nazi Holocaust: but the problem can also arise, for example, if the husband suffers from chronic mental illness, making him legally incapable of giving a GET, or simply if he willfully refuses to do so.

Rabbinical scholars have permitted many relaxations in the general laws of evidence, in order to relieve the hardships suffered by the Agunah. On the other hand, great care was always taken to avoid the risk that permission may inadvertently be given for a married woman to contract a second marriage that would be adulterous and result in any children, from such a second marriage, being MAMZERIM (bastards not allowed to marry into the flock, being born of sin against the seventh commandment). To achieve both these ends, i.e., to enable the Agunah to remarry, while ensuring that an adulterous union does not result, is the object of intensive discussion in the laws of the Agunah.

It is a basic rule of HALACHAH that facts are to be determined on the testimony of two witnesses. However, the Mishnah already attributes to R. Gamaliel the Elder the TAKKANAH that when a husband is missing because of war, and his fate is unknown, the wife may be permitted to remarry on the testimony of only one witness to his death (Yevamoth 16:7). At the time of Rabbi Gamaliel of Yavneh it was again determined not only that one witness was sufficient but also that hearsay evidence might be admitted, as well as the evidence of a woman, a slave, a handmaiden, or a relative (which classes were otherwise legally incompetent as witnesses). The legal explanation given for these far-reaching rules is that the wife herself will endeavor to make sure of her husband's death before remarrying, since she will become prohibited to both men if it later transpires that her first husband is still alive, and her other rights, especially pecuniary ones, will be affected too.

An AGUNAH may also be permitted to remarry on the strength of her testimony alone as to her husband's death, when she is known to have lived in harmony with her first husband and his absence is not due to war-conditions, for the reason, already mentioned, that certainly she has made careful inquiries herself before seeking to contract another marriage (Yevamoth 93b, 114-116, and Poskim).

The HALACHAH, while striving to be as lenient as possible in the method of proving the husband's death, imposes strict requirements concerning the nature of the evidence.

The identity must be established of the person whose death it is sought to determine and there exist most detailed rules in order to establish it with the maximum amount of certainty under the circumstances. Thus evidence as to circumstances from which death would be likely to result in a majority of cases, is not considered as sufficient proof of death itself, since it may be merely the opinion of the witness that the husband is dead, but not testimony as to the fact of death. Hence, the wife will not be permitted to remarry on the strength of evidence to the effect that her husband was seen to fall into the sea and drown in "water having no end" (where one can see only the sea but not its surroundings), when his death was not actually seen to have taken place, since he may have been rescued. If, however, the witness testifies that he was later present at the funeral of the husband or some other clear evidence of death, for example, that an identifiable limb was found at the place of drowning, it is accepted as evidence of death. On the other hand the death of the husband will be accepted as having been sufficiently proven and the AGUNAH will be permitted to remarry on the strength thereof if there is evidence that he drowned in water "having an end" (that one can see its surroundings): and the witness stayed long enough at the scene "for the victim's life to depart," without seeing him rise to the surface (Yevamoth 120; 121; Maimonides Yud, 15-27; Shulchan Aruch, EH17-42, esp. 32).

Finding a way for permitting an AGUNAH to remarry is deemed a great MITZVAH (Responsa Asheri, 51:2). Indeed, an onerous application of the law, without justification, and in cases where there is no suspicion of deception, is regarded not only as a failure to perform a MITZVAH, but even as a transgression. However, in view of the danger of legalizing a possibly adulterous union, it is customary for an Agunah to be permitted to remarry only after consultation with, and consent having been obtained from other leading scholars.

An AGUNAH who remarries after permission is granted by the court, is generally entitled to the payment of her KETUBBAH (Yevamoth 116b; 117a; Maimonides Yad, Ishut 16:31; Shulcan Aruch, 43,44). If an Agunah remarries after permission has been given, and then her first husband reappears, her legal position is that of an "ESHET ISH" (a married woman) who has married another man, thus becoming prohibited to both men, being an act of adultery. Accordingly, she requires a GET from both, and any children born to her of her second husband will be MAMZERIM.

In view of the unhappy straits in which an AGUNAH is likely to find herself, ways were sought already in early times of taking precautions against such an eventuality. Thus it was customary, for anyone "going to wars of the House of David, to write a bill of divorce for his wife" (Ketuboth, 9b, Rashi and Tosef). This GET was a conditional one, i.e., becoming effective only should the husband not return from war until a specified date, whereupon the wife would become a divorcee and be entitled to marry another man. In certain countries this practice is adopted even in present times by those going to war, but complications may ensue; since the rules and the consequences of a GET of this nature, are beset with HALACHIC problems, particularly when the husband is a KOHEN, his wife will be a divorcee and he may not thereafter remarry her. (For more information see AGUNAH in the ENCYCLOPEDIA JUDAICA.)

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During the last two weeks before the outbreak of World War II, towards the end of August of 1939, I assisted my Father in an avalanche of weddings and divorces. In Poland many couples were married only religiously, not having processed their wedding ceremony through the official channels of courts and civic authorities of the municipality. Children born from such parents had to bear their mother's maiden name. Not being married legally, a wife or possibly a widow, was not entitled to any benefits, granted by the government to families of serving soldiers. Hence, the sudden rush to correct records accordingly. Since only the Chief Rabbi in a community had the authority to issue legal certificates of marriage, people were desperately surrounding our home in a last minute effort to legalize their status of marriage. The procedures consisted of vows, signatures, witnesses and other formalities.

Along with this "last chance" marriage rush, came numerous couples, who wished to have a "Get-Al-Tnai", divorce proceedings "on condition", so that if the husband failed to return from the war, his wife would be free and allowed to remarry, not becoming an AGUNAH. During those two weeks, dozens of marriages and divorces were issued to the frightened and alarmed couples expecting general mobilization of all males to take place momentarily. The Beth Din (Rabbinic Court of three ordained Rabbis) was in session some eighteen to twenty hours a day.

My Father's Responsa of "The Unbinding of the Holocaust AGUNAH" was the first legal document which served as a model to many a Responsa by other Rabbis, in America and in Israel, for their future resolving of this painful post-war problem.

The actual Responsa consists of 40 fully printed Hebrew pages, with elaborate analysis and deliberations, in spite of the lack of exact bibliography. Since most quotations were made by heart, "From the treasures of my memory", is a statement made repeatedly in the original text of this responsa.

The novel interpretation has been quoted in various books about the Holocaust, especially those dealing with Halacha. Lengthy discussions are recorded in an English book "The Echo of the Nazi Holocaust in Rabbinic Literature" by Rabbi Dr. H. J. Zimmels (Ktav Publishing House, Inc. 1977 P. 220-221), with regard to my Father's original and novel application of the laws of AGUNAH. In the Hebrew literature, publications, both here and in Israel dealing with matters of HALACHAH, Father's name and the text of his Responsa have been quoted repeatedly.

Very interestingly, Rabbi Solomon B. Freehof in his book "The RESPONSA Literature" (The Jewish Publication Society 1959), says the following (P. 198-199):

". . . To what extent may we presume that a man, taken to the extermination camps, is dead? In this regard, a remarkable type of responsum has appeared, and there will undoubtedly be others of the same kind, in which the rabbi, giving his opinion, was himself in the concentration or even in the extermination camps. One such refugee rabbi has relied upon the legal principle that if the rabbinical court sees a certain event with its own eyes, it does not need witnesses at all. The rabbi himself therefore may judge as to what proportion of those taken away were actually done to death, and he has the right to decide, on the basis of overwhelming probability, that the man in question is dead. Thus, Rabbi Jacob Avigdor, formerly Chief Rabbi of DROHOBYCZ in Galicia, after being released from the concentration camps and while still a refugee in Belgium, before coming to the United States, wrote an opinion on the problem of the AGUNAH. Of course, his description is now partly affected by the modern historical interest in detailed delineation of events; yet the events which he delineates are marshalled to support a certain legal investigation and so are in a different mood from those in more conscious historiography.

He proceeds to describe the various steps in the long tragic

road of the Jews of Europe toward the gas chambers; and he indicates how small a percentage could possibly have escaped. Thus, on the basis of his own detailed knowledge, he can declare the overwhelming probability to be that any particular missing man may well be presumed dead."

The fact that the problem of the AGUNAH recurs throughout the Responsa literature is in itself a reflection of its historical importance.

The dilemma of an AGUNAH and the various laws about it have not been known to lay people. As part of Jewish living and the continuous scattering of families, particularly amongst the emigrating Jews from Russia of recent days, I felt that the translation of this treatise into English would be of interest to the general public besides its historical worth for future references.

With reverence and everlasting admiration of my great Father and teacher, of blessed memory, I dedicate to Him this chapter.

YITZCHOK CHAIM BEN RECHL BRAINDL

November 1945
Antwerp, Belgium

ב"ה בראשית שנת תש"ו ואני בתוך הגולה מצל מאש.



ספר
תחיית יעקב

קובץ מאמרים ומכתבים בהלכה שכתבתי אחרי אשר אני הגבר, ראיתי עני ושבר, כשבאו זרים ארורים, ותורתנו קרעו לגזרים, וספרי הקדש נתנו להדש, ושנים רבות לא טעמתי מטעמה של תורה. אכלני המתני הצר הצורר, שבר עצמותי זורר ומפרר, ורק בנסי נסים קמתי לחתי' ויצאתי מאפלה לאורה.

הק' יעקב המכונה ד"ר אביגדור

לפנים רב ראשי ואב"ד דקהלות דרהגאביטש ובאריסלאוו והגליל וכעת רב דביהכנ"ס תובבי תורה בברוקלין, נ. י. ור"מ דישיבת מורשי"ק זצ"ל בניו־יורק.

AGUNAH of Our Time

עגונה דאיתתא

By Dr. Jacob Avigdor

This responsa is written while in Belgium, after having left Germany and after five years of witnessing the killing, destruction and depravation in the Holocaust period of 1940-45.

I have been asked by my friends to delve into the question of Agunoth (married women who have not been able to verify the fate of their husbands and questions of their husband's life or death are left unanswered) who have survived the war after the liberation by the American and English armies. They presently remain in Germany, but have no verification of their spouse's death. Although most are certain their husbands have perished, no witnesses can testify to that fact, pursuant to the normal modes of Halachik jurisprudence.

I realize at present my lack of resource and unworthiness after many years in the black darkness or war. With my own hands, I buried, in the Ghetto, hundreds of the saintly departed. I placed parchments of holy Torahs in their graves as I

buried the bodies along with pieces of scraps from Scrolls that have been strewn in the streets, torn and tattered. I pray, that those who would someday collect retribution for the shame of Torah, would exact punishment for the tortures of the departed souls of the martyrs as well.

Naked, I entered the Jewish quarter and naked I passed through the Ghetto on the road through several concentration Camps to finally reach the fires in the furnaces of Buchanwald. For a while, I was placed in a unit of the sick inmates known as "Revere", amongst many who were already dead. I was miraculously saved from disease and horrible, eventual demise from hunger.

Now, however, is not the place to speak of this, nor would there suffice ink to write or paper to record the tragedies of this war. The pains and scars of those times are all over me. The mental anguish and torture remain, and I find my soul bruised and wounded. In this state of mind, how can I possibly attempt to enter this complicated and complex query of an Agunah and issue a ruling on a matter as weighty as this? Somehow I feel compelled to refrain from dealing in this most difficult of Rabbinic Responsa, in light of my lack of proper books and resources for research during the last six years. Even at present in Belgium, I am devoid of the proper materials and books and behold "there is no craftsman without the tools of his trade."

On the other hand, however, I admit that my soul cannot rest. I believe that only one who went through the tribulations of this period and has drunk from the bitter cup, can properly fathom the occurrences of the time. Only a survivor is worthy to judge the happenings of this era.

Tosephoth in Talmud Sanhedrin, relate that judges who have personally witnessed an event need not call for formal testimony. They are the witnesses and the judges. In my pondering the Biblical quote "And G-d said, the cry of Sodom and Gemorah is *great,* and their sin is *heavy.*" (Genesis 18:20), I venture to explain the double language – great and heavy.

Maimonides writes that a country whose evil deeds outnumber their good is decreed for death. The Raavad (a contemporary in Maimonides time) argues that periodically even a lesser amount of evil committed will outweigh the good of a country. The dispute is a fundamental one, quantity versus quality. Maimonides counts quantity, the number of evil deeds, while the Raavad contends that the nature, depth and severity of the evil dictates the punishment.

Quantity versus quality is the question. We similarly find a question in Talmud Yevomoth 14. "Did the School of Shamai follow their own teachings or not?" The School of Shamai were fewer in number. They were the minority in comparison to the House of Hillel, but were much sharper in their learning. Indeed, the House of Shamai were of the opinion that quality counts more than quantity and did themselves follow their own interpretations that quality is superior to quantity.

This is alluded to in the Scriptures. The cry of Sodom and Gemorah was great. The quantity of evil was overwhelming compared to that of good; pursuant to Raavad's learning. However, "And their sin is heavy" alludes to quality, the depth and nature of their sins were also heavy. Thus, according to both Maimonides and Raavad, the towns of Sodom and Gemorah were deserving for retribution and punishment. Yet, in spite of the known atrocities of Sodom and Gemorah, the Bible tells us, "And G-d said, let Me go down and see for Myself" (Genesis 18:21), hence establishing the law that when the judge himself sees the crime committed, then no witnesses are required for him to pass judgment and inflict proper punishment.

A closer examination of the passage in Deuteronomy answers this question. The Torah stresses, "lest he die in war and another man take her." The concern of the betrothed soldier is not as focused on his possible demise as on the probability that another man might marry his perspective bride. Assuming then, that the soldier wishes to prevent her from marrying anyone else and is concerned with that possibility then he would

certainly not facilitate that possibility by his granting to her a conditional GET. Indeed, if the soldier had an option to prevent marriage by not giving a conditional GET, he would not have to be worried "Lest he die in war and another man takes her." We must therefore conclude that death alone triggers a release of the wife to remarry, and by no means has a husband a way of binding up his wife from marriage after he is dead.

The instance of death without witnesses at the time of death or burial is sufficient; knowledge and awareness suffice. In normal circumstances, a widow need not seek out a Beth Din (a Rabbinic Court) to issue a ruling or perform an act to permit her to remarry. The subsequent remarrying is permitted without question.

Halachically then, it must be unequivocably stated that death is the impetus for the wife's permission to remarry and it makes no difference if witnesses actually see the death or burial. In a normal situation no testimony or act of a Beth Din is required for the wife's remarriage. The knowledge of the husband's death suffices.

Generally an overwhelming majority is a certainty. The fact that most people captured and held in the concentration camps and crematoria were killed presents another issue to be examined. Does the majority indicate a certainty or only a probability in this instance? Permitting the remarriage of an Agunah is normally not based on the probabilities of a majority, offered in certain circumstances. However, the probabilities offered when *two* majorities are present is in limited circumstances acceptable (see Responsa of Bais Yaakov Chapter 9).

The majority of Jews brought by transports were killed in the crematoria. The remaining minority were sent to labor camps where once again most did not survive. I personally remember witnessing a German roll call. I counted in my mind seventy-three men sent to the ovens and two sent for work in the camps. There can be no better example of a majority than

that. Those workers fared little better than their counterparts for the crematoria. Those of us who survived Auschwitz know that of three million Jews coming from Poland, the Balkans, France and Belgium, no more that 300,000 were left for slave labor. One of ten survived to become a slave laborer. I worked in such a camp until my strength failed me and I was placed on a disabled list with two thousand others. We were placed in horse stables, covered with hay and we laid there naked for twenty seven days, without clothing or blankets. Three hundred ninety-two of us survived the pain and torture of those twenty-seven days to be taken to Buchenwald. Along the way eighty more perished before we reached our destination.

Therefore, a judge who sits and deliberates weighty issues, must look to what his eyes behold, and also see the inner meaning of the issue. In my opinion, only one burnt by the flames of destruction himself, who saw it with his own eyes, can comprehend that era and as such, and because of it, I find the burden resting heavily on my shoulders.

With a prayer, lest I stumble, I put my weak hand to explain and clarify this matter.

From my memory, I recall that there are two categories of testimony of witnesses . . . the first type of testimony is integral to the proceeding and without which no proceeding may occur. For example, witnesses must sign to an act of divorce or a contract. Witnesses testifying in a murder or civil trial, similarly are crucial in the proceeding to establish the basis for the ruling.

The second type of testimony is a bit less formal and is customary as opposed to requisite in nature. The purpose of the testimony is to reveal a fact or circumstances, rather than to establish a form or proceeding. In this category falls the testimony regarding the death of a husband and the permitting of a widow to remarry. In essence, the death of the husband automatically permits the widow to remarry, but the informal testimony of a witness certifies and reveals that fact. As the Mish-

nah relates, (Kidushin 2) "And a woman acquires herself with the death of her husband". The death alone permits the wife to remarry as opposed to subsequent formal proceeding of a GET (the act of divorce) permit her remarriage.

The death of the husband is the causatory event which triggers an automatic release for the wife. The source of this concept is the paragraph in Deuteronomy (20:7) which states "Who is the man who has betrothed a woman but has not married her, let him return home, lest he die in wars and another man take her." The Torah teaches that the husband's death triggers an automatic release for the wife.

An interesting query may be posed. It is acknowledged in the Talmud that all soldiers going to war would write a conditional divorce decree to their wives in case they did not return. In this case, it would seem that the conditional GET that is given, is the factor which releases the wife and not the automatic death of the husband. Indeed the paragraph in Deuteronomy (20:7) might be alluding to an instance where the conditional GET was given and therefore, no support is found for the position that death of the husband automatically releases the wife.

When the Germans realized that they could not win the war, their efforts to eradicate the Jews intensified and they attempted to "liquidate" the camps. When the Americans liberated us there were only eight of our original group left.

Even after our liberation, death continued from disease, plague, malnutrition and the deprivation of the war.

Now, a bit less than one year after the end of the war, we can state:

(1) All of us Jews of European countries who had been under the Nazi rule were condemned to death by the German government as if a verdict had been signed. No bribe whatsoever could help save the victim, as money had by then been taken away, the whole property of the Jews being regarded as property of the Germans.

(2) The transports which had been dispatched were destined for extermination. Hence, if one was sent with a transport, it is comparable to a person who is going out to be executed, not having the slightest chance of escape, bribery too being of no avail. In order to reduce the severity of their actions, the Germans claimed they were sending the Jews off to labor. To justify this claim, they had to leave a small number of Jews alive. So the minority was taken to work while the great majority was led to the furnace or grave.

(3) Most of the minority left died from hunger and terrible sufferings.

(4) From the minority of the minority left some died during the "Liquidazie" and after the liberation from the plague and evil disease (cholera, typhoid).

(5) The minority of that minority of the minority (i.e. the slightest number left) wrote home to relatives and friends (and if he did not do so it can be taken as an indication that he was no longer alive).

If we have two given proponent situations, the proponent of life and therefore the assumption of a marital prohibition for the wife, we normally can't disregard them in the face of a decree against the lives of Jews (that maybe there are survivors). In the Holocaust, however, all chances of life were snuffed out. The assumption of life is broken and we were all considered as shadows without life, captured with no escape route.

There are no comparisons to Talmudic examples of a majority drowning in the sea or a majority standing for death (which do not produce a permit for the wife to marry) because with our own eyes, we saw the vast majority die and indeed their demise was fact not future speculation. Therefore, as noted in the Rosh (famous Talmudist in the 13th century) a prisoner sentenced to die and taken to the execution chamber is considered dead. His wife is permitted to remarry even without the final word of his fate. The majority of the Holocaust fell into

this category, and the handful of survivors do not detract from the awesomeness of the fate of the general population. The minority of survivors can not even be considered a choice or possibility, in which it might be said that there were two categories, survivors and non-survivors (this would strengthen the status of a survivor as a viable alternate, 50-50 chance of falling into one of two categories, which it unfortunately wasn't.)

In the problem of our time we must evaluate the situation as two majorities (majority dying in the Holocaust and a majority of survivors letting their whereabouts be known) and not as a single majority with a minority of survivors. The Maharam Arik (Rabbi of Tarnow, Poland, at the turn of the Century, known as a Rabbinic authority in the field of Halachic Responsa) in his exegesis "Imrie Yosher" carries a similar opinion and permits remarriage under a strong majority theory. In our generation, we should follow the paths of these Rabbis who strove to find the permissible and not heap undue hardship with stringent opinions upon the tragic widows of the Holocaust. We should not rely on miracles of possible survival to doubt the eligibility to remarry.

My memory tells me that indeed a similar theory (of two majorities) has been employed and used by the Gaon Rav Steinberg of Brody and by the Chasam Sofer in a similar vein.

To recapitulate on our subject then, it can be said that the essence of permissability of remarriage is the death of the husband, not the witnessing of the demise or even an act of a Beth Din but the husband's death itself. In dealing with an Agunah, the Rabbis were more lenient than in other matters, due to the ramifications of their decisions. An overwhelming majority in limited cases may be considered a certainty. As opposed to just one normal majority, there were two majorities which indicated death of the husband, and if any survivors remained, their identities would certainly have been made known.

I turn now to end this Responsa by stating a double warning not to use my writings as a blanket permit for remarriage. Rather, if my words find favor in the eyes and minds of the Rabbis reading my responsa, I pray they combine them with their own wisdom.

To the ONE who said to the universe "Enough" (Rashi, Genesis 43) I pray that he say "Enough" to the tribulations of our people and have mercy upon us and our survivors. May He speedily bring us rejoicing to ZION with the coming of Messiah.

AMEN

קונטרס זה כתבתי בעת היותי בבלגיא
אחרי עזבי את גרמניא הארורה ואחרי
אשר משך חמש שנים ראו עיני יום יום
את ההרג ההרס והאבדון בשנות ת"ש
עד תש"ה. –

נתבקשתי ממכירי לעיין בענין העגונות שנשארו כעת אחר שנשתחררנו ע"י חיילות אנגליא ואמירקא ונמצאות עדיין במחנות שונות בגרמניא. רובן כמעט יודעות שאין בעליהן בחיים, אולם אין עדים שיוכלו להעיד על מיתתם.

והנה יודע אני את ערכי ושפלותי כעת, אחרי אשר ישבתי שנים רבות בחשך ואפלה, וראיתי עני בשבט עברתו. עירום נכנסתי אל הרבע היהודי, ועירום נכנסתי אח"כ לגעטטא, והייתי גם על הדרך חמוביל אל ככשן האש, וגם בין המתים שכבתי, ועשרות פעמים נצלתי בדרך גם מכל מיני מיתות משונות וחליים רעים. לא אחת קברתי אני בעצמי בידי מאות חרוגים קדושים, והנחתי לתוך קבריהם גם חבילי גווילי ספרי תורה, קרועים לגזרים, שהתגוללו בחוצות, ואמרתי מי שיתבע עלבונן של ס"ת, הוא יתבע גם עלבונם של הקדושים. ולא כאן המקום לדבר מזה, ולא יספיקו לזה לא חדיו ולא חנייר. אבל רצוני לומר, שיודע אני בעצמי, שכמו שלקיתי בכל מיני מדווה בגופי, כמו שנופי הי' משך שנים אחדות מלא פצעים, חבורות ומכות מרויות, ועדיין רשמי חמכות הללו נראים על גופי, כמו כן חש אני גם בנפשי פנימה, שגם היא, כלומר רוחי ונשמתי נלקו במרה מרוכה, ועדיין הם פצועים, מוכים ונכאבים, ובמצב כזה בוודאי שא"א לי לדון ולהורות בענינים חמורים ומסובכים בחומר איסור א"א. ובפרט שזה כמעט שש שנים שלא ראיתי שום ספר חנחוץ בענינים אלה, וגם פה בבלגיא מחוסר ספרים אנכי, ואין אומן בלא כלים.

LEAVING EGYPT 600,000 HEALTHY ABLE MEN WERE AFRAID OF 300 PHARAOH'S CHARIOTS. A LITTLE WHILE LATER IN THE SAME BIBLICAL PORTION A HANDFUL OF SELECTED WARRIORS UNDER THE COMMAND OF JOSHUA BEAT AMALEK IN NO TIME.

Lions Out of Lambs

The splitting of the Red Sea and the outcome of the war with Amalek were the two greatest miracles that G-d wrought for the Jews in delivering them from Egypt.

We read this portion of the Torah on the seventh day of Passover, and it might have been proper to observe the last day of Passover with the same kind of happy Seder that we do the first day. The 21st day of Nissan has earned it. All the nations of the world heard the news of the splitting of the Red Sea and became frightened of the Jewish People and its G-d. That is why remembering the splitting of the Red Sea and reciting the song our ancestors sang, when they crossed the sea, are part of our daily morning service – on weekdays as well as on Sabbaths and Festivals.

If that is not enough, at the end of the sidra (weekly Torah portion) "Beshalach" we read of Amalek's attack on the Jews. We recite this, too, every day, and we are commanded never to forget what Amalek did to us. Even though the Amalekites surely heard, along with all the other nations, about the downfall of the Egyptians, they still dared to attack the Jews and to try to destroy them.

We didn't pass through the land of the Amalekites, didn't ask them for anything. They attacked us for no good reason whatsoever. And whereas, we had no family ties at all with the Egyptians, the Amalekites were our cousins, descendants of our uncle Esau.

The Talmudic Sages point out that Amalek wasn't waging war against the Jews as much as against G-d, who came to the Jews' aid, smote the Egyptians and drowned them in the Red Sea. Amalek thought that G-d wouldn't wage war against him, as he was also a scion of the Patriarch Abraham. He was sure that G-d wouldn't visit any plagues on him. Furthermore, the Amalekites were big, husky people, not slight and short, like the Egyptians.

When Moses and Joshua led the Jews in routing the Amalekites, their victory perhaps, made a greater impression than the splitting of the Red Sea. It was a massacre in which the Jews won without supernatural means. It did not take place in a miraculously split sea, amid tempest, thunder and lightning.

These two events – the splitting of the Red Sea and the defeat of Amalek, made a tremendous impression on the whole world especially on Moses's father-in-law, Jethro, who all the while stood silently at a distance. He took shelter somewhere with his daughter Tzippora, Moses's wife, and their children till he had made sure that G-d was a genuine G-d and that the Jews were His people.

The splitting of the sea and the war with Amalek convinced him and he came to Moses and recognized him as the leader of G-d's chosen people, Israel, chosen to lead them out of Egypt and lead them into the Holy Land.

Rashi and the Talmud in Tractate Zevachim confirm this, telling us: "What did Jethro hear that caused him to come? He heard about the splitting of the Red Sea and the war with Amalek." Although the Torah tells us expressly why Jethro came at that particular time, the Talmud sees fit to emphasize these two events as the cause of Jethro's decision.

As we all know, the Talmudic Sages never read thoughts into the plain meaning of Biblical passages unless absolutely necessary. Therefore, we must carefully consider the Talmud's words.

Although the Torah tells us that Jethro came because he heard about the miracles that attended the Exodus, we can understand why the Torah emphasizes the splitting of the sea and Amalek.

The Talmudic Sages are bothered by the fact that Jethro waited so long. He didn't want to go to Egypt, and rightly so. However, he didn't show up as soon as the Jews were liberated. He was not present at the first Seder, and he also did not appear on the seventh day at the Red Sea. He waited, and waited. Even after hearing that the waters of the sea had parted and the Jews were dancing and singing to the accompaniment of drums and tambourines, still Jethro did not come. Some time later, when he heard about the Israelites' victory over Amalek, he packed his things and came to join the Jewish People.

If, as the Torah says, it was only the matter of the Exodus and the wonders G-d performed for the Jews, Jethro should long since have come along. But it seems that both events, the splitting of the Red Sea and the war with Amalek, were necessary in order to convince him.

What did Jethro see in these two events that was more important than any of the previous miracles? Wasn't the liberation of an entire people from Pharaoh's tyranny enough of a wonder? What is the connection between the splitting of the Red Sea and the Jews' victory over Amalek?

The way the Talmud pairs the two, it appears that the splitting of the Red Sea or the victory over Amalek alone was not enough to persuade Jethro to leave his home, his people and his religion and join a nomadic people wandering in the desert. What is it that binds the two episodes together?

A careful study of the relevant passages in the Torah shows the tremendous contrast between the supernatural revolution, the complete metamorphosis, the total transmogrification that occurred in the character of the Jews between the time they crossed the Red Sea and their encounter with Amalek. This is what Jethro observed in astonishment.

In the Song of the Sea portion (Exodus 14-15) we have a description of the mood of the Jews at that critical moment. When they saw Pharaoh and his footsoldiers and cavalry coming after them, they stood there frozen with fear. Then they started railing at Moses: Why did you drag us out into the desert? Aren't there enough graveyards in Egypt for us to be buried in? It would have been better to die under the lashes of the Egyptian taskmasters than to be killed out here in these barren wastes!

What happened to the Jews? What had frightened them so? After all, Pharaoh had come with only 600 chariots, his best, to be sure, but still heavily outnumbered by the 600,000 able-bodied Jewish men, among the larger number departing from Egypt.

But the Jews stood there like paralyzed lambs. In spite of their large number, and in spite of the fact that they had left Egypt heavily armed (Exodus 13:18)! What were they so frightened about, what caused them to quake with fright?

But the Talmudic Sages tell us that although the Jews left Egypt, it took much longer for Egypt to depart from the Jews. They were a herd of frightened people, cowards, creatures without a will of their own, without courage, their spirits broken from their enslavement. The concentration camps alongside the pyramids had transformed them into robots, zombies. They were capable only of carrying bricks on bent backs and bowed heads, stiffnecked, compliant, devoid of pride and self-esteem. The fight had gone out of them, they had lost the desire to be redeemed.

In our own time, in the concentration camps of the Holocaust, such creatures were called Musulmen. The people so dubbed were half-dead, spiritless, just lingering in wait for the gas chambers. In the view of Jews in slavery to Pharaoh, it was better to remain in Egypt than to go back to their ancestral homeland as a free people. They were as sheep being led to the slaughter. One Egyptian had 1,000 Jews paralyzed with fear.

When G-d told Moses that the Jews should leap into the Red Sea, Nachshon son of Aminadav was the only one ready to dip his feet into the chilly water. Now G-d had no choice; with such soldiers one cannot wage a war. So he said to Moses: "Let them be silent. Just let them stop wailing and complaining. I'll find a way of dealing with the Egyptians." Moses said to the Jews (Exodus 14:14): "G-d will battle for you: you hold your peace."

But wonder of wonders: soon afterwards, something else happens. The giant Amalek and his army attack the Jews. By now, the Jews are made of different stuff. Now we have a new type of Jew. These Jews were strong and healthy. They hadn't suffered any blows at Pharaoh's hands, and this time we hear no outcries and see no fear.

Joshua chooses only a select group of people, goes out to the battlefield, and utterly routs Amalek.

What had happened? How had the timid sheep suddenly turned into fierce lions? How had the cowards become heroes all at once? That large mass including 600,000 able-bodied men, who had been unable to budge when they reached the Red Sea shore, now suddenly found it possible to beat the Amalekites with only a handful of valiant warriors. What had changed?

This is what astonished Jethro. He was a leader of the Midianites, but he knew that sheep that do not learn to fight remain sheep, and nothing can be expected from them. It seemed incredible to him that, within the space of a few weeks, sheep should turn into hawks. It is because of this marvel that Jethro came to join the Jewish People. He decided that he wanted to be part of a people that was able to alter its nature so radically.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

During the tragic Hitler years, while our martyrs were being exterminated, and also later, we were asked: Why didn't you fight back? Why didn't you resist? Nobody, who was not

there, could understand it. The world gaped with amazement when a few short years later the Jews of Israel fought like lions. One Jew routed a thousand Arabs. The same Jewish People, only at another time and in a different place. In our instance, too, a miracle happened, and former slaves became heroic fighters.

A TRUE STORY OF A MIRACULOUS ESCAPE FROM THE GHETTO. FATHER OB"M USED IT DURING HIS SERMON OF INSTALLING ME AS RABBI IN THE UNITED SYNAGOGUES, APRIL 5, 1956. "K'HARAF AYIN" – A SPLIT SECOND MADE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH OF TWO PEOPLE

Grandmother's Story, A Life Saver

My father's mother, the "Terever" Rebbitzen was well known as a seeress. We children loved her very much because of the tales she often told us. She never exhausted her humorous or historical treasure of stories.

One such a story helped me in being saved from the thousands of dangers that I had the merit of overcoming. It could be that grandmother's tale was factual but it could also have been fictional.

When she repeated this one particular tale, she always laughed very heartily, and began with an introduction; "This is the way an astute Jew outsmarted the Czar's foolish anti-semitic edicts."

As is well known, a Jew was prohibited from residing in St. Petersburg without a special government permit. This was very difficult to procure even with bribery. When a Jew for some reason had to come to St. Petersburg, he came by stealthy methods. If the police accosted this "lawbreaker" on the street without the permit, he was imprisoned. It was then, with great difficulty, that the Jewish community would intervene, mostly through a high ransom, to secure one's release.

So the story goes that two Jews were walking together. One possessed the necessary permit, but the other did not. Suddenly a policeman appeared and confronted the two, asking them for their permits. Knowing of the great danger in which the illegal resident will find himself, the one with the permit began running. Naturally, the policeman let the remaining one go, and began chasing the fleeing man. The strong sturdy Cossack had no difficulty in catching the runner at which time he immediately produced his permit to the startled policeman. After checking the documents carefully, the policeman asked, 'Why did you run?" to which the runner calmly answered, "My doctor has prescribed jogging twice a day, and this is precisely what I am doing." Hearing this the policeman naturally had to let him go.

Whenever I remind myself of this story, I laugh even today. The reason I mention this, is because repeating the same action of that story, helped my sainted Father OB"M and myself to escape from one of the ghetto's so called "actions", a day during which the German's launched the hunting down of Jews for liquidation.

This is the story. Drohobycz-Borislav were twin cities in Pre-War Poland. In Borislav there were oil wells which were called "Kopalnies" and in Drohobycz there were the refineries in which the raw petroleum was manufactured into various products. The names of the three refineries were "Galicia, Naptha and Polmin." The first two belonged totally to Jews who were oil specialists. These employed many engineers, chemists, and technical professionals, most of them Jews. Many of these engineers were well-known internationally before the war, because of their research findings.

When the Nazis came, they immediately took control over the refineries and the Borislav oil wells. The Nazis soon realized they would be forced to use these Jewish experts, without whom these factories could not function. In addition to needing petroleum for their war efforts, the Nazis were hoping

to occupy the Baku oil fields in Russia in the future, and the Rumanian fields as well. Hence, saving Jewish oil specialists was to them of prime importance. This saved our ghetto from being liquidated after many others already were erased.

The directorship of the refineries was in the hands of German Nazi enterprisers but the day-by-day operations were the works of Jewish ingenuity and strength. Every Jewish refinery worker had to wear on his breast-pocket a ten centimeter, white square patch with the letter "R" inscribed on it. The "R" stood for "Rüsstung" meaning industries with war priorities, producing materials for the army.

Every day a column of Jews marched from the ghetto to the oil refineries situated several miles away, outside the city. Very few of the Jews cared to work in the refinery, because of the great distance getting there on foot and the lingering stench of oil on their bodies and clothing. The work itself was tedious for those who were not laborers by trade, and they were constantly supervised by the Ukranian militia. The so called Jewish "Prominent Ones" worked in the offices and laboratories.

In 1942, the Nazis made a work camp for those engaged in the refinery work on Jupna Street, a few blocks from the Ghetto. We had to sleep in the camp, even though we had freedom of movement, which many took advantage of. Sundays, we visited our relatives in the Ghetto, as well as purchased various sundries which were unavailable to us in the camp. Every morning we went to the appointed place called the "Apel-platz" from which we marched to the refineries. We returned every evening for food and rest.

The camp "Feuhrer" was Obersturmfeuher Friedrich Hildebrant, who was captured and tried after the war. As luck would have it, a well-known engineer and personal friend of my family Ing. Tulek Backenroth (Bronicki) took me out of the hard-labor battalion, and gave me a position as a designer in the technical office.

Since childhood, I had artistic talents and always designed the "Sfira" and "Shovisi" tablets which were ornate charts in use for services in all large Synagogues in town. During the Russian occupation, I became a "Chudoznik" (an artist in Russian) and made poster announcements for funerals, weddings and political portraits. Both my Russian and German documents from that time on listed my occupation as designer.

The change of being able to work in the bureau, gave me a chance to overhear what the Nazis were talking about amongst themselves and know what the latest news was on the radio. Thus I had some outside contacts.

The director of the refinery whose name was Yunke liked my "art" and made me paint birthday and greeting cards, as well as new years wishes, with graphic colors in Gothic calligraphic script. From time to time he rewarded me with bread and sugar, which were worth more to us than money at the time. He had no idea who I was, and that my Father was Chief Rabbi of the area.

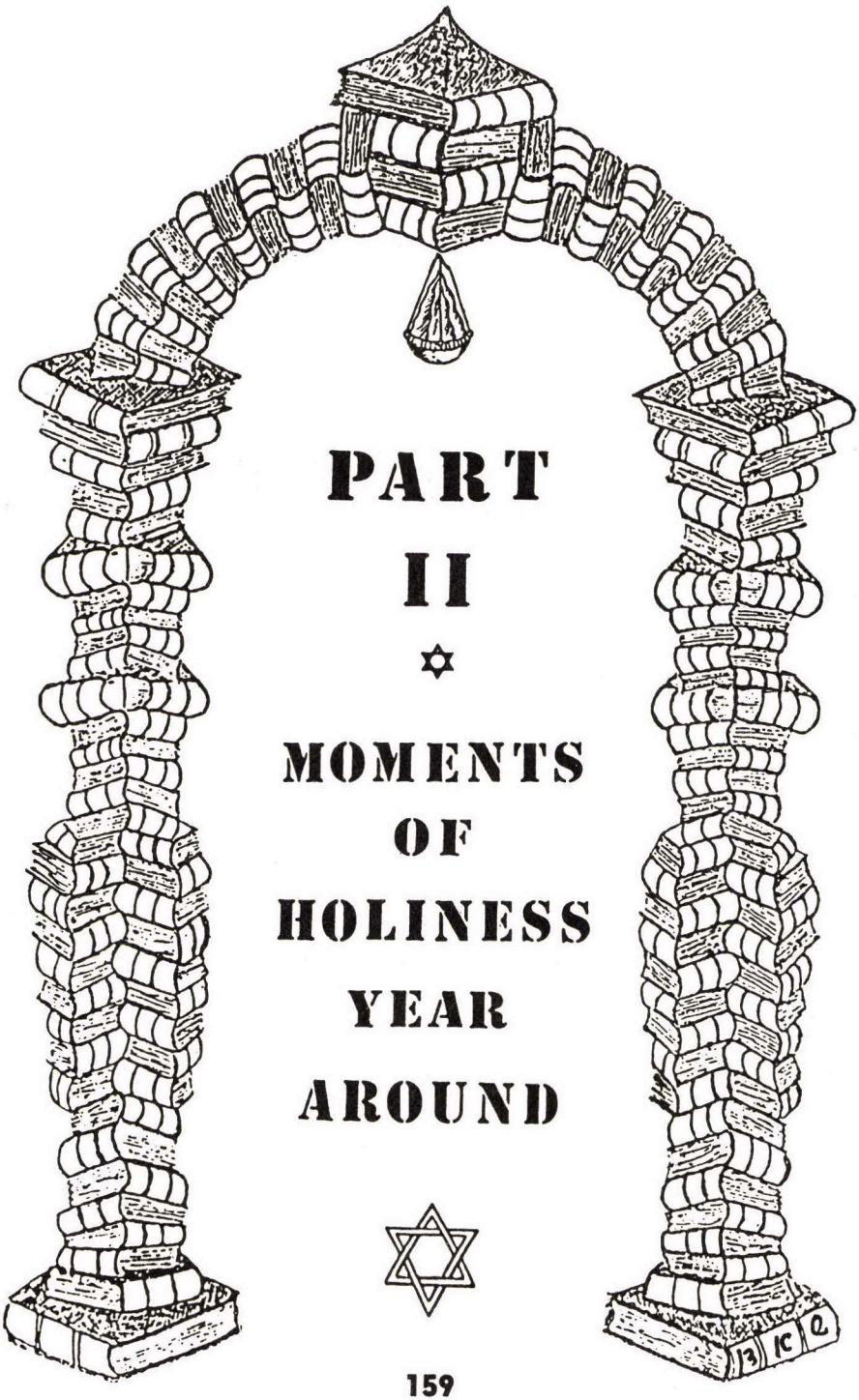
Several times he mentioned to me that I should not go into the Ghetto, because the "R" will not protect me there. It was just good in the refinery and work camp. One day, I met my Father and entreated him to leave the Ghetto, assuring him that we would find some work for him. He refused, saying that it was his job as Rabbi not to leave his flock leaderless. "Even while hidden in the Ghetto, I am still present," he said. I pleaded with him on later occasions, pointing out that he wouldn't be recognized, and there is nothing shameful about leaving, but to no avail. Meanwhile hunger and disease increased wildly in the narrow confines of the Ghetto.

It happened on the Sunday when I was in the Ghetto with my "R" permit, that a noise was heard outside and we immediately understood that an "Action" to catch Jews was beginning. The S.S. encircled the Ghetto allowing no one to leave. Military trucks were being used to bring their Jewish passengers to the train station for deportation.

We were living in the women's section of the "Oseh Chesed" Synagogue, and mother, hearing of the "action", hid with my two sisters in the hiding place between two walls on the attic. Suddenly the main gates of the Synagogue were broken, and in came a wild herd of police. The Synagogue itself was now to be used by the Ukrainian Militiamen as a depot for transporting Jews to the railroad station for deportation.

I looked outside through the window and noticed Hildebrandt commanding the "action" on the street. In that perplexed moment, I suddenly reminded myself of grandmother's story about the two Jews in St. Petersburg. Every second hung between life and death. I quickly took off my "R" and attached it on to my father's jacket. My father screamed, "What are you doing? Now both of us will perish." Ignoring his plea, I ran down the side exit of the women's gallery which was on the opposite side of the main entrance and headed towards the street where Hildebrandt stood and told him that another refinery worker and I came to the Ghetto before the "action", and a Ukranian policeman ripped off my "R." "Dumbkoph, Rauss," (Dummy, get out) he shouted wildly. "Didn't I tell you all not to go to the Ghetto? Go get your companion!" I ran back to my Father and returned to Hildebrandt with my Father displaying his "R" on his chest and me with the work permit card from the Refinery in my hand. Hildebrandt in the excitement of his commanding role and rank asked no further questions, and ordered an S.S. man to lead us out from the Ghetto. Grandmother's story worked, I fooled the German and we were saved. . . .

Thus my Father, of blessed memory, finally left the Ghetto and at the refinery an old acquaintance Mr. Krater, took him in as an assistant into his bookbinding workshop. In the Hebrew language both an author and a bookbinder share the same word of "Mechaber." After this experience my Father used to say, "I remained in my old profession, the making of books – a "Mechaber."



PART II

✡

MOMENTS OF HOLINESS YEAR AROUND

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ISRAEL.....Jerusalem Post -- Hatzofe
NEW YORK....The Algemeiner Journal -- The Jewish Press -- Rabbinical Council of America Manual
MEXICO.....La Voz -- "The Yidishe Shtime"

Reprints appeared in Jewish periodicals in France, Australia, Argentina and Brazil.

ALL OF OUR FEASTS AND FASTS HAVE SEVERAL NAMES AND SYMBOLS. THEY ARE HISTORIC AND EDUCATIONAL IN THE ACTUAL CONTEMPORARY LIFE OF EACH GENERATION. THEY GO ALONG WITH THE SEASONS OF THE CALENDAR AND DEMAND AND REMIND US OF OUR SPIRITUAL DUTIES.

Our New Years – A Quartet . . .

Rosh Hashana "The Year's Beginning" is actually not one holiday, but four holidays rolled into one. It is a four-faceted holiday, each with a name of its own, and with a meaning of its own for Jews, for humanity and for the world.

1. **The New Calendar**

First of all it is Rosh Hashana, the new year, a fresh start. Our reckoning of the year starts anew. One year has departed and another one has arrived. The old calendar is discarded and replaced by a new one. But the "New Year" aspect, which is so important to the Gentiles, who mark it as a major holiday, is of minor significance in Judaism. To be sure a new year has arrived and the holiday is called "Rosh Hashana – Year's Beginning," but in itself this signifies very little to the Jews. As the great Jewish poet Bialik said: "The Jews don't tally the years. We tally the generations." Jewish history knows only of epochs: the generation of the Deluge; the generation of the Wilderness that was delivered from Egyptian bondage; the periods of the two Temples in Jerusalem; the Talmudic era; the period of the Spanish Inquisition; the era of the Crusades; the era of the Enlightenment and Reform; the rise of Hassidism and of Zionism; and the recent era of Hitlerism and of the establishment of the State of Israel.What does a single year signify to us?

Where infants are concerned, days are counted. The child is eight days old, two weeks, four, ten or twelve weeks. Where

the aged are concerned, however, not even the years are counted. People say: "His is seventyish," or "He's in his eighties." How far into the eighties doesn't seem to matter any more. The Jewish people is thousands of years old. We are one of the oldest nations in history. The years aren't counted any more, where we are concerned, either. We reckon "time." The year per se is of virtually no significance. We reckon in terms of generations. For us, a year is only a speck in eternity.

That is why the new-year theme occupies a very minor place in our prayers. We have almost no prayers for the new year as such in the Rosh Hashana machzor. Apart from the reference in the name – Rosh Hashana, "Year's Beginning" or "New Year" – the new-year theme is practically of no significance. It just tells us that calendar year 5744 has ended and 5745 begun.

2. **The Day of Judgment**

Rosh Hashana's second name is "Yom Hadin," "The Day of Judgment." In Western culture, "New Year" involves only time – the calendar and the clock. It has nothing to do with morality and ethics. When the clock strikes 12, people are supposed to kiss each other and start dancing away.

To the Jews, Rosh Hashana is also a time of reckoning, but of an altogether different kind. We tally not the time that has passed but the deeds that have been performed, reckoning the quality of our conduct. Man on earth takes a spiritual stock of himself while his record is being reviewed up in Heaven.

So instead of singing and dancing on his New Year, the Jew stands in the dock while the Heavenly court measures the balance of the good he has performed against the evil he has perpetrated. Is it any wonder, then, that his bearing is earnest, solemn and that we refer to the period as the Days of Awe?

In the lives of individuals, years and events have quite a different significance than they do in the lives of nations. Human beings have a short lifespan, and they cannot see the

beginning or the end of eternity. So a year in the life of the individual is not a dot but a station.

Rosh Hashana, the Day of Judgment, is a point at which the Jew halts to review the road he has taken and considers how to proceed. In the life of the individual, all experiences are like links in a chain, all connected to and affecting each other. But because the individual is puny and his time is so short, events loom large out of all proportion. The individual counts the years of his private life and takes note of them, but he cannot see their true value relative to the totality of history.

3. **The Day of Horn Sounding**

The third main motif of Rosh Hashana is that of "Yom Terua," a "Day of Horn Sounding." On Rosh Hashana, Jews are judged not merely as individuals but as a nation.

In our long history, we Jews have well understood and paid careful attention to the relationship between the individual and the collective. This theme runs through our entire liturgy. On the one hand, the insignificance of the individual, who is nothing but earth, dust, clay in the hands of the Creator who does whatever He wishes with him. On the other hand, the responsibility of the individual to and for the collective.

The responsibility of Jews for each other exists not only in the eyes of G-d, but also in the world's eyes. The nations of the world long ago accepted our religious – social concept of "Jews are responsible for each other." From the onset Jews were responsible for each other, and whenever one Jew sinned the collective was punished. This mutual responsibility, this partnership, of Jews has always been present in the Jewish people, functioning not only from the individual to the collective but also from the collective to the individual. If one Jew was in trouble, the whole community concerned itself with him. It is sufficient to remember the mitzva of "Ransoming captives." Whenever a Jewish community learned that a Jew was being held captive, they considered it their solemn duty to try and ob-

tain his release, even if he was a total stranger. That is why every Jewish heart trembles over the fate of one single Jew, Anatoli Shcharansky, in Russia.

This Jewish unity is expressed by the "Terua" sound of the shofar. Just as the staccato sounds of the "Terua" are separate yet one, so is each one of us part of a communal whole, sovereign yet dependent, united as one "Voice of Jacob," sharing a common destiny. We pray to be forgiven for our individual, private sins and for our collective sins. The Yom Terua – The Day of the Horn Sounding – is the day on which both the Jewish collective and the individual Jew are judged.

4. **The Day of Rememberance**

Finally, there is the fourth designation for Rosh Hashana. It is also called the Day of Remembrance. It is the day when G-d judges the world, all of mankind. "This is the day of the world's birth. Today, all of the world's creatures will stand in judgment." Not only we Jews, but all the nations of the world must give an account of themselves to G-d.

Just as the individual's years are like links in a chain, so is it with the history of nations. Foolish despots believed that they could dictate the laws of nature and humanity and determine the course of history. G-d's *diktat,* however, is that truth and fairness should rule the world, that righteousness and justice should rise to the top the way oil comes to the top of water. This wish of Divine Providence has ultimately prevailed over all despots, and in the end they have all had their day of judgment. G-d does not forget; they all get their due punishment.

Hitler thought that he would "make" history, "for at least a thousand years," he said. Now the world knows how wrong he was. Hitler was not history's master, but its pawn. History let him play a little, the way a volcano sometimes plays with fire-spewing lava and sows catastrophe and desolation all around. Finally, history spewed out Hitler and continued on its course.

"Will the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" Will G-d

forever leave the world devoid of justice? That is impossible! Truth must prevail. G-d can forbear for a while, but the day of remembrance and reckoning comes, bringing the due punishment with it. Hitler was burnt, just as he burned his victims.

Such has been the end of all tyrants, from Pharaoh in Egypt to his successors today, and that will be the end of all our contemporary tyrants.

The sense of justice, fairness, fraternity, the yearning for peace, are universal. However, they have been a specialty of the Jews all through the generations. All of Jewish culture is permeated by the Jewish spirit of truth and righteousness. The world's scholars acknowledge that the world got its moral and ethical concepts from the Jews and our Torah.

History carries out its Divine mission of bestowing on the great of each generation its supreme gift, the blessing of immortality. At the same time, it punishes the wicked with the curse of oblivion, imprinting, however, the brand of guilt on their brows before casting them into the bottomless pit.

Over the generations, ideologues of various nations have sought to replace individual – but especially collective – religious feelings, the adoration of G-d, with various "isms." Socialism, communism, humanism, capitalism, have all had their revolutions whose ideal was to create a new social order. Assisted by science, culture, art, economic and civic equality, each in turn hoped to make human relations fairer, more brotherly, eliminating injustice, exploitation, falsehood.

But ever since the beginning of history we have seen that "man's urges are evil from his youth" (Genesis 8:21). However much reason, conscience and common sense may point to good, impulse and passion drag us in the direction of evil. If G-d is not present in our hearts and minds, no possessions, no education, culture or science will curb the bestial in us.

On Rosh Hashana, the Day of Remembrance, we pray for the whole world, and we pray that we shall live to see the day

when the Shofar blast, announcing the coming of the Messiah, will be sounded and all humanity will acknowledge and know who G-d is, all will bow down to the King of Kings and say, "G-d, our G-d, is the One-and-Only Master of the Universe." Without Him, the world cannot survive. Without Him, the leaders of the nations will lead the world back to chaos. They will destroy themselves and the rest of us along with themselves. We are almost at that point. The menace hangs over our heads.

We have to pray fervently for a good year for ourselves, our families, the entire Jewish people, and all mankind. Let us pray that the new calendar year will be consecrated and remembered as the year in which our lost children will return to worship G-d again, on the holy mountain in Jerusalem, the year of the recognition of G-d and the acceptance of the Heavenly Yoke.

WHAT CONNECTION IS THERE BETWEEN THE SHOFAR BLOWING AND THE EVIL SPIRITS THAT WE WISH TO DISPELL ON NEW YEARS DAYS?

Satan and the Shofar

"Why is the sounding of the shofar done with a ram's horn?" The Talmud (Rosh Hashana 16a) gives two reasons. (Rabbi Saadiah Gaon gives ten explanations.) One reason is that the sounding of the shofar is supposed to remind G-d of the Akeda, the Binding of Isaac, when the ram was sacrificed instead of Isaac. And we ask G-d to receive the shofar blasts we have sounded as though we are offering Him our lives on the altar the way Isaac did.

The second reason is short and sharp: "to confuse Satan." The shofar blasts are intended to startle and befuddle Satan and thereby prevent him from pursuing his prosecution against us before the Heavenly Court on this holy Judgment Day.

These two explanations do not seem to have any connection with each other and both raise numerous questions.

First: What power does the ancient episode of the Akeda, which happened 4,000 years ago, possess to influence G-d every year on Rosh Hashana to forgive us our sins?

Second: How is it that G-d, "Who remembers all the forgotten," should have to be "reminded" of the last and greatest of the ten trials that the Patriarch Abraham, the first Jew, had to undergo: leading Isaac, the first Jewish child, to the sacrificial altar?

Third: Why recall an ancient episode, which in the end involved no more than a fright for the two protagonists, Abraham and Isaac, when throughout the generations of Jewish history we have produced so many martyrs, so many who perished sanctifying G-d's Name? Why not mention our own Six Million martyrs who were shot and burned and buried alive before our eyes?

As for befuddling Satan – that is a real necessity on Judgment day, but it is a difficult matter to understand.

First: How is it possible that Satan is startled and confused by the sound of a little shofar? Isn't there some better way of throwing Satan off balance?

Second: After all these years, how is it that Satan hasn't learned the order of the shofar blasts, which is printed in every Rosh Hashana prayer book? The biggest ignoramus knows at least this, and comes to synagogue to hear the sounding of the shofar. How is it that clever Satan is always surprised and frightened anew?

Third: According to the Talmud, a ram's horn is supposed to serve as shofar. The sounding of a horn of any other animal will not confuse Satan. Why precisely a ram's horn?

Fourth: Is it the sounds that confuse Satan, or is it the shofar?

Fifth: What sort of instrument is the shofar that its sounds constitute a paradox – on the one hand serve as a reminder, on the other cause forgetfulness, reminding G-d of the Akeda and causing Satan to forget the Jews' sins?

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It seems to me that there actually is a connection between the ancient, everlasting Satan and the story of the Binding of Isaac. It is possible that the two reasons the Talmud gives, for using a ram's horn as a shofar on Rosh Hashana are really one and the same, "one dream" as Joseph put it.

G-d created Man with two urges, the Good Urge and the Evil Urge, the latter being personified as Satan. The struggle within us between the two urges is an eternal one. The good urge wants us to be good and honest, while Satan tries to persuade us, seduce us with every crooked means at his disposal, to sin and not observe any mitzvot.

According to the Talmudic Sage Ben Zoma (Avot IV), the greatest hero is the person who can control his evil instincts, his passions, which are directed by Satan. The Sages tell us that Satan "is full of eyes," he sees all, knows all, and uses evey means, fair and foul, in his effort to cause Man to stray from the right path.

When G-d appeared to the Patriarch Abraham and told him to offer up his only son, Isaac, Satan was certain that he would be able to handle Abraham with very little effort. He was sure that he would have no trouble at all frustrating G-d's plan.

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni,* "Vayera") lists various stratagems by which Satan tried to prevent Abraham from carrying out G-d's bidding. He blocked Abraham's way with a mountain, a chasm and a river, and when he saw that all that did not stop Abraham, he tried using logic. He argued with Abraham as follows:

1) How could a father do that to his child? True, other parents in those days were sacrificing their children to their gods. But those fathers had other children, so they could afford to give up one child, whereas Abraham and Sarah had only one son, Isaac!

2) How could G-d demand the sacrifice of Isaac after He Himself had promised Abraham that through Isaac He would create a Jewish nation that would have as many people as there are stars in the sky? Would G-d renege on His promise? Would He breach the pact He had just made with Abraham? From whom would a new nation emerge if Isaac was not alive

to continue the line begun by Abraham? After all, they were the only two Jews in the world then.

3) Satan argued with Abraham: "Why don't you plead with G-d? You pitied Sodom and Gomorrah; don't you care about your own child?!"

Failing to persuade Abraham, Satan tried his wiles on Isaac: "Why are you letting yourself be led as a sheep to the slaughter?"

When Satan saw that he was wasting his words, he decided that it really didn't matter, for he would get the best of Abraham either way. If Abraham was finally persuaded by Satan's powerful arguments, that would mean that he had stopped believing in G-d, and he would be ashamed over having failed the trial. And if Abraham stood fast and sacrificed Isaac, he would lose all his prestige and authority as far as the world was concerned. Everything he had been preaching all his life, as he tried to missionize the world on behalf of the G-d of justice, truth and mercy, would burst like a soap-bubble. With the death of Isaac, Abraham's one and only son, Abraham's One-and-Only G-d would also be slain – so Satan reckoned. As he saw it, he could not lose.

As we know, the Patriarch Abraham surmounted all the obstacles. Lovingly he went to G-d – proudly, not bargaining, asking no questions. It was Satan who emerged from the encounter humiliated, a laughing-stock. The Patriarch Abraham showed the world what one can do with true faith. He showed that our G-d does not desire human sacrifice. Not only did Abraham overcome Satan and pass the trial; he also emerged from the encounter strengthened, a hero for all time.

The classical Jewish commentators ask: If the Akeda was a trial for Abraham, why is it called "The Binding of Isaac" rather than "the Trial of Abraham"? This can be answered with another question: Whose trial was greater, Abraham's or Isaac's? There is no doubt that Abraham deserves a lot more credit. For many reasons.

Abraham had an active role, while Isaac was passive: he only came along. "And the two of them went together," fearlessly proceeding to the place where Isaac was to be sacrificed. Isaac had someone to learn from, as far as undergoing trials and devotion to G-d were concerned. His father served him as an example. Abraham had learned nothing from his father, Terach. He had run away from him. Nobody had led him. In his belief in the One-G-d, Abraham was all alone in a world of idolatry and human sacrifice.

If, G-d forbid, Isaac had been slaughtered on the altar, his death would have been quick, whereas Abraham, Isaac's father would have gone on living after that tragedy, with a big hole in his heart, a broken man.

Abraham's heroism is expressed in the very name "Akedat Yitzchak – The Binding of Isaac." Who bound whom? Abraham was the binder and Isaac the bound one. The word "akeda – binding" apears in the active form, referring to the binder, Abraham. If Isaac were the chief protagonist, the episode should have been referred to as something like "How Isaac was Bound," to emphasize his greatness in letting himself be bound. The designation "The Binding of Isaac" emphasizes Abraham's greatness as the one who did the binding.

Now of all the Patriarchs, only Abraham and Isaac had the privilege of going together as father and son. Ishmael, Abraham's eldest son, was an uncontrollable ruffian, because he did not have a mother like Sarah. For Isaac and Rebecca, the problem was just the opposite: there was an active mother, but not a father whose presence was felt. Isaac was blind, and both their children – Esau and Jacob – deceived him. Rebecca was helpless to deal with the situation alone.

With Jacob, Satan had a field day. He had the right assistants, Esau and Laban. Both of them – Jacob's brother Esau and his father-in-law, Laban – tried in various ways to eradicate Jacob and his entire line. The jealousy and hatred between the brothers spread like an epidemic. Jacob's sons, the fathers of

the Twelve Tribes, had neither father nor mother, because many mothers are worse than nothing and reduce their husbands to non-fathers as far as the children are concerned. By sowing mutual hatred among the brothers, Satan made the job easy for himself.

When Satan makes his way into a person, he confounds him, causing him to lose all sense of value and proportion. Even righteous people are sometimes deceived, because not everyone can see through Satan's disguises. But the truly wise man is able to deceive and confound Satan instead of being swindled and befuddled by him.

And Satan never suffered such humiliating defeat as he did in the episode of Akedat Yitzchak. He never expected such an outcome. It never occurred to him that G-d was only testing Abraham's faith and that the outcome would be "And the two of them went together" – that Abraham would agree and Isaac would go along, and that in the end a ram would appear and would be sacrificed on the altar instead of Isaac.

That is why on Rosh Hashana, Judgment Day, when our destiny in the new year is being decided, the Master-of-the-Universe tells us to sound a ram's horn before Him, to serve as a reminder of two things.

First, the sounding of the shofar is to remind us that the only way for mortal human beings to combat Satan is by total, unequivocal faith in G-d, such as the Patriarch Abraham had. With G-d as a partner, we can succeed in our struggle to frustrate Satan's designs. The Master-of-the-Universe Himself helped Abraham to deceive Satan. Without faith in G-d, it is impossible to overcome the diabolical forces of the Evil Urge. With wisdom and fear of Heaven, it is possible to befuddle Satan, to bedazzle his thousand eyes, just as he does to people. The ram that appeared and was sacrificed instead of Isaac is the best evidence of this.

Secondly, as regards the prayer of all parents that their

children should go side by side with them – there is only one way to achieve that. One must wish to be and be capable of being a father and a mother such as Abraham and Sarah were. Here, too, we require Heaven's help. However, if we strive for it and seek it wholeheartedly, G-d becomes our partner and helps us – parents and children alike – to overcome Satan.

When Satan comes to the synagogue on Rosh Hashana and sees parents and children together and hears the shofar being sounded, that indicates to him that we are following the way of the Patriarch Abraham, and Satan is distraught. What he has seen and heard means that he is out of work, that nobody is going to heed him! People are going to have faith in G-d! Children are going to follow and obey their parents! What will Satan do? . .

WE ARE TAUGHT TO MIX GLADNESS AND SADNESS IN ORDER NOT TO BE TRAPPED BY ANY MENTAL OR PHYSICAL EXTREME DISORDER. WALKING THROUGH LIFE IS LIKE WALKING A TIGHTROPE WITH LEARNING HOW TO KEEP THE BALANCE IN THE AIR.

Rejoice – Even Though There Isn't Much to Be Happy About

It is said that the best proof that there were murderers and thieves in the time of Moses is the fact that the Ten Commandments proclaim so emphatically: "Thou shalt not kill" and "Thou shalt not steal." For otherwise, the Torah should not have had to include these prohibitions in the Ten Commandments...

From the fact that the Torah three times exhorts us to rejoice on the Festival of Sukkot, it is similarly inferred that during Sukkot, of all festivals, we are somewhat depressed. For Sukkot and all its religious and historical symbols remind us of grave matters indeed.

First of all, the sukka-booth recalls exile. G-d caused the Children of Israel to dwell in sukka booths during their forty years sojourn in the wilderness. The historic sukka symbolizes nomadism, want, rootlessness. This was a phenomenon not only of Moses' time, but of almost our entire existence. The era of the sukka is an eternity in our history as compared with the brief intervals of national sovereignty.

The individual Jew, too, who must leave his bright, comfortable home and enter the sukka, which admits the rain, whose walls and table and chairs rattle in the wind – he, too, does not find Sukkot the best time to heed the Biblical injunction: "Thou shalt be only joyous."

The truly pious Jew learns from the sukka that the world is but a temporary dwelling, that life is emphemeral, and these thoughts make him sad. And the distinguished "guests" – Ushpizin – we invite to join us in the sukka remind us how low we have sunk – "boshnu mikol am."

"Tzilta meruba me'chamta" – Dark and heavy are the shadows of the sukka, obscuring the light of the sun. No wonder, then, that the Torah had to exhort us several times to rejoice, to prevent our falling into complete despondency.

One might infer all this. But it is not so. Actually, the exhortation to rejoice is intended to teach us the profounder significance of joy, of human happiness.

To understand joy, we must compare it with unhappiness and suffering. The philosophers and scholars of many religions have grappled with these complex concepts.

Nature is all contrast: light and darkness, hot and cold, work and rest, friendship and enmity, black and white, day and night, summer and winter. These contrasts are further divided into two categories, the active and the passive. Darkness, for example, is passive, in that it is an absence of light. Cold results from the absence of sunlight or the extinction of fire. All contrasts in nature comprise an active and passive element. Thus it is with man, too.

Let us, for example, compare human life with death. These are two forces as opposite as day and night. We all know that life is the active element, whereas death may be defined as an absence of life; just as silence means the absence of sound.

Now let us consider the problem at hand, that of joy and suffering. Which of these two emotions is active and which passive? Is joy an absence of pain, or something more than that? Joy must be actively expressed, and if it is not a heart-and-soul rejoicing it may as well be called sorrow.

Is a man happy when he has no sorrow or pain, or is he unhappy when he has no joy? This discussion has always been

timely, because man has always sought happiness. Each of us wishes to seize a bit of happiness and possess it with all our might. No people has suffered as much as the Jews. No people has endured pogrom, pillage and banishment, and come back to start all over again. To live, to plant, to work as though nothing had happened; to wipe away the tears and forget. Only the Jews know how to do this. Each time in history that we have fallen, we have gotten back up on our feet. Whence came this courage and stamina?

The sukka provides the answer to this question and to the problem of happiness. The sukka reveals to us the secret of true human happiness. Modern man is on the wrong track in his pursuit of happiness. He cannot achieve it because he does not know what it is.

Medicine has long recognized that there are two types of human pain, the physical and the spiritual, or the psychosomatic. A man's hand or tooth may hurt him; this is pure physical pain. He may also be plagued by a purely psychic or nervous disturbance. Medicine knows that psyche and body are partners which are in constant contact with each other. A pain in the stomach may be due to an ulcer or may result from an unpleasant encounter at home or at work. Moreover, medicine has established that overwrought nerves may cause ulcers, heart ailment and even cancer. A good doctor today will inquire about intimate matters which seem to have no connection with one's physical ailment. Indeed, one's psychic condition must be examined as closely as the blood pressure or body temperature.

But science has yet to learn one thing which the Jews have long since determined. Just as there are two kinds of pain, physical and psychic, so are there two kinds of joy, physical and psychic. This we learn from the sukka.

Physical happiness derives from bodily pleasure. The eating of good food, imbibing a good drink, are pure physical pleasures. It is this sort of physical pleasure with which modern

man is preoccupied. People by the myriads pass their time in theaters and other amusement places where they can gain admittance for an hour or two of "joy." This is false, superficial joy. Man imitates the actor on the stage and laughs only with his face, not with his heart. This is a joy of lip service, not of the human spirit.

This hired joy is but a forgetting oneself, an absence of pain, temporary. No sooner does man leave the entertainment place than he feels emptier than when he entered. Physical experiences do not last.

Physical joy is the contrast of physical suffering, and contrasts repel each other. When man is ill he loses his appetite for food, because illness and appetite are physical phenomena, one counteracting the other. We cannot at one and the same time feel physical joy and physical suffering. When one has a toothache, one does not feel like dancing even in the most posh nightclub.

How quickly do these momentary pleasures and time killers pass. The more one seeks to make life pleasant by buying little joys, the bitterer is the aftertaste. It is said in America that one who buys a new automobile is happy only twice, once when he buys it and later when he sells it and gets rid of it. Possession of an automobile only brings headaches.

The truth is that when man is able to afford luxuries, he is not really capable of enjoying them: his soul does not participate in his enjoyment of them.

It is spiritual joy that expresses an active factor in man. But not every man is capable of experiencing spiritual joy, for it requires certain preparation and special circumstances. Everyone is capable of suffering spiritually, but very few people are able to enjoy themselves actively, with their spirit. As King David has put it (Psalms 90:15): "Cause us to rejoice according to the days wherein Thou hast afflicted us." That is: Let me rejoice as actively as You have caused me to feel my suffering; I

should like to express my joy as profoundly, as fundamentally. And King David achieved this joy of soul.

Spiritual emotions are not dichotomous to a person's physical condition. Physically a man may be in terrible pain, while spiritually he may be in a state of ecstatic joy. Spiritual joy transcends pain and suffering. Spiritual joy can endure forever; joy and the taste of joy can endure though we may fast between one Sabbath and the next, though we may mount the pyres and enter the crematoria.

The laws of mourning are cancelled by the Sabbath and festivals. Human grief is, to be sure, a spiritual pain, but our forefathers were capable of dispelling grief with Sabbath and festival joy. Pious Jews sing and dance even on a Sabbath that falls during a week of mourning. And rightly so, for spiritual joy offsets spiritual sorrow, which is a passive element and must therefore retreat before the active joy of the spirit to which the person has elevated himself.

This is the lesson of the sukka. "Thou shalt rejoice in thy festivals . . . and thou shalt be only joyous." Precisely in the sukka, unstable as it may be, you must learn to rejoice in all circumstances. Festival joy is a spiritual joy which must be actively expressed, notwithstanding the surrounding gloom, exile, rootlessness, suffering and grief. The heart-and-soul Jew can rejoice even in the sukka, which no tempest can topple.

In other words, the Jew can rejoice, be content with his lot, be a spiritual millionaire even when he is in material straits. The Jew is capable of rejoicing even when there seems to be nothing to rejoice over. No wonder, then, that the Jewish people has survived so many nations and so much travail.

SOLOMON, THE WISEST OF MEN, IS RIGHT WITH HIS STATEMENT IN ECCLESIASTES. ALL NEW INVENTIONS ARE BUT DISCOVERIES OF THE SECRETS IN NATURE. THERE IS ACTUALLY NOTHING NEW.

There Is Still Nothing New Under the Sun

A whole body of literature has been written about the Book of Ecclesiastes. No one – from our Sages thousands of years ago down to the modern Bible critics – has quite been able to make out this enigmatic book. In Tractate Sabbath 30b we read: "The Sages wanted to suppress the Book of Ecclesiastes (that is, exclude it from the canon of the Sacred Scriptures) because its words are mutually contradictory. But the book remained because it opens and closes with Torah."

The question is asked: If our Sages felt that the book was not good because it was full of contradictions, of what use is the fact that the beginning and end contain Torah? The beginning and end cannot make up for what comes in between. They could at least have discarded everything but the beginning and end.

But the Talmud wishes to imply something else altogether. The Talmud wishes to stress that there is Torah at the beginning and end of Ecclesiastes only because all the rest is full of contradictions. It would not have been good without these contradictions. The great thing is to reach Torah after doubts and challenges.

Faith which follows scepticism is perhaps the strongest faith of all, especially when the scepticism arises not out of reason or theory but out of life itself.

Ecclesiastes concludes that "all is vanity," not as a result of more philosophizing, but because life itself has convinced him so. He had experienced everything and seen with his own eyes that all is vain, futile.

Ecclesiastes did not reach his conclusion of "vanity" the way other philosophers have, through hermit-like meditation upon what is written in books, but after enjoying all the pleasures that life has to offer and adding up all his experiences.

Ecclesiastes describes the life of luxury he lived. From his description one gets the feeling that he was driven to luxury by an inner unrest. First he abandoned himself to wealth and pleasure, thinking thereby to still his unrest. Then he pursued wisdom, thinking there to find peace. He betook himself to science, in order to learn all there was to know about everything that happened under the sun. But in science, too, he found no peace.

He then concluded that neither joie de vivre nor knowledge bring true inner peace.

Sometimes man thinks that a new age will bring him happiness. In the new age, he thinks, there will be new discoveries, new inventions and comforts which will make life a veritable paradise. All this is delusion, says Ecclesiastes. For all that has been done will be repeated, and there is nothing new under the sun.

Ecclesiastes is full of contradictions and paradoxes because it is no theoretical work but a description of life. And life itself is nothing but contrasts and paradoxes. Man can achieve nothing. Evil deeds are committed under the sun, and science, too, leads to nothing.

Twopenny heretics challenge Ecclesiastes on his statement that there is nothing new under the sun. What, they demand, of the airplane, the radio, television, the atom?

But those who are familiar with modern technology know that modern civilization consists not of discoveries but of reve-

lations. Nothing new has really been discovered. New things are revealed daily, because they existed – albeit in unknown form, even before they were revealed.

The airplane, for example, is based on the principles of bird flight. But the principles of bird flight were never mastered until it was revealed, but not discovered.

Radio and television are a result of the study of the human eye and ear. It was found that light travels at a velocity of 180,000 miles per second. But this was a revelation, not a discovery. If it were not an existing fact, it could never be created or discovered.

And the atom is certainly not a discovery, but a revelation of existing protons, neutrons and electrons, Moreover, the Greek philospher Democrites spoke of the existence of atoms over two thousand years ago.

These revelations turned the whole philosophical world topsy turvy. Things were revealed which do not seem reasonable at all. Therefore a leading American thinker said that he must begin to doubt his previous scepticism. Heretofore, he said, we doubted faith; now we must begin to doubt whether we are justified in doubting faith.

Can our reason comprehend, for example, that there exist trillions of living creatures – microbes – which we cannot see with the naked eye? It is frightening to think that these creatures live among our teeth, inside our mouth, in our intestines. But it is a fact.

Or can reason comprehend that with a triangular piece of glass we can determine the composition of all matter in the universe?

All these revelations have led man to realize that reason alone is insufficient; that one must believe in a power which transcends reason.

The French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, father of the latest school of philosophy, Existentialism, takes general world

philosophy to task for, in his view, having trodden a false path. For thousands of years philosophy had sought only to explain the universe and mankind, neglecting individual men. The individual was lost in the enormous structure of philosophy.

Existentialism has seen it as its task to teach the individual the meaning of his existence; to teach him what he can and must do for his existence.

Man, says the new philosophy, is in a constant state of unrest. For man is free, and being free, he is responsible for his deeds. How sad, therefore, is the lot of man, who has no one to lean on, but must carry his own pack of care. Human freedom is therefore a curse, leading to the uneasiness and fear – the fear of responsibility.

Happy, therefore, is the man who has faith, who believes in G-d. For without faith life is very unpleasant. Where there is no faith, gone are the fond hopes, gone is the consolation and support in moments of despair.

The modern intelligentsia has taken to this new philosophy. In America there is a great interest in Existentialism. The faith in cultural progress sustained a fatal blow during the last world war, and life itself has shaken this culture optimism. Life has brought a profound yearning for faith. In a survey taken at Harvard University, seventy per cent of the students declared that they feel a need for faith.

A group of Jewish students in America published a pamphlet in which they declared as follows:

"The Hitler and Stalin catastrophies, the World War and the rise of the State of Israel are, to us, phenomena which we cannot understand by pure logic. These events have brought into our lives a renewed interest in our faith. We see that our faith is the only support, the only means of salvation. Gone is our faith in science, and the former certainty that science would one day answer the question of the purpose of human existence. We are convinced that science is no substitute for religion."

Knowing the modern trends, we can understand the words of Ecclesiastes: neither the pursuit of pleasure nor knowledge alone can give the individual a raison d'etre; but "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear G-d, and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." To believe in G-d and to live ethically and morally – this is the ultimate purpose of everything. This is man. Man is no sage, no scientist, no mere creature of comfort. He is an ethical-moral essence.

This conclusion is reached not through theorizing, but from life itself, from the paradoxes and contradictions in life. And it is reached because "this is the whole . . . of man." Only morality, ethics and the belief in G-d can make man whole and complete.

THE OBSERVANCE OF LIGHTING THE CHANUKAH CANDLES IS SUBJECT TO DIFFERENCES OF OPINIONS BETWEEN THE SCHOOLS OF SHAMMAI AND HILLEL. TO START WITH ONE AND ADD EACH DAY A NEW CANDLE OR START WITH ALL AND LIGHT EACH DAY ONE LESS. WHY AND WHATFOR SUCH A CONTROVERSY ABOUT THE CANDLE LIGHTING PROCEDURE? THE TOTAL NUMBER OF CANDLES USED REMAINS THE SAME, 36 IN TOTAL. WHAT IS THE DEEPER MEANING BETWEEN THESE TWO VERSIONS?

All or Nothing

The mitzvah of kindling the Chanukah lights stands in a class by itself. The Talmud (Shabbat 21b) defines different categories of Jews: "ish uveito" – the ordinary person and his household; "mahadrin" – the more pious ones; and "mehadrin min hamehadrin" – the especially pious ones. Each of these categories has to observe the mitzvah of kindling the Chanukah lights differently.

In connection with no other mitzvah do we have this sort of class differentiation regarding its observance. Every Jew without exception is supposed to observe the same mitzvah. To be sure, there exists the idea of "beautifying the mitzvah" – that is, of observing it with more beautiful appurtenances, but even here we are not supposed to invest more than one-third, more than the cost of an average grade ritual object, such as a sukka booth or an etrog.

There really is no class distinction here. This only means that each Jew is expected to observe every mitzvah according to his means. Why, then, should Chanukah be different? To explain this, we have to examine the laws of Chanukah.

Concerning the kindling of Chanukah lights there is a disagreement between the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel. The School of Shammai maintains that eight lights should be kindled on the first night and one less each following night, seven on the second night, six on the third and so on. According to the School of Hillel, we start with one light on the first night and add one on each subsequent night, until we reach eight on the last night. As in nearly all other matters on which the above two schools differ, we follow the practice of the School of Hillel.

The two schools agree that the miracle in the Temple continued for eight days and that the laws concerning the Chanukah observance are in force for fully eight days. And the number of lights kindled according to both schools is identical; whether we begin with one and end with eight or vice versa, the total is 36.

There is the well known question asked by the Beit Yosef, the composer of the *Shulchan Aruch:* Why do we say that the miracles in the Temple went on for eight days, when the truth is that what happened the first day was not miraculous but natural: There was enough oil in the cruse for one day's burning. So if the oil lasted for eight days instead of one day, then it was only seven days that the Temple candelabrum burned miraculously. So why do we observe Chanukah for fully eight days?

There are very many answers to this question. One explanation is that the miracle occurred on the very first day. The wicks burned, but the oil did not start being consumed until the eighth day.

The commentators go on to ask: If the oil started consuming itself only on the eighth day, there is still one day of miracle missing – because there was enough oil in the cruse for one

day's burning, either the first or the last day, without the need for a miracle. In that event, the Beit Yosef's question stands.

Another explanation says that the miracle of the Chanukah Menorah consisted in the fact that the oil began consuming itself on the very first day, as soon as it was poured into the containers and the wicks were kindled, only instead of burning itself out at a natural pace, it did so at a rate of only one eighth each day. A small amount burned each day as brightly as a full day's quantity. This is how the miracle of the oil occurred each day for eight days.

Along comes the School of Shammai and says that eight lights should be kindled on the first day of Chanukah and one less each day, because that was the nature of the miracle in the Temple: each day, the oil in the candelabrum was diminished by one eighth.

The School of Hillel differs from the School of Shammai. They say that when the Chasmoneans found the oil, they knew that eight days would be required to produce a fresh supply of ritually pure oil. So they marked off eight sections in the cruse and poured only one eighth into the candelabrum. The miracle consisted in that each measure of oil burned eight times as long as it naturally should have. According to the School of Hillel, the apogee of joy was reached on the eighth day, when the people saw that the miracle lasted until the new supply of pure oil was ready.

What is the historical and religious difference between these two views? Why couldn't the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel agree?

It seems to me that Beit Shammai maintained that the Priests had no right to divide the cruse of oil into eight portions and use only one eighth at a time in the candelabrum. Since they had a cruse containing oil for one day's burning, as the law dictated, they were in duty bound to observe the law and not expect miracles. It was forbidden for them to make com-

promises in advance and immediately, on the first day, divide up the oil, as the School of Hillel say they did.

The School of Shammai supported the strict construction of all laws. They were always for the extreme interpretation: all or nothing. Since there is a 100 percent supply for one day, it should be done right, and people should not worry about tomorrow. You say that there won't be a drop of oil left for tomorrow? Better nothing tomorrow than to skimp today.

The School of Hillel, however, thought along different lines. They took the more lenient view – that it is better to have a little light over a long period than to use up all the oil in one day and be in the dark for the remaining seven days. This approach is expressed in their ruling that one should kindle one light on the first night of Chanukah and add one on each subsequent night, ever increasing the light until we reach fully eight lights at the culmination.

The School of Hillel also expressed their view when they categorized the kindling of the Chanukah lights according to the nature and quality of the people doing the kindling. Not every person can all at once become a Jew who scrupulously observes all the commandments to the last detail. If you start by observing one mitzvah, that leads to the observance of another, and yet another, and it may be hoped that such a person will eventually become a perfectly observant and righteous person.

Let us see whether in our time, the people of the Chassidic world are not involved in the same dispute over whether to gradually decrease or increase the degree of observance. One view maintains "All or nothing." The advocates of this view contend that if one is not prepared to observe a mitzvah absolutely flawlessly, it is better for them not to observe it at all. They say, for example, that if the Messiah has not yet come, there can be no Jewish State. But there is another kind of Chassidic piety, one that believes in starting by kindling one light, by observing one mitzvah, and then gradually and steadily increasing the amount.

We are told (Proverbs 6:23) that "Ner mitzvah, Torah ohr," that if you start with one mitzvah light, you eventually achieve the full flame of Torah.

Getting hold of a Jew in the subway station and helping him to perform the Lulav-Etrog ritual is also a mitzvah. Putting on the Tefillin at least for the recitation of "Shema Yisrael" is a light, a beginning. And when one voluntarily makes a beginning, G-d performs miracles, if necessary, in order to help one carry on.

Such is the approach of the School of Hillel.

The Chasmoneans were a tiny minority vis-a-vis the Hellenists. But eventually they looked around and realized that assimilation is darkness and Judaism is light. Gradually matters arrived at the miracle of "the impure being vanquished by the pure, the wicked by the righteous, the many by the few." Both the Temple and the Jewish home were cleansed and sanctified.

Certainly there will be those who will argue that both views may be right, that "Both are the living words of G-d" The answer is: No. The lenient answer is the correct one, the answer of the School of Hillel is the Halocha: Start small, strive tall, and you will attain all . . .

THE MOST POPULAR FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS, THOUGH THEOLOGICALLY MINOR AMONGST ALL OF OUR HOLIDAYS, HAS WON THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE. STATISTIC RECORDS THAT 80% JEWS OWN, LIGHT AND OBSERVE CHANUKA. WHERE LIES THE POWER OF ATTRACTION?

Is Chanukah a Pitiable Holiday?

Pity the bright holiday of Chanukah. Every other holiday, even the short Purim, has a tractate of its own in the Talmud – except Chanukah. Chanukah has a "Scroll" of its own, like Purim, but the Scroll of the Chasmoneans is not read, has no sanctity, no blessing is recited over it. Few Jews know that there exists a Scroll of the Chasmoneans, and it does not appear in the standard prayerbooks.

Chanukah is the longest holiday, being eight days even in Eretz Yisrael. The *Whole Hallel* is said in the morning prayer service, and a candelabrum is lit on the basis of a whole set of laws about how, when and with what, the Chanukah candles should be lit.

In spite of all that, the great editor of the Mishna, Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, did not find it necessary to devote at least a chapter, if not an entire tractate, setting out the laws and customs of Chanukah. All that we have is a little section of the Talmud (in Shabbat 21) describing briefly the miracle of the cruse of olive oil. The military victory of the Chasmoneans over the Greeks, the miracle of the many being overcome by the few, is not mentioned here at all.

The question arises: Why did Rabbi Yehuda omit Chanukah? Why is Chanukah the only holiday not included as a Mishna tractate? The problem becomes even more difficult when we read in the Midrash Tanchuma on the Torah portion

"Behaalotecha" that when Aaron was disappointed and sad over the fact that he and his sons – the Priests – were not given any part in the sacrificial ceremony at the dedication of the Tabernacle, along with the princes of all the tribes, the Master-of-the-Universe Himself consoled him saying: "I swear to you that your role is greater than that of the princes with their sacrifices, for you will kindle the lights of the Menorah. The sacrificial ceremony will take place only so long as the Temple exists, whereas the lighting of the Menorah is for all time, an Eternal Light for you and your offspring."

The commentators ask a question about this Midrash: What is meant by the statement that the Menorah will exist forever? Wasn't it extinguished when the Temple was destroyed, just as the sacrificial rites connected with the altar came to an end? Didn't the wicked Titus march into Rome carrying the Menorah, proclaiming "Judaea Capta", that Jewish sovereignty was ended.

Nachmanides cites a comment by Rabbi Nissim that when G-d said that the Menorah was for all time, He was referring to The Chanukah lights, which the Jews would kindle even after the Temple was destroyed, even in all the exiles to which the Jews would be driven. This promise by G-d consoled and reassured Aaron the Priest.

But it is still difficult to understand how the Chanukah lights were a consolation for Aaron the Priest and his sons the Priests. After all, lighting the Chanukah candles was not the exclusive preserve of the Priests, but was given to all of Jewry, to all the tribes. How was Aaron's role greater than that of the princes of the tribes? Wherein lies the greatness of Chanukah?

Whatever else may be said, there is no doubt that Chanukah is extremely important if only for the fact that the miracle of the cruse of oil had already been foretold to Aaron 1,500 years before the Chasmoneans. G-d Himself explained that the Chanukah lights of the Menorah are more important than even the sacrifices.

In view of all the above, it is really hard to understand why the Chanukah miracle with all its laws and customs was omitted from the six Orders of Mishna.

It is also interesting to note that even the Gemara, which does tell a little about Chanukah, begins its account in the form of what seems a silly question: "What kind of holiday is Chanukah?" Nowhere in the Talmud is this form used. Why doesn't the discussion begin in the usual form, "The Sages taught?" It is hard to believe that the Amora'im, who lived no more than 200 years after the miracle of the cruse of oil, did not know about it.

All these questions beg the terse reply: Chanukah is Different! All the other Jewish holidays commemorate a historical event, a miracle that G-d brought to pass once upon a time.

Purim, has its story of Mordechai and Esther. Pesach commemorates the Exodus from Egypt. Shavuot marks the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, Sukkot is in recollection of the Jew's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Each of these holidays marks an event that occurred once and ended.

Chanukah is in an altogether different category. For the first time the entire Jewish people was threatened with spiritual annihilation, G-d forbid. It was a struggle of Jews against Jews. The Greeks were not bent on exterminating the Jews the way Haman had been. They waged a spiritual battle against Judaism, against our G-d and our Temple.

If a Jew became a Hellenist, he was well off. Antiochus appointed Hellenists as High Priests and installed an idol in the Holy of Holies, and Jews came and sacrificed swine and other impure animals there, went to theaters and circuses that were put in Jerusalem near the Temple. The Greeks might have won this internal spiritual war of Jew against Jew had it not been for Mattatyahu and his five sons. The Maccabees saved Judaism from disappearance by assimilation, the way many nations of that time vanished from history.

Judaism was the only religion to vanquish Hellenism. The Torah overcame the false gods and cults of Greek philosophy, and the Greek mythology connected with Mount Olympus.

Unfortunately, however, the threat of assimilation did not pass with the victory of the Chasmoneans. The struggle continues right down to our own time. In the days of Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, Rome tried the same tricks as Antiochus the Greek and his Hellenizers. The ten Sages executed by the Romans, the heroes of the revolt led by Bar-Kochba, the warriors of Masada and Bettar, all underwent the trials of threat of physical and spiritual annihilation, and like Channah and her seven sons, in the time of the Greeks, they sanctified the Name of G-d.

When we carefully study Jewish history, we see that every period of assimilation ironically resulted in a wave of anti-Jewish hatred. The Jews of ancient Persia brought a Haman on themselves. The Marranos in Spain brought on the expulsion. The German Jews produced a Hitler, and the Russian apostates and Yevseks – those of the Jewish section of the Communist Party – produced a Stalin.

The Gemara's question, "What is Chanukah? – that is: What miracle is the holiday of Chanukah supposed to commemorate? – was also the question of Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi. What is special about Chanukah? In the view of the Talmudic Sages, the miraculous military victory alone did not warrant a special holiday. (We have no special holidays commemorating the military victories of Joshua, Samson, Saul or David.) The miracle of the spiritual victory against the Hellenizers was not a permanent one. The war against assimilation did not end with the Chanukah miracle. So what was the occasion for a holiday? Chanukah was no more than an interlude between two generations. For Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, Chanukah was a tragic unfinished symphony in the long struggle for Jewish continuity.

As arranger of the Mishna, Rabbi Yehuda did not know what to do about Chanukah.

Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi left the matter of Chanukah for the later Amora'im of the Gemara to investigate and clarify. The Sages of the Midrash and the Gemara knew that not only a member of the Priestly line, but also an Israelite may kindle the Menorah. Aaron the Priest was comforted by G-d's words because what mattered to him was that the Eternal Light should remain lit forever and not whether this person or that person lit it.

Just as it came to pass in those days, in the days of the Hasmoneans, so will this miracle come to pass in every generation for all eternity.

MORE QUESTIONS ON CHANUKA THAN ON PASSOVER. THE ENTIRE HISTORICAL EVENT OF THE MACCABEES IS UNCLEAR. HOW, WHERE AND WHEN DID THE MIRACLE OF THE OIL COME ABOUT?

Four Chanukah Questions

I should like to ask you four questions.

"Ma Nishtana"? Why is Chanukah different from all the other Jewish holidays:

THE FIRST QUESTION IS: Why do the classical Jewish sources never refer to Chanukah in terms of any of the traditional "Holiday" designations, such as "Chag", "Mo'ed" or "Yom Tov"? All the references in the Talmud and Poskim are to "the Chanukah days, never to "Chag Chanukah." Does this imply that Chanukah isn't really a Yom Tov, a Jewish Festival, in the full sense of the term?

On Chanukah, we are not called upon to fast, as we are on Yom Kippur, we are not required to change dwellings, as during Sukkot, or go on a new diet, as during Passover. It is permissible to work, travel, cook and even bake. Everything is allowed, even certain things that Jews are forbidden to do the rest of the year. Normally, gambling is regarded as a sin, but on Chanukah, it is practically considered a Mitzvah to play cards, or at least draydel, even for money.

About the only religious acts that we perform on Chanukah, that make it different are the daily lighting of the candles, while saying a special blessing and reciting the "Hallel", thanksgiving prayer.

THE SECOND QUESTION IS: If almost everything is permitted on Chanukah and actually no special duties are imposed on us, why are we nevertheless burdened with one prohibition, the one forbidding us to "use", or in any ways derive any benefit from, the Chanukah candles?

Why are we permitted to enjoy the fragrance of the etrog during Sukkot or to kiss the tzitzit and mezuzah whenever it is called for? Why are we allowed to derive benefit from and enjoy the Sabbath and Festival eve candles, over which we recite almost the same blessing as over the Chanukah candles, whereas we are forbidden to use the Chanukah candles in any way? What is their special sanctity?

THE THIRD QUESTION IS: What is the source of the name "Chanukah"? The word means "dedication", and is used in speaking of the dedication of new buildings, and the like. Was the Temple dedicated at that time? Did Judah the Maccabee build and dedicate a new edifice? The Hellenists didn't destroy the Temple, level it, as the Babylonians and Romans did. True, Antiochus and his legions desecrated the Holy of Holies, polluted the Menorah and the Altar, installed idols in the Temple but the building itself, however, remained intact, and all that the Hasmoneans did was to clean it up and relight the Menorah with the holy cruse of pure oil.

Why then is all this referred to as "Chanukah"? Renewal, dedication, apply to a new creation but are not relevant to an old building. When we teach our children about Chanukah in the Hebrew schools, we tell them that it means dedication, restoration, not new dedication.

That being so, the holiday might more appropriately have been called "Liberation, ("Geula"), "Renewal" ("hitchadshut"), or "Redemption" (Pidyon"). It marks our liberation and redemption from the yoke of the Hellenists, and our renewal or revival after their attempt to stamp us out.

THE FOURTH QUESTION IS: Why shouldn't Chanukah, like all the other Jewish holidays, have a variety of observances, the way Purim, for example, has the reading of the Megilla, noisemakers, hamantaschen, a festive meal, all kinds of gaiety? All the other holidays are intended to recall some miracle, by which the Jews were saved from extinction. G-d protected our ancestors, and the enemy was prevented from carrying out his evil design. Chanukah, on the other hand, recalls battles victoriously fought by our ancestors, battlefields with valiant Jewish warriors, fighting like lions. The Hasmoneans were the first in the world to break the chains of Hellenic hegemony. After being driven out of Judea, the great Greek Empire began to decline and before long it disappeared from the arena of history. Why, then, wasn't this great Jewish victory declared to be a great, joyous festival.

In order to understand an answer to these four questions, we have to probe deeper into the history of that period. It is true that our Festivals are usually occasions for great rejoicing, "Chagim Umo'adim Lesimcha," marking occasions when we were miraculously delivered from external enemies.

The events of Chanukah, however, involve mainly an internal enemy. The Jews who wanted to assimilate into Greek culture, the traitorous Hellenizers, were more dangerous than Antiochus and his soldiers.

Some Jews were powerfully attracted to Hellenism. They discarded everything that had the slightest connection with Judaism. The Hebrew term "Hashmona'i" (meaning Hasmonean, as Mattathias and his five sons, including Judah the Maccabee, were called), is an acrostic of five Hebrew terms, representing the essence of the Jewish religion and Jewish living. These are "Chodesh" ("month") "Shabbat," "Milla" (circumcision"), "Ner" ("candle") and "Eretz Yisrael" ("Land of Israel"). The Hellenizers discarded the Jewish calendar, profaned the holy Sabbath, stopped circumcizing their sons, extinguished the candelabrum in the Temple, and polluted the Land of Israel with Greek idols.

Even the High Priest was a wicked man who had been installed by the Greeks. In the First Book of the Maccabees 10:14 we are told how the High Priest Eliakim asked the tyrant Antiochus to come and help rescue his loyal Hellenizing Jews from the hands of those fanatics who believed in the One-G-d and His Torah.

Antiochus actually fought against Judaism more than against the Jews. A Jew who became a Hellenist had nothing to fear. Chanukah celebrates the successful – for the Jews – outcome of a war, that was waged against the Jewish soul. The other Festivals celebrate our deliverance from enemies, like Pharaoh and Haman, who wished to destroy us physically. The battle between Antiochus and the Hasmoneans was a battle between the two mountains, Sinai and Olympus: between the One-G-d who gave the world the Torah on Mt. Sinai and the chaos of gods and goddesses cavorting on Mt. Olympus.

The first to be slain by the sword, wielded by the Old High Priest Mattathias was a Jewish traitor who had been ready to sacrifice a pig on the altar during one of the festivals.

The war was a long and difficult one. The first task was to cleanse the Jewish homes of the traitors supported by Antiochus. Only then came the task of fighting the Hellenic legions. Jewish families split up. Fathers fought against sons, brother against brother. Imagine the feelings of a father, fighting in the Hasmonean ranks, having to kill his own son who was a soldier in the Hellenic ranks!

There isn't another event in Jewish history like the one marked by Chanukah. Historically, before the struggle between the Hellenizers and the loyal Jews, there had been no Jews who had betrayed their people, land and G-d. Thousands of Jews perished, and the miracle was a twofold one. The handful of loyal Hasmoneans and their followers defeated both, the internal and external enemies.

Now how did those righteous ones overcome the wicked,

and how did those evil assimilators fall into the hands of those true to the Torah? We find the answer to this question in the word "Chanukah." The Hasmoneans were loyal, faithful heroes, ready to give up their lives for G-d, ready to die, if necessary, so that the Eternal Light of Judaism should not be extinguished. With their Chanukah spirit they won their wars. That is why the Holiday is called Chanukah. Not because any new building was *dedicated,* but because of the *dedication* of the Hasmoneans to the cause of saving the Jewish People and the Torah from extinction.

The Chanukah days are serious ones, perhaps even sad. In our thousands of years of Exile, the story of assimilation repeated itself many times. The Jewish spirit was extinguished in many a family. In our own time, people couple a menorah with a tree and shamelessly display them in the window for all to see.

When a pious Jew sees what is being done to the Chanukah candles, he cannot possibly derive any pleasure from them. When you see thousands of Jewish youngsters marrying out of their faith, when you hear of the growing divorce rate among Jews, the heart fails.

If Chanukah means fidelity, then Chanukah is, unfortunately, not a very happy occasion. Gone is the spirit of loyalty to parents, brothers and sisters, to one's husband or wife. The Hasmonean Chanukah meant obeying one's aged father, Mattathias. It meant the loyalty of Mattathias' five sons to each other, like the five fingers of the hand bent and clenched into a powerful fist, a hammer – which is what the word "Maccabee" originally means. Finally, and most important, the Hasmoneans displayed readiness to die for G-d and His holy Torah . . . "Who is like You, G-d, among the gods?" – This statement, whose initial letters in Hebrew form the acrostic "Maccabe," was their battle cry in the war they waged against assimilation.

The present situation causes us no pleasure. In many

homes, the yahrzeit candles burn for the dead Jews, instead of the Chanukah candle for the living. It is no wonder that Chanukah isn't a festival, and one needs a draydel or a deck of cards in order to forget one's troubles.

But dear Jews, don't worry. The draydal spins, and darkness gives way to light, and the Eternal Light shall endure forever. We are an ancient people, and we know that the few can overcome the many.

"Am Yisrael Chai Vekayom." Long live the Jewish People.

THE MACCABEES FOUGHT AND WON THE BATTLE WITH THE HELLENISTS AND THE REFORMERS WHO ASSIMILATED TO THE GREEK CULTURE. THE REVOLT WAS ON TWO BATTLEFIELDS – WITHIN AND WITHOUT.

Within and Without

Chanukah is different from all the other Jewish holidays.

Chanukah is marked by the kindling of modest little candles, unlike the Havdala torch. Furthermore, the candles must burn for a minimum of 30 minutes. And the mitzvah of lighting the Chanukah candles is incumbent on every Jew and his household (Talmud Shabbat 21b). Thus, it seems to be only a private mitzva, restricted to the four walls of the Jewish home.

So we wonder when we learn the rules of Chanukah and see that it is really an exception among the holidays. Unlike the other holidays, Chanukah has the requirement of "publicizing the miracle." This is to be done by placing the candles outside the entrance to the house, so that they can be publicly seen. Interestingly, if one's house has two doors leading to the street, a lit Chanukah candelabrum must be placed outside each door.

Hence, Chanukah is not celebrated privately, modestly, but, because of the requirement to "publicize the miracle", we are required to broadcast the fact of the miracle for all the world to see, so that all may know of G-d's wonders.

The most beautiful rose can be lost in a large bouquet of flowers. In the harmonious whole of a wreath, the specific beauty and fragrance of the individual rose is lost. It is no more

than one small detail of the whole. The same applies to the individual human being in a great throng. And the same applies to the Jewish holidays. Some holidays are celebrated with great pomp and circumstance, festive meals, singing and dancing, whereas a holiday like Chanukah was in the millenia of Exile marked modestly, quietly, almost without any festivity. The candles were hardly visible, even on the darkest winter nights.

Who does not remember the freezing nights in the Jewish hamlets of the vanished "old home" in Poland? The lanes were covered with white snow piled as high as the house windows. Space was filled with deep darkness and biting cold winds during the days of Chanukah. The 25th of Kislev is nearly the end of the month and even in a clear sky there was barely a sliver of a moon to see.

In that gloomy atmosphere the Chanukah candles were lit in Jewish homes. But not every window was lit up by a Chanukah candelabrum. The Jews were afraid of the Gentiles, always afraid about a possible pogrom by the Christians, who often, on coming out of their churches, were wont to attack Jewish homes and shops. It is the wretched fate of Chanukah to fall often, at the same time as Christmas. The happy Chanukah days were not always such happy ones for some Jews. They would lock themselves inside their homes, bolting the doors and windows and putting the Chanukah candelabrum in a far corner so that its light should not be visible outside. I have memories of fright on my way home from the Cheder school during the Chanukah season.

That is how it was once. Our generation, however, has placed Chanukah at the top of our holiday list. Chanukah has defeated all the other holidays in the popularity contest. Even Jews who observe nothing else celebrate Chanukah. Little children, all Jews both young and old, have removed the veil from the Chanukah candelabrum of Exile, have taken it out of the far corner and placed it in a prominent place in the street.

From the quiet "Shmoneh-essray" service of so many years, the "Al hanissim" prayer has emerged into a loud and joyous song. Today we have in New York a 10-story-high Chanukah candelabra that sends a bright message blazing in all directions amid the skyscrapers.

Perhaps the Talmudic Sages foresaw our time with the two types of Jews we have, as regards Judaism in general and Chanukah in particular. There are Jews who observe Chanukah only at home. They light the Chanukah candles in the four walls of their home, on a limited scale, in the family circle. But there are also Jews who take their celebration outside, organizing Chanukah events for the society they belong to, for their synagogues, for their business contacts, while forgetting their own homes. For their own children and grandchildren they do nothing, or in any event not enough.

Neither of these types fulfills his duty regarding the mitzvah of Chanukah. It is the duty of every Jew to kindle the Maccabean flame both in private and among the Jewish public.

The Hasmoneans, too – in the time of the Chanukah events long ago – had to wage a two-front battle. Externally they had to wage war against the Greeks, and internally they had to contend with the powerful Hellenizing movement. Jews were ready to give up their faith and adopt Greek culture, become Greeks. That is why the victory of the Maccabeans under the leadership of the High Priest Mattatyahu was a two-fold victory – one on the battlefield and one in the Temple in Jerusalem.

The Hasmoneans realized that it wasn't enough to ensconce themselves at home, in the caverns of the Modein mountains, and there serve the Master-of-the-Universe in secret, in private. They risked their lives and went out in open battle against both the external and internal spiritual foes.

That is why the kindling of the Chanukah lights is both a private and a public mitzva, to be performed both in the pri-

vacy of the home and in public. There was a time when we could not allow ourselves to take the Chanukah candelabrum out into the world, when we were afraid to "publicize the miracle." But today we no longer have to be afraid or ashamed. Let the world know and understand the Hasmonean victory.

We have to inform the world that all the victories that the Jewish people achieved in all times came by virtue of the "Maccabee" – in Hebrew an acronym of the initial letters of the words "Mi Kamocha ba'elim Hashem? – Who is like You among the mighty, O G-d" – by the might of our One-G-d, like Whom there is none.

There is one more thing that we Jews, and also all the nations of the world, ought to know and bear in mind these Chanukah days. Chanukah means renewal and liberation not only of the Temple and the candelabrum, but of the entire Holy City Jerusalem. If Jerusalem had remained in the hands of our enemies, there would have been no rededication of the Temple.

This two-fold Chanukah observance is underscored by the very name of the holy and eternal city, "Yerushalayim: The Midrash's explanation of the root and origin of the word "Yerushalayim" is interesting. Originally, the city was called "Shalem" and its king was Malki-Zedek, as we read in Genesis 14-18. (Malki-Zedek was Noah's son Shem.) Later the Patriarch Abraham came, and to commemorate the binding of his son Isaac (Genesis 22:14): "And he called that place Hashem-Yireh."

The Midrash comments that G-d made a compromise between those two righteous men, Shem and Abraham. He combined the two names, "Yireh" and "Shalem", to form the name "Yerushalayim – Jerusalem." Thus Shem and Abraham both were satisfied.

Now the question arises: Since the city's original name was "Shalem", why did G-d place Abraham's "Yireh" before it, instead of having the two elements of the combination in chronological order?

It can be said in reply that Shem was indeed a righteous man, a tzaddik, only he confined himself to the four walls of his yeshiva, the School of Shem and Ever. He was not active among the idol worshippers, did not try to draw them to the belief in the One-G-d. "Shalem" indeed means "wholeness", "contentment." Shem contented himself with his limited group of colleagues and disciples not concerning himself with the rest of the world around him. Our Patriarch Abraham, on the other hand, worried even about Sodom and Gomorrah. His approach was to infiltrate the masses and try to influence them to come under G-d's wings. Abraham and Sarah were missionaries. As the Torah tells us (Genesis 12:5): "and the souls that they made in Haran" – he went after all the straying people and taught them to acknowledge the true G-d.

So when G-d decided to give the city a new name, He gave Abraham's "Yireh" priority over Shem's "Shalem." The emphasis had to be placed on the "Yireh", on the broad concern for the masses, the concern to gain believers in all circles. Abraham's covenant with G-d remains forever, while no vestige is left of the Shem and Ever Yeshiva. Where are that yeshiva's students besides Isaac and Jacob, Abraham's children?

The Prophet Zechariah, in the Haftara read on the first Shabbat in the week of Chanukah, declares (3:2): "You, Satan, G-d will rebuke you, the Chosen One of Jerusalem will be angry with you. Desist from that lonely people that is like an ember plucked from the flame." We, the surviving remnants of the Holocaust, the authentic representatives of those rescued from the flames – we must ever remain aware of our duty to the martyrs and their sacred memory. Our duty is to fight for Jerusalem, our holy city, as suggested by the components of its name, "Yireh" and "Shalem." We have to fight on both fronts, the external as well as the internal one. The Chanukah candles have to guarantee the continuity of the Jewish home and family, while at the same time spreading G-dliness and our faith throughout the corrupt world. We must fight to protect

the Jewish State together with its capital, the Holy City of Jerusalem, against the enemies of Zion besetting the Jewish people. If we launch the battle as Mattatyahu did, then I am certain that Zechariah's prophecy will be fulfilled and G-d will indeed rebuke them, showing them once and for all that there is no G-d like our G-d, and teach them, once and for all, not to start up with us again. Amen.

A HUMOROUS BUT TRUE IMAGINATIVE COMPARISON BETWEEN THE JEW AND THE DREIDEL. OUR SPINNING THROUGH HISTORY, OUR FALLS AND RISES, OUR COMINGS AND GOINGS WERE ALL AROUND THE GLOBE IN A PERPETUAL TWIRL.

Our Top That Won't Stop

Chanukah and Purim are related to each other in the sense of nearness in history and on the calendar, yet they are not twins. They may be similar, but there are fundamental differences between them, making Chanukah and Purim, two separate independent events, historically and Halachically.

Both are holidays of victory over Jewish enemies. Mordechai in Shushan and Matathias in Modeen are both fearless, unbending heroes. The same "Al Hanisim" prayer (On The Miracles) is said in the Amidah service on both, Chanukah and Purim, because naturally, and in a normal manner, these events would not have occurred, were it not for G-d's miraculous interventions.

With regard to holiday observances and abstention from work, both are festivals with no prohibitions, on which one may behave just like on any other work-day. Both were rabbinically promulgated and not written about in the Torah, like all other festivals are. They are the newest and youngest holidays in our calendar and the two partake of gift giving, such as Chanukah gelt, and Purim Shalach Manot. Both festivals allow behavior normally frowned upon, like gambling on Chanukah, and getting intoxicated (Adloyodah) on Purim.

These similarities are on one side of the coin, but on the

other, there are many more differences than likenesses between them.

Chanukah is eight days, while Purim is only one. Chanukah has no fast days while Purim has the Taanit Esther, the fast, preceding it. Chanukah has no obligatory scroll to be read from, while we have a commandment to read on Purim the Biblical book of Esther. Chanukah saw many Jewish life-sacrifices on the battlefields and the history of Purim, however, tells of no Jewish lives lost; as it was, the fear of the King's edict was enough to attain victory and destroy the enemy. Chanukah commemorates a war against the Jewish spirit declared by the Greek King Antiochus, who was determined to uproot the Torah. Haman of Persia however, wished to destroy Jewish men, women and children physically. In the prayers on Chanukah, we say the full Hallel which is totally omitted on Purim. Chanukah engrains the use of a Menorah with a Shamos, Purim does not.

Finally, there is one phase in which Purim and Chanukah are both alike and at the same time different. Both involve turning something. Chanukah, has the dreidel, and Purim, the grogger (noisemaker), but there is a big difference between the two. The dreidel is quiet, while the grogger makes noise. The latter is used just for noise and nothing else, while the dreidel offers profound and important thoughts and lofty ideas . . .

The Chashmonean history tells us, that when Antiochus forbade the teaching of Torah to Jewish children, the teachers used a dreidel as a cover up for their lessons. When the Greek inspector entered, and saw the students playing a dreidel, with Greek characters on it, he was satisfied, but as soon as he left, the teaching of Torah was resumed.

The rabbis then had no inkling that there would be a time in the United States, in a free country such as ours, where there aren't any external threats upon Jews and the study of Torah, that games will have to be used, all year around, to interest Jewish children in learning some Hebrew or Bible . . .

But the dreidel has even deeper significance, things of spiritual nature, in addition to the aforementioned tale. It proves to us that there is a G-d ruling the universe . . .

Just as the dreidel rotates, so too does the sun, moon and stars, according to the laws of nature, which are the source of their existence. The dreidel, used by humans, rotates and stops. However, the perpetual motion of the universe is different. The ideal of all human wisdoms was always to duplicate a creation that would imitate G-d's "perpetuum mobile," that would last forever. Man's thousands of "sputniks" and satelites may rotate for a time, but eventually must fall down to the earth. G-d's creations, the sun, the moon and stars, may disappear for a time, but always return. The moon returns nightly and the sun rises once more every morning.

The dreidel teaches us the eternal truth about the Jewish people. When G-d blessed Abraham that his children will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens, it was the best blessing not only quantitatively, but in contents as well.

Like the stars, the Jews have been rotating throughout the thousands of years of their existence. Many times it was thought that they would fall down, come to a stop and disappear, but to everybody's amazement we stayed aloof.

Great empires such as Babylon, Greece, Rome, Spain, Russia, Poland and Germany, blew stormy winds at us to topple our dreidel over. G-d, however always miraculously gave us another spin for a new twirling energy, and we regained power and courage to dance even more vigorously than before.

The dreidel, having only one foot must be constantly rotating to remain erect. Thus, the Jews throughout their existence were never allowed to remain stationary for very long in one place. Just as the ballet dancers who float around the stage on the tips of their toes, so too did we, the Jewish people turn in a perpetual motion, while constantly touching ground with one foot only . . . In our 2,000 year period of Galut, we were called

"Luft – menshen," because we were never allowed to reside in one country for more than two or three generations at a time.

As the stars in the heavens keep on being suspended in the atmosphere, while in rotation, so too did the Jews never fall down, but kept on spinning. This is the secret of the Chanukah dreidel and the Jewish people.

Unlike the other mighty nations of the world with their huge conquests, who eventually disappeared without a memory, we are here and alive to tell our story today. These nations were like dreidels spun by tyrants, despots and fascists, who won great victories, but lasted only for a short period and eventually later have disappeared and faded into oblivion. Where are Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini? There is no trace of them anymore in their own countries.

A Jew, when asked the question as to how his family is, would answer: "Men Dreid Sich," we are twirling and twisting to get by. One son, 'Dreid Sich Arum" – is turning around left and right, the second is a little "Fardreit" – so to speak "off balance," and the third one, I hope, "Vet Sich Aroisdrein," – he will wiggle himself out from a tangled up situation. . . .

On the Jewish dreidel are written the letters "Nun-Gimel-Hay-Shin," the initials of the sentence "Nes-Gadol-Haya-Sham," which translated means a great miracle occurred there. The numerical value of these four letters is 358, the same as that of the Hebrew letters for the word "Moshiach." Through miracles, like that of the dreidel, will Messiah come to redeem us . . .

Israel may be small and there is hardly enough room to race around in it, but the dreidel can spin even in the smallest space, while standing, so to speak on one finger! The Jewish dreidel was spun by G-d and, though small and humble, will keep on turning forever, as long as there is a universe that is in constant motion.

The idea of differentiating between the historical back-

grounds of Chanukah and Purim is not the only reason for Chanukah's greater significance, but even in comparison with other holidays, Chanukah stands out uniquely.

The events of Pesach took place in Egypt, . . . that of Shavuoth at Mt. Sinai, . . . Sukkot in the desert, while wandering 40 years. Yom Kippur, the day of begging our father in heaven for forgiveness for sins, also originated in the same desert, when Moses brought down the second set of commandments. Rosh Hashonah is the holiday of mankind and the beginning of the calendar, commemorating the creation of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Purim occurred in Persia. Only the events of Chanukah and the victories of the Maccabees took place in Israel itself, making it the only holiday of the Holy Land.

The miraculous events of the Menorah in the Temple were like radiating lights, beaconing in an era of darkness and idolatry. Our Menorah triumphed over the forces of the wild Greek Hellenists who occupied most of the civilized world of those days. Not only has G-d returned to the Temple, but Israel has returned to the G-d of Israel. That is why it is called the Festival of "Chanukah," meaning in Hebrew, renewal and dedication. With one spin of the dreidel, the Jews awoke and purified themselves and their Temple, with a newly born spirit and commitment, beating the world hegemony of the idolatrous Greek Hellenism.

THE MONTHS OF SHVAT AND AV ARE TURNING POINTS FOR THE SEASONS OF SPRING AND AUTUMN IN THE LUNAR CALENDAR. THEY BEGIN THE PREPARATIONS FOR PASSOVER AND SUKOT 2 MONTHS IN ADVANCE.

Fifteen Is Holy

The number 15 is an exception for us Jews. The Hebrew language uses the letters of its alphabet not only for writing and reading, but also for counting and calculation. The letters also serve as numbers.

The letter-numbers are all secular, workday digits that have no significance beyond their numerical value. But 15 is an exception: in Hebrew it is holy. We are forbidden to utter and to write it, because it is G-d's Name, half of the Ineffable Name.

So what do we do? Instead of writing 15 by combining the letter "yod", which stands for 10, and the letter "heh", which is 5, together forming the Divine Name, we use "tet" for 9, and "vav" for 6, which add up to the same 15. That is why our New Year of Trees is called "Tu Bishvat", the word "Tu" consisting of the letters "tet" and "vav." The same is done with 16, which is not written "yod" (10) "vav" (6) but "tet" (9) "zayin" (7), even though it is not as holy as 15.)

The sanctity of the number 15 is not limited to the month of Shvat. It plays an important role in every month of the Jewish calendar.

Most of our holidays fall on the 15th of the month. Pesach starts on the 15th of Nissan; Sukkot on the 15th of Tishri, Purim on the 15th of Adar, the New Year of Trees on the 15th of Shvat, and Tu B'av, the 15th of Av, was an important holiday in antiquity. About the latter, the Talmud (Taanit 26b) tells us: "The Jews didn't have happier holidays than the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur."

The number 15 is holy and nature marks it with a magnificent occurrence every month. That is the night when the moon is at its most powerful and most beautiful. It is full, resembling a large glowing ball hanging in the dark deep of the universe. At half-month the moon is complete, full. The 15th night of each month is emblazoned on the heavenly tablet. From the sun we cannot know what day of the month it is, but the moon reveals the secret to the whole world. Not only does the sun not reveal this information, but we cannot even look at it directly. It blinds the eyes.

The moon is like a living calendar whose changing form tells us about most days of the month. It especially announces, with great pomp, in the fullness of a perfect circle, the 15th of the month. There is the story of the Jew of Chelm who was asked whether the sun or the moon is more important. "The moon, of course," he replied. "The sun shines by day, when it's light. The moon shines at night, when it's dark, and what is more, it also tells us about the beginning of every month."

(In my book "From Prison to Pulpit" about the concentration camp years, I describe how I kept a Jewish calendar, with the dates of the Jewish holidays, as a result of learning how to reckon the phases of the moon.)

In the precise cosmic balance, the moon is a mysterious element of G-d's marvelous creation, and the 15th of the month, the same time of the full moon, is the ultimate secret of all secrets (despite the fact that it already contains human footprints).

Pesach and Sukkot, two of our most important festivals, are fully six months apart – the former falling in Nissan, the latter in Tishri. But the 15th of both months unites them harmoniously in a natural bond, in a bond of G-d's nature, that is quite remarkable. Pesach and Sukkot are not only historical festivals, but also milestones in the laws of the Jewish lunar calendar. Pesach is the Spring Festival and Sukkot the autumn Harvest Festival.

Actually, the year is divided into two parts: summer and winter. These are only prologues to the two main seasons. Pesach ushers in summer and Sukkot, winter. But, although, as said, these two festivals are far apart, they are closely related by virtue of falling on the same day of their respective months.

The two minor holidays of Tu-Bishvat and Tu B'av are relatives of the same nature-family.

The high point of winter, when winter reaches its climax is Tu Bishvat. Since by then "most of the year's rains have fallen" in Eretz Yisrael (Rosh Hashana 14a), is on Tu Bishvat, on the 15th of Shvat, the winter rains cease and a revolution begins deep in the bowels of the earth. As in a cauldron, the energy of the subterranean minerals seethes. Exactly two months before Pesach, on Tu Bishvat, the preparations begin for expelling the cold, dead winter and making room for the dyamic, warm summer.

Nature rouses the roots of the grasses and trees from their long winter sleep. Outside one cannot yet see or feel any change, but the work is in progress according to the rules of the Divine program.

Tu B'av plays the same role with regard to the Sukkot Harvest Festival. "On Tu B'av the power of the sun starts waning" (Taanait 31a). The hot summer is drawing to a close. There are only two months till Sukkot, which falls on the 15th of Tishri. On Tu B'av nature starts preparing to usher in winter.

Pesach and Sukkot thus mark the beginning of summer and winter, respectively, and during these holidays one can feel and sense the new seasons and the changes in climate. Actually, however, the dynamic transformation begins quietly, secretly, two months before Passover-Spring and Sukkot-Autumn.

Officially and actually, Tu Bishvat is the end of winter and Tu B'av is the end of summer. The number 15, the full moon, half-month, the seasons, are blatant witnesses of the wonders of G-d, who "daily renews the works of creation." Every day G-d renews the global energies and the harmonious laws of the entire universe. Nature affirms "the praise of the works of His hands, of G-d's world creation. Some commentators point out that "hateva", the Hebrew word for "nature", and the name of G-d, used in the creation account in the first verse of Genesis, "Elohim", have the same numerical value, 86. The Jewish people live according to nature, according to G-d's creation and command.

That is the difference between us and the other nations of the world. Everyone can recognize the spring, when the buds start appearing on the trees and the fragrance of flowers fills the air. No wonder, then, that spring is celebrated with happy song and dance. We Jews, however, look a little deeper into things. We acknowledge the roots hidden deep in the earth, underneath the topsoil. Two months before the official Pesach, despite the fact that there are as yet no obvious signs of spring, even though the eye does not yet discern any changes and the nose still freezes from cold and wind, the Jewish heart senses the coming springtide, senses and starts rejoicing on the 15th day of Shvat. Winter has shown its force and now we have to begin planting, begin putting roots in G-d's earth and launch new growth, new trees, new life.

Is it any wonder that Tu B'av was forgotten and neglected? What is there to celebrate? What is so wonderful about the fact that winter is approaching? Is the fact that nature is going to

sleep a cause for rejoicing?

Perhaps when we Jews were living in Eretz Yisrael and Tu B'av heralded a period of respite after a season of hard labor, those toiling out in the fields, plantations, orchards and vineyards celebrated. After the arduous work of plowing, sowing, irrigating and harvesting the fruit and grain from the fields and orchards, they could hardly wait to start their vacation, a period in which they could devote themselves to their personal matters and to their families. The air began to get cooler, the sun no longer burned so fiercely, people refreshed themselves and danced and sang more than they did all year round.

In Exile, the season of Tu B'av lost its significance. Tu Bishvat, on the other hand, became a holiday of hope, of liberation, of preparation for the great Pesach. Yes, spring is coming, and with G-d's help summer will come too. The heart feels lighter.

ALL RELIGIONS HAVE DOGMATIC LAWS AND CUSTOMS – SO DOES JUDAISM. THERE ARE CERTAIN MITZVOT THAT WE DON'T KNOW THE REASON WHY IT IS OBLIGATORY UPON US TO OBSERVE THEM, BUT OUR SAGES HAVE IN MANY INSTANCES INTERPRETED THEM AND FOUND VARIOUS EXPLANATIONS. THE EXCEPTION IS "THE RED HEIFER" A DOGMATIC LAW, WHERE WE ARE NOT EVEN ALLOWED TO ASK ANY QUESTIONS – NEVER MIND FIND ANSWERS.

Ask No Questions . . .

There are various Torah precepts that we Jews are obligated to observe. Some are positive and some are negative, commanding us to do certain things or not to. Some of the laws, called *Mishpatim,* have an obvious, understandable logic to them; others, called *Chukim* or statutes, are of a dogmatic nature and have no apparent reason.

Unique among the *Chukim* is the one concerning the *Red Heifer.* We don't know the reason for this precept, and we are not even supposed to ask. However, as we know, and as Eve, the mother of all mankind showed: "the forbidden fruit tastes sweeter . . .", so too, have all our Sages through the generations tried to fathom the mystery of the precept of the Red Heifer.

King Solomon, "the wisest of all men", struggled with this mystery. Although he succeeded in understanding all the other Commandments, this one defied even his intelligence and wit.

Solomon's failure, however, did not prevent the later Sages from trying to understand why G-d commanded us to burn a Red Heifer.

Hundreds of questions arise concerning both the text of the passage in the Torah dealing with the Red Heifer (Numbers 10) and the contents of the Commandment itself. I shall list just 13:

1. We are told *"zot chukat ha-Torah"*, which means that the Torah as a whole is a *Chuka* or statute and not just the precept of the Red Heifer.
2. The Torah twice writes "lemor" – so to say –, for no apparent reason, and we know that there is not a single redundant word in the Torah.
3. Having twice written "lemor", meaning "to say", why does the Torah then write, *"dabber el Bnay Yisrael"*, "speak to the Children of Israel"?
4. Rashi offers the following comment: "If Satan and the Gentile nations should ask the Jews to explain this precept, they should reply that G-d has decreed it, and we are forbidden to ask why or what for." On what grounds does Rashi say that *Chuka* means that we are forbidden to inquire into the reason for it? Perhaps it merely means, as it does everywhere else in the Torah, that we should obey even though we do not understand, but not that we are forbidden to inquire?
5. In spite of the prohibition on inquiry, we see that King Solomon and other Sages did inquire. Rashi's teacher, Rabbi Moshe Darshan, even offers the explanation that the heifer, the mother, thus expiates the sin of her child, the calf, that the Jews worshipped in the wilderness.
6. On what basis does Rashi make Satan and the Gentile nations partners in querying the Jews?
7. Why does Rashi have them ask what seems to be the same question twice: "What is this Commandment, and what is the reason for it?"

8. Why does Rashi say *"monin et Yisrael"* when the word "monin" does not mean "ask", but "count", "measure", or "quarrel"?
9. Nowhere else are we told about any kind of precept that we are forbidden to inquire into its meaning or content.
10. Is it possible that if Satan and the Gentile nations didn't ask, we would have been permitted to inquire?
11. It is difficult to understand the Midrashic comment on King Solomon's words about the Red Heifer, (Ecclesiastes 7:23): "I resolved to be wise about the matter but the more I thought about it the more remote it became from me." Why didn't Solomon simply say "I don't know" instead of "it became remote from me"?
12. The Midrash tells us that Solomon understood the reasons for all the other Commandments. If so, why didn't he tell them to us? We should very much like to know the reason for the ban on wearing *shatnez,* why we must wear *Tzitzit* or why the ban on eating *traif* animals, and other precepts for which the Torah gives no reason.
13. Why didn't Solomon think of or accept the reason given by Rabbi Moshe Darshan (in number 5 above)? Furthermore, why shouldn't we give that explanation to Satan and the Gentile nations?

These are only a few of the very many questions raised about the matter of the Red Heifer. Now for some answers:

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There is a long-ongoing discussion among theologians of all faiths about whether religious traditions and laws need to be and should be explained, or whether people should accept things on faith. There are two approaches to this question.

We had some of our Talmudic Sages, who tried to explain the Torah's 613 Commandments on historical, moral, humanitarian, hygienic and other grounds. They thought that by understanding the Commandments, the Jews would more readily obey them, and would better be able to resist Satan's efforts to lure them away from observance.

On the other hand, there were great Jewish thinkers who thought that faith must come from the heart, must be based on feeling and not on reason. They believed that if observance is to depend on reasons, someone else can come along with a good reason for not observing a Commandment or for doing just the opposite of what is commanded.

Then there is the statement of Rabbi Yitzchak in Talmud (Tractate Sanhedrin 21B): The reasons why the Torah Commandments, were not revealed to us was because on two occasions where reasons were specifically given King Solomon, the wisest of men was caught violating them. The Torah warns Jewish kings against taking too many wives, lest they lead him astray and against possessing too many horses, lest that cause him to go to Egypt. Knowing these reasons, King Solomon thought that he was too clever to fall into those traps, and he married too many wives and acquired too many horses. And his wives *did* lead him astray, and his interest in horses *did* bring him back to Egypt. If the Torah had not given the reasons for those prohibitions, Solomon would not have been tempted to try them but would have simply obeyed.

It was only in his old age that Solomon realized that his wisdom and cleverness had caused him to sin instead of strengthening his faith. Now he was convinced that it is better to trust in G-d, and that the whole Torah – not just the Commandment of the Red Heifer – should be obeyed without any questions asked. It is better to observe through loving obedience than through the efforts of reason. No one is clever enough to resist the temptations of competitive reasons.

The argument still goes on. Reform and Conservative

Judaism argue that we no longer need those "antiquated" Commandments, like kashrut, family purity, etc. These may have been important once but are no longer today, they say. We must do only what reason dictates, only what is "relevant."

These movements thought that, having freed the Jews from the rigidities of orthodoxy, making life easy without duties and commitments for the Torah's 613 precepts, Jews would become finer, more religious people, thereby guaranteeing Jewish continuity. Life has shown otherwise, however. The more "reason" Jews have, the less they seem to observe Judaism, the less they seem to trust in G-d, and the greater assimilation seems to become. The Satan and the Gentile environment, the nations amongst whom we live, continue to tempt us with their demands for "reason" and "relevance."

So Rashi tells us not to get involved in any arguments with them, but simply to answer: "That is what G-d has decreed, and we accept it, lovingly, even though we don't understand it."

For our own purposes, however, we may study and probe and find fresh answers, and hundreds of new questions. That is why the Torah and the Jewish people both are eternal.

That is the meaning of the Red Heifer and its paradoxical function: Questions can sanctify, can purify, but they can also, G-d forbid, mislead and contaminate. It all depends who is asking, Satan or the "Good Spirit" – and how the question is asked.

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On the day of the Yarzeit (18 Adar 2) of my great Father of blessed memory, I marvel at the rare combination he was of Torah scholar and philosopher. He wore both a *Shtreimel* and a top-hat. In him, there was no contradiction between his worldly knowledge and his perfect faith and observance of the Commandments. In the words of the Talmud (Eruvim 13b), he was able to find 150 reasons for declaring a vermin kosher. This did not affect him, however, because he knew 15,000 reasons why the vermin *is* impure and *"treif."*

My father, Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor, got his Ph.D. and used it in a way that made him one of the leading Jewish-legal authorities in pre-World War II Poland, which at that time meant, in effect, the entire Jewish world. In his dozens of works he fathomed countless Torah mysteries and used his knowledge in a way that brought honor and love to Judaism and to the Torah outlook and way of life. He knew and understood everything, and at the same time he "blindly" and perfectly obeyed the Torah as an unexplained Heavenly decree. The tribulations he underwent during World War II in the ghettos and concentration camps not only did not shake his faith but even strengthened it. He even had the strength to imbue others with his faith. He asked no questions. As for other people's questions – to some of them he gave answers, and to others he said: "You are not permitted to ask. Heaven has so decreed."

I am sure that my Father would have found hundreds of answers concerning the present situation of our people and our Land.

There is no one else I can turn to, with my questions. There is no one to replace him!

THE LINGUISTIC RESEMBLANCE OF PURIM AND YOM KIPPURIM IS NOT THE ONLY SIMILARITY BETWEEN THE TWO HOLIDAYS. SHAVUOT – YOM KIPPUR AND PURIM ARE THREE HISTORICAL DAYS OF RECEIVING THE COMMANDMENTS. SHAVUOT THE FIRST SET, YOM KIPPUR THE SECOND TABLETS AND PURIM THE VOLUNTARY ACCEPTANCE OF THE DECALOGUE.

Purim Is No Joke

A popular saying has it that our holiest day, the Day of Atonement, is called "Yom Kippurim" because that term means "a day like Purim." And Yom Kippur and Purim are, indeed similar. On both days we disguise ourselves. In connection with the Purim jollity Jews disguise themselves and make merry like heathen, and on Yom Kippur, heathen – that is, Jews who have nothing to do with things Jewish all year round – come to the synagogue and play Jew.

Seriously, though, it has been found that there are quite a few similarities between Yom Kippur and Purim. Yom Kippur consists of two days, the day of Yom Kippur Eve – when it is incumbent upon us to feast – and Yom Kippur day itself, when we are required to fast. Purim, too, consists of two days: on Purim Eve, the Fast of Esther, we are required to fast, and on Purim day it behooves us to feast. In our calendar we find another similarity. During a Jewish leap year, when there are two months of Adar, we celebrate Purim during the second Adar while the same day of the month of Adar is marked as Purim Katan – Purim Minor. And every New Moon Eve is marked as

Yom Kippur Katan – Yom Kippur Minor. Purim marks a decisive day in the destiny of each individual Jew. On Yom Kippur we explain in the service: "Remember us unto life; inscribe us unto life," and on Purim we drink and declare: "Lehayim – To life!"

Now all this may seem a mere play with words. But we know that in every joke there lies an element of truth. Purim and Yom Kippur do have a most serious connection with each other.

The Talmud bids us do a remarkable thing on Purim. "Chayav enash livsoma bepuraya ad delo yada bein arur Haman lebarukh Mordekhai" – On Purim it behooves every man to drink till he can no longer distinguish between cursing Haman and blessing Mordekhai. What is the meaning of this? First of all, what is so great about Purim? Passover would seem to be a greater Festival. On Passover the Jewish people was born; on Passover the Jews were freed from Egyptian bondage. Yet on Passover we are told to count our drinks. Furthermore, what is the meaning of "not distinguish between cursing Haman and Blessing Mordekhai"? Even soberly there seems to be no difference between the two expressions. Cursing Haman implies blessing Mordekhai. They are like two sides of one coin.

The Talmud also tells us that Purim will always remain a holiday. Maimonides, who was certainly a strict legalist, goes on to say: Yemay Hapurim lo nivalim – Even when the Messiah comes and certain holidays will be abolished, Purim will remain. The book of Esther, too, declares: "Vezikhram lo yassuf mizar'am" – So long as there are Jewish children, the festival of Purim will not be forgotten.

Our Sages tell that the Festival of Shavuot and Yom Kippur, too, will never be abolished. This stands to reason. Shavuot reminds us of the moment when G-d gave us the Torah at Mount Sinai. The Torah is eternal, and the historic moment when it was given will also remain forever.

As to Yom Kippur, we know this from the Torah: "Ve'haita zot lakhem lehukat olam" – This shall be a statute for you for all time. The only problem in connection with Yom Kippur is this: It would seem that in the Messianic Age, mankind will be on such a high spiritual and moral plane that sin will disappear and, therefore, there will be no need for atonement and forgiveness. To this our Sages say that the same motif of eternity is present in Yom Kippur as in Shavuot. On Shavuot the Ten Commandments were given on the first Tablets, which Moses smashed when he descended from Mount Sinai to discover that the Jews had made the Golden Calf. He ascended Mount Sinai again and brought down the second Tablets on Yom Kippur, which is, therefore, also a day of "Mattan Torah," the giving of the Torah and, like Shavuot, destined to remain forever.

Thus, the Sages linked the concept of eternity only to the Torah, because the Torah alone is eternal. This may be what they had in mind with respect to Purim. The Talmud tells us that at first, the Jews were not willing to receive the Torah. Thereupon, G-d held the mountain over their heads – "Kaffa alayahem har keggiggit" – and told them that if they refused to accept the Torah, he would bury them under the mountain. And they accepted. The Talmud goes on to say that, if so, the Jews could always claim that they had accepted the Torah against their will and were therefore not obligated to obey it. This claim of compulsion is a valid one, legally speaking, and the Jews could not be condemned for disobeying the Torah.

In the time of Mordekhai and Esther, however, when the Jews were in danger of National annihilation and they were saved, the Book of Esther tells us that kiymu vekiblu – they voluntarily, and as one man, accepted the Torah which in the wilderness had been forced upon them.

According to these accounts, what happened in the wilderness on Shavuot and then on Yom Kippur was only "Mattan Torah – the giving of the Torah." But a giving must be com-

pleted by a receiving, and in the wilderness there had, legally, been no receiving. It is only in Shushan, only on Purim, that the Jews performed the act of receiving. Purim, therefore, is the time of "Kabbalat ha Torah – the receiving of the Torah." To repeat what the Book of Esther tells us: "Kiymu vekiblu alahem ve'all zar'am" – of their own free will and with joy in their hearts they took upon themselves and upon their posterity to live by the Torah.

Thus we have three dates of the giving and the receiving of the Torah. The three – Shavuot, Yom Kippur and Purim – are partners in the Torah and will be celebrated even in the Messianic age.

Passover and Sukkot, however, are concerned with the Exodus from Egypt. G-d indeed brought many wonders to pass in that time, but the Jews did not properly understand what was happening. The miracles of the Exodus and those of Chanukah were two sorts; on the one hand the enemy was routed, and on the other hand the Jews won their freedom. The Jews always saw the essence of these miracles in the downfall of the enemy rather than in the fact that they themselves were saved.

Thus, in the Song of the Parting of the Red Sea we read: "Vayar Yisrael et hayad hagdolah asher assa Adonai beMitzrayim" – The Jews saw G-d's hand in the drowning of the Egyptians. Thereupon, "Vayiru ha'am et Hashem" – They became afraid of G-d, "vaya'aminu beHasham" and they believed in G-d. Again, faith through fear. Thus it was in the victory over Amalek; in the conquest of the Land of Canaan; and again in the story of Chanukah where the Jews beheld the miracle whereby G-d brought victory of the few over the many, the weak over the mighty. The Jews did not rejoice that they were Jews and G-d was with them, but rather that G-d had annihilated the enemy.

The first time that the Jews truly rejoiced in their being Jews and lovingly and joyously accepted the laws of the Torah

was on Purim. When the Jews were delivered from Haman's evil design, they sang in the street: "Arur Haman; Barukh Mordekhai." They not only cursed Haman their tormentor, but also blessed Mordekhai, the righteous Jew.

That is why our Sages bid us celebrate till we cannot distinguish between cursing the enemy and blessing the Jew; Jews must be Jews not because the enemy forces them to. Those who returned to the fold because they were driven by Hitler, curse Hitler and no more. They curse Haman because if not for Haman, they might be able to forget about their Jewishness.

The joy of a Jew must consist in the proud awareness that he may consider himself fortunate, blessed, in spite of the Pharaohs, the Amaleks, the Chmielnizkys and Hitlers. And this feeling our people had for the first time on Purim in the time of Mordekhai.

This is how the Jews will feel when the Messiah comes and then they shall have a truly joyous celebration of Purim, proudly blessing the day they were born as children of Israel.

THE IMPORTANCE AND INFLUENCE OF WOMEN IN BIBLICAL HISTORY, FROM EXODUS TO MODERN TIME. THE CREDIT FOR THE EGYPTIAN LIBERATION BELONGS TOTALLY TO YOCHEVED, MIRIAM AND BATYA. THE HAPPY ENDING OF THE PURIM DRAMA IS ALL A RESULT OF THE HEROISM OF ONE JEWISH GIRL BY THE NAME OF ESTHER

The Incomparable Heroism of a Woman

No more than 30 calendar days separate Purim and Passover. Historically, however, the two events are a thousand years apart.

Passover is the oldest Jewish festival, marking the birth of the Jewish people. Passover was ordained by the Torah, lasts for seven days, and its observance includes mandatory abstention from work. Purim, on the other hand, was ordained by the Talmudic Sages and is almost like an ordinary weekday. Passover is a serious time. The main commandments of the Torah commemorate our liberation from Egyptian exile and bondage. Purim, on the other hand, is a happy day, full of fun and laughter, a day on which we let ourselves go and do things that would seem ridiculous on any other day of the year. We disguise ourselves, get a bit drunk, and in general go a little wild.

There is one thing, however, that Purim and Passover have in common: Jew-hating. Passover has Pharaoh doing it, and Purim has Ha'man. Both hate the Jews. Still, there is a great difference between the two. Jewish tradition regards the two men differently.

Pharaoh drowned Jewish children in the Nile, bathed himself in Jewish blood, enslaved an entire people and tormented them with grinding labor for 210 years. That being so, why don't we curse him and why aren't we commanded to blot out his name as we are commanded regarding Haman's ancestor Amalek? Pharaoh is mentioned throughout the Haggada, yet the Torah commands us not to offend or mock the Egyptians, because we were guests in their land, ate of their bread, and mustn't be ungrateful.

Haman, on the other hand, did nothing to the Jews. He wanted to harm them, but he didn't get his way. More than 2,500 years have passed since that time in Persia and Mudai, and we still cannot forgive him. In addition to the fact that Haman had a bitter end, when Purim comes, we bring graggers and other noisemakers to the synagogue, and every time his name is mentioned we make an uproar to drown it out. Why don't we use graggers at the Passover Seder, to drown out the wicked Pharaoh's name the way we do Haman's?

This is not an easy question to answer. But it seems that the Talmudic Sages regarded Haman as a more dangerous enemy than Pharaoh.

Pharaoh had a reason for doing what he did. He did not want to let the Jews go. When they left, he chased them in an effort to bring them back to Egypt. He wanted the Jews to build him pyramids and sphinxes and to remain his slaves forever.

He liked the girls, but he was very afraid of the boys with their Jewish minds. He knew very well what a Joseph accomplished in Egypt in a short time. Pharaoh was afraid that the Jews might increase their number too rapidly, and then, when the time was ripe, link up with Egypt's enemies and dethrone him.

Haman, on the other hand, had no right to destroy an entire people because of one Jew who had made him angry.

Haman scorned the Jews, saying to Ahasuerus that the Jews were not worth keeping alive. They were, he said, parasites, scattered everywhere, different from everyone else in the world. He scorned, mocked and jeered us. He hated us for no reason at all. The same as Hitler, blast his name and fame. To this day the historians continue searching to find the true reason for Hitler's bestial hatred of the Jews. No one knows how it began.

But there is yet another important difference between Passover and Purim. Queen Esther, the heroine of Purim, risked her life by intervening with Ahasuerus on behalf of the Jewish people. What this meant at that time can be inferred from what the king did to his first wife, Vashti, when she refused to heed his mad, drunken request. We can well imagine what a risk Esther took when she approached the throne and revealed to Ahasuerus the secret that she was Jewish, that she had deceived him by concealing her true identity.

But Esther valiantly played her part to the end, saying: "It doesn't matter what happens to me. I am ready to sacrifice myself in order to rescue my sisters and brothers from the clutches of that evil Haman."

On the other hand, what do we see among the Jews during their 210 years of Egyptian exile? Did as much as one slave stand up to Pharaoh and his decrees? There was no heroism, no resistance. The Jews quarrelled among themselves, not with their Egyptian taskmasters. When Moses "saw that there was no man" – that among the thousands of captives there was not one single person with the courage to act for his fellow Jew – he placed his own life in jeopardy and killed the Egyptian taskmaster who had been beating the Jew. But Moses's courage did not last too long either, and he fled and hid out with Jethro in Midian.

Moses did not want to go back to Egypt to liberate the Jews even when G-d Himself asked him to do so. "Send someone else," Moses tells G-d. Moses's courage was a one-time

thing; afterwards he did not want any part of what was happening. That is the way all the Jewish men conducted themselves in Egypt. It was every man for himself. Nobody cared about his fellow Jew.

The men were enslaved not only physically, but had also become spiritually degenerate. They did not want to leave Egypt and they had no desire to go to Eretz Yisrael. They were like a worm lying in brine and believing that there is nothing in the world sweeter.

The women, on the other hand, displayed great valor and self-sacrifice in opposing Pharaoh and his evil decrees. It is no wonder that the Talmudic Sages tell us that the Jews were delivered from Egypt thanks to the righteous women of that time. The women had babies and hid them in holes of the clay walls so the Egyptians should not be able to find them.

The Midrash tells us that Amram, Moses's father, divorced his wife, Yocheved, because, like many other Jews of the time, he did not wish to bring any more children into the world to be drowned by Pharaoh. But his daughter, Miriam, told him: "Your decree is worse than Pharaoh's. Pharaoh wants to destroy only the sons. You, by separating yourself from Mother, are going to put an end to the Jewish people, because that way there will be neither sons nor daughters."

So Amram remarried Yocheved, and Moses was born. There are no words to describe the grief of this mother, who had concealed her son for three months and now with her own hands had to abandon him to the currents of the mighty Nile. No one can grasp it as well as those of us who experienced it in the Hitler period.

Similar heroism was displayed by thousands of women in the ghettos and labor camps. When a child was born, people would steal out at night to the Aryan side, put the baby on the threshold of some Gentile family's home, and flee. Thousands of such children were lost to Christian homes and convents and

raised as Christians who to this day do not know about their Jewish origin. The adoptive parents, especially the priests and nuns, in most cases never told the children. This tragedy of lost Jewish children is a very painful chapter in the story of the destruction of European Jewry.

Moses was doubly fortunate. He not only had a brave mother, but he was also saved by an Egyptian princess, Batya, who displayed great heroism in doing so. Batya, Pharaoh's daughter, risked her life when she reached out her hand to pull to shore the basket containing Moses.

Can anyone imagine what such an act meant in Egypt of that time? The king's daughter defies her father's order and pulls a Jewish boy out of the river instead of throwing him in. She knows that that baby in the basket is a Jew, but that does not deter her. She takes him and adopts him as her prince. Moses gets the best education from the renowned teachers of the great Egyptian civilization of that time. She cuddles and kisses and pampers Moses, who lives in the lap of luxury under Pharaoh's aegis.

G-d granted Batya a two-fold reward for her extraordinary valor. When Moses was born, his parents called him Tuviah (one of many names he had), but he went down in history with the name Moses, the name Batya gave him.

The survival of the Jewish people has historically been guaranteed by the role and heroism of Jewish women. Today too, our future depends upon the commitment of the home, where mothers are entrusted with the continuity of Judaism for the future generations. It is all in their hands!

THE 4 SONS IN THE HAGADA REPRESENT 4 STAGES IN THE HUMAN LIFE. EACH PERIOD IN A PERSON'S BIOGRAPHY BRINGS ABOUT A CHANGE OF PHYSICAL AND MENTAL STATE IN BODY AND MIND.

The Four Sons – A Single Biography

The time-honored Haggada comes again and tells us at the Seder about the Four Sons – the "Wise Son", the "Wicked Son", the "Simple Son", and the "Son Who Does Not Know How to Ask". We are so familiar with these four types that they don't need much introduction. They ask questions, and we have to give each one a different explanation of the Exodus, and the more the better.

We manage with all of them except the "Wicked Son". Precisely on Passover night, when the door is open to everyone and everyone is invited to enter and join the Seder – there is no room for the Wicked Son. We "put his teeth on edge" and we chase him away; the Exodus and its celebration are not for him.

The Talmudic Sages ask many questions about both the contents of the discussion concerning the Four Sons and the way the editor of the Haggadah put this entire section together. Here are some:

What sort of "Wise Son" is he, who has nothing else to say at the Seder table but "What are the statutes?" If he is wise how come he doesn't know the Passover laws?

Why is the "Wicked Son" placed right after the Wise Son? It would seem that the "Wicked Son" is the worst of the lot and he comes off the worst of all. Yet the editor of the Haggada places the "Son Who Does Not Know How to Ask" last, as though he were the worst of all, whereas actually he is pitiable:

poor fellow, through no fault of his own, he simply doesn't know.

What an embarrassing situation for the father of the "Son Who Does Not Know How to Ask". The Haggada tells the father of such a son: "Open his mouth." It is accepted that when one is teaching a baby to eat, one opens his mouth to put the food inside. There is nothing shameful about that. But it must be very mortifying to have to open one's child's mouth so that he should ask a question.

If the editor had arranged the Four Sons in alphabetical order, the "Son Who Does Not Know How to Ask", a designation that in Hebrew begins with the letter "shin", would have come before the "Simple Son", whose designation in Hebrew begins with the last letter of the alphabet, "tav".

Why isn't the former called simply "He Does Not Know, etc." instead of ". . . Who Does Not Know, etc."? None of the other designations contain the pronoun "Who"; they are called simply "Wise Son", "Wicked Son", "Simple Son", not "the Son Who is Wise", and the like. And if he had been called "He Does Not, etc.", which begins with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, "aleph", he would have come first in an alphabetical arrangement of the four sons.

These and many more questions, including many questions about the answers we give the Four Sons, require a master preacher to supply us with a bundle of explanations to help us understand the strange way in which the editor of the Haggadah edited this text concerning the various differences between the Four Sons.

In spite of all the explications and commentaries, it remains problematic. So let us try a new approach.

Perhaps the Four Sons are actually meant to symbolize different periods of the life of every individual.

Chronologically, our life begins at the phase with which the Haggada ends. We enter the world in the category of "Does

Not Know How to Ask". All human beings are born equal, speechless, languageless. No other creature in the world is dependent on his parents and unable to speak as long as the human child. Everybody is born with the ability to eat, drink, cry, laugh, shout, and perform other physical functions. To be able to speak, to become one who knows how to ask questions, takes about two or three years. Our parents open our mouths and put our first words on our tongues. What greater pleasure is there than hearing a child utter his first word: Mama. One is born with the potential of speech. But the oratorical art is latent in every individual and has to be awakened, released. The human word is enslaved and has to be liberated.

One becomes truly human when one finally acquires the power of speech, a faculty that distinguishes us from all other creatures. Birds chirp, sheep bleat, dogs bark, as soon as they are born. But it takes a few years before the human being can start communicating with his fellow humans by means of the faculty of speech.

From the period of not knowing how to ask, we move into the Simple Son period, the period of "What's this?" These words are constantly on young children's lips. Just as previously the parents had to struggle to get a word out of the "Son Who Does Not Know How to Ask", so is it now virtually impossible to silence the "Simple Son" with his constant "What's this?"

The child is eager to get acquainted with the world. He sends an endless barrage of "What's this?" at his parents. This is the most important period in a person's life. Through questioning, one achieves scholarship. One can measure a child's intelligence by the number, form and content of his questions. During those years of a child's life personality is shaped, his character is molded, and his nature is formed for the rest of his life.

Psychologists say that only in the period from three to nine years of age can one influence, and even change, the nature of the adult-in-the-making. Afterwards, it is too late. But the

"Simple Son" period, the period of asking questions, continues well past the age of nine, till the age of 20. Educational development is a very long process. It takes quite a while to get one's basic fill of knowledge. Only at 20 is one truly independent and no longer a child. Only now does the "Simple Son" period end and the third period of human life begin.

This period hinges very much on the first two periods, those in which the individual was born and raised, periods involving such crucial factors as what sort of people his parents are, what kind of teachers he had, and the kind of friends he played with.

Of course, a major factor is that the heritage is transmitted to us by one's parents and earlier forebears. The blood flowing in our veins carries various traits that we have inherited and which we then transmit to future generations. Often, we cannot control our genetically inherited traits, and they remain with us throughout our lives. As we are told in Pirkay Avot V, when we turn 20 years of age we start running. Until 20, we move on our parents' strength. Our parents pull us, push us, support us, and help us. On reaching 20, we are mature and independent. We dive into the river of life and start building for ourselves – our own family life, a vocation, a home, a wife and children, a basis for the future.

Man is on the battlefield fighting. In this difficult struggle, various passions and demands come to the fore, the Evil Urge gets stronger, desire mounts. Various evils, wild instincts of wickedness that we all possess, rise to the top the way oil surfaces in water. Man becomes egotistical and wants to go on a rampage. The demands of the body rage, the blood seethes, and what we see before us is a wicked man.

No more parents or teachers to control and restrain the pull that nature exercises in those years. The child, the former "Simple Son", has grown up and now wishes to throw off the yoke of authority that has dominated him for so many years.

From now on, the new person – the adult – wishes to be his own boss, to set out on his own path, sometimes even one that does not please his parents.

Of course, there are exceptions. But most of our young people rebel against the older generation. It really seems to be an ancient problem, one that exists since we became a people. When Pharaoh asked Moses, "Who was going to leave Egypt?" Moses had to tell him the truth: "We shall go with our youth and our elders." Where were those in between? It seems that, 20 being the age for running, they ran around not wishing to listen to Moses. They had no desire to leave the fleshpot with its leeks and onions. When those of the in-between years left Egypt, they immediately wanted to run back.

Fortunate are the parents whose children want to follow in their footsteps. The act of father and son going together, in step with each other, was only the privilege of the Patriarchs Abraham and Isaac. Isaac himself, and Jacob as well, weren't privileged to see their children go together. The problems with Esau and Joseph led to wickedness, envy and hatred, to the very point of murder.

In such "storm and stress", the years fly by till we reach the age of 60, the seventh decade of our life. "An 'aged' person, is he who has acquired wisdom." Only then does one become wise. The pace of living slows down. You can't allow yourself to run anymore, and looking back into the past, you see how naive you were. Only at 60 do we start acknowledging the mistakes we made, at which point it is too late to correct them. The clock cannot be turned back.

Someone already said a long time ago that if people could have the strength of a 20-year-old and the wisdom of a 60-year-old, there would be no stopping anyone. The fact, however, is that when one has the right number of years, one lacks the wisdom, and by the time one has acquired the wisdom, one is no longer the right age. That is what the great Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah meant when he said: "I am like 70 years old." He had

the rare privilege of being young in strength and old in understanding.

These are the four elements of the biographical arrangement of people's lives: not knowing how to ask, being simple, being wicked, and being wise. I think that the same idea is expressed in the four expressions the Torah uses in speaking of the Exodus from Egypt. "And I shall take out . . . and I shall rescue . . . and I shall deliver . . . and I shall bring." It is in token of these four expressions that we drink four cups of wine at the Seder. And they are in the right order, according to my explanation of the significance of the Four Sons.

After birth we go through the childhood years, and we need G-d to take us out into the world. In the years till age 20, we need G-d to rescue us from the various traps lurking along our path to independence. Later, in the in-between years, we need G-d to deliver us from ourselves, to deliver us from the wicked passions. And in old age, we need G-d to take us slowly back to the soul's source, back to Himself. It is the final cup of life, which we drink to the last drop – hopefully, without pain.

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Age sixty is the time for a person to take stock of himself, to delve into his memories of the past "Who is wise?" the Talmudic Sages ask (Tamid 32). "He who sees what is in store." People mistakenly think that what is involved here is prophecy, that a wise man is one who can foretell events. This is wrong. The Talmud does not say "Haro'eh asher yiva-led," the literal meaning of which is "Who sees what is going to come into being," but "Haro'eh et hanolad," which means literally, "Who sees what has come into being." It is one who understands the past and draws the right conclusions concerning the present and the future.

Reflecting on what has become of me since I came into this world, I see that I do not have much to complain about to G-d. We are not asked whether we wish to be born, and we are not

given the privilege of choosing our parents. We think that we choose the woman we are going to marry. That is an illusion, because marriages are arranged in Heaven. What is love? Why does precisely this girl marry precisely that boy? And what about the way one's children and grandchildren turn out? Surely everything is determined by Heaven.

And I ask myself: If I were given the chance today of picking my parents, my wife, my children and grandchildren, would I pick what destiny ordained for me?

I categorically declare that today, 60 years later, having achieved "wisdom", my answer to all counts of the above question is an unequivocal "Yes!" I would pick exactly the parents I had, the wife I have – the bride of my younger years – and the children I have.

I have one complaint against G-d: Why was I born in a period of Jewish history in which a Hitler, blast his name and fame, and the Nazis appeared and nearly destroyed our people, and in which, it fell to my lot, to be one of the "She'erit Hapletah", one of the "Saving Remnant", one of the one-in-a-thousand who survived?

On the other hand, if I had not been born when I was, I would not have had the father I did, the mother, brothers and sisters I did, the wife and children I did! Was it all worth the price?!

The answer is going to be found in the Seder's "Chad gadya" ditty. In spite of everything, I think it was all worthwhile. And even if I had known in advance what was going to happen to me, I would still have agreed. So, having been born when I was, without being asked, I have no complaints. Time subjected me to great trials, perhaps because it was the most difficult and most important period in Jewish history.

Thank You, Master of the Universe, for having kept us alive and brought us through to this day. . . .

HAGADA AT SEDER: "THERE ARE FOUR SONS; ONE WISE, ONE WICKED, ONE SIMPLE AND ONE WHO ASKS NO QUESTIONS."

How Come a Jewish Son Becomes a "Rasha?"

Why should children become wicked and ungrateful? Why should they cause their parents grief and pain instead of extending them honor and love? How far can children go in willfully wounding their parents' hearts, even at the Seder night? Has knocking out the Rasha's teeth and excluding him from the family ranks really helped? These are questions that have troubled family life ever since creation.

As a young Cheder pupil, I could not forgive the Patriarch Jacob's ten sons for having so cruelly hurt their old father. How much anxiety and grief did their grudge concerning their brother Joseph cause their father?

Joseph was young and also an orphan, while his brothers were already mature men who lacked nothing. Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel, for the love of whom he had paid dearly with 14 years of virtual enslavement to his swindling father-in-law, Laban, died young, while giving birth to Benjamin. Jacob was hit hard by this tragedy. Rachel's death caused him a wound that never healed. But after she died, he found some comfort in her older son, Joseph.

It may have been wrong of Jacob to favor one child over the others. But he did not deserve to be so severely punished by his

own children. How could ten sons bring such evil tidings to an old father – the tidings that the apple of his eye, Joseph, was dead? And what they reported was not a simple, natural death, but, in their words that "Joseph had been torn to pieces by a wild beast." The ten brothers had unfeelingly vowed to keep the secret of their crime locked in their hearts forever.

How could ten children just look on as their father, Jacob, wept and mourned over the double wound – the loss of his beloved wife, followed closely by the death of his beloved son? How could they remain silent while Jacob refused for 22 years to be consoled? As far as Joseph is concerned, after selling him, they didn't see him, so they were able to forget him, but how could they resist not being moved to pity by the torrents of tears gushing daily from Jacob's swollen eyes? Jacob's suffering was a thousand times worse than Joseph's tribulations! The only possible answer is that at that fateful moment when they sold Joseph, they were out of their minds.

And Jacob was not the last one whose children caused their father grief. Our greatest men, none other than Moses and Aaron, suffered the same fate.

Moses had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. Except for the fact that they were born, Scripture tells us nothing about their lives. What became of them? What happened to them? Moses, the great teacher of the 600,000 who came out of Egypt, was, it seems, unable to teach his own children! When the time came to choose a successor to Moses, the man chosen was Joshua, son of Noon – Moses' disciple, to be sure, but not of his flesh and blood. Whereas Aaron had the privilege of transmitting the Priesthood to his posterity, no vestige seems to have remained of Moses' line.

But Aaron, too, had grief from his children. Two of his four sons, Nadav and Avihu, were burned to death in the holy Tabernacle in his presence. The Torah relates that their sin consisted of having brought "alien fire" into the sanctuary.

What was this "alien fire"? One opinion is that they said to

each other concerning Aaron and Moses: "If only those two old fogeys would die already, so that we could take their places!" Simply, they wished their father and uncle dead. How is it possible that holy, pure priests, who come into the Inner Sanctum to perform the Divine service, should be so filled with jealousy and hatred that they would sink to murder? So they were punished on the spot. Can anyone imagine the pain and suffering of a father like Aaron, at seeing his two sons being burned alive? The prophet Isaiah's outcry (Chapter 1, Verse 2), "I reared children and they have sinned against Me!" – These words are heard again and again throughout the history of mankind from the throats of broken-hearted fathers and mothers.

That is why the Fifth Commandment doesn't say, "You shall love your father and mother," but, "Honor your father and mother." It can happen, G-d forbid, that children should hate their parents. That is why the Torah demands honor, not love. We must treat our parents with honor and respect under all circumstances.

I remember a story that was told in my hometown in Europe. There were a mother eagle and three baby eagles in a nest. A storm came up and the mother eagle decided to transfer her chicks to the safety of a cave. Unable to carry all three at once under her wings, she decided to take them one by one.

As she was flying with the first baby eagle through the stormwinds, the thunder and the lightning, she said to the chick: "You see how I'm risking my life for you. Tell me child, when you grow up, will you do the same for your mother?"

"Of course," the chick hastened to answer. "I'll protect you with my limb and very life. I'll treat you the way you're treating me."

"You're a big liar," the mother screeched. "I'm not risking my life for you anymore. I know very well how ungrateful children are." And she shook the baby eagle loose from under her wing and let it fall to its death.

The mother eagle returned to the nest and took her second chick. Again in mid-flight she asked the chick the same question she had asked the first one and she got the identical reply. The mother promptly disposed of this eagle as she had of the first, and flew back to the nest to get her third chick.

As they were flying through the storm, the mother asked this child the same question she had asked the first two. This eagle gave her quite a different reply. "Mama," the chick said tremulously, "I don't know how I will behave when I grow up or what will become of me. I do know that no child can repay his mother for her devotion and for the pain she endures in bringing a child into the world and raising it. There is one thing I can promise you and that is that when I have children of my own, I will do for them exactly what you are doing for me! I will risk my life, just as you are doing, to protect them from harm."

Deeply moved, the mother eagle said: "You are a clever child and you speak the truth. You I shall save. I will guard you as I guard the apple of my eye."

There is an interesting explanation of the fact that children tend to be ungrateful, and often even are jealous of their parents, while we know the Talmudic principle, that jealousy and hatred tend to be present everywhere in human relations, with one exception: "A man is jealous of everyone except his son." It is the wish and prayer of all parents that their children should be better, more beautiful, richer and wiser than they themselves are. Why?

The answer is that we all stem from Adam and Eve. They had children, but they had no physical father and mother. They never knew a mother's love, a father's desire to provide for his child. So it remained in the human genes that parents should be devoted and faithful while there are not too many devoted children who fully appreciate having parents . . .

Jewish law also recognizes the great difference between a father's love for his children and the attitude of children to parents. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 72) rules: If a father steals into

his son's house with the intention of killing him, the son may not kill him in self-defense. It is assumed that the father is likely to relent, perhaps at the very last moment, and decide not to go through with his original intention of killing his child. But if the son comes into his father's house with the intention of killing him, it is considered a certainty that he will have no compunctions about pitilessly killing his father, and the father may kill his son in self-defense. (Maimonides "Hilchot Geneiva" 9-10).

There is an old joke about a young man who kills his father and then standing in court before the judge, pleads for mercy on the grounds that he is an orphan. Unfortunately, that isn't such a joke, but the real situation.

It seems that among other problems, we will also have to leave the problem of the gap between children and parents to be solved in the Messianic Era. As the Prophet Malachi (3:21) said: "Lo, he shall reconcile the heart of the fathers with their sons and the heart of the sons with their fathers." May the time soon come when children will love their parents as ardently as parents have always loved their children. May it be G-d's will . . . Amen!

THE PASSOVER HOLIDAY REVOLVES AROUND THE NUMBER FOUR. AGAIN A DISTINCTION IN HEBREW NUMERALS REGARDING RITUAL OBSERVANCES.

Who Knows Four?

Nearly everything having to do with that joyous old festival of Passover, with the magnificent Seder, is interwoven with the number of four. It is a quartet of symbols, laws and commandments, customs and traditions.

G-d used four terms concerning redemption in taking the Jews out of Egypt: "And I extricated", "And I liberated", "And I took", "And I rescued." As a reminder of this, we have four Sabbaths leading up to the Passover festival.

There are four words in Hebrew expressing the idea of freedom: *Dror, Cherut, Pedut, Chofesh.* At the Seder, four questions are asked, there are the four sons of the Haggada, and four cups of wine are drunk. We open with three matzot, one representing the Cohen, one the Levite, and one the Israelite. But right at the beginning, the middle matza is split in half, and we have a fourth portion of matza, known as the Afikoman. And once again we have four.

There are four main symbols on the Seder tray: karpas, maror, charoset, and the zero'a (or egg). Finally, there are, as we all know, the holiday's four designations: Matzot Festival, Passover Festival, Freedom Festival, and Spring Festival.

"Who knows four?" What is the meaning of this quartet aspect of the Passover holiday?

I am inclined to explain that the quintessential lesson of this is that there are four kinds of freedom that the Jew is called upon to remember when he celebrates the Passover holiday.

Of all the four designations, the only one to remain relevant, all through our long years of Exile, is that of Matzot Festival. Rightfully we say "This is the bread of affliction" and "This is matza." This is the very same matza. It hasn't changed. Flour and water, no sour dough. Exactly what our forefathers ate when they hastily fled from Egypt about 33 centuries ago.

So it is only right that in the Kiddush at the Seder and in the Shemoneh Essray prayer, we should say, "on this Matzot Festival day," for the matzot are right there before our eyes. We no longer offer up the Paschal Sacrifice or, for that matter, since the destruction of the Second Temple, any other sacrifice. So there is no Paschal lamb at the Seder table.

The law forbids us even to eat roast meat at the Seder, lest we so much as think of it as a Paschal offering. We may only have, lying on the Seder tray, a roasted bone and a hard-boiled, somewhat burnt, egg, as reminders of the Paschal offerings of the olden days.

Neither did we enjoy true freedom for nearly 19 centuries. From the destruction of the Second Temple till that blessed day of the establishment of the State of Israel we were regarded as strangers wherever we settled. We belonged to that class of people who were regarded as living in a particular country by sufference and not by right.

And throughout that Exile, we never got to enjoy the spring aspect of the festival. Wherever the Jews lived, the skies were overcast with dark clouds and the soil was drenched with the blood of innocents.

A difficult question arises, therefore: Of all the four designations of the holiday, why did precisely the "Pessach" – one stick? Actually, "Matzot festival" is the one that should have

stuck, being the only one that remained genuine and original after the destruction of the Temple and after we were banished from our homeland. In Exile, the other aspects were all abstract ideas. Where was the Paschal offering? Where was freedom? Where, in Exile, did the Jewish People have any Springtime?

Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev sought to answer part of this question by saying that at Passover time, G-d and the Jewish People exchange compliments. The Torah calls it "Matzot Festival", in order to praise the Jewish People for obeying G-d and baking the unleavened bread, as Rashi explains in his commentary on Exodus 12:39. We, for our part, call it "Pessach" – "Passover" – to praise and thank G-d for having "passed over" the Jewish homes (Exodus 12:27).

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"Who knows four? I know four." I have an urge to explain the holiday's four names in the following manner.

Matza is called "Lechem oni", "The bread of poverty" or "affliction." But that designation could also be interpreted to mean "lechem she'onin alav harbay", "the bread about which so much is spoken." No other commandment of the Torah involves as many fine points as that of the avoidance of Chametz-leavened products – and the eating of matzot.

The matza symbolizes the individual Jew bearing the yoke of mitzvot all year round. Just as the strict observance of the commandment of matzot involves carefully guarding the flour from the moment of the harvesting of the wheat, so is the Jew linked to mitzvot, about which he must be careful, from the moment of birth. And is there any people about whom the world talks as much as the Jews? The tiny Jewish State seems to bother everyone. And what of our situation before we returned to sovereignty in our own land? Weren't we a bone in the throats of our enemies?

Matza lasts. It cannot be bent. Each matza is humble, not inflated, taking up minimal space, capable of being packed into the smallest crack. The same applies to the Jews. We settled in a place that others would have found too cramped. The Jews are enduring. They are stubborn. This is sometimes a bad trait, but usually it is good to be persistent, to persevere. We suffered and endured a great deal without bending, and it is precisely our stubborness that has enabled us to outlive our enemies.

The Paschal offering symbolizes the family. It is a "lamb for the household"; not for the individual, but for the group; each member of the family group is counted so as to get his due portion of the Paschal offering. A stranger who wasn't "enrolled" at the very outset was unable to join in at the last moment.

The freedom of the individual is best expressed in his family membership. The Torah maintains that a truly free person is only one who marries, has children, builds a home. Contrary to the contention of the modern world with its celibate priests that marriage means loss of freedom, Judaism maintains that it is the unmarried young men and women who are enslaved to their lusts.

The importance of family life is expressed, emphasized, by this Paschal "lamb for each household", the family group membership is what makes the individual truly free.

Then there is the liberty aspect of the holiday. Every nation needs civil liberty, law, justice. "Cherut" (Liberty)) is "Charut", "engraved." The concept of liberty must be engraved on the hearts of the rulers and judges in order to guarantee equal justice for the individual and for society as a whole.

It is no wonder that over 200 years ago, the young United States of America inscribed on its Liberty Bell the words from Leviticus, "Proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof." Without law, without justice and equality, there is anarchy, chaos.

After the personal needs, family obligations and social justice have been attended to, comes the springtime aspect of the Passover holiday. Every person and every nation must make peace with nature, with the air we breathe, the water we drink, the soil we till. Unfortunately, the modern world, with its science and progress, has polluted the air, the soil and the water and poisoned the food, and humanity today suffers from a growing number of ailments many of which were unknown to our forebears.

Finally, it may be said that although matzot have become so popular that they are eaten all year round, even by non-Jews, when we Jews eat them on Passover they remind us of poverty, affliction, exile, slavery, our hasty departure from Egypt.

Passover symbolized G-d's protection against the Angel of Death. The mezuza on our doorpost recalls the action of our ancestors in smearing some of the Paschal lamb's blood on their doorposts so that the Angel of Death should "pass over" their homes when he came to slay the Egyptian firstborn.

We would like to forget the poverty aspect, but we would always like to remember the "passover" aspect. We would like G-d to protect us and our homes against trouble. As someone once put it: "G-d, grant us health and life, and we'll take care of our livelihoods ourselves."

The Paschal lamb is the source of the mezuza that Jews put on their doorposts. Many Jews who are not religious at all still have mezuzot.

That is why "Pessach" – "Passover" – is the name that caught on, even though nothing remains of the Pessach sacrifice but a symbolic recollection, a bone placed on the Seder tray, known as the "zero'a". And this is not only a remembrance of long ago, but also a promise for the future, a promise of the Final Redemption, which will also be brought about by a "zero'a netuya", an "outstretched arm", just as happened at the Exodus from Egypt. Amen. So may it be G-d's will.

BIBLICAL PERSONAGES HAVE MOST OF THE TIME THE NAME OF G-D INCLUDED IN THEIRS. "EL" IS ONE OF G-D'S NAMES AND YOU FIND IT IN SAMU-EL, ISRA-EL, CHASK–EL AND OTHERS. JUDAISM BELIEVES THAT A MAN MUST TRY TO LIVE UP TO THE STANDARD OF HIS GIVEN NAME AT BIRTH.

Names

In all the languages of the world except Hebrew, the second book of the Pentateuch is called "Exodus." We Jews, however, call it "Shemot", "Names."

The sanctity and greatness of the Jewish names is referred to in the Midrash, where we are told that one of the reasons why G-d delivered the Jews from Egyptian bondage is that they did not change their names.

.William Shakespeare said, "What's in a name?" and declared that a rose by any other name would still have the fragrance of a rose.

We Jews have a different view on this subject. Apart from the important struggle against assimilation, there are other reasons why names are an important expression of one's Yiddishkeit and humanity. In the history of the Jewish People there are names that proved to be prophetic about the characters and natures of those who bore them.

There are instances of names making the people bearing them, and others of the people making their names. The "good name" of which King Solomon speaks in Ecclesiastes, as being better than the finest oil, is the name that a person makes for himself in the course of his life. This is the name that one acquires by virtue of good works, and it endures for generations. A person with a good name never dies but lives forever.

For example, take Moses's name, "Moshe" in Hebrew. It was given to him by Pharaoh's daughter Batya, when she saw him lying in the basket, hidden among the reeds in the river, and drew him out of the water. She said she was calling him Moshe, "because I drew him out of the water" – "ki min hamayim *meshitihu.*"

Batya, Pharaoh's daughter, didn't realize that by giving him that name she was prophesying about his role as redeemer of the Jewish People. Grammatically, the name "Moshe" isn't really correct. "Moshe" doesn't mean that she drew him out of the water; it isn't the passive case, "drawn" or "he was drawn." "Moshe" is an active verb, meaning "he draws." The passive case is "mashui", meaning "the one drawn out." "Moshe" means the one who draws out, not the one who is drawn. Thus, by naming him "Moshe", Batya foretold that he would play an active role in history.

The Talmudic Sages say that Moses had many names his parents, Amram and Yocheved, gave him. But the name that stuck forever is the one that Batya gave him. The Jews don't know him by any other name than Moses.

Jethro also had many names. The one that stuck, though, is the one connected with something he did for the Torah's sake. He gave the Jews a system of organization without which the Jews would not have been able to accept the Torah. He added the section, "You shall also seek out" (Exodus 18:21), and that is why we call him Jethro – "Yitro" in Hebrew, whose root means "more."

"Hoshea" becomes "Yehoshua" – "Joshua", because G-d appointed him as Moses's successor, assigning him to bring the Jewish People into Eretz Yisrael. "Hoshea" means "assistant", which was Joshua's role vis-a-vis Moses. "Yehoshua" means "he will be the deliverer." "Moshe" will draw out and "Yehoshua" will lead into. Joshua will lead the Jews in the conquest of Eretz Yisrael.

Nevertheless, the Torah shows us that we can't always rely on the name also to guarantee that its bearer will fulfill the promise it contains. There are people with beautiful names who did not deserve to be born. And there are people with unworthy names who become great, famous, immortal. I shall bring two interesting examples.

We find all sorts of names in the Book of Numbers where the Torah lists the names of the heads – the nesi'im – of all the tribes. Of the 12 names, 11 are compounds, of which either the first part or the second is some form of G-d's name. Elitzur, for example, means "G-d is my protector." Netanel means "G-d has given."

One is a combination of four G-dly designations. The head of the tribe of Simon is called Shlumiel son of Tzurishaddai. "Shlum" or"Shalom" is one of G-d's cognomens. "El" means "G-d." Then there is his father's name: "Tzur" is another one of G-d's cognomens, as is "Shaddai." One would imagine that a person whose name consisted of four designations of the Master of the Universe was some outstanding tzaddik, one of the most righteous men of his time. But the facts are exactly the opposite.

Shlumiel was the biggest sinner of all the nesi'im. According to the Talmud (Sanhedrin 82), he was the famous Zimri who had the affair with the Midianite woman and whom Pinchas killed for G-d's sake.

The other nesi'im weren't such great people, either – not fit for their high offices and not living up to their G-dly names. They were stingy concerning the contributions for the construction of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle. Most of the Jews had long since given their contributions, and the nesi'im were still holding back. Finally, at the very end, they came sheepishly bringing their gifts in the drive that Moses conducted.

We don't know of a single thing that the nesi'im did for the Jewish People that the Torah considered important enough to

record for posterity. There isn't even the slightest hint of such a thing. Apparently, there were many shlemiels among them, not just one. Isn't it ironic that a man with a four-fold-G-dly name should become the Jewish People's first shlemiel? He committed such an ugly act that he had to be slain in order that the Jewish People as a whole should be saved. If Pinchas hadn't stabbed him to death, the plague wouldn't have stopped.

There was only one exception to what I have said about the nesi'im. And he had quite an ordinary name. He was Nachshon son of Aminadav, nasi of the tribe of Judah.

What is the root of the name Nachshon? "Nachash" means "Snake." This recalls the primal snake that enticed humanity to commit the first sin: eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. The snake is cursed by G-d. "Nachash" – "snake" – means deceit, black powers of magic that dazzle the eyes with lies and bluff. "Nachash" recalls the lethal venom. So the name "Nachshon" certainly has no connection with holiness, G-dliness, faith, or religious devotion.

So it is really astonishing that precisely someone named Nachshon is a hero, the first one to leap into the raging waters of the Red Sea at the Exodus and by his act causing the waters to part. All the others at the shore just stood there telling each other to go first . . . each was willing to have his fellow Jew be the first to volunteer and he himself would go second. Only Nachshon had enough faith and trust to leap in even before the waters of the sea had parted.

By that act, Nachshon son of Aminadav saved the entire Jewish People. If not for him, they would still be standing there today! They might even have gone back to being slaves in Egypt.

Just as when it came to contributing gold and silver for the construction of the Mishkan – the Tabernacle – the nesi'im told the rest of the people to give first, and only at the end they shamefacedly put their hands into their own pockets, so did

they initially hesitate to put their feet into the chilly water of the Red Sea.

The Jewish People and Jewish history well remember these types. In the new Jewish State, the designation "Nachshon" is applied to the soldiers who go in the war and risk their lives for the sake of their land and people, while Shlumiel son of Tzurishaddai, in spite of his magnificent name, so rich in G-dliness, is immortalized as a model shlimazel.

The moral of all this is quite a simple one. If you have been given a good name, you must strive with all your might to live up to the honor that the name demands. On the other hand, someone with an ordinary or even ugly name can strive on his own to gain status and recognition. Such a man was the hero Nachshon.

WHY HAS G-D SELECTED AND INSISTED THAT MOSES BE THE REDEEMER? WHY DOES MOSES REFUSE TO ACCEPT THE MISSION? THE DIFFICULTIES THAT MOSES CONFRONTED AT THE BURNING BUSH.

G-d Wants, Moses Doesn't

In the entire Torah, nobody is written about with as much biographical detail as Moses. About Adam, we get only the barest details in Genesis. A whole sidra is devoted to Noah; three sidrot deal with Abraham; Isaac gets one and a half; and Jacob and Joseph get a few. But Moses's life story is spread over more than 40 sidrot, from "Shmot" till "Vezot Habracha," in four of the five books of the Pentateuch.

We are told all kinds of the finest details about Moses from his birth to his death. Moses ascends and descends, speaks, calls, gets angry, smashes the tablets, begs mercy. Moses's name appears in every sidra except "Tetzaveh", which is read during the week of the Seventh of Adar, the anniversary of Moses's death, and a few sidrot in the Book of Deuteronomy, which consist, as the opening verse says, of "the words that Moses spoke."

But in spite of the extensive biographical material, there are episodes in Moses's life that are not clear, and our commentators struggle hard to solve many problems that still remain unresolved.

Let us, for example, take the famous dialogue between the Master-of-the-Universe and Moses at the bush. For seven days, G-d and Moses bargain and argue over G-d's request that Moses go and deliver the Jews from Egypt. Moses doesn't want to do so and he declines the sacred mission. He comes up with all kinds of excuses. All of a sudden he gets an inferiority complex and says to G-d: "Who am I? Why have you picked pre-

cisely on me? Send someone else, whomever you wish, only not me!" Moses makes a supreme effort to evade this divine mission.

When all these arguments fail, Moses comes up with complaints about physical handicaps: he is tongue-tied and close-lipped, lacking any oratorical ability, totally incapable of being spokesman for a nation.

Finally G-d settles on a compromise. Seeing how stubborn Moses is, G-d pairs him with his brother Aaron, who becomes Moses's mouthpiece, saying whatever Moses tells him. How can we explain the fact that Moses, who risked his life to save one Jew from an Egyptian's blows, refuses to save an entire nation of 600,000 souls?

Moses, the man of truth and fairness, who leaves Pharaoh's royal palace in order to join his suffering brethren, languishing under the whips of their Egyptian taskmasters, the Moses who after being a prince becomes a slave – this Moses rejects a request by G-d Himself to go and deliver the Jews? Instead of being happy about G-d's readiness finally to deliver the Jews, Moses frets, bargains, tries every means to evade G-d's request? Incredible!

Later, too, when he was already back in Egypt and the Jews refuse to listen to him, Moses again complains about his speech disabilities, saying that was the reason why they would not listen to him.

When we look deeper into the Torah, many more questions arise concerning the matter of "G-d wants and Moses does not":

1. Why did the Master-of-the-Universe choose Moses to be the liberator? Among all those Jews, wasn't there another, better, more talented candidate than Moses?

2. Why didn't G-d immediately choose Amram's elder son, Aaron, who had the same pedigree as Moses?

3. What extraordinary talents did Moses have that made

him G-d's sole choice, the only one worthy of the mission of liberating the Jewish people?

4. How did Moses eventually become a speaker and singer, a writer and poet, as we see in the later chapters of his biography? Were his thick lips, his tied tongue, his heavy mouth finally healed? Why doesn't Moses stutter anymore when the time comes for him to sing his last sermon in the Book of Deuteronomy?

One might say that Moses's arguments about his physical disabilities were really a result of his emotional state. Nobody has been in such an uncomfortable situation as Moses was at the moment when G-d proposed to him that he undertake the mission of liberating the Jews from Egypt.

What Moses did not relaize, however, was that precisely because of his handicaps he was the only one in a position to help his brethren leave Exile. That is why G-d chose him and no one else. His disabilities were actually assets!

Moses's mission was a twofold one. He had to go and demand from Pharaoh that he let the Jews go, and at the same time to persuade the Jews to leave Egypt. Both parts of the twofold were specially difficult for Moses.

To go to Pharaoh, threaten him with plagues, speak harshly to him – none of this was to Moses's liking. He had been raised in Pharaoh's palace in the lap of luxury and enjoying all the honors given to a prince. Batya, Pharaoh's daughter, had raised him like her own son. How could he go there and behave like an ingrate? How could he return stones for bread? Moses thought it would be disgusting to repay kindness with ingratitude. His conscience bothered him. He felt that his mouth would be as though paralyzed; it would be sealed; he would be unable to open his lips against the people who had kissed and hugged him. How could he bite the hand that had fed and caressed him? Gratitude was an integral part of Moses's nature and along comes G-d and tells him to be an ingrate!

However, it is precisely the fact that Moses grew up in Pharaoh's bosom, was raised in the royal palace, that qualified him for the mission more than any other Jew in Egypt. Moses knew the procedures and protocols of the Egyptian monarchy. He knew the ins and outs of the palace, which had been his home. He was an insider. All this is why G-d wanted him to be the one conducting the difficult negotiations with Pharaoh.

No other Jew in Goshen had ever crossed the threshold of Pharaoh's royal palace. The only Jew who knew how to open a door there was Moses.

But the second mission – that of speaking to the Jews – wasn't easy either. As soon as Moses put in his first appearance at the Jewish slave camp, one of the Jews said to him: "Who asked you to preach to us? Where were you until now? You grew up in luxury while we were slaving away. You aren't one of us: you're a stranger."

Moses was very hurt. With Pharaoh, he was a "member of the family", while the Jews regarded him as a stranger, an "outsider." Moses did not feel like talking back to Pharaoh, while the Jews were not ready to listen to him.

But as a matter of fact, even this handicap of Moses's, that of being an outsider to the Jews, was really another factor that made him especially qualified for the task of liberator.

A prisoner cannot free himself from prison without outside help, the Talmudic Sages said. Only one who has lived in freedom can really appreciate freedom. The Jews had been in Egyptian Exile for 210 years, slaving away in the lime pits and making bricks. They had been born to slavery and remained slaves all their lives. Even after they left Egypt, the slightest pretext caused them to regret leaving, and they wanted to go back to the task of making bricks even without straw.

Only Moses with his love of truth, justice and human dignity, with his familiarity with Egyptian civilization, was capable of leading a revolution against Pharaoh's monarchy, of liberating a people from slavery.

That Moses despises ingratitude we see from the episode with Korah's accomplices, Datan and Aviram, when they waged their campaign against Moses. Moses was upset on hearing that both of them opposed him. "To at least one of them, I did no harm whatever," Moses complained. "After all, I took the part of one of them, telling the other one, 'You scoundrel, why are you beating your comrade:' – So why have both, the bully and the victim, become my enemies? *One* of them should be grateful to me! Why do I deserve rocks for the bread that I gave?"

G-d does not let Moses strike the waters of the Nile and inflict the plagues of blood and frogs on them, because those waters saved his life when his mother hid him in a straw basket that she placed among the bulrushes in the river. The Nile, which carried the basket to Pharaoh's daughter, could not be struck by Moses's hand! That would have been an act of ingratitude on the part of Moses. The same applied to the plague of lice: not Moses but Aaron had to bring the plague on the Egyptians, because Moses also owed thanks to the sand, in which he had hidden the body of the Egyptian taskmaster he had killed when he saw him beating a Jewish slave.

Moses suffered bitter disappointments in his task as leader of the Jews. They never gave him his due acknowledgment. Instead of showing love and gratitude, all through those 40 years they did nothing but complain and quarrel. Some of the commentators struggle to explain why Moses wasn't buried in the conventional way, with a funeral and a eulogy. Why was it his destiny that no one should even know the location of his grave?

The reason may be that Moses did not wish any posthumous honors, after having been denied thanks in his lifetime. He did not want an expensive monument to which people would come to thank him for his devotion and self-sacrifice, for liberating his brethren, for giving us a Torah.

Unfortunately, there is no gratitude in the world. Isn't this true also regarding the attitude of the world to the Jews. We

Jews have given the world all our talents, we have helped all the nations of the world to develop their countries in our 2,000 years of exile. Where is their gratitude? For the bread we have given them, they have repaid us with rocks. Everywhere there arose leaders "who did not know Joseph." In no time at all, they always forgot the Josephs who served their kings more devotedly, more patriotically, than those kings' own subjects.

Moses teaches us otherwise in the Torah. We are commanded: "Do not despise the Egyptian, for you were a sojourner in his land." So great is the quality of gratitude considered by the Torah that even with regard to an enemy who drowned your children and sucked your blood and sweat, you must not forget to express gratitude to him for some small favor that he did you!

MOSES SINS BUT THE PUNISHMENT IS TOO SEVERE, SEEMINGLY UNFAIR. NOT MEASURE FOR MEASURE. WHERE LIES THE UNFORGIVABLE TRANSGRESSION THAT DENIED TO MOSES ENTRANCE INTO THE PROMISED LAND?

Moses Wants and G-d Doesn't

"Va'etchanan" – Moses relates how he had pleaded with G-d: "Let me cross the Jordan, Master-of-the-Universe. Forgive me for the sin I committed and let me go into the Holy Land with my people! I am ready to do anything just to realize my dream of forty years, to have the privilege of placing my foot in the land of our Patriarchs!"

"Va'etchanan" – 515 prayers, the number of the total of the letters of the word "shira" – meaning song. In his effort to gain G-d's mercy, Moses used every form of supplication that he knew. But G-d angrily said to him: "Be silent and stop discussing the matter with me. The decree cannot be cancelled. It has been sealed and I will not change it! You shall not cross the Jordan, the case is closed!"

The question arises: What did Moses do to deserve such punishment that repentance could not annul, that no prayer could prevail on G-d to forgive him? What sin or crime did he commit that was so grievous that it could not be expiated? How is it that Moses, who had been able to rend the very heavens and reach the throne of G-d and gain expiation and forgiveness for very grave sins that the Jews had committed in the wilderness, was helpless to get a reprieve for himself and had to pay with his life for the one sin that he inadvertently committed?

The punishment consisted not only in Moses's not entering the land but in the fact that it was recorded for posterity that Moses died on account of his sin. Moses, of whom the Torah says that "there was none like Moses," the man whom G-d

Himself called "My servant Moses," G-d's faithful disciple, died a sinner! He sinned only once, but he remained forever recorded as a sinner.

Let us see what Moses's sin was all about. Did the punishment fit the crime? Wasn't it perhaps too severe?

All our commentators struggle over this. The Or Hachayim offers ten explanations concerning Moses's sin in striking the rock to make it give water instead of speaking to it, as G-d commanded. But despite all the Midrashim and commentaries that try to clarify the matter of Moses's sin and punishment, it remains obscure, shut with seven locks, and no one has succeeded in clarifying the deep, dark secret. Notwithstanding all the explanations, all the questions remain unanswered.

The Torah tells us that Moses's sin was in his disobeying G-d's command to speak to the rock and striking it with his rod instead. The Master-of-the-Universe was angry and said: "Because you did not trust in Me enough to sanctify My Name in sight of the entire nation."

As usual, Rashi comes along and tries to help us understand the plain meaning of the passage. He says that G-d was angry because if Moses had spoken to the rock the people might have learned a lesson: if a mute, cold rock obeys G-d, then human beings, who have hearts and minds, should certainly trust in G-d and obey Him.

According to Rashi, then, Moses and Aaron sinned in missing an opportunity to teach the people a rare lesson. Their sin consisted of failing to use the opportunity to help bring to pass a Divine miracle which at that moment, just before the Israelites were to enter the Land, could have had a tremendous influence on the Generation of the Wilderness. Moses and Aaron missed a propitious moment.

But it is not easy to accept Rashi's explanation, and the other commentators, especially Nahmanides, offer the following different rebuttals:

1. If the sin consisted of striking the rock instead of talking to it, G-d Himself can be accused of causing the sin by telling Moses to take along his rod. It is possible that Moses used it inadvertently, automatically, as he had been accustomed to do in bringing about the previous miracles. If Moses was only supposed to speak to the rock, why did he need the rod that G-d instructed him to take along?

2. If the Master-of-the-Universe was interested only that the Jews should be impressed by the miracle and from it learn the lesson that they ought to obey G-d, then the question is, wasn't getting water from the rock with the rod, miracle enough to impress the people? To be sure, getting water from the rock by speaking to it might have been more impressive. The fact is, however, that getting so much water from the rock, even by striking it, was itself a supernatural event. Is it possible that hundreds of thousands of thirsty people won't appreciate such a wonder, that it won't make any impression on them? Perhaps the miracle wasn't as great a sanctification of G-d's Name as G-d had desired, but it certainly was not a desecration of the Name. So why was Moses punished so harshly?

Maimonides says that the punishment was not so much for Moses's striking the rock instead of speaking to it, as for his losing his temper and shouting at the people: "Listen, you foolish rebels!" Since losing one's temper is like worshipping idols, Moses at that moment was faithless, as G-d tells him and Aaron: "Because you did not have faith in me."

But Maimonides's explanation is not so simple either. Was this the first or only time that Moses lost his temper? And is "Listen, you foolish rebels!" so terrible an expression of anger as to be ranked with the sin of idolatry? It was really no more than a little insult.

There are many such questions without a satisfactory answer. This episode of Moses striking the rock instead of speaking to it seems to be the most difficult in the whole Torah.

Moses's sin here and the punishment he got for it pre-occupy our greatest commentators – not only the aforementioned Rashi and Maimonides, but also Nachmanides, Ibn Ezra, Abarbanel, the Ritva, the author of *Ikkarim,* the author of *Mizrahi,* the Maharal, the author of *Akeda,* the *Or Hachayim* and many others. Since the simple sense of the Torah's account of this episode eludes us, let us see whether we cannot clarify this obscure matter by the homiletical method.

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It seems to me that G-d had two difficult problems – one with Moses and one with the Jewish people. Moses was not a good talker and the Jews were not willing listeners. Moses was tongue-tied and he stuttered; he had trouble uttering words. When he had to speak to the people, it was "the Shechina speaking from his throat": G-d spoke, not Moses. Without the Shechina, Moses was silent. His power of speech was impaired. Our commentators say that when Moses cried, "listen, you foolish rebels!" that was the first time in forty years that he spoke "harsh words" to the Jews, on his own. The power of his authority derived from the staff with which he led the people and brought to pass the miracles from the first days in Egypt, after G-d assigned him to his mission, till they arrived at the borders of Eretz Yisrael.

The Jewish people, on the other hand, suffered from deafness. The Jews have always had and still have the weakness of not wishing – or not being able – to listen. Our ears are stuffed; our hearing is blocked. Already in Egypt they didn't want to listen to Moses. He had to shout into their ears, as the Torah tells us (Exodus 11:2): "Speak into the ears of the people."

At the giving of the Torah, when G-d asks the Jews whether they will accept the Ten Commandments, they give the strange answer, "We will do" and only then ". . . and we will listen." As though to say: We will do everything, but we cannot yet promise "to listen." The listening will come a little

later. G-d has to give them the Ten Commandments so that they shall "see the voices," see the Commandments, for they cannot hear . . . The Jews received the Torah at Mount Sinai not with their ears but with their eyes.

In the portion "Va'et-hanan", the verb "to hear" appears seventeen times in some form or another, crowned by our holiest prayer, "Shema Yisrael," which we say every night and every morning. "And if you will listen and hearken" – everything depends on that; that is all G-d wishes of us.

Here the Jews stand with Moses, after 40 years of discipleship in his school as it were, and it might have been expected that, after such a long time, the people would have learned to listen and Moses would have learned to speak. The people stood on the threshold of the Holy Land and had to pass a test, but unfortunately both teacher and students were not up to it and they both failed badly. A good ear doctor and a throat specialist were needed to cure the two ailments – which, however, proved incurable . . .

Instead of G-d's Name being sanctified at the incident of the rock, it was desecrated. The Jews shouted and quarreled. Moses's pleas of "Please listen" were of no avail. Moses himself committed his old sin of remaining silent and used his staff. He lost his power of speech. He did not speak to the rock, as G-d commanded him, but struck it. Not only was he not cured of his ailment of stuttering and a tied tongue, but he had also acquired the bad quality of his disciples, who did not want to listen to G-d, and he himself also committed the same sin of not listening. This was Moses's great unforgiveable sin, a sin for which he could not get G-d's forgiveness.

Moses's life story is unbelievably tragic. At the beginning Moses did not want and G-d did. At the very end, the situation was just the opposite: Poor Moses wanted, but G-d didn't.

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This homily may have some fantasy in it. But there is a saying to the effect that there is no fantasy that doesn't have a grain of truth in it.

We today must concede that mankind's trouble stems precisely from the fact that people do not talk and do not listen to each other. How many couples could save their marriages if they would only talk and listen to one another? All the problems of family life stem from the severance of communication between the family members. All evils result from the muteness and deafness between parents and children, the absence of straightforward talk on the part of parents and reluctance of children to listen.

I think that a certain opening of ears and mouths would be a salutary thing in the United Nations beside New York's East River. Some of those talking there, ought to remain silent, and some of the silent ones, should speak up . . .

FREEDOM IS A BLESSING, THE PRAYER OF ALL GENERATIONS, THE CAUSE MILLIONS DIED FOR. YET LIBERTY HAS ITS LIMITS AND MUST BOW TO LAW AND ORDER, ETHICAL AND MORAL VALUES THAT PRESERVED OUR PROGENITORS AS A PEOPLE.

Freedom a Blessing and a Curse!

People ask, "Why is there such chaos in the world of today? Is it just a natural order of events, or is the history of mankind a carousel which rotates around and around but never moves ahead?" A parable is told about an architect, a doctor, a lawyer and a politician who engaged in a heated debate about which one's profession was the oldest in the world history. The doctor, a surgeon stated "I operated on Adam to take out his rib." The architect said, "I made the plans for Adam's first home in the Garden of Eden." The lawyer stated that his word began at the origin of Genesis because his function was to bring an end to chaos, which prevailed before creation. To install law and order in the wild nature of the universe, there was a need for an expert lawyer. At the end, the politician laughingly announced, "Before all of you, there was chaos. If not for me, the politician creating this chaos by confusion of mind and natural forces, who else would be more qualified to turn the world into a chaotic place? Thus joked, "the men of knowledge."

When we read in the press about the social evils plaguing today's society, the increase in incurable venereal diseases, epidemics that result from leading an immoral life, the inter-

marriage between people of different religious groupings and sects, homosexuality, and lesbianism and add to them the terror and fear of walking the streets at night, the ongoing struggle on all fronts, land, sea and in the air, we ask ourselves what causes all this, and who is responsible? The answer is that men of wisdom and science and the human progress bear responsibility for all the troubles "Chochmah" – wisdom, the initial letters of "Chochmah" in Hebrew CHET-CHOOF-MEM-HEY stand for "KEY MOLEH HA-ARETZ CHOMOS", "The world is full of violence."

Science made great progress in many facets, but civilization and humanity has receded into chaos, lust, violence, destruction, sadism, terror and the darkness of Sodom and Gemorah or the age of Noah and the flood.

Do we give thought that our progeny, today's youth, is learning in schools and universities a curriculum based on four cardinal theories that came about in the last one hundred years as revolutionary processes?

The first of these was the socialist-communist one. The theory developed out of a book "Das Kapital" written by a Jew, Karl Marx. Marx propounded economic equality for all; no difference between rich and poor. Religion, he said, was the opiate of the masses, a destructive power in society, and of no use. Marx's disciples believed in bloody revolutions as the means to attain such an equality. But instead of raising living standards, in a sense raising the grass to the height of the trees, they cut down the trees to the size of grass. The difference between rich and poor was eliminated because most of the people became impoverished. Instead of erasing class distinctions, a new ruling class of party commissars emerged, ruling over the enslaved masses. One totalitarian government changed for another. Communism became the "Dictatorship of the Proletariat" which dehumanizes and brutalizes men.

All religions preach social justice, human rights and dignity. Under communism men were put under another dictatorship without rights to criticize and without any privilege for mobility of job or place. Half of mankind is enslaved today to

these commissars, who have little regard for human values. Their propaganda makes no secret of their program for enslaving the world into a communistic "Garden of Eden."

The second was the biological revolution of Charles Darwin, who proclaimed men's descent from the ape. Creation was not G-d's handiwork, but evolved from lower to higher forms. The world is here not 5746 years, but is billions of years old.

This is taught to school children, even in the elementary grades. Man has no divine origin, but his ancestor's were apes. Hence, the law of "Survival of the Fittest" suggests that the strong rule over the weak. Both in the spiritual and the physical sense. Darwinism adopted the law of the jungle which dictates, that only the mighty survive and the weak perish.

From Darwin emerged the German philosopher Frederich Nietzcshe, from whose racial ideas emerged an Adolf Hitler. Thus Darwin's "Fossils, Protoplasm and Organisms" brought the "Homo Sapiens" the cleverest of all creatures to the level of a plain animal.

Afterwards, the third theory, which damaged mankind no less, was that of Professor Sigmund Freud, himself a Jew, who said, that man is the product of his inner instincts. Born as "Fait Accompli", fully developed in his psychological disposition, he cannot overcome and control his own nature. Man's spirit is like a computer with built-in programming which motivates his deeds and determines his actions.

Freud plainly denies men's free will. Hence, the theological basis of religious beliefs, especially Judaism, of man's freedom of choice and accountability, for the ultimate responsibility to do Mitzvoth and not to sin, is emphatically denied. Man has mechanical instincts and he is not responsible for his actions.

These three revolutions, the social, the biological and the psychological, produced an upheaval in man's thought processes, especially that of the so called civilized, university trained intellectuals of today.

The fourth revolution is current in the free democratic world, particularly in the United States. In the communist society, barbaric dictatorship of the pre-historic type prevails.

In the free world, too much freedom developed in the climate produced by the three previously mentioned revolutions and led to a license for an unbridled chaos in our society. "What should the son of man do, that he should not sin?" (Talmud Brachot 32:1) Why should he strive for angelic perfection, when he could do as he chooses to do? The intellectual of today declares that he has descended from apes, that his nature is predestined and his desires should be fulfilled, whether he is rich or poor.

According to Marx's "Das Kapital", the rich are the thieves and every man is entitled to the rich man's wealth, since it was obtained unethically. Why not take it by force as even the Jewish law dictates: "He who steals from a thief is exempt from sin." Marx considered religion the opiate of the masses, but modern man who has no use for religion is drunk and keeps hallucinating on drugs. Darwin put man into the ape class, hence permitting him to use his sexual desire without shame like an animal. After digesting the cup of knowledge from Marx and Darwin, the younger generation turned to reading and experiencing Freud's ideologies. Why not?

From Freud's teaching one learns that man has no responsibility for his actions. Man is a slave to the passions of his instincts, and needs not have any sensitivity to sin, nor be ashamed of it.

The universities produce intellectuals with new scientific ideas, developed by professors, learned, knowledgeable and sure of themselves that there is no G-d of creation. Hence, man, as a descendant of apes, evolving into a human, can be led by the passions of his own instincts. This is the Torah of Marx, Darwin, Freud and the license of a wild democracy of unlimited liberties.

How wonderful it is to read the words of the greatest scientific intellectual of our time, the one who shattered Newton's theories, the Jew, Professor Albert Einstein who remarked, "Science without religion is a cripple, and religion without science is blind." More eloquent yet, are the words of the great "eagle" Maimonides that "Wisdom comes from the head, requiring study, analysis, question and answer, weighing and measuring. Religion comes from another source, the heart and is felt emotionally but not rationally. It cannot be proven, measured nor weighed physically. Religion is realistic, when practiced with emotion of vision and idealism."

Religion stresses that Man is G-d's product, directly. Not only is he totally different from all other creatures, but no two human beings will ever look alike or be alike in both thought and personality. Man has this power of creation, unlike any other living creature in all of nature. Economics and class struggle, are no problem for us. Nature, makes us physically different beings, and we reach various economic and social statuses. Anyhow, man's riches are limited to his earthly physical existence.

We Jews, who believe in G-d, know the value of a human life and freedom. Thus, a person committing suicide destroys G-d's creation and is excommunicated even in death. Without belief in G-d man is just an ape dressed in clothing.

False religions and cults treat non-believers unmercifully. In the name of religion, innocent people are destroyed in Lebanon, Ireland, Iran, Iraq and other lands in the world. Suicide, in certain faiths, is an act of holiness and heroism. World history is full of religious warfare in G-d's name. Judaism believes in the individual worth of man, and his need for freedom within the limits of G-d's law. "There is no freer man, than one who lives by the Torah." (Avoth 6:2) We don't need the threat of "AIDS" to teach us the importance of wholesome pure family life. Health means adherence to Jewish laws of family purity. Life's holiness through Torah living is a way leading to health,

happiness and honor. Only Torah can lighten the darkness, and drive away chaos. The world sciences have tested all social and economic theories, only to find them morally bankrupt. With Torah, man can become an angel, without Torah, man is just an ape in a jungle.

Ironically our biggest problem today is "TOO MUCH FREEDOM." Mankind needs LIBERTY but not LIBERALIZATION from providential disciplines which lead to the chaos of 5746 years ago . . . to be confined by the limits of our own sinfulness is to be in chains. True freedom is not freedom to do as we like, but freedom to be what G-d intended us to be.

We are away from the days when we believed that science would restore to man the dignity of which he allegedly was deprived when religion made him subservient to G-d. There was a time when enlightened scientists urged man to come of age and become self-reliant and autonomous. It now turns out that the rejection of the Biblical doctrine that "man was created in the image of G-d" leads to spiritual bankruptcy. Modern man ends up with denying not only G-d, but the very humanity of man.

RABBI AKIBA SUPPORTED BAR KOCHBA BUT COULDN'T GET OTHERS AND EVEN HIS OWN DISCIPLES TO FOLLOW. THE PLAGUE OF GOSSIP AND EVIL TONGUES, QUARRELS AND INSULTS KILLED 24,000 SCHOLARS.

Bar Kochba or Bar Koziva

Whenever I see someone dozing off while I am delivering a sermon, I am reminded of a well known and very interesting Midrash. It is a strange one, difficult to understand, but it provides some consolation and encouragement to a speaker who finds himself facing a sluggish audience. It seems that the Jews have been afflicted with sleepiness ever since Moses' time; they did not want to listen to him.

Our Sages tell us (Midrash Bereshit Rabba 58:3): "Once, while Rabbi Akiva was delivering a sermon, the audience started dozing off. So he tried to rouse them with a riddle: How did Esther get to be queen of 127 provinces? No one knew the answer, and he told them: because she was the descendant of Sarah, who lived 127 years."

This story is very difficult to understand. It's hard to believe that the disciples of Rabbi Akiva would doze off in the middle of a sermon by their beloved master Rabbi Akiva, that giant among the Tanna'im, whose power of speech persuaded thousands of young men to come and study at his yeshiva in Bnai Brak, whose disciples risked their lives, studying Torah as they did, in defiance of the Roman decree prohibiting it.

Rabbi Akiva's oratorical powers were already evident in his youth. With his eloquence and wisdom he persuaded Rachel, daughter of the wealthy Kalba Savua, to leave the luxurious comfort of her parents' home and marry him, Akiva, a poor, unlearned shepherd.

By all accounts, Rabbi Akiva's was a magnetic personality. It is even more difficult to understand why the Midrash saw fit to record for posterity a story about Rabbi Akiva's students falling asleep in the middle of a lecture by him.

Furthermore, the riddle itself lacks the inner logic of the usual homiletical style of Rabbi Akiva, who was a homileticist par excellence. In Sarah's instance, the figure 127 pertains to time, the number of years she lived, whereas in Esther's instance it refers to geography, nation and national territories. Furthermore, the Persian-Median empire consisted of 127 provinces even before Esther succeeded Vashti as queen.

It is well known that Rabbi Akiva was one of the most brilliant of all the Tanna'im. He dabbled in the deepest mysteries of Torah and emerged unharmed, with his mind clear, unlike some of his colleagues (Tractate Hagiga 14a).

At that time, the Talmudic Sages lived under Roman domination and their lives were in great danger. Rome had prohibited the study of Torah, and the Tanna'im often conducted their discussions in riddles or parables that only they and their disciples would understand. For there were spies and informers everywhere, and many thousands of Jews were martyred for the sake of the Torah.

Rabbi Akiva's riddle about the Matriarch Sarah and Queen Esther contains a very profound thought. It was really an argument against his rivals concerning a very important issue of that time.

Rabbi Akiva was the main Rabbinic supporter and organizer of the revolt led by Bar Kochba. He urged his disciples to enlist in Bar Kochba's army to fight against Roman rule. He believed that Bar Kochba was the "Kochav", the "star" that had risen to illuminate the skies of the Jewish people and the Land of Israel, that he was the promised redeemer, the Messiah (See Maimonides, Hilchot Melachim, 11:3).

Some of the Tanna'im, however, held otherwise. Rabbi

Yohanan ben Torta, said to Rabbi Akiva (Yerushalmi Taanit 4:4, 21a): "Akiva, grass will grow out of your cheeks and still Messiah the son of David will not have come."

The main argument of Rabbi Akiva's opponents was that Bar Kochba was not pious enough. They said that he was not "Bar Kochba," "son of a star," but "bar koziva", a "child of deceit", a lying adventurer. These Tanna'im objected to Bar Kochba because of his arrogance, his overwhelming pride, and the various transgressions he committed as leader (see Maimonides, Hilchot Melachim, 11:3). They maintained that a person like him was not worthy of being the redeemer of the Jewish people.

Rabbi Akiva, however, was Bar Kochba's most ardent advocate, from the beginning to the end of the revolt. He constantly urged his disciples to support Bar Kochba. Against the argument of Bar Kochba's alleged unworthiness Rabbi Akiva said: When G-d decides to bring salvation, He isn't particular about the religiosity of the one He uses as the agent of salvation. (Or, as the folk saying goes, "If G-d so desires it, a broomstick can shoot.")

For example: Take Queen Esther, who saved her people from destruction in the time of the wicked Haman. Was she all that righteous? What did she do to deserve to become queen of an empire comprising 127 provinces? Was the way she attained the throne strictly on the up-and-up? Was she justified in concealing her identity so that she could participate in the royal beauty contest? Was it right of her cousin Mordechai, whom we call "Mordechai Hatzadik, the righteous," to instruct her to hide her Jewish identity?

And what of the theory that Esther was Mordechai's wife? If that theory is correct, then she committed adultery in becoming Achasueros' wife – although those who support this theory say that Mordechai first divorced her.

In any event, how could Esther become Ahasuerus' queen?

The answer is that when G-d wishes to rescue the Jews from grave danger, He doesn't check the "religious" credentials of the person who is available to carry out the mission of rescue. In Haman's time, it was Esther who was in a position to help, so *she* it was, who was chosen to be the "true redeemer."

This was also the case with Sarah and Abraham. Can anyone doubt the holiness and righteousness of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs? Nevertheless, Abraham twice saved his own skin by instructing Sarah to lie – first to Pharaoh and then to Avimelech, and tell people that she was his sister rather than his wife. And lie she did. And not only did she lie, but, although she was Abraham's wife, she even went to stay with the other men. And all at Abraham's instructions.

This is no light matter. The consequences were very serious indeed. When Sarah gave birth to Isaac, people said that Avimelech was the father. G-d had to intervene and cause Isaac to look like Abraham's twin, in order to refute the gossip about who his father was.

And this is the point that Rabbi Akiva tried to make in his defense of Bar Kochba. If G-d wills it, he will be the agent of salvation, regardless of whether he is a "son of a star" or a "son of deceit." Since the Jewish people and the Land of Israel are being ravaged by the Romans, every Jew must do his or her share to help overthrow the enemy. A united front against the enemy, is the call of the hour.

Rabbi Akiva surely remembered "Tanach", a chapter in the Bible which many people either don't know or ignore. In Kings II 14:23-29, we are told of something that occurred in the Prophet Jonah's time. We read that Jeroboam, son of Jehoash, King of Israel, reigned in Samaria for 41 years. And "he did what was wrong in G-d's eyes, continuing the sinful practices of Jerobom son of Nebat," who had not only himself sinned but had also led the people into sin. However, "he restored the frontiers of Israel . . . in fulfillment of the word of G-d . . . spoken by His servant the Prophet Jonah son of Amittai . . . For G-d had

not threatened to blot out Israel's name from under Heaven and He saved them through Jerobom, son of Joash."

Indeed, Jerobom was a wicked man, a sinner who also caused others to sin. What could have been worse? But where the national needs were concerned, he did as the Prophet Jonah told him in G-d's name. And since there was no one else around for the task, G-d chose Jerobom to save the Jews, even though he was such a big sinner.

It may be difficult for us to accept G-d's decision and yet the Bible records the story for posterity as always, not in vain. There must be a profound message in it.

This, I think is what Rabbi Akiva was trying to tell his contemporaries about Bar Kochba, through his little riddle concerning Queen Esther.

In our own time, such Zionists as Herzl, Bialik, Sokolow, Jabotinsky and Ben-Gurion tried to rouse the Jews of Europe to leave the Galut – the Exile. But the majority of religious Jews, with the exception of those who formed the Mizrachi, rejected Zionism because it consisted mainly of non-religious elements. The assimilationist Jews, on the other hand, rejected Zionism because it was too nationalistic for them. The upshot of all this was that the Jewish people slept on for decades prior to the Holocaust. When we woke up, it was too late. The European Jewry was leaderless.

When I read the different criticisms of Prime Minister Menachem Begin – for the very pious he is not religious enough, and for the non-religious he is too religious – I am reminded of the story of Jerobom and other Biblical accounts attesting how mysterious are G-d's ways, how we cannot fathom the ways He chooses to help the Jewish people.

It seems to me that what we need today, no less than we needed it in Rabbi Akiva's time, is unity, Jewish brotherhood. Let us leave it to G-d to worry about who is or is not sufficiently religious. He can take care of Himself. Even disputes that are

"for the sake of Heaven" can lead to destruction, G-d forbid, as we see happened to Rabbi Akiva's disciples, who, we are told (Yevamot 62), did not treat each other respectfully.

Quarrelsomeness is like a plague, it is contagious. It is time to celebrate Lag Ba'omer, the day the plague stopped. I am certain that only unity and Jewish brotherhood will speed the coming of the True Redeemer and the Final Redemption.

THE HAPPIEST SEASON OF THE YEAR – THE SPRING AND REVIVAL OF NATURE, TURNS TO BECOME A PERIOD OF MOURNING UPON THE FALL OF THE BAR KOCHBA REVOLT AND THE DEATH OF TENS OF THOUSANDS OF HIS WARRIORS.

From Joy to Sadness

In olden times, the Sefira season, the period of the Counting of the Omer, was the nicest and happiest time of the year.

On the second day of Passover, the Omer, the first measure of the barley crop, was harvested and brought to the Temple in Jerusalem. Forty-nine days later the people came from all over the country on another pilgrimage to Jerusalem, bringing along the first fruits of the field and orchard as another gift to the Temple, where they joyously celebrated the festival of Shavuot, the First-Fruits Festival.

Between Passover and Shavuot came the time of growth, florescence. Nature awoke from its wintry sleep and mild weather set in.

Every Jew sat "under his vine and under his fig tree," watching the fruits and blossoms grow and fill the air with their delicious fragrance. In addition, pious Jews made the daily Sefira count, eagerly looking forward, and preparing themselves, to receive the Torah on the historic day of Shavuot, the day on which G-d gave us the Ten commandments at Mount Sinai.

Suddenly, after the destruction of the Second Temple, the Sefira period was enveloped in a pall of grief. The Sages declared this period to be a time of national mourning, dedicated to the memory of Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 disciples, who perished in a terrible plague, in the period between Passover and

Shavuot. These disciples took part in the revolt against the Romans, led by Bar-Kochba.

An individual Jew is required to observe seven days of mourning following the death of a close kin. The destruction of the two Temples is mourned by our people for three weeks, from Shiv'a Assar (17th day) BeTammuz to Tisha (9th day) B'Av. But fully 42 days – the six weeks between the end of Passover and Shavuot – were set aside for mourning over Rabbi Akiva's disciples.

The sole exception to this Sefira mourning period is the 33rd day of Sefira, the day known as Lag Ba'omer. This is because on that day a miracle occurred and the plague stopped. On Lag Ba'omer none of Rabbi Akiva's disciples perished.

The question arises: What was the heinous sin that Rabbi Akiva's disciples committed to deserve such terrible punishment?

Apparently, this question also bothered the Talmudic Sages. In Tractate Yevomot (62b) we are told that Rabbi Akiva's 24,000 disciples perished "because they did not treat each other respectfully," because they insulted each other, were constantly bickering with each other, and gossiped about each other.

No nation can endure – certainly no nation can progess culturally, morally, ethically, esthetically and economically – if its members, specially its intellectual leaders, do not treat each other respectfully.

More than any other nation, we Jews seem to be afflicted with the plague of internecine jealousy, hatred, lashon hara – evil tongue – and tale-bearing. Ever since the time of Joseph and his brothers, of Korach and his henchmen, notably Datan and Aviram, we have been afflicted with internal quarrelsomeness. This, according to the Talmud, seems to have been the cause of the downfall of Rabbi Akiva's disciples.

To be sure, learning is a great thing, one of the central pillars of Judaism. But G-d Himself said (Nedarim 81a; Yerushalmi Hagiga I:7): "For all I care, they can forsake Me; only let them observe My commandments." No less a person tha Rabbi Gamliel son of Rabbi Yehuda said (Pirkay Avot II:2): "Scholarship must be accompanied by good manners." One cannot endure without the other. Both Temples were destroyed because of internal strife.

Lashon hara – evil tongue – and gossip are called "fire" in the Zohar. Like fire, strife destroys everything in its path. The Sages tell us (Vayikra Rabba 26:2): Evil-tongue slays three: the person bearing the gossip, the person who hears it, and the person about whom it is being told. Both Temples were destroyed because of strife: the Babylonians and the Romans were able to destroy Jerusalem only because the Jews were quarrelling among themselves. The same thing led to the destruction of Rabbi Akiva's disciples.

The Torah teaches the importance of treating each other respectfully. First we are told: "Honor your father and your mother." Then we are told: "Love your fellow human being as yourself." We are also told: "You shall rise for elders and give honor to the aged." And our Sages tell us that this refers not only to those older than us in years, but also to those ahead of us in wisdom.

Rabbi Akiva knew his disciples well and he knew how diseased they were with evil-tongue. That is why he said that "Love your fellow human being as yourself, is the most important principle of the Torah." My Father of blessed memory interpreted this to mean that Rabbi Akiva was telling his disciples that people engaged in Torah must be even more careful than others to live fraternally, peacefully, with each other. "Talmidei chachamim – scholars – are supposed to increase peace in the world." It is the duty of those engaged in Torah to set an example for the others. Peace is so important that one is sometimes permitted to lie for its sake. Thus Rabbi Akiva

pleaded with his disciples. But it was of no avail. They were incurably ill with evil-tongue.

Our Sages also laid down the important principle that a man should always be very careful to treat his wife respectfully. No one knew this better than Rabbi Akiva, and when his disciples, not knowing that Rachel was his wife, wouldn't let her approach him, he said: "All that I and you possess is hers" – that is: "If not for her, I and you would still be ignoramuses."

Respect for one's wife is more important than love. For love, like a bird, can fly away and disappear, but if respect remains, love can return. If a husband and wife stop respecting each other, however, all is lost.

All the discussions in Talmudic and Rabbinic literature concerning the importance of mutual respect would fill many volumes. All people – young and old, men and women, parents and children, rich and poor – have to be treated with respect and have to treat each other accordingly.

The Sages caution us that one who tries to advance himself at the expense of his fellow has no share in the World-to-Come (Yerushalmi Chagiga II). Shaming a person is like slaying him (Bava Metzia 58b). Respect for fellow human beings is so important that for its sake one may do what the commandments forbid (Berachot 19b). Rabbi Elazar ben Azaria, about whom we are told that when he died, the Crown of Torah disappeared, cautioned his disciples: "Be very, very careful to treat each other with respect and dignity."

So we see what a terrible sin Rabbi Akiva's disciples committed when they failed to treat each other with respect.

Even the Torah, which does not have a single redundant letter, did not hesitate to use extra words in order to avoid foul language (Pesachim 3a). To speak about others in refined language is much more important than dressing elegantly in order to impress others.

Therefore, before we celebrate Shavuot, each year our sages demanded that we must remember and consider carefully the cause of the horrible end of Rabbi Akiva's disciples. If we were to take careful stock of our world condition today, of the Jewish people's situation both in the Diaspora and in Israel, we would realize that only less quarrelling and much less mutual recrimination among Jews, could speed our Final Redemption, the coming of Messiah. "Sinas Chinam" baseless hatred must be replaced by "Ahavat Chinam" the altruistic love of one another.

Unfortunately, however, that kind of Jewish life is lacking.

The first Belzer Rebbe, "Sar Shalom," said about the series of "Yehi ratzon" prayers recited after the Torah reading on Monday and Thursday mornings. The first four prayers begin with "Yehi ratzon," "May it be G-d's will" that these prayers should be accepted. The last one, however, begins with "All our jewish brethren." Why? The old Belzer Rebbe, who was truly a fighter for peace, which is why people dubbed him "Sar Shalom," "Prince of Peace," said: "If all the Jews will be truly united as brethren, we shall no longer have to beg for G-d to will the fulfillment of our prayers, for there is nothing that G-d wills more than that the Jews should be united."

SHAVOUT, THE MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL HOLIDAYS COMMEMORATING THE RECEIVING OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, IS THE MOST PUZZLING. THE MEANING OF THE NAME, TIME, PLACE AND THE ACTUAL EVENT ARE ALL QUESTIONABLE. WHAT COULD BE THE REASON BEHIND THE VEIL OF SUCH SECRECY?

Shavuot: Where, When and How?

It is common courtesy that when three people walk together, the most important of them, goes in the middle, implying that he is being honored by having an escort on his right and his left side, like a king or a groom.

Hence it would seem that Shavuot is the most important of the three pilgrimage festivals. Since, according to the Torah, the first month is Nisan, then Shavuot comes right in the middle, between Pesach and Sukkot, which falls in Tishri, the seventh month. This raises the question: What makes Shavuot so great? The matter is not altogether clear; in fact, Shavuot would even seem to be the least important festival . . .

First of all, Shavuot is the shortest and poorest of the three festivals. It lasts only one day in Israel (two days in the Diaspora).

Then, as far as content is concerned, Shavuot has no special symbols, no special mitzvot, like the eating of matza and bitter herbs and arranging a Seder at Pesach, or eating in a sukka and reciting the blessing over the lulav and etrog at Sukkot. In comparison with Pesach and Sukkot, Shavuot looks like a poor, miserable orphan.

There is a folk saying to the effect, that on Shavuot we are permitted to eat when, what and where we wish. Precisely on Shavuot we allow ourselves certain things that we are careful to avoid the rest of the year. We don't wait six hours between eating meat and milk; we don't have to eat big, festive meals of meat and fish and all kinds of delicious side dishes, such as we eat on the Sabbath and other festivals. The special food of Shavuot are rather commonplace, mostly milk dishes, which do not satiate one for long.

This poverty of content applies not only to the holiday's material pleasures. Its spiritual content as the traditional anniversary of the giving of the Torah is also rather obscure.

First, the very name of the festival is not a simple matter. The name "Shavuot" has nothing whatsoever to do with the historic day on which G-d gave us the Torah at Mount Sinai. "Shavuot" means "weeks", and the festival is so called because it falls 49 days, exactly seven weeks, after the second day of Pesach. In the Torah, this period is called the period of "THE COUNTING OF THE OMER," when we are supposed to daily recite a special blessing and count the days from the second day of Pesach until the day, seven weeks later on which we are commanded to bring the first measure of barley to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Like Pesach and Sukkot, marking spring and fall seasons, Shavuot has other designations of Chag Habikurim, FIRST FRUITS FESTIVAL and Chag Hakatzir, FIRST INGATHERING, when the first produce and the first yield of the fruit trees and the vegetable gardens are brought from the field and an offering is given to the Temple in Jerusalem.

The question arises. How is it that the holiday marking the occasion on which we got our "constitution", the basis of our national existence, G-d's Ten Commandments, does not have a name indicating the commemoration of this? Wasn't the primary purpose of our leaving Egypt that we should get the Torah at Mount Sinai? (Exodus 3:12)

Instead of the Pesach event being treated as secondary to the event at Mount Sinai, exactly the opposite is the case. Shavuot, by name and by virtue of its marking the end of the omer-counting period, is merely an appendage to Pesach. The situation is even more paradoxical in view of the fact that the name Shavuot does not appear anywhere in the T'nach and Talmud. The other designations – "First Fruits Festival and First Ingathering" also don't appear anywhere in our classical sources. The only name we find in the T'nach is the strange designation "Atzeret", which is exactly the opposite of "Shavuot." "Atzeret" connotes separateness, independence, Shavuot indicates that the day is a mere appendage to Pesach, a kind of leftover from the Freedom Festival.

Also incomprehensible is the fact that the exact date of Shavuot is not specified in the Torah, unlike all the other holidays mentioned in the Torah; Pesach, Sukkot, Yom Kippur, and Rosh Hashana. All we know, about the time of the giving of the Torah is that it was 50 days after Pesach. If you know when Pesach begins, you know that Shavuot comes 50 days later. And even regarding that 50th day, the Torah uses unclear terminology. It says: "The morrow of the seventh Sabbath." This expression led to a number of misunderstandings. the Karaites, Samaritans and especially the Christians held that the "Pentecost" must fall on the day after the Sabbath, that is on Sunday.

When, actually, did the Divine act of the giving of the Torah take place? This too is already a subject of debate in the Talmud. All agree that it occurred on a Sabbath day. According to Rabbi Yosse, it happened on the 7th day of the month of Sivan, whereas the Tanna Kamma maintains that it was on the 6th (Tractate Shabbat 86). Rabbi Yosse says that the Master-of-the-Universe wanted to give the Torah on Friday the 6th of Sivan. Moses, however, made a mistake. He did not understand how to reckon the 50 days and forgot that in the three days of preparation for receiving the Torah, the night was reck-

oned as the end of the day preceding it, rather than as the beginning of the day following, the way the Jewish calendar usually reckons the days. As a result of this error, G-d altered his plans and consented to give the tablets with the Ten Commandments on the Sabbath, the 7th day of Sivan, a day later than he had planned.

Neverthless, the law is that Shavuot commemorates not the day the Torah was actually given but a day earlier, when G-d INTENDED to give it, on the 6th of Sivan.

It is a bit of an irony that in Israel, where Shavuot is observed only one day, it does not fall on the historical date of the giving of the Torah, whereas we Diaspora Jews, who observe it for two days, do mark it on the day of the Mount Sinai event, the 7th day of Sivan, according to Moses's erroneous count, which G-d ratified.

Another question arises: Where is Mount Sinai? To this day we do not know. Archeologists have various theories about which peak in the Sinai Desert is Mount Sinai. It is doubtful whether the mountain so called Sinai today, is actually the one from which the Torah was given to us. Still, I wonder why Jews did not stream to visit that mountain in such masses and as enthusiastically as they rushed to the Western Wall, when it became possible after the Six Day War?

When Israel agreed at Camp David to give the Sinai Peninsula back to Egypt, nobody protested. When the new Jewish town of Yamit in Northern Sinai subsequently had to be evacuated, people went on hunger strikes and threatened to commit suicide. But nothing was done in honor of one of the holiest Jewish sites, Mount Sinai. Its relinquishment was greeted with indifference.

And why is the mountain called "Sinai"? There are various opinions about this too. This name is said to come from the same stem as "sneh," meaning "bush", that is, the bush from which G-d first appeared to Moses. But there are other expla-

nations. The Talmud tells us (Shabbat 88) that it is called "Sinai", because "from there 'sinah' – hatred – came upon the Jews." On account of the Torah that the Jews were given at Mount Sinai, all the nations of the world became our enemies. "Sinai" and "sinah" are homonymous.

The mountain is also called "Chorev", which means "wilderness." When G-d created the world, He immediately named the mountain "Chorev" (Pirkay Derabbi Eliezer, chapter 41).

So why do the Jews and the rest of the world not hold the mountain in much higher esteem?

Finally, an explanation is needed about where we get the gall to mark the Time of the Giving of the Torah, whether on the 6th or the 7th of Sivan, as a day of joy and celebration?

Actually, the historical moment of receiving the Torah was a very painful episode! What is there to celebrate when everybody knows that the original tablets with the Ten Commandments, that G-d gave us, were smashed to smithereens just 40 days later, on the 17th of Tamuz, because of our foolish sin in idolatrously worshipping a calf. Instead of rejoicing, we should be feeling deep shame and regret, an eternal pang of conscience, even though G-d forgave us. If an individual had received a precious gift and promptly and deliberately smashed it, would he make a party on the anniversary of that tragic episode?

Eighty days later Moses brought down a second pair of tablets, which G-d permitted him to make after his long and hard pleading. This happened on the 10th day of Tishri, on Yom Kippur. These tablets accompanied the Jews during their 40 years in the wilderness kept in the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle. Later King Solomon placed them in the Temple. Logically, we should be doing the opposite of what we do. Yom Kippur should be a day of singing and dancing, of rejoicing over the fact that G-d gave us a second chance whereas Shavuot should be a day of sorrow, fasting and repentance, like Yom Kippur. . . .

So as we see, Shavuot is full of mysteries and problems regarding its name, the date and place of the historical events it celebrates.

Why is this so?

Probably for no other reason than that G-d wanted it that way. We were given the Torah in a wilderness, in an unfamiliar place, on an unspecified day and at an unspecified hour, because the Torah is above space and above time. Shavuot is all spirit. Pesach and Sukkot are remembrances of an ancient event, so their symbols must be featured once a year. The giving of the Torah, on the other hand, is a continuous process to which every Jew of every generation, wherever he lives, is obligated. Every Jew is duty bound to observe the Ten Commandments. So it makes no difference exactly where, when, how and even why, we have to celebrate the Shavuot festival. If G-d wishes us to fast on Yom Kippur and rejoice on Shavuot, then that is probably the way it is supposed to be.

Perhaps all these questions arise in order to teach us that one is not supposed to ask questions about the Torah. We don't have to understand everything absolutely 100 percent. There are many profound mysteries which not everyone is privileged to fathom.

And if anyone is really eager to know the answer to all the questions we have posed, then my advice is: Gird yourself with patience until Elijah comes to herald the advent of the Messiah and to clarify all questions and along with them also those about Shavuot! . . .

"NAASE VENISHMA" – TWO WORDS NOT IN ORDER OF HUMAN REACTION, HAVE BEEN THE SUBJECTS OF MANY INTERPRETATIONS IN THE VARIOUS FIELDS OF RABBINIC STUDIES, HALACHA, MYSTICISM, HOMILETICS.

We Shall Do and We Shall Hearken

Ever since the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, since we became a people, we have had the reputation of being an impetuous people. There is a kind of contrariness to us. Jews do not answer a question directly. We answer a question by asking a question, or we answer the second part first and the first part last. A perfect example of this is the way we answered at Mount Sinai: "We shall do and we shall hearken!"

That Sadducee scoffed at the Jews when he remarked to Rava (Talmud Shabbat 88a) about how impetuous and unthinking the Jews are: "Your mouth is quicker than your ears," he said. "Why were you in such a hurry to say: WE SHALL DO AND WE SHALL HEARKEN? One should listen carefully first, think it over, consider whether one can carry out the undertaking and whether it is worthwhile, and only then agree. But you – you rushed to promise to do before you heard exactly what you were being asked to do. You foolishly signed a blank promissory note, without knowing what obligation you were assuming. That is no way to do business!"

That is how that missionary of the Talmudic period argued. And indeed, the Talmudic Sages had a hard time explaining why, at Mount Sinai, the Jews answered, "WE SHALL DO," before, "WE SHALL HEARKEN." After all, that Sadducee was right: you don't promise before you know what you're being asked to do.

There are many answers to this question. First let us see what Rava answered the Sadducee: "We trusted G-d not to demand of us something we would not be able to carry out. We were not afraid to say, "WE SHALL DO," blindly. The Master-of-the-Universe is a Father whom our forebears trusted implicitly."

The Talmudic Sages offer a second explanation. The Hebrew term "shamo'a – to hear" comes from a stem that connotes not only biological hearing but also intellectual understanding. The Torah tells us that Joseph's brothers "did not know that Joseph is shome'a", that Joseph understood the Hebrew they were speaking. It was obvious that he "heard" what they were saying, because they spoke in the range of his hearing. But they thought he was an Egyptian who did not understand what they were saying because they were speaking Hebrew.

The answer is that the Jews undertook to immediately start performing the mitzvot, leaving for later the matter of understanding the reasons for them. First they would do, act, and only then would they stop to "listen" – to philosophize, study, ask questions. And that is exactly what the Jews did for thousands of years. When a boy is circumcised, we say: "Just as he had entered the Covenant of our Patriarch Abraham, so may he be privileged to enter the Covenant of Torah," that is, just as he fulfilled the mitzva of circumcision unasked, so may he also fulfill all the other mitzvot willy-nilly-first do, act, and only later ask for the reasons and explanations.

These ideas do not exhaust the great treasure-house of explanations of the declaration, "We shall do and we shall hearken!" The Talmud tells us a remarkable story in Tractate Shabbat 88a: The Jews said "Naaseh venishma! – We shall do and we shall hearken!" because that is the way the angels speak. When the angels get a command from G-d, that is how they answer. And when the angels heard the Jews say, "WE SHALL DO AND WE SHALL HEARKEN!" they were astonished and asked indignantly: Who revealed the secret of the angels? How

did the Jews get hold of our secret formula? Who taught them to speak our language?

The answer is that at Mount Sinai the Jews were in the category of angels. They attained the highest degree of unreserved love of G-d. At the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, the Jews behaved like an obedient, loyal, patriotic soldier who, upon being given an order by his general, replies, "Yes, sir!" – meaning: "I will do as bidden, sir, and no questions asked." That is what the angels, the faithful Celestial ministers, do upon getting a command from G-d. Doing G-d's will is their greatest pleasure and sole desire. Later, when the mission has been accomplished, they will allow themselves to ask for explanations and discuss the consequences of their actions.

There is even a more fantastic story about "Naaseh Venishma!" Rabbi Sima'i said (Shabbat 88a): When the Jews said, "We shall do" before, "we shall hearken," 600,000 angels descended from heaven and placed two crowns on the head of every Jew, one crown for the "Naaseh" and one for the "Venishma."

Many questions are asked about this. First, if G-d was so pleased with the Jews that he wanted to award them a crown for every word, why did he wait for them to reverse the order and say, "We shall do," before, "we shall hearken"? Secondly, if the point is that G-d was pleased with the form of the Jews' utterance and not its substance, then the Jews deserved only one crown, for using the style of the angels. Third, if both the substance and the form mattered to G-d, then the Jews should have been awarded three crowns – one for saying, "We shall do," a second for saying, "and we shall hearken," and a third crown for saying it in that order. Common sense seems to dictate either one crown or three crowns.

There are more questions, and there are many commentaries that try to explain Rabbi Sima'i's enigmatic words.

One lovely explanation is based on a practical Halachic ruling that is fundamental in Judaism. It is axiomatic for us

that "One who is commanded and does, is greater than one who does uncommanded." Common sense seems to suggest that one who does a good deed voluntarily deserves more credit than one who does it under orders. But when we reconsider human nature, we see that this ruling is more to the point.

Each one of us possesses two urges or spirits, the urge to do good and the evil urge. This is like two cooks preparing a broth in one pot. They are constantly at odds with each other. There is a struggle inside us, over every decision we make in our lives.

The good urge is constantly begging the person to do good, to seize the opportunity to perform one more mitzva, while there is time. Meanwhile, the evil urge keeps tugging at us to do wicked deeds. Usually, the evil urge is very strong and uses every possible means in the effort to get its way: titillation, intimidation, beautiful promises and spurious arguments.

When someone wishes to do good of his own accord, clever Satan knows that he will have a very hard time dissuading this person. In such an instance, the evil urge does not start up with the good urge. It simply is not worth its while. But when someone must perform a mitzva, is obligated to do so, then Satan spares no effort and puts forth all his arguments: Why do you have to do it? What will you get out of it? What good will it do you?

It is much more difficult to overcome the evil urge when one does not know the reason and purpose of a particular mitzva, when one performs it only because G-d has so commanded, than when one does it voluntarily, because one feels like doing it. When one desires something, one has no cause to fear Satan. The evil urge has no dominion over such a person.

The reward for performing a mitzva is in proportion to the extent of the resistance the person had to put up against the evil instincts in him. The greater the struggle, the more credit does G-d give him for performing the mitzva.

In light of the connotation of "understanding" contained in the declaration "venishma – and we shall hearken," it was logical for the Jews to say, "WE SHALL DO," before, "AND WE SHALL HEARKEN." They wanted to perform the mitzvot G-d commanded before learning and understanding the reasons for them.

After "nishma," after understanding the reasons for the mitzvot, it is easier to handle Satan. So they rightly said, "Naaseh," first and then "venishma." And for this they indeed deserved two crowns, not just one.

But the problem can be resolved even if we take "nishma" in its literal, simple sense, "we shall hear." This construction is also in keeping with another law. Different mitzvot fall into different categories and carry different rewards. And the same mitzva may have different weights, according to the different circumstances in which it is performed.

Take, for example, the mitzva of "tzedakah," commonly translated as "charity." It is one of the 613 Commandments, but a very important aspect of tzedakah is the manner in which it is performed.

If a Jew gives tzedakah because he has been asked, he is considered "one who gives on demand." He was asked and he gave, but if he had not been asked he might have forgotten to give or it might not have occurred to him at all. An act of tzedakah is much more significant when it is performed spontaneously, unasked. Imagine what a revolution would take place in the organizational world if no collectors were needed, no machinery for sending bills and receipts! Just imagine every would-be donor, coming of his own accord, to beg the institution to take his money!

This explains why G-d says (Exodus 25:2), "and they shall take for me an offering" rather than, "they shall give." If G-d had said, "give," that would have meant that he was demanding donations for the construction of the Tabernacle. That

would have deprived the truly selfless people of the opportunity to give entirely of their own accord, which is the very highest and purest form of tzedakah.

That is why our forebears said, "We shall do," before, "we shall hearken." By this they showed that they were in the high category of giving of their own accord, unasked. Later, after they had heard the Ten Commandments, they would have been in the category of commanded, duty-bound people, and their reward for observance would have been much smaller.

There is another explanation. At Mount Sinai, the Jews received two Torahs, the "Oral Torah" and the "Written Torah." So the Jews were right to give a twofold reply concerning two Torahs. Concerning the Written Torah they said, "We shall do," for that Torah was given to them on the spot. And concerning the Oral Torah they said, "We shall listen," for they had yet to be taught that Torah by Moses, who was also to hand it down to future generations as a "masora – tradition." The tablets containing the Ten Commandments were given on the seventh day of the month of Sivan, whereas the Oral Law is an eternal process continuing ever since the event at Mount Sinai, right down to the present day, from Moses to the great Sages of our time.

In my humble opinion, the problem can be resolved in a very simple way. The Ten Commandments consist of "Thou shalt" and "Thou Shalt Not" commands. There are three "positive" Commandments: "I am" "Remember the Sabbath," and "Honor . . ." The other seven are "negative" – that is, G-d commands us not to do certain things. He commands us to control ourselves, to restrain our bestial urges to murder, steal, swear falsely. The "positive" commandments call for active deeds, whereas the "negative" ones are passive, calling on us not to do certain things.

So I wonder what other answer the Jews could have given concerning the Ten Commandments, than the one they gave, "WE SHALL DO AND WE SHALL HEARKEN." In other

words, "We shall do" what G-d tells us to do and "we shall hearken" to G-d's bidding to refrain from sinning. We will obey – and not steal, not murder, not lust. By obeying the command "Thou shalt not covet" we restrain our instinct to lust. The only other possible answer was: "WE SHALL DO AND WE SHALL NOT DO," but that would have been unseemly. This explanation seems so simple. It seems to do away with the question. I regret that no one else suggests this interpretation. It is too good an explanation to have been overlooked by other interpreters before me.

WAS THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE DECALOGUE A VOLUNTARY OR INVOLUNTARY ACT, OUT OF FEAR AND THREATS? THE LEGENDARY DESCRIPTION IN THE TALMUD ABOUT THE CONDITIONS AT MT. SINAI.

The Mountain – Legend or Legalization ?

There is an item in the Talmud that sounds like a fantastic legend. It deals with the event at Mount Sinai and the giving of the Torah. Concerning the mountain, there is a mountain of questions and explanations. That may be why the Talmudic Sages describe such a matter as a "mountain upon a mountain."

In Tractate Shabbat 88a, we are told the following: The Torah tells us "betachtit hahar." Rabbi Avdimi interprets this to mean that G-d held the mountain in the air over the heads of the 600,000 Jews and warned them: "If you accept the Torah – that is good, if not, there you will be buried." Rabbi Acha says: "If that is how it was, then the Jews have a good excuse when they sin. They can plead that if they accepted the Torah under duress, under fear of a dire threat, rather than of their own free will, then G-d has no grounds for punishing those who sin. They can claim justly that their agreement to accept the Torah was extorted from them under the threat of being buried, right then and there, under the mountain that G-d was holding over them."

To these arguments Rava replies: "It is true that our ancestors were forced to accept the Torah. However, a thousand years later, in the time of Mordechai and Esther, they accepted the Torah willingly, as the Scroll of Esther tells us, that in that time they voluntarily fulfilled what was forced on them at Mount Sinai.

This is hard to swallow. No wonder that it raises a mountain of questions. I will mention just a few:

First, the Tosafot points out a chronological inconsistency in Rabbi Avdimi's comment. The words "betachtit hahar", which he interprets to mean "under the mountain", appear in the Torah after the Jews had earlier proclaimed, "We shall do" as G-d wishes. Other nations to whom G-d offered the Ten Commandments rejected them. The Jews, on the other hand asked no questions and promptly agreed to accept the Torah. If that is so, why did G-d later have to hold the mountain menacingly over their heads and threaten to bury them under it if they did not accept the Torah?

Second, If G-d wanted the Torah to be received under duress, why did He use the term "accept"? When people have to do something against their will, what difference does it make whether they say yes or no? When a gift is involved, there has to be a giver and an accepter. But when the giver uses threats, then the so-called gift is despised by the recipient. On the other hand, if G-d wanted the Torah to be accepted willingly, wholeheartedly, lovingly, why did He threaten the people with the mountain that frightened them so that "their souls passed out of them"? The mountain hovering over their heads may even have had a negative effect, causing them to accept the Torah unwillingly.

Third, why did G-d have to use the mountain at all in order to strike fear into them? Wouldn't His speaking alone have stricken them with awe?

Fourth, why did G-d say *"there* you will be buried" instead of *"here",* under this mountain, will you be buried if you do not accept the Torah?

Fifth, if Rabbi Acha is correct when he says that the Jews now have a good excuse for their sins, and therefore cannot be punished, what did the Master-of-the-Universe achieve by frightening them? Actually, that frightening act undermined the legality of the Ten Commandments.

Sixth, why was G-d so angry about the sin of the Golden Calf? If the Torah was accepted forty days earlier under compulsion, the culpability of the Jews could not have been very great. They had a good excuse, and a clever lawyer would have found plenty of arguments to get the Jews acquitted. Why didn't Moses use the argument of duress, when he pleaded with G-d to forgive the Jews?

Seventh, Rava's argument that only a thousand years later, in the time of Achasuerus, the Jews agreed to accept the Torah willingly and until then everything was legally up in the air, opens up a Pandora's box of hundreds of more questions. Why were the Jews punished so severely from the day the Torah was given till the time of the Purim events a millenium later? Why were they punished for the action of the ten spies; why all the punishment of Nadav and Avihu, Miriam, Saul, David, Solomon; why was the first Temple destroyed? Was so much punishment warranted over a Torah that was received in such fear, under a threat against life?

Finally, Rava explains that the phrase . . . "and the Jews fulfilled and took upon them" in the Scroll of Esther (9:27) means that the Jews now voluntarily fulfilled what they had previously undertaken under duress at Mount Sinai. How can this be, in view of Rabbi Avdimi's observation that there was not a proper "receiving" of the Torah at Sinai, but only a "giving." G-d gave the Torah but the Jews accepted it unwillingly. So the Scroll of Esther should properly have reversed the order to say that at the first Purim the Jews "wholeheartedly took upon themselves" what their ancestors had long been observing without having properly "received it."

There are many more questions, but these will suffice.

I believe that Rabbi Avdimi's observation can be explained by that one little word that G-d used in His threat. Instead of saying "here" will be your graves, He said "there." G-d was referring not to that moment at Mount Sinai, but to a later time.

Actually, the Jews promptly agreed to accept the Torah – "We shall do and we shall hearken", they said in unison, in unanimity. G-d did not have to frighten them with threats of death and graves. The mountain hovering over their heads was a warning concerning the future, concerning what would happen to the Jews later in their history if they ignored the message of Sinai, and not addressing that moment when they were standing at Mount Sinai.

At Mount Sinai the Jews were in an extraordinarily comfortable situation of a life without worry. They wanted for nothing; G-d was looking after all their needs. From heaven there fell right into their homes manna and the quail; roasted birds flew right into their mouths; they wore clothing that did not get worn out; their large pockets were stuffed with the gold and jewelry they had gotten from the Egyptians. They had no worries or expenses.

They enjoyed deluxe comforts: cool air by day in the shade of the Pillar of Cloud, warm at night in the heat of the Pillar of Fire. They were in a virtual Garden of Eden.

Under such circumstances it was easy to accept a Torah and say, "We shall do and we shall hearken." But what will the Jews do when a mountain is hanging over their heads? What will they do when their enemies torment them in the various exiles? What will happen when the Jews will be starving for a piece of bread, won't have anything with which to cover their bodies, will be naked and barefoot? In such circumstances, will they remain true to the Torah and the Ten Commandments?

Two factors – trouble and well-being – put the Jews through severe trials in Exile. In good times, the Jews assimilate. Prosperity and opulence lead to sin. When Jews succeed among the Gentiles, they get the urge to cast off the yoke of Jewish observance and to become just like the Gentiles.

So G-d warned: Jewish survival in Exile depends on Yiddishkeit, on observance of the Torah and its precepts. "If you

accept My commandments, you will outlive all your enemies. If not, *there* you will be buried – you will perish in those lands." That is what happened to Joseph in Egypt and to all the others who believe that if Jews do great things for the Gentiles, the latter will be grateful to the Jewish people and return the favor.

In the time of Achasuerus, all the peoples of the Persian empire enjoyed democratic freedoms. The Scroll of Esther speaks of every citizen's being like a king in his own home and speaking whatever language he wished. The Jews took to such a free society like fish to water, and they started social-climbing. The king invited them to his banquets and they ate there, drooling at the mouth from the forbidden food they guzzled.

Suddenly there arose a Haman, who made a deal with the king, buying for ten thousand pieces of silver the right to slaughter and bury all the Jews. Only the miracle came to pass and Esther and Mordechai saved the Jews from the evil decree. The Jews took stock, realized how grievously they had erred, and began once more to fulfill what their ancestors had undertaken at Mount Sinai.

The wicked Balaam defined it accurately when he said, "Lo, this people shall dwell alone" – if the Jews live apart, different, from the other nations, then they will live through the greatest tribulations. If they don't live apart, as Jews, then the Jews will be buried alive there, among the nations.

All of Europe is a graveyard today. Germany, the source of Reform and assimilation and of mixed marriage, became Hitler's arena. One is born a Jew without being asked and – in joy and in tribulation – one must live as a Jew by the Torah and its precepts, till the Consoler of Zion, G-d Himself, comforts and redeems us through our True Messiah. Then the nations of the world will bow their heads in shame and acknowledge that there is only one G-d and His Name is One-and-Only, of Whom one does not have to be afraid and with Whom one does not have to fear anyone.

THE NAME OF THE DECALOGUE IS INACCURATE. "ASERET HADIBROT" DOES NOT TRANSLATE INTO "10 COMMANDMENTS." IT MEANS STATEMENTS, SAYINGS, BUT NOT IMPERATIVES. THE DIFFERENCE THE UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED VERSION MAKES IN THE BASIC MEANING OF THE DIVINE REVELATION AND THE CODES WE RECEIVED.

Ten Commandments, or Two?

As probably happens to other rabbis, I often get involved with assimilationist Jews in conversations about Judaism and the commandments in general, and about such matters as kashrut and Sabbath observance in particular.

They almost invariably argue that it is possible to be a believing Jew without being observant. They all contend that they believe in G-d, but that the laws laid down in the Shulchan Aruch are outmoded, irrelevant to the 20th century. Many also say that being Jewish is a matter of having a good heart, of giving generously to charity. All you need in order to be a good Jew is to have G-d in your heart, they say.

Only recently I was dragged into a discussion with someone who proudly insisted that the way he gave charity made him not merely a good Jew but an absolute Tzaddik. In the heat of the discussion he said to me: "Whatever you may think of me, Rabbi, I want you to know that even though I don't attend synagogue and don't observe kashrut or the Sabbath, there's one thing I believe in and consider holy, and that's the Ten Commandments!"

I retorted: "I hope it won't surprise you to hear that I take just the opposite view. I try to observe the Torah, the commandments, the Shulchan Aruch, but I don't believe in the Ten Commandments."

He was stunned: "I can't believe my ears," he said. "An Orthodox rabbi, and you don't believe in the Ten Commandments?!"

"Relax," I said to him. "Now I'll tell you something that will shock you even more: there is no such thing as 'Ten Commandments'!"

He looked at me as though I were crazy. He snatched up a Pentateuch to show me that "the Bible" twice lists the Ten Commandments – once in the Book of Exodus and once in Deuteronomy. "What do you mean?" he said, "The Ten Commandments are the Jewish People's great gift to humanity."

"My dear friend," I said to him, "I also know where the Ten Commandments are listed. But you and the others like you haven't the slightest idea about the contents and meaning of the Ten Commandments."

I went on to tell him that historians and archaelogists point out that long before Moses, the Babylonian king, Hammurrabi, had already formulated many of the laws contained in the commandments. Others say that Moses learned law and jurisprudence from the Egyptians. The point of all of them is, in brief, that the Ten Commandments aren't original.

Then they ask why we list the first two commandments as we do, since both of them deal with the One-G-d concept. And indeed, instead of "I am, etc.," the Christians list "Thou shalt not have, etc." as the first commandment and "Thou shalt not make, etc." as the second. In the traditional Jewish count, the latter is part of the second commandment. For them, "I am, etc." is only a kind of foreword to the Ten Commandments.

Then there is the old question: Why do the commandments, inscribed on the Tablets of the Covenant, begin with the declaration: "I am G-d, your G-d, Who brought you out of Egypt, etc." instead of with a declaration in which G-d introduces Himself as creator and master of the universe?

Furthmore, is G-d really so jealous that He cannot tolerate any competition, not even by an idol made of stone or wood?

And why are the commandments given to what in Hebrew is the singular form of the pronoun "you", as though they were only being given to an individual rather than to the entire Jewish people?

Then there is that most complicated of all the commandments, the tenth one. How can coveting be banned? How can people be commanded not to have an urge? And what is wrong with having an urge to steal, kill, swear falsely, and so on, so long as one does not give in to the urge? On the contrary, people should be rewarded for having an urge to do wrong and resisting the urge. Why is it sinful to feel like doing something if one doesn't do it? Is there a court in the world that will punish someone for having an urge to do wrong?

To all these questions, I told my interlocutor, I have one answer: There is no such thing as "The Ten Commandments"!

The problem is one of translation. What is referred to in English as "Ten Commandments" is called in Hebrew "Asseret Hadibrot" or "Asseret Hadvarim", meaning "The Ten Statements" or "Utterances." Nowhere in the Hebrew sources are the statements inscribed on the Tablets of the covenant referred to as "Commandments", Asseret Hamitzvot.

Furthermore, the word used for a negative command in Hebrew is "al." We often find the Torah saying, for example, "al tishkach" – "You should not forget," and the like. On the other hand, "Lo tirtzach," for example, is not a command saying: "You should not kill," but a statement declaring that in the future "You will not kill." By the same token, "Lo tignov" is not a command, "You shall not steal," but a declaration that "You will not steal." If these were meant to be commands, the formulation would have been "Al tirtzach," "Al tignov," etc. In the so-called "Ten Commandments", we do not find the word "al" but only "lo." And that is why we do not call them "The Ten Commandments," but ". . . Statements" or ". . . Utterances."

And if "lo" were the word used for a command, for an imperative, then the text on the Tablets of the Covenant contains this word 12 times. This, plus the "I am . . .", "Remember . . .", and "Honor . . ." would make 15 commandments and not ten.

Now we can begin to understand the real meaning of the text on the Tablets of the Covenant. No doubt laws existed before the time of Moses, but never before had there been "Ten Utterances" teaching the true belief in the One-G-d. For the first time G-d addresses Himself to the Jews, and to no other people, saying "I am your G-d, the One Who delivered you, liberated you, from exile and bondage in Egypt." If you believe that I am the One Who brought you out of Egypt, rescued you, delivered you, and took you to be My people – that I am the One-and-Only-G-d, then you have nothing to worry about. Your future is assured and you will not need or want another god. And, having G-d in your heart, you will surely never murder, rob, steal, or bear false witness. The result of full and sincere belief is that the "I-Am" will immunize you against any possibility of coveting, will eliminate any urge you may have to commit shameful deeds.

Laws alone cannot prevent people from coveting. G-d, however, can say with full certainty: "If you truly believe in Me, you will have no desire to covet."

Fearing G-d, true piety, is a means of restraining one's sinful passions. The Ten Commandments are intended as a preventive rather than as a cure, as a preventive against the evil urges that all of us possess.

But there *are* two commandments: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" and "Honor they father and thy mother." These two commandments are imperatives, because in addition to believing in G-d one must also respect one's parents. And in order to understand how to honor G-d and one's parents, one must have a home. And a Jewish home is possible only when one observes the Sabbath and the other Jewish holy days, without which the home is banal, colorless, lifeless.

Possessing these three fundamentals – fear of G-d, respect for parents, and home sanctity – one can be certain of not growing up a murderer, a thief or a liar. Those possessing these three will not even have a desire to commit these sins; it won't even occur to them. Our G-d cannot survive without respect for parents and without a Jewish home, regardless of how much charity there is in one's life.

When I finished my explanation, no one said a word. My excited interlocutor sat there abashed. He had never heard of such Ten Commandments.

HEBREW LETTERS SERVE IN A DOUBLE CAPACITY, AS AN ALPHABET AND AS NUMBERS. BEING THE LANGUAGE OF THE BIBLE, THERE ARE VARIOUS MEANINGS AND CATEGORIES OF HOLINESS IN THE LETTERS AND NUMBERS.

Seven is Holy

The holiday which commemorates the day of the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai, *"Z'man Matan Toratainu"* is called SHAVUOT.

The Rabbis ask the question why the name of the holiday does not indicate any connection with the Commandments, G-d's revelation to the Jewish people and to mankind?

Shavuot means weeks, seven weeks that separate the 6th day of Sivan from the 15th day of Nisan, totaling 49 days between Passover and Shavuot. Accordingly, the name Shavuot – weeks, equally applies itself to both holidays Passover and Shavuot, with no reference directly to the historical events which the holiday is supposed to commemorate. The name Shavuot seems to address itself to the separating period between the two holidays rather than directly to the festival name it bears!

Scholars offer many answers, trying to clarify and explain the puzzling title of Shavuot, that one of the three major Polgrim Festivals carries. The most fascinating is the one the KABALISTS, the scholars of mysticism, give. When it comes to numbers they were the masters of theological calculations, CHACHMAY HASFIRA, the C.P.A.'s of our religious Theosophy.

Shavuot has to do with weeks, the forty-nine days that we must count by Biblical ordinance. Why forty-nine, the equivalent of seven weeks? Why not a combination or multiplication of any other number of days or weeks? Why not the holy

number of ten, which would be the emination of the Ten Commandments?

So KABALISTS say and reveal to us that seven is the magic holy number around which esoterically, our Torah and indeed nature itself revolve. The great Jewish philosopher and Kabalist, Philo of Alexandria (of first century of C.E.), authored a book on the meaning of the number seven.

Here is a partial listing of the "Wonders of Seven":

1) Beginning with Genesis, G-d himself selected the number 7 for sanctification as the Sabbath day. After creation "G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it." (Genesis 2:3)
2) Each seventh year is designated as the Sabbatical for rest from work in the field, redeeming the slaves from servitude, plus many other laws affecting the life of the Torah-true Jew, in the 7th year called "Shmita."
3) After 7 Sabbatical years came the Jubilee year, which regulated and controlled the entire society of the Land of Israel, with regard to real estate along with various political and economic changes, during the 50th year. The Biblical ordinance of the Jubilee year is expressed in the sentence, "Proclaim liberty throughout the Land" which became the basic principle of the American Constitution and is inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia.
4) The world was created, Kabalists say, to only last seven millenia, the seventh prophecized to become the Sabbatical, with the definite coming of Messiah. With this prophecy comes the promise of ushering in the Messianic Era that will finally bring peace and harmony for mankind in the seventh Millenia. We are close to the end of the sixth millenia, only 254 years away from the Sabbatical one.
5) The lunar month consists of 28 days, which is 4×7.
6) Our calendar has annually 7 holidays; Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Chanukah and Purim. Passover and Sukkot are seven days each.

7) Noah and his family had been given 7 laws, known as the Noahide laws, which are binding upon all of mankind to observe. Any Gentile who lives by the 7 Noahide laws is considered a just man in the eyes of G-d. The seven are: 1) Idolatry, 2) Blasphemy of the Divine name, 3) Bloodshed, 4) Sexual perversity, 5) Robbery, 6) Establishment of a code of justice, 7) Prohibition from eating meat from any living animals or birds.
8) Seven were the patriarchs and matriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachael and Leah. Their Hebrew initials are all spelled in the name YISRAEL (in Hebrew).
9) Of the 10 Commandments, seven are don'ts, negative ones.
10) The emblem of our faith is the Menorah consisting of 7 branches with the seven eternal lights.
11) There are seven heavens, seven chambers of Hell, seven seas, seven continents and seven wisdoms.
12) There are seven good and bad years, as Joseph of old explained Pharaohs' dreams.
13) Our average life span is three score and then, seven decades, ten times seven. These years are divided into different periods. The first seven are the years of childhood. The second cycle of seven ends at the age of Bar Mitzvah. It is the boy's sabbatical year. Reaching thirteen, we become obligated to fulfill the positive commandments called Mitzvot, hence the name of Bar Mitzvah, a son of the Mitzvah. With regard to the negative restriction of committing sins, one is not culpable, BAR ONSHIN, until he becomes 20, "MIBEN ESRIM U'MALA", which is the end of the 3rd cycle of seven. Deducting 21 from 70, we are left with 49 years that we are truly and fully responsible for all our good and bad deeds.
14) Seven members of a family are considered "Close." They are the only relatives after whose death we are supposed to observe the "SHIVA", seven days of AVEILUS, of mourning. The seven are: Father, mother, wife, brother, sister, son, daughter.

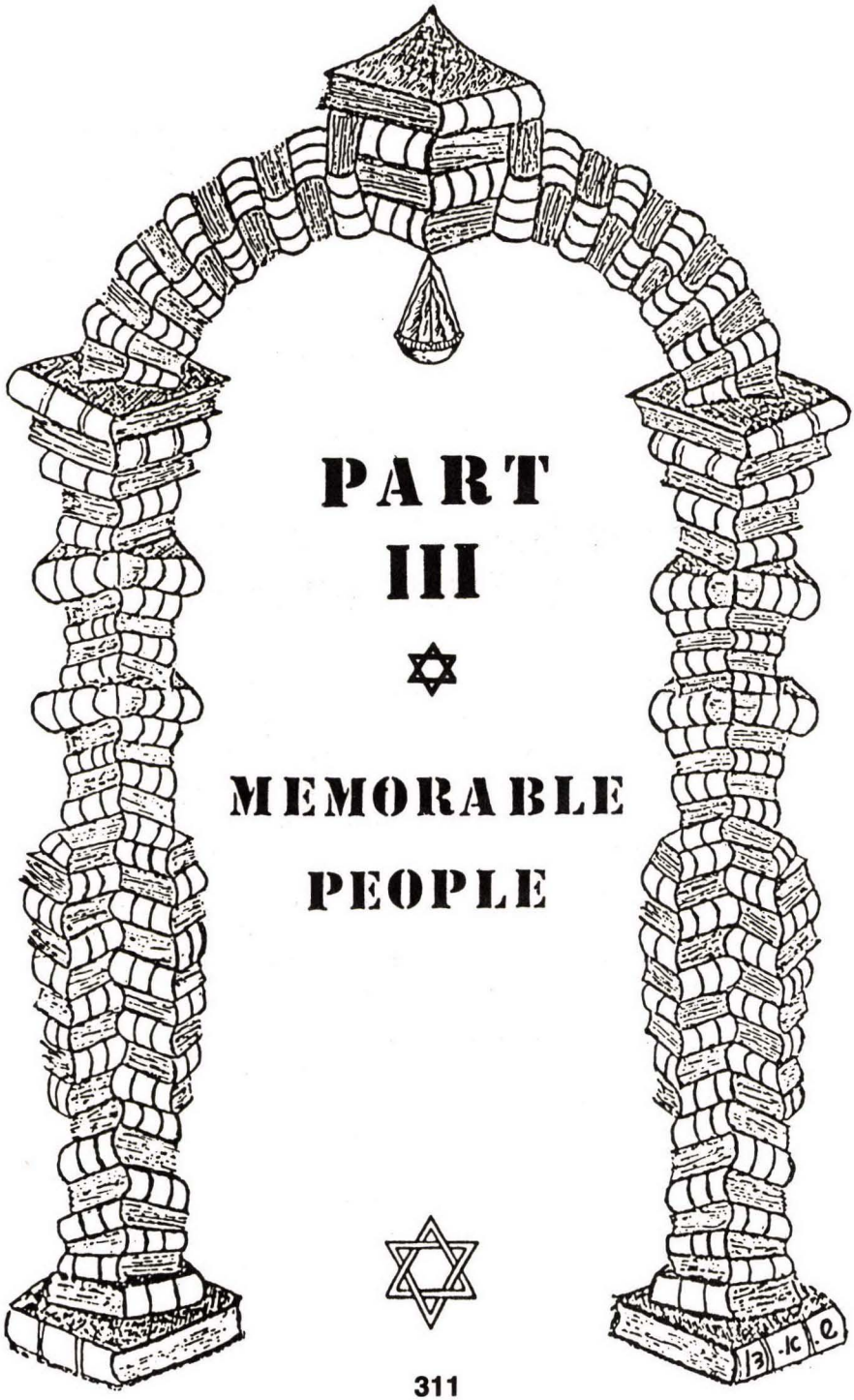
15) Seven are the days of joy upon getting married, THE YEMAI MISHTE. Under the canopy we get SHEVA BROCHOT, seven blessings after the circling of the bride 7 times around the groom. There are seven Hakafot on Simchat Torah and seven portions of the Biblical readings, Aliyot on Sabbaths.
16) The Magen David has 7 fields, six points and one in the center.
17) A chicken lays an egg in 21 days, ducks in 28 days and geese in 35, all in cycles of seven.
18) A human baby is ripe and ready to be born after 7 months pregnancy.
19) We have 7 days of physical purity and impurity, TIMA VE'TAHARA.

The above list, far from being complete, is proof enough that SEVEN is not only Holy, but the most mysterious of all numbers in arithmetic.

The Jewish people were in Egyptian slavery for 210 years, 3 times 70, instead of 400 as mentioned by the Almighty, at the Covenant with Abraham. The redemption came ahead of time because their spiritual state of mind was at a critical point of total extinction. There are 49 gates, SHAAREI TUMA, of spiritual, sinful impurity. When an individual or a people cross that last gate, there is no return any more to normalcy as human beings. G-d had to act quickly to save the Jews from self destruction. The exodus was the last chance for their liberation as Jews and as human beings. A little later would have been too late because they were drowning in sin of the Egyptian impurity.

During the 49 days, after leaving Egypt, with the help of Moses, the Jews were able to lift themselves from the pit of their impurity. Each day they were climbing one rung at a time, until they reached the high standards of humanness and G-dliness to receive the Ten Commandments at Sinai. From the ugliness of the pit, they have risen to the beauty of the Mount.

Only because of these 49 days of self-introspection and a total metamorphosis of their souls did they deserve to receive G-d's words of the law. Hence, the name of Shavuot, seven weeks, are basic as the condition upon which depended the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai.



PART III

MEMORABLE PEOPLE

THERE WAS NO END TO FATHER'S AUTHORSHIP. WHY SO MANY BOOKS? HIS ANSWER TO MY QUESTION WAS: "EACH BOOK I WRITE IS A 'MATZEVA' – A MONUMENT FOR THE BURNT BOOKS THAT NEVER CAME TO THE REQUIRED BURIAL." BOOKS AND PEOPLE ARE OF EQUAL CATEGORY IN THE HALACHIC LAWS OF INTERNMENT AFTER THEIR DEMISE.

My Father the Perennial Author, of Blessed Memory

In our daily correspondence, my Father, may he rest in peace, would always keep me informed about the progress of his books. (All together, he published 30 books before and after the war.) "Today I submitted the manuscript of my 10th book to the printer" (in Mexico). That is how he informed me again and again about his 11th, 12th and 13th books.

I would argue with him: "What is the use of your printing so much?" Every book did cost him a great deal of money. But my main concern was all the effort and hard work that I knew he invested in the production of his books.

People do not realize that the author of a book is just like the housewife preparing for the Sabbath – cooking and baking, spending several days making things that are eaten up in a flash, often without the proper gratitude being expressed to the creator of those tasty dishes. The same applies to literary works: It takes months, sometimes years, of hard work to create something that the reader finishes off in a matter of minutes or hours, and almost invariably the work fails to get its proper recognition.

"The final act originates in a thought" – first comes the idea that haunts the mind in the course of many sleepless nights. Then comes the writing, the polishing, the editing of the draft manuscript. Then comes the typing job, preparing a typescript to send to press. It all adds up to an arduous task. It demands extraordinary patience, endurance and perseverance. Above all, however, one must love the work. Without all these traits, one cannot become a writer.

In the last few years before his death, he was often very tired, because of his diabetes. Nevertheless, he continued to publish books at the rate of one a year. I wrote him a long letter pleading with him to take care of himself. He answered with a letter based on that week's Torah reading, "Ki Sissa." Here is what he wrote:

We Jews have two Torahs, the Oral Torah and the Written Torah. We learn from the portion "Ki Sissa" that the Oral Torah may not be written down. After the Jews sinned with the Golden Calf and Moses reacted by smashing the Tablets, G-d said to him, after a great deal of pleading by Moses (Exodus 34:27): "Write down these words.Write these words of the Ten Commandments again, just as they were on the first Tablets" . . . "What you are permitted to write down in Scriptures is the 'Written Torah' only." Rashi and the Midrash interpret this to say: "You are not permitted to write down the Torah that I gave you orally on Mount Sinai . . . This Torah must remain an oral tradition to be handed down verbally from generation to generation.

Rabbi Yochanan comments on this in the Talmud (Taanit 19a): The word "va'alayhem – and on them" (Deuteronomy 9:10) teaches us that G-d showed Moses all the minute details discussed by the Talmudic Sages, even the reading of the Scroll of Esther. G-d gave Moses both Torahs, the written one and the oral one. So the Mishna in Tractate Avot rightly tells us that "Moses received the (Oral) Torah on Mount Sinai from G-d and passed it on to Joshua, his disciple and successor, and thus it was handed on from generation to generation, without being written down.

Perhaps that is why a Jewish groom says to his bride under the bridal canopy, "Behold, thou are consecrated to me according to the law of Moses and Israel." This means that the bride has been betrothed according to both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah – both Torahs, Moses's Torah and the Torah of the Jewish people as a whole. The Oral Torah was Moses's alone, whereas the Written Torah was given to the entire Jewish people at Mount Sinai.

How important it was to G-d that the Jews should accept the Oral Torah we see from a passage in the Talmud (Shabbat 88a) that tells us that G-d held the mountain over the Jews' heads and told them that if they did not accept the Torah, He would bury them under the mountain.

The Talmudic Sages maintain that this applies only to the Oral Torah, because concerning the Written Torah, we are told that the Jews promptly, willingly and unanimously accepted it, declaring: "We shall do and we shall hearken!" In any event, there is no doubt that we must observe both Torahs. The Written Torah and the Oral Torah are like a pair of twins, indivisible, to be taken together as one whole.

What do the Gentiles understand when they obediently read the "Bible," the so-called "Old Testament," without the Oral Torah? What do they do with the literal translation and application of the passage, "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk"? Or, "an eye for an eye"? Without the Talmud, without the Oral Torah, these things are not properly comprehended.

If that is so, Father observed, how astounded are we to read in the Talmud (Nedarim 38a): Rabbi Yosse bar Chanina said, "Write you" (Exodus 34:27) – this implies that the Oral Torah was given only to Moses and his seed personally. Moses dealt generously with the Jewish people and shared the Oral Torah with all of them, giving it to the people as a whole.

According to this, if Moses had been stingy instead of

generous, and had selfishly kept the Oral Torah to himself, we would have been left with only the Written Torah. What kind of "Torah" would that have been with no Mishna, no Gemara, no Rambam, no early and later adjudicators? How would we have understood the Torah without Rabbi Yishmael's 13 principles? Without the four methods of "peshat," "remez," "derush" and "sod" that the Talmudic Sages use in analyzing Scriptural passages, the Torah often doesn't really make sense. All told, without the Oral Law we would be like the Gentiles, reading the "Bible," without understanding its true meaning, or like the Karaites or Samaritans – because without the Oral Torah, there is no Judaism.

The Talmud tells us quite plainly (Gittin 60b): "For in accordance with these commandments" (Exodus 34:27) – this means that G-d made His covenant with the Jewish people on the basis of the Oral Torah.

According to this, Moses held in his hands the fate of the covenant between G-d and the Jewish people. It is only thanks to Moses's generosity that we were privileged to acquire the Oral Torah and our eternal role as G-d's people was assured.

In light of the aforementioned commentaries, three fundamental problems arise:

1) Why didn't the Master-of-the-Universe want the Oral Torah to be written down?

2) Why did He entrust it to Moses, not fearing that Moses might refuse to pass the tradition on to the entire nation?

3) Why did Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi permit himself to write down the Oral Torah in the six orders of the Mishna, even though G-d had forbidden it?

There are several reasons why G-d didn't want the Oral Torah written down: 1) People wouldn't learn a Written Torah by heart, for why bother when it is all written down? Then, if you need an answer to a question, you simply take the appro-

priate book off the shelf and look the matter up. Otherwise, the book would wallow in dust on the bookshelf. 2) The Oral Torah was given only to the Jews, to be passed on from father to son, from rabbis to disciples. 3) A book is easily lost, but an Oral Torah, which is committed to memory, is carried along by the person wherever he goes.

The fourth and main reason why G-d wanted the Oral Torah to remain such is that it is a never-ending Torah. A book has a beginning and an end. The Oral Torah, on the other hand, comes from every Sage of every generation, it is an eternally continuing process, an endless continuation from person to person, from mouth to mouth. Every Sage has the right and the duty to add his thoughts, his interpretations, his innovations.

How can a perpetuum mobile be confined to the limited bounds of a book? Nobody can foretell what a learned, experienced scholar may innovate; it cannot be written down. Every page of Gemara brings to mind new thoughts, problems and answers that did not occur to one the last time, one studied that particular page. When G-d gave Moses the Torah, He knew that Moses was generous and would not keep it for himself.

In addition, G-d put a certain element in Moses's soul, the magnetic powers of which, forced him to become the teacher of the entire Jewish people. The Masters of Torah of all subsequent generations inherited this quality of Moses's. They had the love and perseverance not only to learn for themselves but also to teach others. Very often, a great scholar's greatest joy upon solving some mystery of the Torah is to share the solution with his disciples. Indeed, there is no joy greater than the joy of resolving a difficult problem, but this joy is enhanced when one can tell others of the solution.

This quality of the great Sages led to the creation of yeshivot centered around them. More than the students needed the Sages, the Sages wanted students and disciples. A

certain inner force always impelled the Sage to pass on to others the fruits of his achievement. None of the great Torah Sages has ever been able to control this urge. The love of learning generated a lust to teach.

So it was with Maimonides, Nahmanides, Rashi, the Gaon of Vilno, the Chatam Sofer and the Chafetz Hayim. Rashi has remained to this day the teacher of the Jewish people explicating for us the Pentateuch and Prophets, Mishna and Gemara. Thanks to Rashi and other great Sages, the Oral Torah has remained an everlasting wellspring that has never dried up since Moses's day. Not only does such a teacher derive the greatest pleasure from teaching students; he is also deeply grieved if circumstances prevent him from doing so.

The Midrash tells us that when G-d explained the mystery of the Red Heifer to Moses and forbade him to reveal the secret to anyone else, Moses was aggrieved. It hurt him that he was prevented from sharing the knowledge with the Jewish people, and that it would have to remain a secret till the end of time.

If Rabbi Akiva had been content to learn for himself, without disciples, he might have lived much longer instead of being one of the ten Talmudic Sages executed by the Romans. This is probably also the main reason why Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi permitted himself to write down the Oral Torah. He saw that the number of scholars was decreasing daily and that the Oral Torah was in danger of being forgotten and of disappearing into oblivion. So he quickly composed the Six Orders of the Mishna. Today we know very well that Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi was right, and that if not for him there would have been no Mishna and Gemara, no Rishonim and Aharonim. He not only rescued the Oral Torah, but also guaranteed the everlastingness of the Written Torah.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

"I want to bring out 24 books in the course of my service as a rabbi in Mexico," Father wrote. (And that is what he did.)

"Why 24 precisely?" I asked him. In reply, he showed me the passage in Exodus 31:18: "When He (G-d) finished speaking with him (Moses)..." The Hebrew word for "when He finished" – "Kechaloto" – comes from a root related to the word "Kalah" – "bride." And Rashi comments that just as a bride adorns herself with 24 pieces of jewelry, so should a Sage adorn himself with 24 books.

"There are four kinds of writers," said my father. "The first category is of those who are learned but cannot write (which does not stop them from writing). The second category is of those who can write but are not learned. The third is of those who neither are learned nor can write but write nevertheless. The fourth is of those who are learned and can write but do not. They are the most sinful of all," father said. "These of the last category are ingrates," he continued. "They learned from their teachers, but they keep their acquired knowledge to themselves, unwilling to share the pleasure with others." "As far as I am concerned," father said, "I cannot hold back my stream of ideas, and I want to share them with future generations. In the European Churban (destruction), not only the great Sages of our time perished, along with their yeshivot, many tens of thousands of books also perished in the flames. It was even worse than in the instance of the ten Sages tortured to death by the Romans, for this time not only the parchment but also what was written on it was destroyed.

"Just as I mourn the loss of my wife and two of my children, so do I mourn the loss of three of my first books, published in Poland, of which not a single copy survives."

"Do you understand now? Now do you see why I write? For as long as I am able I shall go on writing."

Thus wrote my Father-teacher, of blessed memory, in his letter to me during that week of the Torah reading of "Ki sissa" 5724-1964. When he passed away, he was engaged in putting out his last book, which was cut off in the middle, like an unfinished symphony of his literary creations.

WHERE IS ONE'S HONOR GREATER, WHEN GIVEN AT HOME OR AMIDST STRANGERS IN A FOREIGN LAND?

America Says "Mazal Tov!" to Mexico

I am now sitting in the huge Sheraton Americana Hotel watching as hundreds of synagogue leaders from all over the United States gather to honor a Jew from another country, small in number of Jews living there, Reb Shimshon Feldman, head of the Mexican Jewish community.

The elite of the American Jewish lay leadership, especially that of New York, has gathered here to acknowledge the achievements of a unique man, a rare person, who devotes all the time at his disposal to the general welfare.

I am sitting here, thinking, and I have an urge to sing Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev's "Dudele" with a slight variation: East here, West there, North there and South there . . . Feldman, you are everywhere!"

It is no wonder that Mexico should know who Feldman is. What Jew in Mexico doesn't have occasion to meet the head of the community? Young or old, poor or rich, the lonely and the sick – wanting a seat in the synagogue, a plot of ground in the cemetery – come knocking at Shimshon Feldman's door. Rabbis, ritual slaughterers, cantors, teachers, culture workers, educational projects, philanthropic undertakings – the Mexican Jewish community has them all, and thus all matters pertaining to them are administered by Reb Shimshon Feldman.



Mr. Simon Feldman, President of the Jewish Community, "Kehila Nidjei Israel" in Mexico, presents literary award to Rabbi Avigdor for excellence as a feature essayist in the Yiddish newspaper "La Voz – Di Shtime."

I know this, because I have been going to Mexico annually for the past 30 years, and more than once I heard my great Father, Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor of blessed memory, say that there isn't another Shimshon Feldman in the whole world. That is no exaggeration, for no one knew as well as my Father, who worked with Feldman daily throughout his rabbinate in Mexico.

Shimshon Feldman gives to communal affairs his labor, his time, his energy, his mind, and also his money. He gives, and he gets others to give. When he gives, he gives generously, open-handedly, magnanimously. And it is because he gives in this manner that he is able to inspire others to give.

There isn't a single Jewish organization in the world that Shimshon Feldman hasn't helped in some way.

I always thought that only we, close ones, know what a great soul Shimshon Feldman is. But that great America should make him its guest of honor, its man of the year, is the greatest possible honor. Such an honor cannot be bought. One must be worthy of it, and Shimshon Feldman is certainly worthy.

I have proof of the greatness of the honor in the text of the prayers. Wherever I say the "Kedusha" of the Mussaf "Shmoneh Essray" service on the Sabbath or festivals, and I come to the passage "Kvodo maleh olam," "The world is filled with His honor" – i.e., G-d's honor is everywhere – I continuously find it hard to understand why, right after this grand declaration, the Angels ask: "Where is the place of His honor, so that we may there sing His praise?"

What's going on here? We just said that G-d's honor fills the whole world, and now we ask where He is!

The answer is that there is nothing novel about paying homage to a ruler in the land over which he rules. Very often he gets it as an expression of gratitude for some noble deed. But

sometimes it also happens that big parades and banquets are held out of fear; people extend honor as bribery to their leader in order to safeguard their lives.

It is another matter, however, when the praise comes from afar, from the people of another land who don't owe a thing to the object of the honor, are not afraid of him, and do not expect to have any dealings with him, yet wish to honor him.

If someone living in Russia extends honor to the President of the United States, it obviously has much more significance than when a resident of New York or Washington does so.

That is what the angels mean when they say: Precisely because G-d is everywhere, we cannot find a single spot in the entire universe that is neutral; not one spot where G-d is not present, a spot where we could extend honor to G-d without any ulterior motives, not out of fear; not one spot where we could sing His praise and glory away from His presence.

That is why an American banquet in honor of a Mexican Jew is such a rare and important occasion. There are, thank G-d, plenty of worthy philanthropists in America. Just one stretch of New York City has 10 times as many Jews as all of Mexico. But there are very few Jews like Shimshon Feldman; their number can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Shimshon is a rare person, whose fame has travelled throughout the Jewish world. In fact, he is internationally known for his total devotion, materially and spiritually, to the Jewish People. I am proud of our long-standing friendship.

TEARS ON THE FRESH GRAVE OF MY COUNTRYWOMAN AND CHILDHOOD FRIEND ALISA BEGIN, MAY SHE REST IN PEACE.



Mrs. Avigdor visiting the Begins in Jerusalem.

Alisa Begin: Schoolmate Friend From Hometown Drohobycz

Alisa Begin was not an ordinary woman. Her simplicity was her greatness. She was an outstanding example of the traditional "woman of valor" – not only as the woman who married Menachem Begin, but in her own right as well.

Very few people are alive who remember her from the old country. I am one of those select few, having been raised in the same town with her, Drohobycz, in Galicia. We were also born in the same year, 1920. I knew Alisa well, before Menachem Begin met her.

I remember the twin sisters, and especially their father, Dr. Zvi Arnold. He was a frequent visitor in our home. Dr. Arnold and his family were part of the liberal intellectual elite of our town. He was an ardent Zionist, and notwithstanding his tenuous link with religion, he came to the Great Synagogue every Yom Kipper. I still remember where he sat.

When Menachem Begin came to Drohobycz as a young lawyer to start practicing law (there was a "numerous clausus" the Jewish student quota in Vilno), he joined Dr. Arnold's office. There he met his future bride, the boss's daughter, whom we called Ala Arnold.

Already then Begin was known all over Poland as the head of Betar and famous as a fiery orator in Jabotinsky's style. I will never forget how excited our town was over the news that Menachem Begin and Ala were going to get married. Dozens of girls were jealous of her, and wondered what Menachem Begin saw in Ala, then only 19 years old. More than one heart was broken by the "loss" of Menachem Begin, who in the short time since he arrived in Drohobycz, had managed to captivate so many people.

We, who were very close to the Arnolds, knew about Ala's modesty and devotion and that, notwithstanding her youth, she was a fully mature person. It seems that Menachem Begin had a proper appreciation of her loyalty and dependability, and he was not disappointed.

When the preparations for the wedding were being made, the town was all a-dither: imagine, Zev Jabotinsky himself was going to be there . . . My father, Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor, may he rest in peace, who was the town's chief rabbi, planned the arrangements for their wedding in the Eden Hotel at the nearby spa of Truskawiec.

It is interesting to note that my father, received a telegram from Jabotinsky urging him to make sure that the hotel, where the wedding would take place and the one in which he would stay while in Drohobycz, were kosher. The wedding ceremony took place in the one and only nice synagogue in Truskawiec. Jabotinsky delivered a little talk to the bride and groom, referring to Menachem as his son and trusted disciple.

Before Jabotinsky started speaking, he removed a rose from Alisa's corsage, sniffed it, and put it in the boutonniere of his jacket. He did this with a flourish that left an indelible impression on me (I was standing next to him). My father, of blessed memory, and Cantor Baruch Gross officiated.

Later, at the wedding banquet at the hotel, I had the honor of extending greetings to Jabotinsky and the young couple in the name of their friends and of youth organizations in town. I spoke in Hebrew.

Zev Jabotinsky several times, both privately and publicly, warned that the Jews of Poland had no more than a year or two to flee the country. As it turned out, three months later the Germans marched into Silesia. Jabotinsky's words were to keep reverberating in my mind in the course of six years of ghettos and concentration camps. He was the only one to see and utter the horrendous prophecy concerning the destruction of Polish Jewry. No one believed him, and nobody heeded his warning.

Another prophecy of Jabotinsky's was also not taken seriously. Under the bridal canopy that day, Jabotinsky said that Menachem Begin would be one of his people's great leaders, and that together with his wife Ala he would rank among the outstanding statesman of our time.

Ala proved to be the right mate and life's partner for Menachem Begin, in tribulation and in joy. Her blend of tenderness and stubbornness, endurance, were already in her lifetime recorded in the annals of the Jewish people. She ranks among the great Jewish women of all time, as one who devoted her life to the Jewish people and the Jewish State. From the moment they were married until her last breath she was a tower of strength, courage and comfort for Menachem Begin throughout his stormy career.

Her simplicity and modesty were unbounded. She never made the slightest fuss about her devotion and heroism, or about her tremendous influence on her husband. To be Menachem Begin's wife was not a light matter. Today all the world knows it, but we of the old country sensed that more than four decades ago. One may say that it was a woman like Ala Begin, whom King Solomon had in mind when he composed his poem to "A Woman of Valor" in the Book of Proverbs.

The meaning of the title "Woman of Valor" – "eshet chayil" – is actually hard to understand. What does it really mean? Is it the genitive case, meaning "isha shel chayal," "a soldier's wife"? Or is it a combination of a noun and an adjective, meaning: "a female soldier" or "a soldiering woman," a

heroine who goes out to the battlefield with the men to wage war against the enemy?

The question arises why King Solomon, during whose reign there was no war, saw fit to glorify soldiering, or being a soldier's wife. Could not King Solomon, the wisest of men, find a more suitable expression of honor for a highly esteemed woman than one that has to do with warmaking? What kind of praise is this?

There are very few women of whom it can be said that they wore the "Eshet Chayil" crown in both senses of the term. But Alisa Begin was both the wife of a soldier and a soldier herself. She was the faithful, tenderhearted, merciful mother, and the stubborn, heroic fighter in the struggle against the many enemies of the Jewish people and the Jewish state.

I recall an article that Jabotinsky wrote on the anniversary of Yosef Trumpeldor's death. In this article, Jabotinsky explained in his unique way why the Jews say Kaddish for the dead. What is the connection between this prayer to G-d and grief over a dead person? Jabotinsky explained that the intention is to praise the divine nature of the dead person. Those saying the Kaddish promise the deceased that even though he is no longer alive, his divine ideal will live on after him. The wish of a Jew is the continuity of his faith in G-d. This ideal is eternal. The Kaddish is a declaration that not everything dies. The spirit lives; ideals endure.

It is hard to believe that Alisa Begin is gone. We exchanged letters frequently. What heartache! It was just on Thursday, November 11 that I received a letter from her, written from Hadassah Hospital, in reply to my get-well wishes. She informed me that she was feeling better, and that Shabbat, when the portion "Chayyei Sarah" was read in the Torah, I offered a prayer for her health. It seems that at that very moment, she returned her noble, heroic soul to her Maker prematurely.

Unfortunately, I have a harder task than my father, of blessed memory, had. More than forty years ago he wished Menachem Begin "Mazel Tov," "love and fraternity, peace and friendship." The blessing for a happy family life was fulfilled totally. My task, on the other hand, is the important one of extending condolences to Menachem on the loss of his dearly beloved Ala. I can hear him sobbing to himself, "Ala, why have you forsaken me?!"

How can I comfort him? What can I say to him except the eternal words, "May the Almighty comfort you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem"? G-d alone can console you, heal your wound and assuage your grief.

מַה טֹּבוּ אֹהָלֶיךָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֹתֶיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל

How goodly are Thy tents, O Jacob; how beautiful are Thy homes, O Israel.

ON THE DEDICATION OF THE "OHEL YAACOV" KOLLEL AT RAMOT SHAPIRO NEAR JERUSALEM IN MEMORY OF RABBI DR. JACOB AVIGDOR, MAY HIS SOUL REST IN PEACE

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

In the Bundle of Life

Wherever there is a Jewish cemetery in the world, you can see inscribed on the tombstones the five Hebrew letters: Tav, Nun Tzaddik, Beit, Heh.

What is the meaning of these letters, and how did it become such a deeply rooted custom to inscribe them on Jewish tombstones everywhere?

The answer is that these are the initial letters of a prayer, for both the dead and those coming to the grave, to pay their respects. The prayer asks that the soul of the deceased "shall remain bound up with the bond of the living."

The tombstone tells us who the deceased was, his name and his father's. Sometimes there are also a few words of praise for the deceased. The tombstone shows the exact spot where the remains are buried. It is the address of the body that left the world of the living and is no more.

What has happened to that person's soul? Did the soul also die? Was it, too, buried in the grave, or has it remained in the bond of life? Has the deceased left a living spirit? Are there people in the world who remember him? Who miss him?

In the Bundle of Life

"In the bundle of life" is perhaps the fondest wish of every one of us. We all want our soul to endure forever. Nobody can live forever physically. But spiritually we can go on existing for years, even generations, after we are physically dead.

It all depends on how we live our lives, it depends on the "Liver." In our short span of 70 years, we can create hundreds of years of spiritual continuity, even eternal life, even though our bodies have turned to dust. Many human beings who lived a relatively short time succeeded in creating a spiritual heritage that is independent of and above the time dimension.

The Talmudic Sages tell us that Moses never died: "On the day that Moses died, Moses was born." On the very day that Moses's body departed from the material world, his soul was born anew. The soul and memory of such a great person not only remain alive but even grow from year to year, from generation to generation. The Rambam, Rashi, the Vilno Gaon, the Hafetz Chaim, our Tanna'im and Amora'im – they never died spiritually. Quite the contrary: their souls, their spirits, have continued to soar even higher. Their lights shine brighter today than they did in their lifetimes. They have remained in the bundle of life, wherever in the world Jews live.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Friends and relatives keep asking me why my Father's remains haven't been transferred to Eretz Yisrael.

The truth is that it was not possible at the time. He passed away on a Thursday, during a Mexican holiday weekend, a "Fiesta", so we buried him provisionally in Mexico on Friday. Once, in the middle of a conversation, my Father, may he rest in peace, suddenly said to me: "When my time comes, do as you see fit." And he never mentioned the matter again.

The first months passed, and then came the Yahrzeit. I continued to be plagued by the question of what to do, whether to transfer my Father's remains or leave him buried in Mexico.

There is that ancient maxim about "time taking care of things that the mind doesn't know how to deal with." The mind often cannot find immediate solutions to problems of the present, whereas time often shows us how simple the problems and how obvious the solutions really are.

With the passage of time we realized that the important thing really was the "bundle of life," where the grave would be closer to the living people among whom my Father, may he rest in peace, would be remembered longest.

Today, years after his passing, we see that the grave, and especially the magnificent mausoleum over the gravestone that the Mexican Jewish community placed on his tomb, has become the most religious site on the cemetery.

The gravestone has become a veritable shrine. Men and women come there daily to pray. They light candles there on the grave, say Tehillim (Psalms), leave *kvitlach* (notes) containing their prayers and pleas. A woman I met at the graveside last summer told me: "Rabbi, your Father's tombstone didn't have to be washed this year. I washed it with my tears." She had come there every day to pray for a sick dear one.

So my Father's grave really remained in the bundle of life in Mexico, and his image remained alive in the hearts and memories of hundreds of friends, admirers, disciples and just plain Jews.

Time showed us the right thing to do, but it didn't give us a full answer to the entire question bothering us.

Our Father, of blessed memory, was not restricted to the limited confines of Mexico City itself. He belonged to the entire Jewish world. He belonged to the entire Jewish People. He was an outstanding Gaon (Scholar) of his day. Most important of all: his heart was always turned to the East, to Eretz Yisrael. Right up to the final moments of his life he wanted to go there to live.

That is why his friends and admirers, led by the distinguished communal leader Reb Shimshon Feldman, recently had the idea of creating a spiritual monument in Israel in the name of Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor, of blessed memory. Not a tomb for the body, but a memorial to the spirit and soul of my Father as a Mizrachi leader, as one of the leaders of his generation. It was obvious to us that such a spiritual monument belongs in the Holy City of Jerusalem, in an institution where Torah and science would find expression in the spirit of my Father's creative soul.

And we found such a place in Ramat Shapiro, an institution that collects youth from all over the world and turns them into aware Jews.

There are many, many yeshivot and charitable and educational institutions in Israel in general, and especially in Jerusalem. But Ramat Shapiro is something unique. In order to appreciate properly the physical beauty and spiritual greatness and scope of Ramat Shapiro, you have to visit it personally. There aren't enough words to describe it. It embraces everything. It has a combination of features; education, immigrant absorption, yeshiva studies and science. It gives an intensive program for safeguarding Jewish survival, for safeguarding our future in terms of "Eretz Yisrael for the Jewish People according to the Jewish Torah." That is the ideal of which my Father dreamed and for which he strove all his life.

The Mizrachi leadership in Israel and the Ramat Shapiro Executive Board decided to call Ramat Shapiro's new Kollel "Ohel Yaacov" ("Jacob's Tent"), in memory of Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor. The Kollel is for advanced students who wish to delve deeper into Torah and Jewish studies in general.

In this Ohel Yaacov will be perpetuated the memory and the name of our Father Jacob, our great Father and the great rabbi of the Mexican Jewish community, where he produced his best oral and written works.

The project was launched last summer with the help of a few individuals. When it is completed, both the body and the soul of Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor will remain tied up in the bundle of life for many generations, perhaps even until the True Redeemer comes.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

In the Talmud Tractate Eruvin 13 we are told that honor runs away from those who pursue it, whereas it pursues those who seek to evade it.

That seems hard to understand. What is the meaning, the moral, of this statement? What are we supposed to learn from it?

According to the Talmud's description of the situation, either the person is constantly evading honor or honor is constantly evading the person, and they never meet.

The answer is that there comes a time when the running ceases. There comes a time for every person to come to a halt. Sooner or later, every person not only stops running but even ceases to walk. Sooner or later, everybody leaves this world. When this happens, honor comes along and places the crown on the heads of those who earned it in their lifetimes.

I venture to say that my Father, may he rest in peace, richly deserves the honor. In his lifetime, he always hid, always ran away from all the honors of our modern world. Thank G-d that there are individuals in Mexico who, right along with us, his children and grandchildren, will never forget Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor. He will remain bound up in the bundle of life with us for as long as we live.

THOUGHTS ON THE OCCASION OF THE HONOR BESTOWED ON RABBI LEIBUSH KATZ OF MEXICO AT THE MIZRACHI-HAPOEL HAMIZRACHI BANQUET BY HIS SON DR. MARCUS KATZ



Mr. Marcus C. Katz

Honoring the 5th Commandment At Its Best

As former director of the Hapoel Hamizrahi in New York, I have participated in nearly all the annual Mizrachi banquets of the last 35 years. The programs of these events are usually pretty much the same: appetizer, dinner, speakers, and a guest of honor to whom tribute is paid in the course of the evening.

But the last Mizrachi banquet was an exception as regards the way the dinner chairman, Marcus Katz, paid homage, like a loyal son to the guest of honor, his father, Rabbi Leibush Katz Hacohen.

This time I was present not on account of my own achievements in and for the Mizrachi movement, but as a personal guest of the Katz family, with whom I have enjoyed close ties for many years on account of my frequent visits to Mexico, where my father, Rabbi Jacob Dr. Avigdor, of blessed memory, was Chief Rabbi for 18 years.

I could relate many episodes about Jewish life in Mexico, especially in the area of kashrut, where my Father, of blessed memory, and a handful of people, including Reb Leibush Katz,

one of the country's leading shochtim (ritual slaughterers), struggled for years to reach a high level of kashrut in Mexico City and throughout the country. And indeed the level of kashrut was raised so high and achieved such world renown that for many years the State of Israel used to buy kosher meat slaughtered in Mexico. Of course, the main reason was the low price of beef cattle in Mexico, as compared to the price in other countries.

It should be noted that the early Jewish immigrants to Mexico were mainly non-religious Bundists, atheists, Trotskyists, and other such "ists." In such an atmosphere, every bid to get some benefit for Orthodox Jewry was a real struggle in the community offices, among the general public, and also a matter of sanctifying G-d's Name. My Father, may he rest in peace, would deliver six or seven talks every week, write an article in the Mexican Yiddish paper's Sabbath Eve edition, and, most important, give a lecture in the Kadima Hall before an audience of hundreds every Sunday, besides his many books, published at the rate of one a year. I can safely say that every Jewish man and woman in Mexico is a disciple of my Father's. His word – both oral and written – reached all. His spiritual influence was well recognized and respected even by people far removed from his kind of Judaism. Precisely for that reason he accomplished things that are beyond the reach of the average American rabbi. Anyone you ask in Mexico will tell you that there never was such a rabbi as Rabbi Avigdor and there will not very soon be another one like him.

Among the select few in the front rank with my Father in the struggle for Yiddishkeit in Mexico were Rabbi Leibush Katz and his family. More than once have I been in Reb Leibush's home and also in the home of his son Reb Mordechai, and we are well aware of the trials the family went through in its struggle, up the ladder of success, to achieve its international reputation as businessmen and philanthropists.

As I sat on the dais at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel as an im-

portant guest of "the groom", and observing the lovely members of the family – the wife, the mother, children, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, rabbinical mechutanim, all strictly observant Jews – as I sat watching them, I got the answer to several difficult questions in the Torah portion "Behaalotcha." Perhaps that portion came to mind because Reb Leibush and his sons are Kohanim (of the Priestly line) and the Mizrachi banquet was in a certain sense an expression of a "Behaalotcha" honor.

The first few verses are not very clear. The main problem is the Torah's language where it tells us that G-d commanded Aaron the Priest to kindle the candelabrum in such a manner that the seven candles should be bent towards the center: ". . . let the seven lamps throw their light forward toward the front of the lampstand." A technical question arises: How is that possible? The three candles to the left of the center and the three to the right can do what the Torah says. But how can the center one bend to face itself? As soon as it bends, it is no longer in the center. So six candles can bend towards the center candle, but all seven cannot possible do so.

The Talmudic Sages ask more questions: 1. Why should the six candles all bow to the lampstand made of one piece of gold? Would not the candelabrum have been as beautiful, as strong and as durable if it had been made of smaller sections that were afterwards assembled? 2. The candelabrum was one of the Tabernacle vessels whose construction Moses did not understand. Only when G-d showed him a menorah of fire did Moses grasp the principle. What was so complicated about it that Moses had trouble understanding?

The candelabrum was one of the most important and holiest vessels in the Temple. Without the light of the Menorah the priests could not perform the Temple service. It was not possible to offer the sacrifices on the altar without the light from the Menorah. Without it, the entire Temple could not function. The Menorah symbolized the Jewish faith in G-d, our religion, and to this day it remains Israel's emblem.

Menorah means light, and light was the first thing created in the Six Days of Creation. Without light, life was impossible. Darkness means chaos. Man differs from all other creatures in that he alone has a "soul light," a part of G-d himself. "Torah" and "menorah" both have the same stem "or," which means "light."

The candelabrum reminds us of something else that is very important for mankind, especially for us Jews. The Menorah is like a family tree, a "tree of life," with branches growing out of the trunk in the center. This represents the human family. The center is the parents, and the branches, blossoms and leaves are the children and grandchildren. From both sides, right and left, the branches have to bow to the center. When children give due respect to parents, the Menorah burns brightly. The happy family is only the one that is wrought of one piece, with a powerful sense of unity among all its members, not one consisting of separate pieces assembled together.

In a family that is careful to respect its parents, to bow to the center, not only the branches of both sides give light, but also the middle candle itself gives a different kind of light, a light suffused with pleasure and spiritual purity stemming from family love and devotion.

Unfortunately, our great teacher Moses was not privileged in this respect. His life with his wife, Zippora, was not all it should have been. His sons, Gershom and Eliezer, gave him no paternal joy. His sister Miriam told lies about him. Moses did not have a family life that was like a Menorah of one piece. And so, the Talmudic Sages say, Moses did not understand how one derives a bit of joy from one's own flesh and blood. G-d tried to explain it to him, showing him a candelabrum of fire, saying that only by the flame of true love is it possible to create a harmonious family life in the human family. With love, it is possible; if love is absent, there isn't even a chance. Love can bring about fraternity, peace, fellowship. Perhaps that is why Aaron was given the honor of kindling the Menorah lights. With

Moses, a total outsider, his disciple Joshua, was his spiritual heir.

No one living in New York can appreciate how difficult it is to raise children in the true Jewish spirit in remote places. I had more than one opportunity to accept important positions in Mexico, both when my father, of blessed memory, was alive and since. But despite the great financial temptation, we always rejected the offers on account of our children, because Mexico is a difficult place to raise Jewish children in the manner we desired.

Until the devaluation of the peso, the Jews in Mexico enjoyed tremendous prosperity. Some of them became very wealthy, and many people are jealous of the Katzes' financial attainments. But nearly everybody envies their fine Jewish family life. The Yiddishkeit of three generations, from Rabbi Leibush through his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, all strictly observant Jews, is all "of one piece" – integrity of body and integrity of Jewish soul, truly like the golden Menorah of the Tabernacle and the Temple.

Whoever observed the face of Reb Mordechai Katz, the son, as he looked on at the magnificent tribute he himself arranged for his father, had to admit that it was a marvelous scene of maximal honoring of one's parents. I am certain that Reb Mordechai would not have had as much pleasure if the honors were being extended to him instead of to his father.

The same expression of spiritual elevation suffused Reb Leibush's face. It radiated with the joy that a father feels when his son honors him in this manner. It was a case of all the seven candles, those on the two sides and the one in the center, radiating together.

Although the program was on a very high level, including some famous personages, what remains etched in my memory is that scene of oneness between father and son.

May the Katz Menorah continue to light like an Eternal Lamp guaranteeing the eternity of the Jewish people.

THE HONORING OF A DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR AND PROLIFIC WRITER, THAT HAS PLAYED AN HISTORIC ROLE AS ESSAYIST IN PRE-WAR POLAND AND IN THE LAST 40 YEARS IN THE UNITED STATES. DR. SEIDMAN IS A PERSONAL FRIEND OF OUR FAMILY AND LANDSMAN FROM THE SAME PART OF GALICIA.

At the Party in Honor of Dr. Hillel Seidman

When I entered the packed hall in the building of the American Jewish Congress, a friend asked me: "Did you come in from Hartford especially in honor of Dr. Seidman?" My answer was an emphatic, "Yes! Dr. Seidman deserves special honor!" Dr. Seidman has been a friend of three generations of our family.

My Father, Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor, of blessed memory, knew Dr. Seidman well. There was an even closer relationship between Seidman and my uncle, Rabbi David Avigdor, may G-d avenge his blood, of whom Seidman wrote in his book, *Personalities I Have Known*. This relationship continued in America, where Dr. Seidman and his children befriended our sons when they attended the Torah Vodaas Yeshiva in Brooklyn.

As a boy I used to read Dr. Seidman's articles in Polish. He is a true literary essayist, with an excellent colorful style. When my Father got his doctorate at the University of Lemberg in 1930, the entire Jewish world was astir, especially the

Rabbinical circles. All the newspapers published the picture of this rabbi in his silken rabbinical robe, a broad sash around his waist, and a large kolpak on his head, receiving his diploma.

That was the first time that an Orthodox, Hassidic-type rabbi, a Belz Hassid (my father was known as "the Foreign Minister of Belz": since he knew Polish perfectly, he used to head Belz delegations to the authorities), an outstanding Rabbinic scholar, a Halachic adjudicator, author of books of Halachic responsa, received a university doctorate. To be sure, there were some assimilationist rabbis who had the title doctor, but that a rabbi of Rabbi Jacob Avigdor's type should get a doctorate was a novelty; it was sensational news.

While many people criticized my Father, Dr. Hillel Seidman wrote very respectfully about this rare event. In his fine style he wrote of my Father's life and career and about the work of Jewish philosophy for which he had received his Ph.D. Apparently, the fact that he himself has a Ph.D. enabled Seidman to understand better than other people the conflict and the delicate, hard-to-achieve harmony between Judaism and science. Not everybody succeeds in achieving it.

When the Polish anti-semitic priest Czieczak was leading his infamous campaign in the Polish Sejm (parliament) for a law banning the slaughter of animals, Dr. Seidman and my Father wrote and published booklets defending ritual slaughtering for Jews. After the ban was passed, the Jews got a limited quota of cattle for strictly kosher purposes. As a result, the hind quarters also had to be eaten, and this required porging. My Father opened a course to train butchers and ritual-slaughterers in the process of removing the forbidden thigh sinew of the hind. A special teacher was brought from the city of Brod to conduct the class and students came from many places to Drohobycz to learn this delicate craft.

There was another link. Dr. Seidman was a cousin of one of the great Jews of the time, Rabbi Yekeleh Terkel, who lived in Schydnice, a little village near Drohobycz and Borislaw. He

was a nephew of the famous scholars, the Weidenfeld brothers, one the Rabbi of Dombrowa and the other the Rabbi of Czebin, of blessed memory. Rabbi Yekeleh was a Talmudic genius, whom a wealthy man, Abraham Backenrot, took as husband for his daughter. This Reb Yekeleh used to come to Truskewitz, a spa near Drohobycz, where the Boyan Rebbe, Rabbi Moishenyu Friedman, may G-d avenge his blood, of Cracow, used to come every year. As we also went to Truskewitz every summer, I would attend the lessons given by various great scholars, including Reb Yekeleh Terkel. (In my book I described our being together at an assembly point in Drohobycz, and how I escaped while Reb Yekeleh Terkel and his sons were deported to Belzec.) In the Terkel home I often heard Dr. Seidman's name mentioned very respectfully.

All this is why we – my father, I and the rest of us – remained friendly with Seidman ever since we arrived in America.

The gathering celebrating the publication of Dr. Seidman's book, *Perfidy and Perversion,* included the elite of New York Jewish society: rabbis, journalists, authors and editors, notably Elie Wiesel and Dr. Joseph Churba, the famous military strategist who worked in the Pentagon until recently.

It is no wonder to me that Dr. Seidman was thus honored. When the Men of the Great Assembly in Talmudic times arranged the Amida silent prayer, the "Shmoneh Essray." the situation was probably like ours today. It was after the destruction of the Second Temple, the execution of the ten Sages by the Romans, and the death of Rabbi Akiva's thousands of disciples. So the Sages included in the "Shmoneh Essray" a prayer "For the tzadikim, (the righteous men)." Very few tzadikim, truly pious people elders (i.e., scholars), and scribes had survived the Roman decrees.

The way this 13th prayer of the 18 prayers of the "Shmoneh Essray" is formulated, it appears that only a pre-

cious few people remained of the former religious and itellectual elite, a select few individuals each of whom possesed only one of the qualities listed. The righteous tzadikim were not pious hassidim, the pious ones were not scholars, and the scholars did not know how to write.

The same situation exists today following the Jewish catastrophe in Europe. Very few great talents survived the Holocaust. Dr. Seidman is unique in that he is a harmonious combination of all the above-mentioned qualities: righteousness, piety, scholarship and writing.

Dr. Hillel Seidman's books are all concerned with the pursuit of justice. He takes up the cudgels against all injustice. In his latest book, which deals with the United Nations, he shows how such a heavily Jewish city like New York and nearly all the rest of the world stood by silently for years while the denizens of that great den of vipers by the East River spewed their venom. Nobody said a word against them. The United Nations became a world center of anti-semitism. Dr. Seidman could not let it pass. His book is an outcry to the world.

Seidman is officially known as a Ger Hassid. But his is also close to Lubavitch, Belz and other Hassidic movements. There is no need to prove that Reb Hillel is a scholar. Ever since coming to America nearly 40 years ago he has regularly written on the Torah portion of the week. What especially impresses me is that Dr. Seidman is always careful to give the source of the commentaries he cites. Not all writers do this. Apparently Dr. Seidman wishes to speed the Final Redemption, in accordance with the Talmudic statement: "Whoever cites the source of a quotation thereby brings redemption to the world."

Finally, Dr. Seidman is a supremely gifted writer. He is short, sharp, clear and to the point. His writing is young, fresh, belying his age. He is a fighter, never afraid of a rhetorical duel. He is afraid of no one, for he tells the truth. There are few people like Seidman.

IN THE STRUGGLE OF RUSSIAN JEWRY, A YOUNG HEROIC JEW STOOD UP AND FOUGHT THE GULAGS AND THE GENERAL DISCRIMINATION AND ANTI-SEMITISM OF THE COMMUNIST GOVERNMENT. HE TOOK PART IN THE ATTEMPTED HIGH-JACKING OF A PLANE TO FREEDOM. HIS IDEAL WAS NOT ONLY A DESIRE TO LEAVE RUSSIA, BUT A THIRST FOR A TRUELY COMMITTED RELIGIOUS LIFE AND A THOROUGH STUDY OF JUDAICA WHICH WAS DENIED TO HIM AND SO MANY OTHERS DURING HIS YOUTH.

Yosef Mendelevitch and the Scouts

Yosef Mendelevitch is one of the leading symbols of the heroic and sacred struggle for self-liberation that the Jews of the Soviet Union are waging.

I heard him for the first time when he visited Hartford on June 14, 1984. The gruesome, fantastic tales he told left us all breathless, and helped to clarify for me a passage in the Torah that had always perplexed me.

I had never understood the story of the Ten Scouts who brought such misfortune on the Jewish people. Their sin resulted in our ancestor's having to remain in the wilderness forty years, during which they all died. The generation that was privileged to be delivered from Egyptian bondage, to have the Red Sea split for it to cross and to be given the Torah at Mount Sinai, was not permitted by G-d to enter the Land of Israel.

All the commentators try to understand exactly what the sin of the scouts consisted of, and the account in the Torah raises numerous questions. Two main points had always bothered me and I had never found satisfactory explanations for them.

First, how could ten righteous men, chosen by Moses and approved by G-d for the mission, turn into wicked men in the short period of forty days? How could righteous men slander the Land of Israel and doubt G-d's word?

Secondly, I had always wondered about the inner contradiction in the scouts' report. On the one hand, they confirmed that the Land was "a land of milk and honey." At the same time, they said it was "a land that consumes its inhabitants." How could the Land be these two opposite things simultaneously?

After hearing Mendelevitch, a unique explanation for this apparent contradiction occurred to me. It is true that the scouts were righteous, pious Jews. However, they erred about certain basic principles of the Torah and Judaism. They thought that the Jews can maintain true Yiddishkeit only when they live in difficult conditions, in poverty. They thought that Jews must not enjoy worldly pleasures, must live austerely, ascetically; that Yiddishkeit and faith in G-d can be kept only in cramped conditions, that only in hunger and need does one believe in and pray to G-d. In comfort and luxury, according to this view, one becomes corrupt.

This was the error of the scouts. Judaism ordains that we may and should enjoy the worldly pleasures – we should eat, drink, marry, have children. According to the law, we may taste of all these pleasures. King Solomon said: "Don't be overrighteous." As a matter of fact, we are forbidden to pile on excessive restrictions. We are forbidden to live in want if we are not compelled to do so. People who undertake unnecessary fasts are regarded as sinners. And people who become Nazirites – ascetics – had to bring a sin-sacrifice in the time of the Temples.

There are many Talmudic statements concerning the Jewish lifestyle. For example, "The Shechina – The Divine Presence – does not rest on sad people." Jews are supposed to serve G-d in joy, and that is why we are commanded to celebrate all the festivals as a "time of rejoicing," a time of elation, of physical and spiritual pleasure.

When the scouts entered Eretz Yisrael and saw the prosperity there, saw that it was a land where milk and honey were there for the taking, they were alarmed and they complained: "It is a land that consumes its inhabitants." They were afraid that a land of such easy living would destroy Yiddishkeit, would cause the people to turn smug and rebel against G-d. The trial of wealth is a difficult one. It causes people to forget that there is a G-d, and to think that they achieved their prosperity strictly by their own power.

This may have been the error and great sin of the ten scouts.

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Wherein lies the heroism of Yosef Mandelevitch? In the poverty he underwent? It is not his account of his sufferings, of languishing eleven years in the Gulag, that impressed me. Hundreds of thousands, both Jew and non-Jew have suffered and are suffering in Soviet prisons and camps as he did. Neither were his hunger strikes so sensational. Gandhi also fasted and now Sakharov is fasting. The Jews do not have a monopoly on fasting as an expression of protest.

The physical and psychological suffering, the terrors of interrogation that Mendelevitch underwent – all this we, ghetto and concentration camp people, also experienced on our own skin during the Holocaust period, and descriptions of these do not cause our hair to stand on end.

What I find remarkable is Mendelevitch's true act of heroism and Kiddush Hashem, on his liberation, in going di-

rectly to Israel and sitting down to learn Torah and striving to observe all the mitzvot that he was unable to observe in the Soviet Union.

His studying in a yeshiva in Jerusalem is truly heroic in comparison with the action of thousands of other Soviet Jews who were also liberated from the Soviet hell by means of Israeli documents, but, on reaching Rome or Vienna, headed for America, Canada and other Diaspora lands. Not only were they drawn by material enticements; most of them even abandoned all links with Judaism.

After risking their lives in the Soviet Union in order to gain religious freedom, and the freedom to study Hebrew and Yiddish, they were unable to resist the lure of the wealth and luxury of the Western Diasporas.

We have in Hartford a number of Soviet Jews whom we helped as much as we could. But we do not see them in the synagogues or their children in the yeshivot. It is America that is the land of milk and honey but which consumes its inhabitants, turns its Jews into materialists and causes them to assimilate.

Not only the scouts were afraid of the milk and honey. Our forebears in Poland were also terrified about the prospects of Jewish life in America, where the very rocks were "Treif" as far as they were concerned.

Today, of course, the status of Yiddishkeit has changed radically. But wealth is still the greatest threat to Jewish continuity in Exile.

What Mendelevitch is doing today, despite his bitter life story, is not only a feat of heroism and sanctification of G-d's Name, but also an act of true righteousness: living and studying in Israel in joy and liberty, proudly and honorably – which he well deserves.

הַמָּקוֹם יְנַחֵם אֶתְכֶם בְּתוֹךְ שְׁאָר אֲבֵילֵי צִיּוֹן וִירוּשָׁלָיִם

THE ANCIENT WORDS OF CONSOLATION "AMONGST THE MOURNERS OF ZION AND JERUSALEM" ARE DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND. WHAT SOURCE OF SOLACE DO THEY OFFER TO THE BEREAVED?

והיו עיניך ראות את־מוריך (ישעיה ל. כ.)

(כדרשת רז"ל בהוריות יב. כריתות ו.)

And may your eyes always see your teachers (Isaiah 30:20)

May G-d Console

A friend once asked me how long it was since my father had died.

"Eighteen years," I replied.

"Do you still publish an article on his yahrzeit?"

"Yes, I haven't missed a single year!"

"Do you mean to say you haven't gotten over your grief yet?"

"If I live another hundred years I won't forget a single detail concerning my Father."

"Have you forgotten that the Talmudic Sages tell us that the dead should be forgotten?"

"Well, there are two kinds of remembering."

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This is a conversation I am constantly having with relatives and acquaintances and my answer is always the same: "I remember, and shall never forget, my Father, of blessed memory."

Two human organs contain the archives of a person's memories and experiences. One such storehouse is the brain and the other is the heart. The process of remembering differs in these two organs.

In the heart, memories link up with sentiments of joy and suffering. Such emotions are quickly forgotten. If not for the possibility of forgetting, we would not be able to exist. How would it be possible to carry on if we could never forget the emotions and tension of an extraordinary experience. To carry with us always the burden and the impression of every sad and happy experience we undergo, would be the greatest curse. The heart would not be able to bear it; it would burst. Like medicine, time heals the wounds, softens the sharp pain of sorrow and tones down the intoxicating impressions of joy. The heart laughs and cries, and then forgets.

The death of a relative, especially of a Father and Mother, is the most painful experience that a human being can undergo. But time heals all wounds, both physical and psychological. The seven-day Shivah mourning period, the Shloshim period, the 11-month Kaddish period, the annual Yahrzeit observance, all serve to heal the psychic wound in the heart of the bereaved. The same applies to joy. There is the wedding, followed by the week of Sheva Berachot, the honeymoon-month, the first year in which the bride and groom are considered as a royal couple.

It is quite different where the mind is concerned. The memories that enter the chambers of the brain become hermetically sealed, and time hardly affects them at all. As a matter of fact, sometimes it is precisely the opposite. Sometimes, while the person is undergoing a certain experience, his mind doesn't

grasp at all what is happening. It is only later that he realizes what he underwent.

The memories in the brain's archives are more permanent and remain deeply etched in them. Sometimes a person cannot remember the details of a certain experience, which comes back to him only as a result of some totally unrelated event that revives the memories and opens up pages of the mind, that one did not realize existed. Science knows how to use hypnosis to get the mind to recall forgotten details. Events stored away in the subconscious come back to the front of consciousness the way oil rises to the surface of water.

An interesting fact about the relation of time and memory is the fact that sometimes people can remember every detail of their childhood but cannot remember a single detail about something that happened to them yesterday. That is what the Talmudic Sages must have had in mind when they said that one doesn't forget what one learns in childhood. The mind cannot grasp the workings of the mind, because time and mind function in different dimensions.

I have always found it hard to understand the formulation Jews use to console mourners: "Hamakom Yenachem et'chem betoch she'ar avelay Tzion vi-Yerushalayim" – "May the All-Present console you among the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem."

What kind of consolation is that? What do those words mean?

We never saw the Temple in Jerusalem and not even our grandparents lived at the time of the Destruction. It all happened 2,000 years ago. What personal memories and which direct cause for mourning do we have concerning that event, that G-d Himself should come and console us?

If being consoled means forgetting, the various enemies of the Jews haven't allowed the Jews to be consoled about the Destruction. The burning of the Temple wasn't a one-time

tragedy; but an ongoing process that never ended during our 2,000 years of Exile.

Wherever we were, everything we built was destroyed, as a continuation of the conflagration with which the wicked Titus burned Jerusalem. From ancient Rome to Berlin and Moscow of our time we have been driven and persecuted everywhere on Earth. Everywhere – in Italy, Spain, Germany and France – there is something to remind us of the Destruction: former synagogues and study-houses and cemeteries of what were once great Jewish communities.

We have never had a chance to enjoy forgetfulness, the privilege of forgetting our travails and sorrows. In fact, we were never consoled, until the rise of the State of Israel. And the world begrudges us even that. Small as it is, it seems gigantic to them. So where is the consolation?

Perhaps the consolation lies in the very wording of that traditional Jewish consolation formula, the only formulation that could give us strength and courage, imbue us with hope, instill endurance in us. In all of human history, there is not another nation in the world that has lived through 2,000 years under the most frightful conditions of persecution and discrimination such as the Jews have endured – and we are still here. The greatest historians and scientists must concede that our existence is a Divine miracle, because it cannot be explained in terms of the laws of the pragmatic history of other nations. This is the consolation that G-d has given us – the eternity of the Jewish People. Other nations never rose again after falling. The Jewish People, on the other hand, has gotten back on its feet after every time it has fallen.

G-d's consolation has consisted in the fact that the Jewish heart always healed quickly; no matter how deep the wounds were, the Jews were always happy with "Shma Yisrael" on their lips when they were tied to the stake, and with "Ani maamin" – "I believe" – even when being led to the crematorium. We never despaired. Even sitting on the ground,

chanting dirges of the Prophet Jeremiah's "Lamentations", we did not despair. Every Jew believed that the prophecy that the Messiah would be born on Tisha B'av would be fulfilled.

In our minds we never forgot Zion and Jerusalem, and always continued to believe the Redeemer was very near, that He would come tomorrow if not today. The mind remembered and the heart never despaired. This is the nature with which G-d endowed the Jews.

How else can we explain the command to remember that arch-anti-Semite Amalek? On the one hand we have the double command to "remember . . . do not forget", two commands, given simultaneously at once, to do and not to do something. Then, in that same passage, we are commanded to "Blot out the memory of Amalek." To blot out, erase, means to forget. How can we at one and the same time forget and remember? The command to forget cancels out the command to remember.

The answer is that what is involved here are the two memory archives. We are commanded to erase Amalek from our heart, not to retain bitter feelings about him. And we are told to remember him, never to forget him, in our mind. Amalek's name ought to be etched in our mind forever; we must never forget that "it is axiomatic that Esau hates Jacob." Amalek symbolizes all the enemies of the Jewish People, and we must remember to rely on the friendship of other nations.

So what we say to mourners is that we wish them that G-d should heal the wound in their heart and enable their mind to retain forever the memory of their loved one.

We tell them: May the soul of your dear departed one remain bound up with our souls in the bundle of life, among the living, just as the remnants of the spiritual mourners never forget the Destruction of Jerusalem even though thousands of years have passed. That remembrance is their great consolation. In the same way, may you, in your minds, always remember your dear departed one. That very act of remembering will console you.

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"Is it true that your father is buried in Mexico?"

"Yes. And the reason for that, too, is the formulation of that immortal Jewish consolation wish, "Hamakom yenachem et'chem . . ." What is the meaning of "Hamakom", which literally means "the place", but is used as a designation for G-d? Why don't we say plainly, "G-d", or the "Blessed Holy One"? And why the word "betoch", "in the midst of", rather than "bayn", "among", or "Kemo", "like"?

These two questions have one and the same answer. After our father, may he rest in peace, passed away, my brother and I had to make up our minds whether to bury him in Mexico or transfer his remains to Israel.

We asked ourselves where his grave and gravestone would bring the most comfort to his children and grandchildren, where Rabbi Dr. Avigdor, of blessed memory, would have more mourners, in Israel or in Mexico.

There was no doubt about the answer: Mexico was the place where his memory would be best honored. In Mexico he had had his most creative spiritual years both in writing and in speech. His greatest and best works had been published in Mexico, and above all, that is where he had the most friends.

When I go to the cemetery in Mexico and see the large number of people making pilgrimages to his grave, reciting the Psalms, lighting candles, weeping and pouring out their prayers and petitions, asking their Rebbe and friend to intercede for them and bring balm to their pained hearts, that is my greatest consolation! The place offers me comfort. I am in the midst of other mourners, not only relatives, grieving together with me at the same gravestone. In my heart I feel the words of that old melody, "Ode avinu hai." Our Father Jacob has not died. His spirit lives on.

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As Moses takes leave of the Jews and speaks of the Torah that he received from G-d, he calls out "Miyemino esh dat

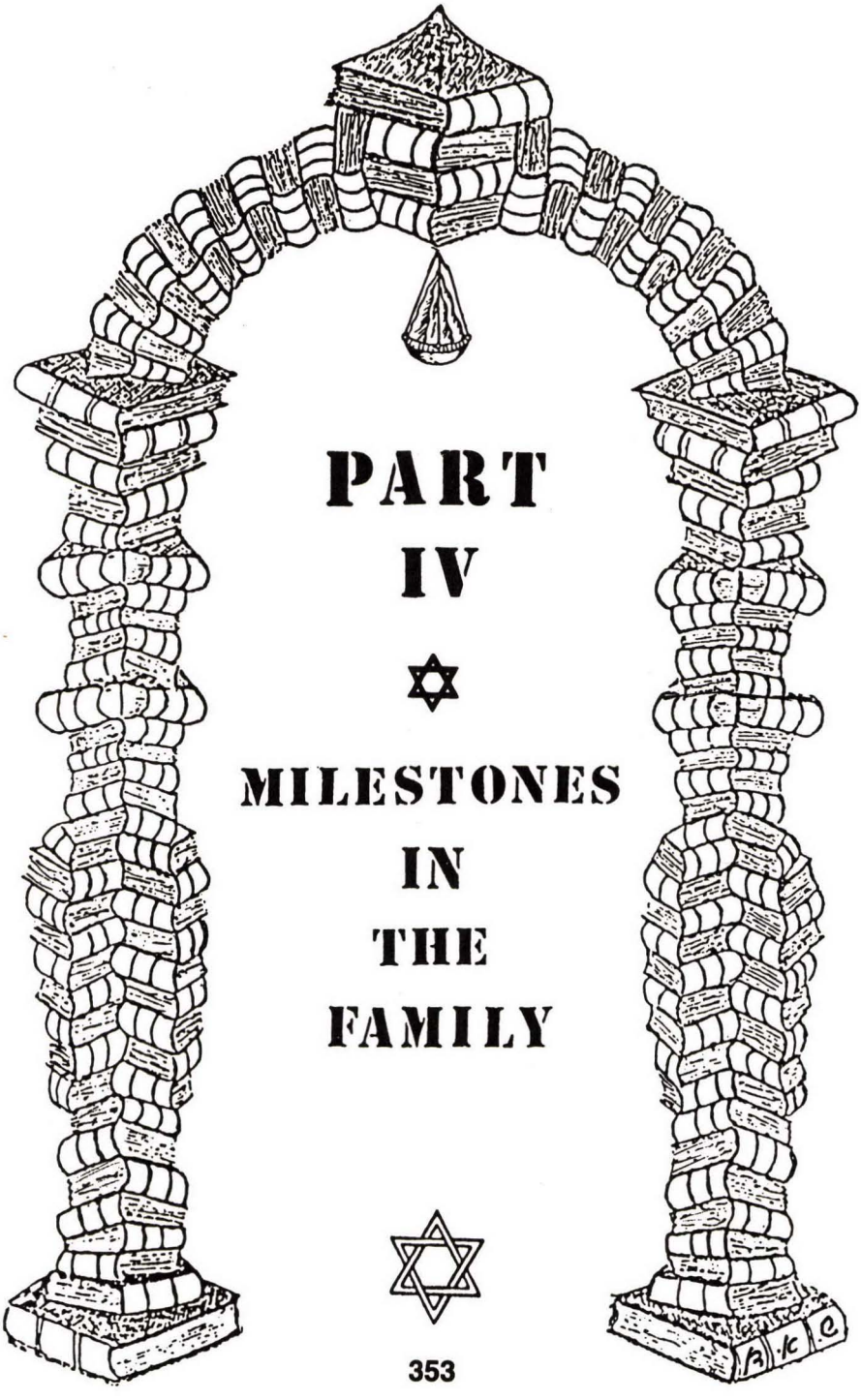
lamo", "From His right hand, a flaming law for them." The Vilno Gaon comments that from this passage we learn that the Torah was given to all who wish to learn it. The Torah belongs to those who study. And it is a tree of life for those who sustain it.

In the term "esh dat", however, which word is the noun and which the adjective? In Hebrew, the adjective always comes after the noun. One doesn't say "gadol ish", but "ish gadol" (literally: "a man great"), exactly the opposite order from that of most languages we know. So in "esh dat", "esh" should be the noun and "dat" the adjective, and the combination should mean "a legal fire", not "a fiery law." If the meaning *is* "a fiery law", then the term should be "dat-esh" and not "esh dat."

In my opinion the reason that the Torah says "esh dat" meaning "a fiery law" is that a Jewish sage is one for whom fire is the noun, the subject, the essence. With fire he kindles various lights, and by his light his disciples forever warm themselves.

That is what happened in the case of Moses. The days of mourning and weeping passed and the hearts healed, but Moses's Torah, his "esh dat", the holy fire of law, lives on. Not only did Moses never die, but the Sages rightly say that on the day that he died he was reborn as his people's teacher for all time.

The teaching of our Father Jacob, of blessed memory, his bright personality, and his fiery mind have bequeathed to all of us an everlasting legacy. The more time passes since the day of his passing, the more I shall remember him all the days of my life.



PART IV

MILESTONES IN THE FAMILY



THIS BOOK IS

Dedicated to

The American Born Girl

ESTHER

36 Years Married

to a

Holocaustnick



Fatherly blessing bestowed upon the three sons, Rabbis, on eve of the New Year, on their way as spiritual leaders to their congregations . . . Hartford Courant, 1985.



The Avigdor men: *(from left to right)* Rabbi David, Jacob Moses, Father, Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Morton Manuel. Picture taken at 30th Anniversary Testimonial as Rabbi of United Synagogues on October 27, 1985.

THE TALMUD STATES THAT ALL MARRIAGES ARE MADE IN HEAVEN. G-D IS THE MATCHMAKER. HE GIVES US LOVE. HE BRINGS US TOGETHER. IF SOMETHING GOES WRONG IN THE RELATION OF A COUPLE, IT IS OF THEIR OWN MAKING. INSTEAD OF IMPROVING UPON G-D'S GIFT OF LOVE AND RESPECT FOR EACH OTHER, THEY SPOIL IT WITH THEIR OWN HANDS.

G-d The Matchmaker

When we returned from Mexico last summer, we were greeted at the airport by our eldest son, Rabbi David Avigdor. With him was a girl he had met a few weeks earlier through a shadchan (matchmaker).

"Who is she?" I asked him.

"A girl from the bottom of the world, from Australia," He replied.

Since she wasn't the first girl our son had taken out, my wife and I attached no special importance to her presence there, regarding it as just another passing episode in the long series of similar ones in the past few years of the life of our very popular son. Ordained by the Torah Vadaat Yeshiva, he has been serving as a rabbi for the past two years. He is also a law-school graduate, a fine cantor, tall, slender, handsome, and lively, and drives his own car. Is it any wonder that he was very popular?

But we were wrong. That same month, our son came from New York to pay me a sick call, accompanied by the same girl. Now we realized that they were serious. We liked the girl, but we had no idea who she was, except that her father was from Poland and her mother from Hungary.

Several days later David told us that "Miss Seifman" had spoken on the telephone to her father in Australia and told him that she was "going steady" with the son of a certain Rabbi Isaac Avigdor and grandson of a former rabbi in Mexico.

On hearing this, her father, Moshe Seifman, had started crying there in Australia. His daughter, on the Brooklyn end of the line, took fright, not understanding what had happened. Mr. Seifman calmed down after a while and told her that he is a *landsmann* of Rabbi Avigdor of Drohobycz-Borislaw, and that Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor of blessed memory had officiated at his wedding 40 years earlier in Poland. He had been in the same concentration camp as Rabbi Isaac Avigdor, and had left their home town with him, been together with him at Plashow and Mauthausen, and was liberated together with him by the U.S. Army on May 5, 1945. Like Rabbi Avigdor, he had then gone to Italy. Subsequently, he went to Australia nearly 30 years ago and settled there.

One month after that telephone conversation, Moshe Seifman arrived from Australia. Since the bride had no family in America, we decided to hold the wedding in our synagogue in Hartford, where the groom, our son David, had been the cantor at the High Holy Day services for the past five years.

There were nearly 1,000 guests at the wedding ceremony, and at the dinner there were 600 outstanding lay leaders, rabbis, and yeshiva teachers (Rashei Yeshiva). Our city had never seen such a wedding, and the local newspapers all carried full reports of the wedding and photographs of the young couple and their parents.

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During the ceremony, under the bridal canopy, I told the young couple:

The Midrash (Shemot Rabba 1:32) tells us: There are three whose destined brides appeared at the well – the Patriarch Isaac, the Patriarch Jacob, and Moses. Eliezer, Abraham's servant, who went to find a suitable bride for Isaac, found our Matriarch Rebecca at the well drawing water. Jacob met Rachel at the well. And Moses found Zippora giving her father's sheep water at the well.

In spite of the similar circumstances of the meetings, there is a difference between the Isaac-Rebecca match and the Jacob-Rachel and Moses-Zippora encounters.

First of all, in Isaac's case, unlike the other two, there was a matchmaker. Isaac had never seen Rebecca and did not know her. The love between them developed only after they were married. Jacob and Moses found their own brides, without the aid of matchmakers, and they married after falling in love. In Jacob's case, the wedding came 14 years after he met and fell in love with Rachel.

Isaac met his mate and married her in a normal manner, without any complications. Jacob and Moses, on the other hand, literally needed miracles in order to impress and please their destined ones. Jacob had to roll a huge stone off the mouth of the well, a stone that no one else was able to budge. Moses had to chase away a band of nasty shepherds. And single-handedly he defeated the gang.

There were also differences in the weddings. I can visualize the way our Patriarch Jacob wept – as the Torah tells us – over the fact that he came to Rachel empty-handed, a pauper, a fugitive, in danger of being slain by his brother Esau, virutally naked and barefoot, with nothing but the staff in his hand and fear in his heart. Jacob knew very well that his mother, Rebecca, had received plenty of presents – gold, silver and precious gems, rings and chains. She had come to his father Isaac from a wealthy home, and lacked for nothing in Abraham's

home. She had whatever she wanted. Isaac and Rebecca did not have to worry about where their food and clothing were going to come from – things that Jacob had to beg from G-d after Esau's son Eliphaz robbed him of all his possessions.

Moses's situation was the same as Jacob's. Moses had fled because Pharaoh wished to execute him. When he met Zippora, all he owned in the world was his shepherd's staff.

And neither Jacob nor Moses had any of his own immediate family at his wedding. Jacob's parents were alive, but unable to be present. Moses's parents, Amram and Yocheved, were slaves in Egypt, not free to escort their son to the bridal canopy.

My dear children: At this moment, I should like you to engrave in your memories how fortunate and privileged you are to have had both your fathers and your mothers present to escort you to the wedding ceremony. A very regal wedding, indeed, was arranged for you, and people have seen to it that you shall have a happy start in your married life.

Your parents did not have the same fortune and privilege. Neither I nor Mr. Seifman was escorted to the bridal canopy by our parents. Thirty years ago, right after the war, we were both refugees, strangers without homeland, not knowing the language of the countries we were living in, without friends, without family. We set out to build homes for you with nothing but our bare ten fingers.

Physically, spiritually, materially and financially alone, broken, lost, we embarked on the struggle to give you a Jewish upbringing under the most difficult circumstances. Like birds we gathered "twigs" from the tables of strangers in order to build you nests. We were in need of miracles, and we literally saw them happen to us in finding our destined spouses.

The Almighty G-d not only delivered us from the ghettos and the camps, but also infused into us faith and courage, hope and trust. G-d was our chief escort at our weddings.

Our prayers today, as they have been all through the years since liberation, are that the same G-d should protect you and all Jewish children from the fate that befell your parents. May you never know such experiences. Your match is truly a blessed one. It was arranged by a matchmaker, but you were in love before the wedding. You know each other, and both your sets of parents know each other. Every one of us knows who the other is. Your wedding is a repast of thanksgiving to G-d for having joined together this second generation, the children of Holocaust survivors, whose parents were sundered from each other by Hitler and his Nazi beasts. Whom the enemy scattered to the four corners of the world, Divine Providence has brought back together. It is quite a way from Australia to America, but G-d knows the shortcuts.

Your celebration is the Jewish People's celebration, a miracle attesting once again the eternity of our people despite our enemies. It is the miracle of "Am Yisrael Chai!" – "The Jewish People lives!" The spring of Judaism shall never dry up.

THE MANY FACES OF ONE HEBREW LETTER "VOV." IT IS A LETTER, A VOWEL AND A CONSONANT. IT CHANGES TENSES AND PERFORMS VARIOUS GRAMMATICAL FUNCTIONS. THE HOLY SCROLL WITH BEGINNING COLUMNS OF "VOV" LETTERS. SPOKEN AT THE WEDDING OF OUR SON, RABBI MORDECHAI MENACHEM AND RIVKA SCHINDLER

These Are The Children

At this solemn moment of your lives, I should like you to take special note of one particular letter of the Hebrew alphabet. It is the most colorful, most powerful letter in our sacred tongue. It possesses tremendous powers, magical powers, and performs various functions in the grammar of our holy tongue.

The Hebrew word for letter, "ot", also means "wonder." It is a controversial paradoxical letter. It has no equal. No other letter of the Hebrew alphabet is as colorful as the letter "vav."

The letter "vav" is a vowel, actually two vowels: the "oo" (as in "boot" and the "o" (as in "gold"). But it is also a consonant – that is, a letter that cannot be articulated without a vowel.

The name of the letter, "vav", means "hook." It was used in the Tabernacle, where the parochet (the curtain) was held by golden hooks. That may be why the letter "vav" at the beginning of a word stands for the conjunction "and", which links two words or thoughts to each other. This vav is called the "Vav Hachibbur."

But the "vav" also plays an important role in the Hebrew language as the "vav hahipuch." In this role, the "vav" at the beginning of a verb in the past tense converts it into the future tense, and vice versa. For example, "yedabber" means "he will speak." But in the Chumash (Pentateuch) we run across so many instances of "vayedabber", meaning, "and he spoke." On the other hand, "ahavta" means "you loved." But in the Chumash we find several times, Ve'ahavta" meaning, "and you shall love," the future tense or the imperative case.

That frail, skinny letter "vav" performs the trick of turning past into future and future into past.

But that isn't all. The "vav" fulfills another function, as the "Vav Hamossif." For example, the word "ayleh", "these", cancels out what preceded it. But "ve'ayleh", "and these", means "these" in addition to what comes before. Here the "vav" connotes not only a continuation, but also an increase, an improvement, a reinforcement.

These three functions of the letter "vav" may be compared to the three types of relationships that exist between parents and children. In some families, the children are a continuation of their parents, linked up to their fathers and mothers. Such a family is a fraternity, whose members aren't cut off from each other. In such families there runs a golden chain of generations, with each new child being an additional link.

Unfortunately, in our time there are many families in which parents and children don't get along with each other, in which there is no connection between the generations, in which there are no bridges linking the generations, whose members don't speak to or understand each other.

The younger generation is a topsy-turvy generation, one that does everything precisely opposite to what the parent generation does. Whatever the parents suggest, the children say: "Why not the opposite?" The children are clamoring wildly: "We reject the old-fashioned ways and we refuse to follow them. We want to build a new order." Nothing that the older genera-

tion does pleases the younger one. The youth wants to go in precisely the opposite direction. G-d protect us from this. There is no greater grief than that of parents who find themselves having to weep, "I have raised children and they have transgressed against me." (Isaiah 1:2)

But there is a third type of generation, one that adds. This is a generation of children who not only are linked up, close, tied to their parents, but who also enlarge, increase, augment the legacy of their parents, improve, broaden, enrich it. Their link in the golden chain is not only pure gold but is also studded with the most precious diamonds. Concerning such children it is written: Blessed are the parents who can boast of sons and daughters who are better than they, richer, more pious, wiser, stronger, an addition to the chain to which they are linked.

The Talmudic Sages say that a man may be jealous of everyone, but he does not envy his son or his disciple. They understood human nature very well, and ascertained that there is jealousy in all family relationships but one, that between fathers and their children, and between teachers, the spiritual fathers and their disciples. No father or teacher begrudges his children or pupils their success. On the contrary, the more their children surpass them, the more they rejoice in them.

So like the letter "vav", the three generations serve, respectively, the function of connecting, reversing and augmenting. The last function, augmenting, is a very serious matter. In adding elements to our Jewish practice, we must be very careful not to desecrate G-d's Name instead of sanctifying and glorifying it. Not every addition is a good thing. We know of the Halachic principle that too much of a certain thing sometimes renders the whole impure, invalid. Where only one of something is needed, two are as good as nothing. An animal that has two hearts or more than the normal number of any limb or organ is as unkosher as if it had none at all.

If children wish to become better, more pious than their parents, they should do so discreetly, gently. They should do so

in a manner that brings honor and pleasure to their parents, in a loving manner, in a manner that adds both to their own and to their parents' lives.

If the Book of Genesis is called "the Book of the Patriarchs", then the book of Exodus, which we begin reading this week, can safely be called "the Book of the Children." It even opens with, "And these are the names of the Children," "Ve'aylah shmot bnay Yisrael." It begins with a "vav" that connects, linking up the first book with the second, creating continuity between the Patriarchs' and the children's generations. And the 12 sons of Jacob the progenitors of the Twelve Tribes, were not only a continuation of their father; they also added something of their own, especially Joseph.

Joseph was exactly what his name means. The root of the word "yosef" in Hebrew means "add", "increase." And it is because of his refinement and gentleness that Joseph earned the designation "Hatzaddik", "the Righteous One." We do not speak of "Jacob the Righteous" or "Isaac the Righteous", but we do have, for all time, "Joseph the Righteous." His "addition" to his brothers and to his father was of the highest quality.

I pray that the names of Rabbi Mordechai Menachem and Rivka shall be in the category of "Ve'ayleh", with a connecting "vav", and that what they add, shall serve the purpose of strengthening, enlarging, improving and broadening the golden chain of Jewish posterity.

An especially precious Torah Scroll is one in which the first word of each column begins with the letter "vav", showing the unity of the Torah in that the columns, although separate, are yet all connected to each other, from the first to the last. Such a Torah is called "Vav Amudim Torah." By the same token, we hope that our children, though different from each other, will nevertheless remain bound to each other in the bond linking them to the roots of their holy forebears. May it be G-d's will.

RELIGIOUSLY OUR LIFE IS DIVIDED INTO 5 STAGES: BIRTH, BRIT (CIRCUMCISION), BAR MITZVA, BRIDAL CANOPY, BURIAL (5 B'IEA) BUT CHRONOLOGICALLY THE ORDER MAY DIFFER WITH VARIOUS PEOPLE.

AT THE SHEVA BERACHOT OF OUR SON, RABBI MORDECHAI MENACHEM AND RIVKA SCHINDLER AVIGDOR

For Torah, the Bridal Canopy and Good Deeds

I welcome the relatives and friends who have joined us at this festive Sheva Berachot repast in honor of our children.

I have long wondered why a marriage ceremony is not called "Brit", meaning "covenant", rather than "Kiddushin", meaning "sanctification", and why the circumcision ceremony is not called "Kiddushin" rather than "Brit."

"Brit," as noted, means "covenant," "bond," which is most appropriate for the occasion when a man and a woman are united into "one flesh." The marriage ceremony is the true covenantal occasion, when two bodies are joined into one, when two spirits, two souls, are merged into one, crowned with the crown of sacred love.

What is "bound" at the Brit rite besides bandages? The Brit Mila is a "severing" rather than a "binding" ceremony. Cutting certainly is not an act of merging two into one. The Brit rite should be called Kiddushin, because it is a Sanctifica-

tion of G-d's Name attested by the newly circumcised infant's blood. Rightly do we say at this ceremony, "By your blood shall you live." It is a holy sacrifice on the altar of our faith in our G-d. How much blood has our Jewish people shed over the generations and millenia for the privilege of circumcising its sons!!

At the Brit Mila ceremony, the child and G-d, both are sanctified. It is a double sanctification. So why is it not called Kiddushin rather than Brit?

This, however, is not the only question I have about the circumcision and marriage ceremonies. At the former, we proclaim aloud: "Just as he (the newly circumcised child) has entered the Covenant of Our Patriarch Abraham, so may he enter the world of Torah, the bridal chamber, and the fulfillment of good deeds." It seems to me that the order is wrong from the chronological standpoint.

As far as Torah is concerned, we know that the child's education begins when he is still in his mother's womb. Before the child came into the world, his parents had dealt with building a home and an ambience, fit to raise Jewish children in. The home is more important than any school. Each time we recite the Shma every day we say: "And you shall speak of (the words of the Torah) in your home." Most of the child's learning is done at home, from his parents, especially where character, ethics and etiquette are concerned. The learning of Torah must begin as early as possible, the sooner the better. So we are right in placing Torah immediately after "the Covenant of our Patriarch Abraham." But why does the bridal chamber come before the good deeds?

Before getting married, a boy becomes Bar-Mitzva, and he is obligated to start performing good deeds at age 13. On reaching this age of Jewish responsibility, he is commanded to observe the mitzvot – to do the right things and avoid doing the wrong things. In order to be properly prepared for this, to know how a Jew is supposed to conduct himself, a boy must receive a thorough Jewish education from age 3 to 13. Only later, when

he turns 18, is he ready to marry and start building his own home and family.

I also have a third question, one that nearly everybody asks: Why is a 13-year-old boy not referred to as a "Bar-Mitzvot", in the plural? After all, it isn't only one mitzva that is involved! In Rabbinic parlance we speak of a Bar-Mitzva boy having "reached the age of mitzvot" – i.e., many mitzvot, not just one. Why Bar Mitzva not Bar Mitzvot?

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All these questions can be answered with one thought. A Jewish boy is born physically capable of observing the entire Torah, except for one mitzva, the most important one since Creation, the mitzva of "be fruitful and multiply." The newborn boy is not yet capable of procreating, the fulfilling of the first mitzva in the listing of the 613 mitzvot.

Of the 613 mitzvot, then, there are only 612 that the newborn boy is technically able to perform and one that he is not. What he has is "brit", a Hebrew word whose letters are the numerical equivalent of 612. The technical possibility of having children comes only 13 years after the Brit – the circumcision rite. This is why we call the boy turned 13 a Bar-Mitzva, for now he has reached puberty and acquired a potential that he lacked at birth.

It follows, then, that it is right that Torah comes first in the order of the blessings we wish the boy at his Brit. First he has to be educated. Then, at age 13, comes the possibility of procreation – that is, the technical possibility of observing all 613 mitzvot.

There may be another reason why "bridal chamber" comes before the "good deeds" in the blessing order. And that is: a good wife enables a man to perform good deeds. It is commonly said that when they marry, a boy and a girl lose their freedom. Judaism believes that the situation is precisely the opposite.

Before marriage, one is a slave of nature and of one's negative passion. Only after getting married does one become truly free. And there is the additional factor that it is easier for two people together to confront life than one alone.

And when I speak of marriage at age 13, I am not joking. Our ancestor 150 years ago, Rabbi Avraham Issachar Ber Avigdor, of blessed memory, got married on his Bar-Mitzvah day. He used to speak of the fact that he put on his Tefillin and his Tallit for the first time on the same day. In our circles, particularly in those days, a boy did not wear a Tallit until he married.

G-d grant that our young couple should have a long and happy marriage, and that the line they establish should endure forever. Amen.

OUR FOUR SONS ARE ALL DIFFERENT IN SIZE – COLOR AND CHARACTER – EACH NEEDED A DIFFERENT HANDLING, THOUGH ALL VERY EDUCATED TO FOLLOW THE SAME DIRECTION. FROM CIRCUMCISION THROUGH BAR MITZVA AND WEDDINGS OF THE TWO OLDEST, WE HAVE BEEN REWARDED WITH 6 GRANDCHILDREN, 5 GIRLS AND ONE BOY, GIVING US THE NACHAS AND PRIDE WE PRAYED FOR.
ON THE BAR MITZVA OF OUR YOUNGEST SON, YAACOV MOSHE

Joy from Children

In the Jewish year 5741, we were blessed with two very happy events in our private lives. We had the privilege of escorting our second son, Rabbi Mordechai Menachem, to the bridal canopy, and we celebrated the Bar Mitzva of our youngest child, Yankele – in Israel at the Western Wall and at home in our synagogue.

Both events reminded us that we are getting older. My wife and I have ended the cycle of Bar Mitzvas and entered the period of weddings and grandchildren. We are, thank G-d, grandparents. Naturally, such happy occasions call for praise and thanksgiving to the Master-of-the-Universe. I praise G-d for sustaining me through the ghettos and concentrations camps, enabling me to survive, "Echod Mini Elef", one remnant out of a thousand from each community in Poland, to overcome the conflagration – to survive and live to have such joy from children and grandchildren.

If the Holy Temple were standing today, we would surely be obligated to bring thanks – offerings to G-d. As it is, I should like to express my thanksgiving and praise in words, a verbal thanks-offering on finishing a year so blessed and an expression of the wish that the new year will be a similarly blessed one.

What is more important, a wedding or a Bar Mitzva? When a wedding and a Bar Mitzva occur simultaneously and one can go to only one of them, which is one supposed to attend?

Interestingly, there are three opinions of this. One, that of the Zohar, is that "The day on which people bring their sons into the Shrine of G-d is as great as the day of their children's marriage." In other words, a Bar Mitzva celebration and a wedding are of equal importance. This is the interpretation of the ZOHAR-KABALA, the study of mysticism.

The Talmudic Sages, however, say that a Bar Mitzva celebration is more important than a wedding. The explanation is that at a wedding, the young couple undertakes only one mitzva, to "be fruitful and multiply," whereas a Bar Mitzva boy undertakes all 613 mitzvot, the entire Torah, at once. At a wedding, one does not know whether the couple will indeed, be able to fulfill the Torah's first mitzva "to be fruitful and multiply," to have children. They may turn out to be childless, or perhaps they will get divorced – a very widespread phenomenon today. With a Bar Mitzva boy, there is no doubt that the boy is assuming the yoke of mitzvot.

The third view is that a Bar Mitzva celebration is much less important than a wedding. This view is based on the logic according to which a merchant would rather sell goods for cash at a smaller profit than for long, drawn out payments even if at a greater profit. The wedding, to be sure, involves only the one mitzva of "be fruitful and multiply." But this is "cash on the spot." A man and a woman bind themselves to each other in the bond of marriage, undertaking to live together and build a family. This is an act of sanctification, a mitzva performed. A Bar

Mitzva celebration involves only the promise of an inexperienced, unestablished boy, without a record of performance to indicate whether he will indeed be able to fulfill his promise. Indeed, we see in our own time what happens to the promises made by Bar Mitzva boys at their sumptous banquets.

It is true, as the old saying has it, that "It doesn't cost anything to promise." The large majority of Bar Mitzva boys today cannot really be relied upon to keep their promises. They forget about the Tefillin, the elegant Tallit, the synagogue, the rabbi and all the rest.

That is why many great rabbis contend that the fancy Bar Mitzva celebrations we see are worthless. It has become a desecration of G-d's Name instead of being a sanctification of the Name, which the wedding is. "It is better not to pledge than to pledge and not fulfill," Ecclesiastes tell us.

But those who contend that the Bar Mitzva celebration is more important, cite the Halacha in support of their position. There is a law that says that when a person declares that he *intends* to donate something to a holy cause, that object thereby becomes the property of that cause, just as an ordinary object became the property of the person who has paid for it and taken possession of it. By this principle, the Bar Mitzva boy's mere declaration that he undertakes to keep the Torah is a great mitzvah.

Our son Yankele is young in years, but he has a fine reputation for his scholarship, his singing, and the way he conducts the service and reads the Torah since early boyhood, long before he turned thirteen. He is, thank G-d, an established firm with the highest credit rating. He couldn't wait to start putting on Tefilin, and indeed we brought him to the Western Wall in Jerusalem two months before his Bar Mitzva day. There his powerful voice rang out in the presence of relatives and such important guests as Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren and his wife. At the festive meal he delivered a discourse in Hebrew in the time-honored manner. (Some say that the most important part

of the Bar Mitzva celebration is the boy's discourse.)

On our return home, we made a celebration in our synagogue. At the very spot in the synagogue where his Brit Mila took place, there was fulfilled the blessing said at a Brit: "Just as he has entered the Covenant of our Patriarch Abraham, so may he enter the Covenant of Torah" – exactly at the spot where he was circumcised, there was he called to the Torah as a Bar Mitzva boy. Nearly 500 people celebrated together with us, and everyone proudly felt that a Bar Mitzva celebration of this sort is much more important than an average wedding of today. There is, thank G-d, no doubt that Yankele will keep his promise to observe the Torah and fulfill the Mitzvot in every detail.

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Since we are now concluding the Bar Mitzva series of our four sons, I shall take the liberty, as our Patriarch Jacob did, of portraying them to you, each with his good qualities and shortcomings. And they all differ from each other – children of the same father and mother, to be sure, but different from each other.

As we know, four liquids were used in the Temple. There was the olive oil for the candelabrum and the gift offerings. Then there was the wine poured on the Rosh Hodesh and festival sacrifices. The third was the honey used for the Tamid offering, among others. Finally, and most important of all, was water, without which the Temple service could not be performed. Our sons are like these four elements.

Our eldest, Rabbi David, is like olive oil. It is not easy to produce olive oil. It is produced only after a difficult process of pressing and squeezing. The olive yields oil under tremendous pressure. That is how it was with our eldest child.

As of today, Rabbi David is, Thank G-d, a respected rabbi in New Haven, not far from Hartford. Besides rabbinical ordi-

nation and his serving his community as a Rabbi, he has received his law degree and practices as a lawyer during the week. He and his wife Sussane (Seifman) have three daughters Rachael, Honey and Malka. But his education was a very difficult matter. It took a great deal of pressure to get him to learn. It is no disgrace to relate this joyously today. I and my Reb David, who today is really "highly refined olive oil for the (Temple's) candelabrum," to G-d and to his fellow men – both of us are proud of the period of pressure and stress that were needed in the educational process that brought him where he is today. He tells me what I used to tell my Father: "If only you had driven me a little harder."

Our second son, Rabbi Mordechai Menachem, is like good wine. Grapes don't have to be squeezed too hard. Some of their juice they yield voluntarily and the rest comes out only with a squeeze. And that is exactly what we did. When necessary, we applied stern disciplinary pressure, and even the strap. Thank G-d, he turned out as someone of whom we and the yeshiva where he studied are proud. His ordination came with special praise by all Deans of the Rabbinic Seminary. He also studied law, like his elder brother, and is a practicing lawyer in New York. At the same time, he occupies a rabbinical pulpit in New York, and like good wine that "makes the heart happy," so do people derive pleasure from him and love him very much. He is married to Rifka (Schindler) and they now have two daughters, Chavey, Zelda and a son, Avrum Yisachar Ber.

Our third son, Rabbi Meir, is like honey. Honey does not have to be expressed. It drips of its own accord, without external pressure. Such is Meir. He does not have to be reminded, begged or threatened. He does everything of his own accord. He understands things without too much explanation and he has a better nature than his brothers. We never had to raise our voices to him; he understood things from a glance, a hint. He is a good student, thank G-d, by now ordained by the Torah

Voda'as Yeshiva – the same one his brothers attended – and he has also completed his B.A. in administration and computers at Touro College. We never had to use the strap on him.

Ten years ago my wife threw the strap away. I begged her to let it hang on the wall, promising not to use it anymore, but she insisted . . .

Last but not least comes our youngest, Yankele. He is like a spring of fresh, clear water. He was our consolation after the passing of my great father of blessed memory and of my father-in-law, Reb Moshe Horowitz, may he rest in peace. He is named after his two grandfathers.

We have felt rejuvenated, refreshed, in the 13 years since his birth. Without him our home would have been empty and life would have been sad, lonely. He revived us the way water revives a thirsty wayfarer on a hot day.

These, then, are our four sons – all different, but all together a source of great joy and pride for us and for all Jewry, a worthy continuation of the golden chain of our family tradition.

It is customary to speak of the travails of raising children. To be sure, there is a great deal to do in the raising of four sons. There was no lack of travail. But it has all been worthwhile. May there be more like them.

THE ROLE OF A RABBI, THE MISSION OF A SPIRITUAL LEADER IS A CHALLENGING ONE. THE EDUCATIONAL PREPARATION, THE LONGEST OF ALL PROFESSIONS, 15 YEARS OF STUDY UNTIL ORDINATION, AND THE APPRECIATION OF A RABBI IS THE LEAST AMONGST OTHER OCCUPATIONS. THE ONLY CONSOLATION IS THAT MOSES, THE FIRST AND GREATEST OF ALL, DIDN'T HAVE IT ANY EASIER OR BETTER.

Letter to Our Third Son Rabbi Meir, Upon His Ordination

Dear Son, Reb Meir, Shlita,

Your ordination (Smicha) to the Rabbinate with the distinction of "Yoreh Yoreh" (there are various categories in the terminology of the text in the Smicha certificate) has brought to me and your mother an unlimited measure of Nachas.

To our family, it means that the burning bush of centuries of rabbinic ancestry will be assured continuity for another generation. The Avigdor bush will not be consumed.

In my time, the rabbinic studies, of a young man in a Seminary, had one specific goal. The attaining of Torah scholarship was the fulfillment of a Mitzvah that led to the assumption of the Rabbinate as a life's profession.

It was understood that the basic requisite to become a Rabbi, was one's scholarly ability to accumulate Torah Talmud knowledge as the training for the vocation of becoming a Rabbi.

Regarding the ancient dispute in the Halacha as to what is more important, Torah or Maaseh (learning or action) tradition ruled that Torah study wins the first place only when it leads to Maaseh, to practical deeds.

Rare indeed were the cases of students, who dedicated their life's most important years to "Torah Li'shmo", study for the sake of "textolatry" with no intention to make use of it as a profession. We considered it a luxury very few could afford.

From my earliest youth, I always wanted to be a Rabbi and to this commitment, I geared all my efforts and talents. I considered the following in my Father's footsteps, my duty, my mission in life.

I knew all about the frustrations and disappointments, the Rabbinic profession brings along and I was resigned to accept them without grudgery. I watched my Father serving a Kehila of European style, with its range of community problems, that no American Rabbi can possibly imagine or understand.

I decided to continue with a missionary zeal to carry on the torch of this professional – individualistic family vocation, because I had no other choice. I was not prepared for anything else.

By now, for over forty-five years, I tolerated the many vicissitudes and challenges of being an orthodox Rabbi and I learned not to begrudge or complain about them. I say quite often to myself, that I could not be better off than Moses, the first Rabbi, who suffered endless insults and abuse from his people.

Throughout the years, I hung in there, despite the problems that drove the sleep away from my eyes for many nights, and the frustration that sapped the strength, courage and vigor from my bones.

How often, though, have I wished I had a second profession to fall back on. The long hours, the intense pressures and yes,

the low pay, have many times shaken my sense of chosenness to remain in service of G-d and his people.

On various occasions, I tried to escape and abandon my calling and get involved in some business propositions, that seemed more lucrative, but they all failed to materialize. I remained a Rabbi by choice and by chance. The condition of orthodox Rabbis in many Congregations is that of being maligned, abused and denigrated. There are always factions, griping and beefing against each other and the Rabbi is dragged into the middle of each turmoil. The Rabbi lives in fear and trepidation of becoming embroiled in a petty strife, where he usually is the victim of hostility and criticism.

The times have changed. Looking, watching, thinking, has made the most capable Yeshivah students, after their ordination, refuse to enter the active Rabbinate. Instead, they pursue other fields such as medicine, accounting, law, computers or government positions.

So, in a way, I envy you and your older brothers, who have prepared themselves, along with their studies for ordination, to be able to attain a secular vocation, or combine both.

You will be spared the stress and tension, that was mine as well as that of many colleagues in similar positions. Your becoming a Rabbi makes us proud, but your majoring in business administration gives us peace of mind, satisfaction and personal joy.

My son, remember that very few people can trace back their descendence for more than three or four generations. After that, their ancestry is anonymous, steeped in deep darkness of the unknown – the oblivion.

You are fortunate to be a link in a golden chain of continuous generations of renowned Rabbis and scholars, reaching back all the way to the dynasty of King David.

Whatever you will do to make a living, you will always be an ordained Rabbi – a Talmudic scholar and academician, to

which you dedicated the best study years of your life. Never think that you have finished learning, for only further study will lead you to a deeper and fuller understanding of your heritage.

My son, remember that you are a son of a Holocaust survivor, whose generation experienced the most brutal and ferocious atrocities in human history. Six million of our brothers and sisters were poisoned and burned, hunted, tortured, drowned, butchered and choked by a well educated and cultured nation of Germany in the heart of Europe. While this was happening, the world went about its business, deaf to the cries of mothers who saw their children cut up or shot before their eyes and sighs of children who were made to watch the agonies of their parents. We Jews live like one a rock surrounded by an ocean of hate and indifference. We are alone and isolated in this world for the last 2,000 years. We are not sure of tomorrow and we never know, when and from where the next storm may come.

You must be alert and courageous, proud and honorable.

Merrill dear, the way of life we prepared you for, is much too precious to give up, because of the folly of the surrounding environment we live in today. The philosophy that modern man in our society professes is just an excuse for his inability to cope with himself. He feels empty within himself and he tries to escape, by artificial means, hiding his irrational style of life. As he ages, he looks back over his wasted life, a life in which he catered to his selfish desires and evil passions only.

What memories does he have? What satisfaction does he realize? What is he leaving for the next generation to cherish and honor?

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Our religion refuses to crown its priests like other faiths of the Western world do, adorning their priests and ministers

with crowns, rings and purple garments. The Jews place their crown upon the Torah. It matters not how tiny or great the Synagogue is, its Torah carries the crown. No Rabbi may bedeck his flesh and bones with the crowning royal vestment. We are the "AM-HASEYFER", the people of the book and the book is the King!

By your achieving ordination, you have placed a new golden crown, not on your head, but on the Torah Scroll. By turning to a secular profession, you will not profane the ordination you received, but follow in the footsteps of the great sages of the Talmudical Era, who labored as craftsmen in various trades, while serving in their free time as deans and scholars in the rabbinic academies.

May the Almighty bless you and may He guide you in all you do.

Your everloving Father

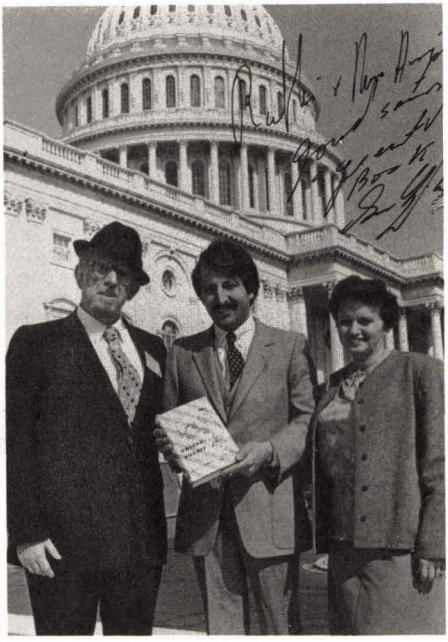


Father OB"M *(in center)* with a group of his students in New Sanz. On the left Uncle Rabbi David Avigdor. On the right Dr. Abraham Zweig (now in New York). Standing on the extreme left Uncle Meir Avigdor. The others unknown.



The Ohel (mausoleum) erected by the Jewish Community in Mexico over the gravesite of Father OB"M. The structure symbolized 3 Volumes of his lifetime service as a Rabbi in Poland, New York, and Mexico. Inside there is room for 10 people to pray and an area for candle lighting. *(From left to right: Rabbi David, Esther Avigdor and brother Dr. Abraham B. Avigdor).*





Presenting "From Prison to Pulpit" to (left) Governor Ella Grasso and (right) U.S. Congressman Sam Gejdenson.



At reception on White House Lawn in honor of Prime Minister Menachem Begin and his wife Alisa, May 1, 1978. Author, President & Mrs. Jimmy Carter.

WE DEFIED HIM!

"I do not think it would be wise to exterminate the adult Jewish men and women . . . leaving their children to grow into avengers against our sons or grandsons.

"The decision had to be made to annihilate as well every Jewish child and to make this people disappear from the face of the earth.

"This is being accomplished."

—Excerpt from a speech by Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer-SS, to Gauleiters, October 6, 1943—Germany

Address of author :

25 Overhill Road

West Hartford, Conn. 06117



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Isaac C. Avigdor is the spiritual leader of the United Synagogues of Greater Hartford for the past 30 years (1955-1985). He is the son of a famous Jewish scholar, the late Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor, chief Rabbi of Mexico.

Born in Poland, Rabbi Avigdor attended various European Rabbinical Seminaries and studied at the University of Lwow, where he majored in philosophy. Ordained in 1938, he was assisting his father as Rabbi in Boryslaw, Poland. When the war broke out he was incarcerated by the Germans for five years in several concentration camps including the infamous Mauthausen.

Liberated on May 5th 1945 by the American Army, the immediate post-war years found the author involved in rescue and rehabilitation work on behalf of refugee children in religious villages and kibbutzim in Austria, Hungary, Italy, France and Belgium.

Upon his arrival in the United States, Rabbi Avigdor became director of the Yeshiva Rabbi Solomon Kluger, later principal of the Yeshiva Academy of Long Island, followed by three years of service as Executive Vice-President of Hapoel Hamizrachi in New York.

Rabbi Avigdor is the author of several books in Hebrew, Yiddish and English and numerous articles in religious periodicals. He is a recipient of several literary awards and an honorary Ph.D. degree from the College of Applied Science in England.

Active as a communal leader as well as on the national level, he is past president of the Rabbinical Council of Connecticut, a member of the Executive of the Rabbinical Council of America and of the New England Board of Rabbis, Past President of the Mizrachi chapter of Greater Hartford and member of the National Executive of the Mizrachi movement of America.



Isaac C. Avigdor, Author of

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