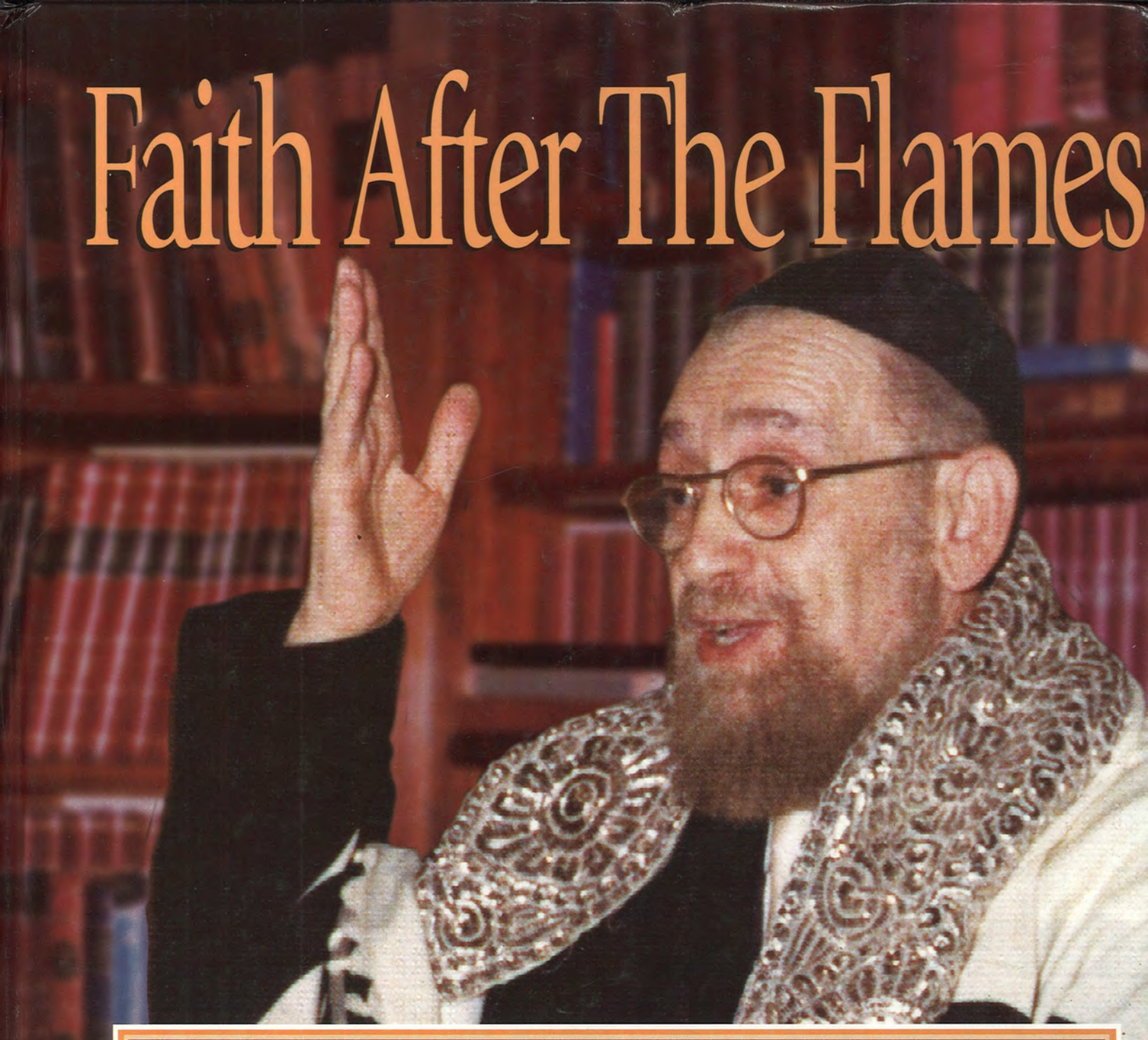
Faith After The Flames



The Life Story Of

Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor זצ"ל

A Spiritual Leader Who Never Lost Hope

by Rabbi Dr. Isaac C. Avigdor

הרב ד"ר יעקב אביגדור

זצ"ל

בגיא צלמות

FAITH AFTER THE FLAMES

The Life Story of Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor

A spiritual leader who never lost hope

By Rabbi Dr. Isaac C. Avigdor

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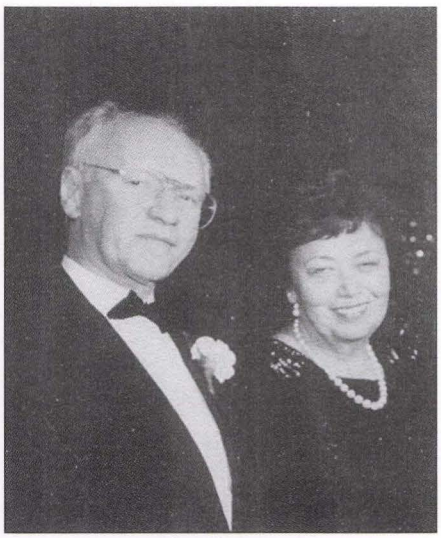
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Diana



Eli and Diana



Eli and Rabbi Isaac Avigdor

Eli Zborowski greets and welcomes Rabbi Dr. Isaac C. Avigdor as his guest at the 20th Annual Tribute Dinner at the Sheraton New York Hotel on Sunday, November 7, 2004 saying, "You are the continuous important historian of Yad Vashem archives, telling the world about the rare and unusual atrocities committed by the Nazi's. "Your new book 'Faith After the Flames' is a documentary."

Mrs. Diana Zborowski o.b.m.

This comprehensive life story of one of the great scholars, authors and philosophers, the only surviving rabbi of the horrible Buchenwald Concentration Camp, Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor, is dedicated to the loving memory of our own hometown "landsliet" of Drohobycz.

DIANA ZBOROWSKI

Diana was the beloved wife of the Hon. Eli Zborowski, who is Chairman of the American and International Societies for Yad Vashem.

None of this project, could have possibly come into being without the wisdom, dedication, support and leadership of Eli Zborowski. The Jewish world is everlastingly thankful to him for his continuous role in sustaining and transmitting the holy legacy of the *kidoshim*, through the Yad Vashem archives.

Yad Vashem is the home of holocaust memories. The museum contains collective records of pieces of information, documentation, research and citations of the Shoah gathered from all over the world for the last sixty years.

Along with this general admiration and recognition of Eli Zborowski, as the father and founder of Yad Vashem, not many are aware of the role that his wife Diana played as the first lady. She stood by Eli, hand in hand inspiring, guiding and guarding him step by step from the very beginning, until the last Gala Dinner on November 7, 2004 at the Sheraton Hotel in New York which Diana attended. We always had the pleasure of sharing personal memories of our hometown Drohobycz. She knew and remembered my father, sisters and the whole family. It was her gift to my wife Esther and myself, to attend all the Yad Vashem dinners for the last 20 years as her honored guests. We were always seated together with several other Drohobyczer "landsmen".

Diana's demise has mostly affected her beloved husband Eli, but her loss to Jewry worldwide, especially Israel and Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, will eternally be mourned, and she will be remembered as a great and noble woman.

Table of Contents

Thankful Acknowledgments 6
Foreword 7
The Avigdor Sephardic Lineage 13
The Golden Horowitz Chain 16
Autobiography I, written by Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor 20
Autobiography II, written by Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor 30
The Surroundings (The Golol) of Drohobycz-Boryslaw 43
Biography of a Renowned Scholar 51
Belzer Rebbe, Arele Rokeach, Zatzal, Visit Drohobycz 55
Gala Hometown Wedding of Menachem & Alisa Begin 59
Memorial Tribute by Rabbi Dr. Hershel Klepfish 69
The Camp Calendar of Buchenwald 95
My Reluctance to Start a Family 107
What Did it Take to Survive? 113
Martyrs and Survivors, Deserve the Title of "Kdoshim" 117
A Father's Startling Discovery 123
An Argument 128
A Din Torah in a Ghetto Hideout 130
Basic Information About Agunah 135

Original Agunah Document 141
Mexico 155
Preface to Life in Mexico City 155
Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor's Weekly work Schedule 169
Avigdor Post War Family 171
"Yaakov Avinu Lo Meis" (Jacob Our Father Did Not Die) ...173
Christianity in light of Halacha By: Rabbi Dr. Y. Avigdor 203
Comments 226
Reaction in Rabbinic Press about Rabbi Avigdor 255
Good Deeds Aren't Forgotten 257
"Vuv Hachibur" The Hebrew Letter of Continuance 263
Religious Observances in Buchenwald 265
The Miraculous Rise of Chassidism 269
G-d's Forgiveness 274
Why we Celebrate a Second Bar Mitzvah 279
Masquerades that were not Purim fun 284

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I was fortunate in obtaining several friends and family members to back me as sponsors for this expensive undertaking. I am most grateful for their help.

My prayers and blessings go out to all who enabled me to reach this day.

Last, but not least, I am most thankful to my sons Rabbi's David, Mordechai and Meir Avigdor for their support in various phases of this books' development. Also supporting them, was their youngest brother Yonky from Toronto.

A very special *yasher koach* goes to my beloved wife Esther, for the hundreds of hours she spent toiling for years over the unfamiliar, mysterious and sometimes frustrating computer, typing the manuscript. Without her help, love, tolerance and patience this undertaking would not have been possible.

Foreword

Our sages have said. *"Tzadik Avad L'Doro Avad."* "When a saintly person passes away, the loss is not merely his family's but that of the entire generation."

The 18th of Adar marks my father's yahrzeit, may his soul rest in peace. It is 37 years since that tragic day of his demise on March 30, 1967, the 18th day of Adar II, 5727 and even now, his death seems unreal and difficult for me to accept.

His memory is still vivid to me, and the pain still sharp. He was seventy-two, and I cannot even think of him as having been old. I guess there are some people who never age. When I saw him last in Mexico City, just before he passed on, he was joking with me. His humor and natural wit never left him.

My brother Abraham and I were near him holding his hand, knowing too well the eternal truth that the need for a father is crucial. The search of each for the other exempts no one, not even a rabbi. Happy is the man, indeed, who finds the satisfaction and comfort of being a son and a father.

To write of his kindness, his goodness of character, his genuineness of soul, his sincerity and earnestness of purpose in whatever he undertook, would require volumes. To attest to his scholarship, he left us a vast treasure of both published and unpublished writings.

Whoever met or had any dealings with him, felt no hesitation in saying that he was a *Tzadik*. There were few rabbis in the world of his vintage and caliber. All the young, inexperienced, average and even brilliant Jews were influenced by his self-sacrifice, idealism and devotion to true *Torah Yiddishkeit*.

Some rare individuals appear from time to time, who can synthesize the ideal and the real. Such men do not stand out only in one area, but also in their

totality of character and personality as true *Tzadikim,* saintly souls.

My father was a rare person. He was a doctor of philosophy, but was always down to earth with the people around him. His self-unity enabled him to harmonize the values of the complex human being.

He was indeed a remarkable man. His piety expressed itself not only in his study of Torah and the rich storehouse of learning he possessed, but in the synthesis of both scholarship and the ideas of philosophy.

"We live in a world in which ideas and practice manage to keep themselves at a great distance," he said. "All of us have certain principles in life which we seem to regard highly, about which we think with respect, and yet with the help of a blind, short-sighted rationalization, we are able to violate them by a false excuse of self-righteousness."

Myriads of people make daily declarations of ideals which they never bring to realization. It is for this reason that religion demands commitment, rather than intellectual engagement. Rabbis of old said, "Preaching is not the operative principle, performance is that which is important." However, even amongst religiously dedicated people there are various degrees of knowledge and performance. Some are great in their scholarship and ideals and yet reflect weak spots in their character and fulfillment of their life. Others practice with utter devotion, but have narrow comprehension of the ultimate meaning of the ideal. Both are respected human beings, but they portray great failings.

All of his writings, (some 40 volumes) in *Halacha,* philosophy and sermonics, reveal not only his depth of spiritual insight, his brilliance of mind, but, also the intellectual attainments of his character and the goodness of his nature.

He loved not only those who were religious, but most patiently catered to, and counseled those with a non-religious background as well.

His yahrzeit falls around the season of Purim on the Jewish calendar. The *Megillah,* the story of Esther, pays tribute to Mordecai, as a Saint and *Tzadik,* by saying that he was a "*Doresh Tov L'Amo,*" literally meaning that he preached and sought the well-being of his people.

It seems to me that this phrase is a bit vague and not too salutary to such an illustrious personage that Mordecai represents in the scriptures. Does it mean to say that he was a good orator and that his sermons were of valuable content?

If this is so, we fail to see any greatness in it. One would think that all

leaders are supposed to be able to deliver a meaningful message to their people and be excellent both, in the form of delivery and its quality.

We are therefore inclined to interpret that the term "*Doresh*" does not refer to preaching a "*Drosho,*" a sermon, but rather "*Doresh*" from the origin of "searching." It is the same as the phrase of "*Chakira V'Drisha,*" the interrogation of witnesses. He searched to find the goodness of each Jew.

Of Mordecai, it is said in the last passage of the Megillah, "*Rotzooy L'Rov Echov.*" He was accepted and respected, by the vast majority of his brethren. It is for this unique trait that my father was loved by all, the religious, the agnostic and non-Jew as well. His memory will live on forever amongst those who knew him.

I was told by Mr. Aaron Swergold, my father's host and friend who was present in the synagogue in Brussels five months after liberation from Buchenwald, that when the congregation asked my father to address the Jewish community and describe his past experiences," he got up on the "bima" and said the following. "All I can tell you tonight, at this *Kol Nidrei* service is that you should omit the section of the confessionals and do not beat your hearts as the custom was for thousands of years. What we Jews have just gone through for the past six years, has totally cleansed us from all sins. We are all like '*Tinokos shenoldu,*' like newly born children."

When Mr. Swergold asked my father why he made such a strong statement, father answered, "These were the words, written in the book of Jeremiah (50-20), that the prophet used, addressing the returnees from the Babylonian exile. The Almighty will forgive all your sins, since you suffered enough in your life as slaves to the tyrant Nebuchadnetzer. We, the holocaust survivors, deserve a total acquittal from the heavenly judgment." Making this short declaration, he walked off the pulpit. The congregants nodded and were all in tears.

It is interesting that some twenty years later in Mexico City my father repeated this statement, of annulling and forgiving sins for survivors, at a mass memorial meeting on behalf of the six million martyrs. He was later asked the same question as Mr. Swergold did in Brussels. How could he dare say that? And he answered similarly, "Jeremiah the prophet did it before me at a lesser Holocaust than ours." The question this time was by Rev. Leibish Katz, the schochet of Mexico City, as retold to me by his son, Sr. Marcus Katz.

Using the language of the Bible, I must admit, "The days of my father's life

have come to an end," but only physically. In order to live and exist, everything in nature has to move in the magnetic fields of gravitation. To remain immobile would only mean death. As long as people are on the move they are alive, but in this constant flux of change and mutation there are three exceptions that remain permanent and eternal and they are love, memory, and custom. It doesn't matter whether a person is actually alive or not, because love, memory and custom can still be carried on, admired and cherished posthumously, even more so than having been shared in life.

It is thirty-seven years since his passing, but his image vividly stands before my eyes. The historical truth is that the secret of Jewish survival, through the centuries of merciless pogroms, persecutions, and endless inhuman terrorization depended on our memory and unshakable faith in G-d.

His soul will remain within us with the passage of time, as Jewish men and women penetrate the depths of his prolific writings. His memory will live on through his written words.



TERAWA WOLOSKA

Birthplace – Growth-Acquisition
of basic and in-depth learning

Lineage of the
Avigdor – Horowitz Families

The Avigdor Sephardic Lineage

On my father's side of the family, we are of Sephardic origin hailing from Istanbul, Turkey. My great-grandfather, after whom my father was named, Rabbi Yaakov Avigdor, was a renowned scholar. Because of political reasons however, the Sultan of Istanbul expelled him, his followers (a group of learned men) and their families from Turkey. They had to leave Istanbul and crossed over the Black Sea in the direction of Odessa, Russia.

The financial situation in Russia was a difficult one, forcing the new immigrants not to settle there. They went further to the "free town" of Brody, which was located between three countries, Russia, Germany and Austria. Being a "free city" meant that the citizens were free from taxes and were allowed to join their choice of many industrial enterprises. This attracted people to migrate there from various parts of Eastern Europe. They especially came from Turkey, which was suffering from a rash of anti-Semitism.

The migration from Istanbul turned the city of Brody into a famous metropolis. It quickly became a center of Jewish learning and communal life. The community hired famous rabbis to be their leaders. Amongst them was Rabbi Solomon Kluger, known as the Broder Magid. He authored three hundred seventy five volumes of scholarship and he befriended my grandfather as an honored colleague and friend. He named Yaakov Avigdor to be his successor upon his demise.

The family name of Avigdor is of pure Hebrew and Biblical origin to the extent that it was the surname of the great Moses, meaning "Father of the gate" or "Father protector."

Terawa Woloska was the name of a small village hidden on the top of a hill in the Karpathian mountains of Galicia. To access the village, one had to climb up a serpentine like road to the top of the hill. It was actually a short distance but ascending there with a horse and buggy was a trip that took several hours on a cold wintry day. Terawa, as it was generally called, was in a very isolated corner of Poland. The name of the hill was the Slona and the views from the roads surrounding the hill were fantastic and breathtaking. I never forgot the scenes that I enjoyed during the annual yahrzeit visits to my grandfathers grave.

It was in this little town that my grandfather Rabbi Abraham Avigdor was the rabbi, heading a community of less than a hundred families strictly observant Jews and many Talmudic scholars. The town had all that it needed for a Jewish community to exist and live peacefully. This shtetel was isolated from the outside world and that was fine with them. My father would always say that he came from such a small town that it was not even on the map of Poland.

Nevertheless, there was a beautiful synagogue, a *mikvah* and Hebrew School. Several non-Jews came to work there as Shabos *goyim* from the nearby villages to light candles and do other chores that observant Jews could not do on the Sabbath.. It was in such a small hick town that my father grew up and started to learn from the treasures of Judaism. His parents provided him with teachers brought in from larger nearby cities such as Sanok and Linsk to give him the necessary Hebrew education. The boys Yaakov and David were both brilliant especially Yaakov who started to learn Talmud at the age of six and by the time he was ten, he did not need any teacher at all and studied on his own.

My grandfather Abraham proudly showed off Yaakov's unusual intelligence and memory as a youngster and his ability to grasp the most complicated concepts. He was more than seventy-five years old when the community decided that he should retire and have his son Yaakov take over the position as rabbi. He did, and Rav Yaakov quickly developed into a mature man loved by all. The family lived in Tereve until 1916, when at the beginning of World War I, they fled to Marinbad. It was originally Czecoslovakia, but at that time it was occupied by the Austrians.

Marinbad was my father's first window to the world with the magnificence of a luxury resort filled, during the war, with thousands of refugees from Poland. Soon the young rabbi Yaakov gained popularity and achieved the position of "official rabbi" of the Leiter Hotel. That hotel housed rabbis and

Chassidic leaders because of its famous *kashruth* reliability. Amongst the guests who made use of this hotel were Reb Yissachar Ber and his son Reb Areleh Rokeach, the renowned Belzer Rebbes.

This position gave my father the opportunity to meet with many great rabbis of Europe and was the beginning of a long time association with Belz. This friendship lasted for decades and developed through the time of his being rabbi of Drohobycz.

In Marinbad, father had the opportunity to delve into the vast libraries and universities of the city, and was able to get acquainted with a world that was completely strange and unknown to him in his youth.



The Golden Horowitz Chain

my mother: **Rachel Braindel Horowitz** *(Avigdor–Drohobycz)*

the daughter of: **Rabbi Naftali Zvi Horowitz** *(Santz–Poland)*

son of: **Rabbi Avrumi Chaim Horowitz** *(Lanzut)*

son of: **Rabbi Naftali Zvi Horowitz** *(Linsk)*

son of: **Rabbi Menachem Mendel Horowitz** *(Linsk)*

son of: **Rabbi Avrum Chaim Horowitz** *(Linsk)*

son of: **Rabbi Naftali Zvi Horowitz** *(Linsk)*
(Famous Roptshitzer Rabbi -- 5587)

son of: **Rabbi Menachem Mendel Rubin** *(Linsk)*

son-in-law of: **Rabbi Isaac Halavi Ish Horowitz**
(Rabbi of Hamburg, Germany -- 5527)

son of: **Rabbi Yikel Halevi Horowitz** *(Gluga -- 5515)*

son of: **Rabbi Meier Halevi Horowitz** *(Tiktin)*

son of: **Rabbi Shmelke Halevi Horowitz** *(Tarnow)*

son of: **Rabbi Yehoshua Halevi Horowitz** *(Ha'aruch)*

son of: **Rabbi Pinchas Halevi Horowitz**
(Brother-in-law of famous Remoh from Krakow -- 5355)

son-in-law of: **Rabbi Israel Isvar** *(Krakow)*

son-in-law of: **Rabbi Eliezer Lipman** *(Krakow)*

son-in-law of: **Rabbi Yechiel Lurie**
(Brisk-Grandfather of famous M'harshal of Lublin)

son of: **Rabbi Aaron Lurie** *(Elsac)*

son of: **Rabbi Nethanel Lurie** *(Erport)*

son-in-law of: **Rabbi Rabbi Shlomo Shapiro**

son of: **Rabbi Shmuel Shapiro**

son-in-law of: **Rabbi Mattityahu Treibish** *(Paris)*

son of: **Rabbi Youseph Treibish** *(Marseils -5105)*

son of: **Rabbi Yochanan Ashkenazi**

son of: **Rabbi Yehuda of Paris** (known as such)

son of: **Rabbi Yom Tov of Paris**

son of: **Rabbi Yehuda B'reb Nossan**

son of: **"Rabbeinu Nossan"**

son-in-law of: **Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchoki**
(Famous Rashi 4800-4865)

son of: **Rabbi Yitzchok**

son of: **Rabbi Shlomo**

grandson of: **Rabbi Elikim**

son of: **Rabbi Aaron Horofeh** *(the Physician)*

son of: **Rabbi Abraham**

son of: **Rabbi Yousi**

son of: **Rabbi Minyomi Gaon**

son of: **Rabbi Yanee Gaon**

son of: **Rabbi Yousi Gaon** *(Author of the "Lilaoth Hashir")*

son of: **Rabbi Nachman**

son of: **Rabbi Yochanan**

son of: **Rabbi Yehoshua**

son of: **Rabbi Yochanan Hasandlor**

grandson of: **Rabbi Gamliel Hazoken**

son of: **Rabbi Shimon**

son of: **Hilel Hanassi** *(3728)*

grandson of *(According To Talmud Bavli, Ksubuth 62; Yerushalmi Taanith P'beth h'beth; Medrash Rabbo Breishith P'98 and many other sources as recorded in the Sefer Hadoroth, Warsaw 1909, Page 109 Under Hille Hanassi):*
Shefatyah

the fifth son of
King David
(2834-2924)

OF BLESSED MEMORY

The following information could be taken from the records of the International Tracing Service:

as to 1. AWIGDOR, Anna, born on 7.10.1922,

was incarcerated in the forced labour camp for Jews in Drohobycz on 5th February 1944 (Profession: technical school).
Category: "Jüdin"

as to 1. AWIGDOR, Anna, born in Neusandez on 7.10.1922,

was committed to Concentration Camp Stutthof, Prisoner's Number 81300 (Date see below).
Category: "Jüdin"

as to 2. AWIGDOR, Jeanette, born on 7.5.1927,

was incarcerated in the forced labour camp for Jews in Drohobycz on 5th February 1944.
Category: "Jüdin"

as to 2. AWIGDOR, Janette, born in Drohobitsch on 12.5.1926,

was committed to Concentration Camp Stutthof, Prisoner's Number 81301 (Date see below).
Category: "Jüdin"

According to what we were able to ascertain, the prisoner's numbers 81300 and 81301 of Concentration Camp Stutthof were issued on 10th September 1944 (Transport from Concentration Camp Auschwitz).

As a consequence of the incomplete and deviating personal data, we are not able to state if the details taken from our records really refer to Ms Anna (Gitel/Lila) Avigdor and to Ms Sabina (Sheinol/Lala) Avigdor.

We regret not being able to convey to you any information which can contribute to clarifying the two persons' fates and remain

with kind regards,

L. Jäger
for the Archives

On Dec. 15, 1995 Rabbi Isaac Avigdor received the first notice about where and when his sisters Anna Gitel and Sabina perished. This information came after many inquiries from the International Tracing service, Committee International, Geneve, Holocaust and War Victims Tracing and Information Center, Central Maryland Chapter, Baltimore, MD


A MAP OF EASTERN EUROPE
BALTIC SEA
ESTONIA
SOVIET RUSSIA
RIGA
LATVIA
DVINSK
BALTIC SEA
LITHUANIA
VITEBSK
KOVNO
WILNO
VOLOZHIN
MIR
GERMANY
GRODNO
MINSK
BIALISTOK
WISLA
POZNAN
WARSAW
N
LODZ
POLAND
PINSK
W
E
LUBLIN
DUBNO
CRACOW
LWOW
BORYSLAW
BERDICHEV
S
PRZEMYSL
DROHOBYCZ
STANISLAW
DNIESTER RIVER
CZECHOSLOVAKIA
KISHINEV
HUNGARY
RUMANIA
BLACK SEA

AUTOBIOGRAPHY WRITTEN BY RABBI DR. YAAKOV AVIGDOR

In the 19th century, Poland was occupied by Germany, Austria and Russia. The civil laws varied in the different areas of occupation. Going to military service was considered suicidal for a religious Jew, so many boys were forced to act illegally in order to avoid the army. One way was to consider yourself a foreigner. Many young rabbinic students changed their names, birthplace and day of birth. This resulted in five brothers of the same parents to bear different family names.

Autobiography written by Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor

Translated verbatim from his original manusript

Part I - 1918-1939

As I have described on numerous occasions, both publicly and privately, the many and various miracles that G-d has performed in saving my life, I feel obligated to write down the details in short about my survival. For future generations it is important to describe the evils, troubles and travails that my eyes beheld during this world wide storm which lasted from 1939 to 1945.

All the communities, that existed for so long, the various cities that I was living in and place where I was born, raised, educated and where I served as a rabbi and teacher of Torah have all come to an end. They have been erased from the face of the earth. I feel within my heart that it is a holy duty to make a written memorial for these communities and people so that these acts are never forgotten.

I was born in a little village called Tereve Veloska (on the road that leads from Sanok to Pshemishel in the center of Galicia). This little town was far from the noise and tumult of city life. It didn't even have a train. The nearest train station was twelve miles away from my home town and separated by large mountains called Karpatan. Some of them were so high that they reached the

clouds of the heavens. Yet this little village was outstanding in the fact that all its residents were Jews (about 120 families) who existed in harmony and friendship. There were never any quarrels amongst them. Most of the residents were Chasidic scholars and Torah observant Jews.

My father, my teacher, *Hagaon Hatzadik*, the saintly genius and renowned mystic, Rabbi Avrahom Yisachar Ber Avigdor, was the son of his famous father, Rav Yaakov, known for his great learning. Rav Yaakov Avigdor was originally from the town of Potkamin, Poland, and was chosen and honored to become the successor of the famous Rabbinic leader Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (the Broder *Magid*) of blessed memory. He served for three years in that position during the life of the *Magid*, who left in his will, expressing very clearly, that his son Rabbi Benjamin Kluger should not succeed him as rabbi, but instead the community should select my grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Avigdor.

My father, in his first marriage was the son-in-law of the saintly Rabbi of Linsk, Reb Menachem Mendel Horowitz, who was the son of Rabbi Avrum Chayim of Linsk, the direct son of the famous Rabbi of Roptshitz. My father was the rabbi and the head of the Court in the City of Terawa for sixty years of his life. During this time he had five sons and one daughter from this marriage.

a) The eldest was my step-brother Reb.Chayim Naftali Tzi Shapiro who served close to fifty years as a Chasidic Rebe in the city of Kalushin, near Warsaw. He was killed in the year 1940 by the Nazis. He was then eighty years old. His sons succeeded him as Chasidic Rabbis but met the same fate and almost a hundred souls of their families were killed by the Germans. May G-d avenge their blood.

b) The second was my step brother who was a rabbi and descendant of the Holy families by the name of Usher Yeshiah Avigdor. (He was the first Gabbi of the late Rabbi Yesachar Dov Rokeach of Belz, the grandfather of the present Rebbi of Belz in Jerusalem.)

c) The third brother, a Chasidic Rebbe Menachem Mendel Horowitz of Krakow, had five sons, all killed. One daughter Bertha survived and married Yusel Baumohl.

d) The fourth one was the rabbi, great in Torah and in observance of *Mitzvos*, Reb. Yoseph Horowitz of Liminov.

e) The fifth one was my step-brother, Rabbi Mayer Horowitz who was killed together with his family in the year 1940 in Drohobycz.

f) Next was my step-sister Sheindel, the wife of Rabbi Sholom Lieberman, a prominent businessman from Zolkveh.

g) In his second marriage, my father became the son in law of Rabbi David Galler, the head of the Rabbinic Court in Nishankevitz and Kriftz, a descendant of saintly families of scholars who were generation after generation rabbis of Kriftch. From this second marriage my father had one daughter and two sons: myself, the writer of this biography, and my brother David, a man of great wisdom and learning, a professional writer and talented artist who was the rabbi of Andrichov near Krakow. Rabbi David Avigdor and his family were all killed on Rosh Hashonah, 5703, in Tarnov. This brother David was famous all over Poland for his wisdom and learning. He was a great orator and journalist and headed the movement of Mizrachi in Western Galicia for fifteen years.

h) The third was my sister Sara, the wife of the scholar and business man, Mendel Frankel of Dinov. Sarah, her husband and her two daughters were killed in the Town of Dobromil in the year 5702. Three sons, Yisroel, Natan and Nechemya, survived together with their sister Chanah in Tel Aviv.

I grew up under the supervision of my father, the saintly scholar who was a genius in the oral Torah learning, renowned in the whole section as a professional judge who dealt with most complicated cases amongst Jews. He was accepted and counted amid the outstanding mystics in his generation. There did not pass a day in which he slept through midnight, and in the early morning he immersed himself in the *Mikveh* and studied for his classes privately until the time for his daily prayers. He did not walk out of his room at all and spent his time in isolation while writing various scholarly dissertations. All his manuscripts were burnt the very first day of World War I.

My father, of blessed memory, had the privilege of being close to the greatest men of his time, especially with the holy Belzer Rebbe, the Sar Shalom and the Holy Santzer Rebbe, and Dgikevor Rebbe and with the Shiniver Rebbe all of whom were his best friends.

I grew up and was educated in my father's house, which was filled with holiness and isolation. When I was still small, I was very outstanding in my studies to the admiration of all. At the age of three, I was registered in a *Cheder*. At four, I started learning *Chumash*; at five, I was taught *Gemorah*, and when I

became seven I learned *Gemorah* with Rashi, Tosefet and Marshoah. When I turned eleven, I did not study any more with a teacher but sat alone in a Bes Medrash and studied classes in deep Talmud, Shulchan Oruch, and Code of Laws. At thirteen, I had my first original thoughts in pilpul published in various monthly journals, especially in the monthly called *"Ohel Moed"* that was published by the great scholar Yikuseal Kamelhar, of blessed memory.

I now started leaving my father's house from time to time and traveled to various smaller cities in order to listen and hear classes from other scholars who were renowned and popular professionals. And so I heard Torah from the mouths of Rabbi Nata Dum of Sanok, Rabbi Jacob Yitzchok Blondvein from Beritch who were amongst the foremost leaders in scholarship and students of the famous Beis Yitzchok of Lvov. I also studied for months in Beltz in the *Beis Midrash* of Reb Yesachar Dov of blessed memory and there I carried on discussions with others of the *Arugas Habosim* and *T'vuos Hasadeh,* along with the famous Rabbi Yitzchok Pesach Bombach of Auschvitch and other great rabbinic leaders of that time. I also visited the Rebbe of Blushiv because he had a group of scholars who were involved in depth with *Halacha.* I was the youngest student of the group.

At the same time, I also attended classes at the house of my uncle, Rabbi Binyomin Galler, the rabbi of Kriftch and Boybarick who was outstanding in his accuracy and memory.

In 1911 my father reached the age of 80. I was then fifteen years old and I was voted in by the community to become the successor of my father's position as rabbi and head of the court of Tereve to judge, rule, teach and preach to those who were sitting and learning Torah.

I was ordained to the Rabbinate by my father, my uncle Binyomin Galler, my teachers Nute Yaakov Segal Dum, the head of Sunick; Reb Moshe Meisels the rabbi of Pshemish and Rabbi Avrum Menachem Steinberg, the head of the Beis Din in Brody.

In 1914 the First World War started and I was eighteen years old. As the official rabbi of Tereve, I was exempt from serving in the military. When the Russian Army arrived in our town, I went into exile and settled in the famous resort of Marinbad, where I conducted Torah classes and studied with students. During the year that I was in Marinbad, I resided in the Leiter Hotel (known as the most stringently kosher place) and where Reb. Areleh Rokeach the Beltzer

Rebbe, also resided.

Until the year 1914, when I married my wife, Rechel Breindel, the daughter of the merchant and chosid Reb Naftali Tzvi Horowitz, I didn't learn any secular studies, and didn't know how to read or write in any other language than the holy languages of Hebrew and Yiddish. In the interim, in Galicia, a new law was propounded, regarding elections of rabbis for communities. This law allowed only the small communities to pick a rabbi whom they found fit for the job. The larger communities did not have a right to choose a rabbi unless the candidate completed high school and he passed tests from the House of Representatives. This procedure allowed the rabbi to get a certificate which freed him from military service.

By then I felt secure enough in my rabbinic studies to take on a post in a bigger community. I decided to take a step forward and complete my general studies. After my wedding, while I was living a short time in my father-in-law's house, I started to learn the subjects of the "gymnasium" (high school) in the German language. I excelled in the subjects of mathematics, philology and the study of languages. I took special interest and worked very hard at the Latin and Greek languages and in their literature. Along with these languages, I also fine-tuned my Polish and German and some of the literary works in these languages. In fact I knew most of them by heart. At the end of twelve months I stood before the testing committee in the gymnasium in the city of Santz and passed with flying colors. I graduated with *"matura,"* a diploma with a mark of excellence.

The storm of the war was still raging, and in Eastern Galicia the Polish and the Ukrainians were fighting each other. The Jews found themselves in the middle of the fury. After almost two years of World War I, we still did not have any peace in the land. I continued to reside in the city of Santz, in my father-in-law's house and waited until the unrest was over. During this time, I concentrated more on my secular education and learned French, Russian, English and Spanish.

By the year 1920, I was twenty four years old and was officially invited by the large community of Drohobycz to come and present myself to the leadership of the *"kehilah."* I was to stand up for tests to see if I was fit to undertake and serve as rabbi of their city. I came to Drohobycz and stayed there for ten days, delivering orations in Hebrew, Polish, German and Yiddish. I was

tested by the scholars of the city for the purpose of asking me hundreds of questions. Only after I stood up to these intense tests was I elected and accepted to serve as the rabbi and head of the court of this big city.

When I was elected as the rabbi of Drohobycz, there were no other communities nearby with a rabbi and all the little villages, (close to eighty of them,) depended upon the *Kehillah* of Drohobycz for religious guidance. They relied on the general leadership of Drohobycz, to whom they had to pay taxes.

In 1928 the government decided to establish a new Kehillah in nearby Boryslaw, and I was accepted to serve there as well. I had to sit daily in the Court from ten in the morning until two in the afternoon, and in Boryslav I sat three times a week with six other rabbis, colleagues of mine, from four to eight at night. In the entire surrounding there were no other rabbinic authorities for settling divorce cases except the courtroom in Drohobycz. Since there were no other Jewish cemeteries in any of these communities except Drohobycz or Boryslaw we had to take care of burials and the like for all of them.

In Drohobycz there were forty-five main synagogues including smaller ones. There was a modern bathhouse built with three mikvahs. They were supplied with water directly from the wells. The facilities were very well maintained, both in their beauty and cleanliness. There was a modern Jewish kosher hospital and an orphanage the kind of which was not available in any other town in Poland. In addition, Boryslaw had thirty synagogues and a big bath house with three mikvahs similarly drawing their water supply from wells. In addition to the three basic *mikvahs* there was one mikvah which depended on rain water.

Jewish people lived in Drohobycz as far back as the fifteenth century and the Kehilah possessed a lot of real estate and land that were called the fields of Abarbanel. Tradition had it that Abarbanel bought these fields in Drohobycz in order to settle Jewish refugees from Spain. These parcels of land were known as the *"Lannes."*

The main synagogue was quite old, established by Rabbi Eliazar Nisan Titlebaum who occupied the position as rabbi from 1843 to 1854. The *Beis Medrash* was also an old one, and it was believed to have been built by the famous saintly Rabbi Itzikel of Drohobycz who was known to be a friend and colleague of the Bal Shem Tov. The Holy Bal Shem visited Drohobycz several times to converse with colleagues and friends such as Reb. Itzikel of Drohobycz.

I was very busy with my work in the courts and various *"Din Torah"*

questions, divorces, and weddings. I also had the supervision of the kosher meats which was placed on my shoulders, and I had to go there daily to supervise the "*Mashgichim.*" Twice a week I traveled to the big slaughterhouse to stand by during the "*Shechitah*" and inspect the removal of the lung adhesions. In addition to that, I was responsible for the de-veining of the hind parts of the animal from which two butchers operated and derived their meats. In spite of such a busy schedule, I managed to study daily with a group of students from seven to nine in the morning amongst which was also my oldest son, Yitzchok Chaim.

In the year 1929, the government established a change in the courses of the university studies and annulled the title Doctor from its system and instead replaced it with the title of Magister. I decided not to give up my chances of finishing the university studies. Higher Educational Institutions were still part of the old system, and I registered in the Lwow University as a student. I never attended even one class given by the professors. Several times during the course of the year I was obligated to appear before the professors, to take tests on philosophy, history of philosophy, logic, psychology and languages, which included Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, Syrian, and general Orientalistic. I wrote a big book about the contents and quality of the subject under the title of "Metaphysics and Judaism and Its Influence on Modern Philosophy." This book was received as my dissertation, and in the year 1931, I was extended the honor of having the title "Doctor" added to my name. The title was presented for philosophy and oriental studies. In this book I tried to show the influence of Jewish scholars in the middle ages regarding Jewish Philosophy and clarified the style of Reb Chasdey Karashkash about determinism. I proved that the influence of Karashkash's opinions was fundamental amongst the philosophical studies beginning with Descartes and Hagel.

At this time I also published my book "The Studies of the Talmud" that I worked on for several years. I wrote it in several languages but printed it in the Polish language. Later, I reprinted it in Hebrew and in German. My goal was to offer Jewish youth the studies of the Talmud according to modern terms of thinking. I knew that Talmud did not find many followers in the new generation in Poland, not because the language was strange to them but simply because the new generation was brought up in gymnasiums and they did not find any satisfaction and estranged itself from discipline and the order of the *Cheder* where they studied as youngsters. For this purpose, I worked very hard to

establish a system of Talmud in chronological order. I tried to give the students a picture of what our scholars of old offered in each generation by themselves.

In the first portion of this book, I assembled all the topics of the oral laws which were generally studied, covering the text until the end of the members of the "Great Synod." In the second volume, I organized all the laws and customs that were studied and preached in the time of the "Five Pairs." In the third volume, I assembled all the newer trends of learning from the periods of the *Nesi'im* "Princes". I couldn't reach further than the period of Shamai and Hillel. The contents were organized in a special order and each subject separated and explained by its roots and in the origins of the written Bible, reaching out all the way to the Code of Jewish Law. The book was well received, and I intended to print a second edition. In the year 5,689, I published a book "*Chaleck Yaakov,*" with sermonic and deep philosophic discussions. This book was also accepted respectfully amongst students and scholars.

I later gathered all the dissertations that I had written to my teachers, colleagues and friends and published two volumes under the names of "*Abir Yaakov*" and "*Hayshev Yaakov.*" In the "*Hayshev Yaakov*" I printed a special portion dedicated to the writings of Rabbi Chayim Halevey and a pamphlet about the book "*Agleh Tal*" from the Rabbi of Sochochov. In the year 1933, I published a pamphlet of essays in the Polish language with the title "My Faith and Philosophy." I tried to prove that these are two separate fields and our senses could often be mistaken in their opinions and evaluations, just as one cannot change the sense of hearing to the sense of sight. Just as it is impossible to hear with the eyes, it is impossible to see with the ears. So it is also impossible to evaluate feelings of faith and general knowledge. Faith comes from the heart and knowledge from the brain. If sometimes it appears that there is a contradiction between these opinions we cannot allow ourselves to be in the place where the new philosophy stands to be judged by the sensation of intuition because its origins are in the heart.

In the year 1934, I published a book about the Rambam since it was the jubilee of 800 years of his birth. I wrote this book in Polish and printed the biography about his great personality and accomplishments in comparison to the new trends of philosophy by Hume and Kant.

In the year 1938, I published a book on grammar which highlighted and defended the differences and mistakes made by literary scholars against Eben

Ezra and Radak.

Besides these books, I published various shorter essays. Thank G-d, whatever I printed was received with love and recognition. Both communities Drohobycz and Boryslaw honored me by subsidizing my works to cover the expenses of the books and essay printings.



Rebbitzen Rachel Galler Avigdor
Mother of Yaakov, David and Sarah Frankel Avigdor
Taken from Drohobycz towards Belzec where she perished together with several hundred other Jewish women

The state of the economy in Poland in the last years before World War II was depressing. The situation was very fearful and critical. There was no city or community where there were no fights amongst its citizens. These tenuous relations between the different parties led each city to breakdowns and splits between the rabbis, community leaders and their organizations. The same existed between the kosher butchers and slaughterers. Each party used words of slander. They snitched on each other till the quarrels led to the courts of the town, and the shame and scandals were great.

In those hard times it was unique that the communities of Drohobycz Boryslaw stood united between their parties and there was peace amongst our people. For fifteen years there were no elections or changes to the Kehilah or to

the city authorities. The parties realized that there was no need for changes at the time and therefore, elections were unnecessary. These difficult conditions brought about a change that led me to decide not to move from the communities of Drohobycz Boryslaw, although I was frequently invited to become a candidate in other cities. I was asked by the communities of Czenstochow, Wlotzlavek, Lomzeh, Lwow to become their rabbi. I did not pay attention to these requests and propositions, and I remained in peace in my own home town.

In the time of the famous rulings against kosher meat slaughtering in Poland, I went to Warsaw several times to specifically participate, with the Warsaw rabbi, Horav Menachem Zemba, and we both met with several government officials about this matter. I then published a booklet in Polish about the humaneness of Jewish slaughtering. I worked very hard to explain the laws of deveining the hind part of the animal, with which I was very familiar. I set up special rules for the proper processesing of the hind portion of the animal which were meticulously followed. This issue was very crucial, since the government assigned "quotas" for the Jewish population and in general, meat was expensive and difficult to obtain.

Autobiography written by Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor

Translated from his original manusript

Part II - 1939-1962

There are more details to describe the local needs of the community which occurred during the twenty years of my being the rabbi, but the military situation of World War II overshadowed all else and disturbed those pre-war days to the extent that I did not have the opportunity nor peace of mind to sit down and record details of that sort.

In the words of the Cantor Meir Ben Yitzchok of Worms, Germany, in his *Akdamus* (prayers), where he poetically used the comparison of being unable to describe a situation he says "if all heavens would be parchment and the forests quills, if all oceans streams, lakes and rivers were ink and all the earths inhabitants were scribes," the same is true about us; we could not ever describe the inhumane acts that were carried out towards Jews during the six-year period of the Holocaust. I could not possibly give you a true picture of those days. I will mention only short anecdotal episodes of that time.

On Friday before the Sabbath, *Parshat Kisavo*, 17 days in Elul, 1939, the first day of September, we got up in the morning, and saw big signs posted upon the

walls. The postings were from the president of the Polish government, advising city residents of the German attack against Poland. The War came upon us with great surprise. We were completely unaware of its coming. There were Jewish people who had heard rumors about war, but we did not believe, and did not want to believe of such a possibility.

All of the clever, insightful politicians were clueless. They argued that Hitler was only threatening Poland in the hope that Poles would surrender, and give him what he wanted, without a war, as he had conquered Austria and Czechoslovakia. We all sat with folded hands and did nothing to prepare ourselves for the cruel unfolding events.

When the war broke out, we were confused and lost. What should we do next, run or stay? We just didn't know how to proceed. On that very first day, Friday, September 1, 1939, German planes started flying over Poland. Standing orders issued on behalf of the Polish government were that, if we were aware of planes overhead, we were obligated to leave our homes and run into cellars and hideouts.

We often sat more than ten hours in a cellar, men, women and children together. We did not eat nor drink. We simply crouched ourselves into corners. The roads and bridges were closed, the trains stopped running and the autos and horses were confiscated by Polish military that ran away from their posts. If a civilian traveled with a wagon, the military soldiers themselves grabbed the wagons and horses and left the owners on the field.

Events unfolded quickly. Although we were far from the German border, ten days after the outbreak of war, and two days before *Rosh Hashonah*, on the eleventh of September, 1939, there were no more government offices operating in our town. The Polish military had gone, the guards ran away at night, and we were left without any authority to which we could turn. We sat tenuously for eight days, until Monday after *Rosh Hashanah*. All this time, we did not leave our homes. The stores were closed, and we were unable to purchase any food. Whoever did not have some flour or supplies at home at the time, simply did not have anything to eat. This is how the two days, of Thursday and Friday, went. We did not go to shul but we prayed in our homes in small quorums.

On Monday, the fifth of Tishrei, 1940, the Germans entered Drohobycz for the first time, and in seventeen days occupied the length and the width of Poland. On Tuesday morning, German soldiers came into our house and took

me, as the official rabbi, to their headquarters. There I was ordered to go out into the common marketplaces and streets, and order Jews to immediately open their stores and start selling their merchandise to the soldiers. They made me responsible for the opening of the stores and threatened, that if even one store remained closed, I would be shot. I walked around in the markets and in the streets, and within two hours all the stores were open.

On Wednesday afternoon, I was again called to their headquarters, and again upon threat of death, was ordered to gather three hundred and fifty Jews by seven in the morning to sweep the streets and the roads. I was duty bound to fetch only intelligent people for that job. They did not let me go home that night. From the office of the military, I had to call up intelligent, learned people, doctors, lawyers and engineers. They all came in the proper appointed time, ready to follow the German orders.

Whoever did not see with his own eyes the shame and embarrassment of these people cannot possibly imagine how they, the esteemed people of our city, the rich and the scholars stood up with broomsticks on the streets supervised by the Ukrainians (the lowest caliber of people in our town). We worked the whole day, I amongst them, until the evening. When I returned home, my friends and my family suggested that I immediately hide myself, for fear of what else they would ask of me. On Thursday night I left my home and went to a hideout in a cellar where I stayed all alone the whole day Friday, the eve of *Yom Kippur*, until Sunday. On *Yom Kippur* itself people suggested that we go to pray in the main synagogue, but we were befallen by German soldiers. They entered the synagogue and smashed the *Aron Hakodesh*. They took out the Holy Scrolls and tore them to pieces and rolled the parchments out to the streets.

On Sunday evening the Russians entered our town, and the Germans left. We discovered that during that short German occupation, hundreds of Jews were killed by the Germans in the surrounding smaller towns. In the town of Pshemish six hundred Jews were chased into the nearby forest and killed by horrible means. Amidst them at that time was Rabbi Tzvi Glazer, Rabbi of Pshemish, son-in-law of Moshe Meisels. He was tied to a tree as the Germans mercilessly cut his body up into pieces.

The Jews rejoiced with the coming of the Russians. That joy was short lived. In a few weeks time the Russians began ordering Jews to alter their life-styles and live according to the Communist system and way of life. Our people

were depressed and without hope. If I were to attempt to detail the happenings of those few weeks under the Russians, I would not have enough ink or paper to adequately describe the experience. At the end of the winter of 1940, the Soviet government ordered all refugees from Poland to hide in the shadow of the Russian government or be sent to Siberia.

From Galicia alone 250,000 Jews left for Siberia. We suffered tremendously because of this decree. The pain of breaking up families was unbearable. No one thought that there would be any future for the Jews that had left. We bid them farewell never believing that they would ever be recovered or remain alive. The tragedy was overwhelming.

In the summer of 1940 the Jewish people began to work in various professions on behalf of the Russian government and slowly began to adjust to the difficult life. We lived under these conditions until the spring.

It is understood that our religious life suffered much. The synagogues were closed, the bath houses and the Mikvaot were filled in with earth and the Talmud Torahs were locked up. On the twenty seventh day of Sivan, the 14th of June, 1939 in the morning at 4 a.m. we suddenly heard airplanes roaring in the skies over our town. We did not understand what was happening. Even the Russian soldiers knew nothing of what was going on. It was not until 8 o'clock that evening that we heard that there was an outbreak of war between the Russians and the Germans. Things were happening quickly. Official Russian offices were immediately closed. On Thursday it was announced that whoever wanted to leave together with the Russians could go with them. Regretfully, a few did go with them. The majority of the people reasoned to themselves that it is better to die at the hands of Hitler than to live as a dog in Russia.

On Friday morning when we felt that the Germans were approaching the town, I decided not to remain in Drohobycz. I already knew that the Germans would make me responsible to carry out their commands and orders. I therefore left my house together with my dear son Yitzchok Chayim in the direction of Boryslaw. I decided to stay away until the storm was over. I came to Boryslaw on Friday morning, and I thought that no one would recognize me because I changed my clothing and rabbinic garb. I was mistaken. As I arrived, I was greeted by friends and acquaintances. People were frightened but they surrounded me. My friends did not let me go any further and begged me to stay with them. They assured me that they would take care of me, and that nothing

bad would happen. I remained hidden with them until June 22, 1939 the 5th day of Tammuz when the Russians had all gone. On Tuesday morning July 10, 1939 we already found Germans marching into town. No one left their home. Everyone stayed put.

There was no food. We were always hungry, very hungry. It was horrible. On Thursday we heard loud cries and screams, and we saw Ukrainian soldiers surround the town. They dragged Jews out of their homes and led them to the German soldiers who promptly threw them into jail. The entire action was carried out by Ukrainians without the help of the Germans. My son Yitzchok Chayim and I locked ourselves up in an attic, and there we sat all day Thursday and Friday, July 13 and 14, 1939. Day and night we heard the cries and screams of our brethren. Friday, before Shabos in the evening, a woman came up the ladder to bring us a pitcher of water. She told us that more than a thousand Jews were arrested. Each time the Ukrainians came, they beat Jews. They killed close to four hundred in that jail itself.

The Germans issued an order that the Ukrainians stop beating Jews. Sunday morning we found out that the Ukrainians had killed more than a thousand Jews.

On Monday the twelfth of Tammuz, July 7, 1941, we started getting ready to bury our dead as ordered by the Germans. The cries and screams were unimaginable. A German soldier arrived at the cemetery, and said that if he heard any more cries, he would kill all the Jews there. We were forced to bury all the bodies in silence, ten in each grave, without proper caskets.

My son remained a few more days in Boryslaw and then we returned to Drohobycz. We found out that the commander, the head of the German S.S., called a meeting and ordered the remaining Jews to select twelve men from amongst themselves that would become the head of the Judenrat responsible for all the orders pertaining to Jews. From then on, anything the Germans wanted of us was carried out through the mechanism of the Judenrat.

All the stores of merchandise and food were confiscated by the Germans. During the time of Russian rule, all stores were handled by the Russian government. When the Germans came in they removed it from them and took it for themselves. The starvation was horrible. Whoever had any sort of food, considered themselves lucky, very lucky.

The Judenrat committee turned to the Germans and requested a quota of

food assigned for the Jewish population. The answer was quick in coming: Jews would get food only if they would work. This is how the period of "slave labor" for the Germans began. We fixed roads, bridges, oil wells and ditches. Every day, at seven in the morning, Jews were assembled and assigned to work groups. The group returned home at seven in the evening. When they returned they received a ration of food, measured to barely keep them alive.

Two months passed, and each day the group of workers increased because they received food rations. Some wealthier people were able to obtain some extra food by buying it with pieces of jewelry. They realized that money itself had no value in the bizarre world and time in which they found themselves.

On November 2, 1941 a new German order was issued that required men, women and children ten years old, to wear an armband on the right arm with a blue Jewish star on it to identify the wearer as a Jew. Anyone found outside the Ghetto without it would be sentenced to death. In this month of Kislev, December, 1941 many Jews disappeared without a trace. Some were taken from their houses and never returned. Initially we did not believe that these people were executed. We thought that they were sent to work somewhere else.

My moment of faith was approaching. The *Judenrat* was given an order to bring me to their headquarters. A death sentence was waiting for me. I find it difficult describing the circumstances and miracles that forced me into hiding.

In the same month of Kislev, November, 1941 the Germans came to the *Judenrat* and demanded a list of people who did not go out to work. Then, according to the list, several hundred people were taken out of their homes, led to the forest of Bronica and they were all shot. The next month the *Judenrat* demanded that each Jew be photographed and each of them receive a special certificate of identification. According to their figures, 16,000 souls in Drohobycz and 20,000 souls in Boryslaw were registered.

The Germans then ordered a division of the city into four sections: German, Ukrainian, Jewish and Polish. In Galicia, Jewish people normally lived in the town.

The Judenrat made up a subsequent list of a thousand Jews to be sent away. In 1941 a thousand Jews were finally shipped out. They were marched to the train station, each with a bundle in their hand. It took some time till we discovered their fate.

From the day of the big "*aktzia*" in the month of Av, July 1942 we realized

that the only way to survive was to escape to a hideout. A lot of individuals began to build their own "bunkers." We hid in attics, cellars, fields, gardens, deep trenches, sewers, and ditches. Quietly and progressively we would store away bits and pieces of food and clothing for use in those G-d forsaken dungeons, we had no choice but to call home. When we felt that danger was ahead, or heard rumors that Germans were readying themselves to invade the Jewish quarter, Jews slowly began to creep into their own hiding places.

Here starts the most tragic and painful chapter. The *Judenrat* instituted a project of sending out Jewish watchmen to search out and seize hidden Jews. This manipulated maneuver was the most bitter and unforgivable act the *Judenrat* executed. Jewish people were handing over their own brethren to the Nazis for murder.

They started a project of using Jews themselves to turn over other Jews for German slaughter. At this time, thousands were dying because of hunger. A great many committed suicide. The death of choice was poison. Thousands in Boryslaw and Drohobycz died that way. Some five hundred Jews perished in one month's time, and it was a grueling task burying the dead.

In the month of Tammuz, we heard that the Jews initially taken to the trains were sent to their deaths. For the first time, the Judenrat was criticized for their turning over Jews for killing purposes. Many people asked whether it was permissible to turn to other religions in order to save their lives, particularly women.

We were confronted with the *Halachik* rule that for three reasons a Jew is required to let himself be killed rather than violate the law. Those sins were murder, idolatry and sexual crimes. The next month, in early July, they brought into Drohobycz Boryslaw several hundred Jews from the surrounding towns and villages, where they lived for generations. Later in the month the Germans closed up the ghetto. They stationed German watchmen around while the Ukrainians and the Germans pulled out six thousand people from Jewish homes in the ghetto. This we called an *Aktzia*.

The people were all pushed into cattle trains at the train station. They packed eighty people into each car. They were taken to Belzetz where they were all gassed to death. That is where my mother Rachel perished. The *Judenrat* wanted to assure my security. I did not accept their safety net. My son Yitzchok Chayim kept on finding new hiding places for me, bringing me food several

times a week.

In the month of *Cheshvan*, 1943, there was another Akzia where the Jewish "*Arbeitsdeinst*" (workforce) were searching for Jews in the fields and gardens. When they found someone they brought him into a *Beis Medrash*, (small worshiping place) completely surrounded by Ukrainians, and there the Jews were closed up for five weeks. Each day the workforce gathered more and more souls. The numbers increased so, that the Germans simply came and took all of them away with trucks into the nearby forest of Bronica to their deaths.

In the month of Adar, in March of 1943, another *Akzia* took place. The Germans took out two thousand more Jews from the ghetto, arrested them and put them into the city jail. Ultimately, they too were brought to the nearby forest and shot to death.

At that point, the ghetto was completely closed without anyone coming or going. The death rate from hunger and suicide kept growing, with several hundred Jews dying weekly.

In April of 1943 there was another "*Akzia*". The Germans circled the ghetto, gathered a thousand Jews and took them to the forests to be shot.

Drohobycz, Boryslaw were unique towns. Their oil wells and refineries operated full time, and the Germans decided to bring a thousand Jews into the "*arbeitslager*" (work place) and select individuals who were acquainted with the workings of the oil manufacturing industry. Two thousand Jews were gathered in a closed camp. Each morning they were led, under police guard, to the refinery for work. They would return to the camp at night. Through the intervention of my son, Yitzchok Chaim, I was accepted with my two daughters, Chana Gitel and Sheindel and my young son Avrahom as workers in the "*arbeitslager*". There were still two thousand Jews remaining in the ghetto.

The Germans came into the ghetto and camp throwing bombs into the few remaining standing homes. They assembled all the people who were left there including my wife Rechel Breindel, of blessed memory and they were taken out to Bronica on the 2nd day of *Shavuos* and killed in the forest. The Germans destroyed all the houses in the ghetto, including the cellars and the underground hideouts.

On the last day of Pesach, the Germans took all the Jews that were gathered in various places in Drohobycz and Boryslaw and shipped them out to the Plashov Concentration Camp. I was left with my son Yitzchok Chayim who had

hidden me in a bunker he had been building for months. We entered the bunker and remained there for nine weeks in terrible discomfort. We were cramped together in very uncomfortable positions.

There were constant quarrels between us about food, elbow room, loud talk, manners and the like. We had a very limited amount of food. Water was measured out by drops and mixed with cornmeal to create a sort of soup that we cooked once a day. We had one pot for thirty people. On April 1, of 1944 the Germans found us with sniffing police dogs and chased us out from the bunker. Strange as it may seem, I was relieved from the situation and condition under which we existed.

This time, I thought we were finished for good. Again a great miracle happened. They didn't kill us on the spot. They marched us to work and later, on April 12, 1944 after the liquidation of the Karpaten Oil Lager, they loaded about three thousand Jews into cattle trains and took us to the Plashov Concentration Camp in Krakow.

It is noteworthy to state that while in the bunker for nine weeks, we yearned for contact with the outside world. We desperately needed medicine. A young Jewish girl from Drohobycz, Ina Bergman, (presently Ina Kleiner) lived as a disguised Gentile on the outside of the ghetto. She volunteered to supply us from time to time with news of the war, some scraps of food, some candy and the medicine that we requested. Needless to say, such acts of kindness were life saving for us, under the conditions and circumstances in which we found ourselves.

Upon arrival in Plashov, they took our clothing away, dressed us in striped pajama-like uniforms. They locked us up in quarantine for ten days, and we were not permitted to leave the premises.

In the month of August, 1944, my two sons, Yitzchok Chayim, then twenty-three years old and Avrum Yisochar, fifteen, were sent to Germany, and I was separated from them. Then my two daughters, Chana Gitel, aged twenty-two and Sheindel, fifteen, were taken away from me. I was left in Plashov all alone, bereft of family until October of 1945.

Eventually two thousand Jews were removed from Plashov and taken to Gross Rosen in Germany. In this camp again we suffered terribly. Five hundred people were cramped into one barn. We were sleeping in much discomfort. We were one on top of another after a hard days work of digging ditches in the hot

sun.

After a few weeks of that hell, the Jews of Gross Rosen were sent to the famous German slaughterhouse, a concentration camp called Buchenwald. The trip took eleven days. For five days we had absolutely no solid food whatsoever. We just drank the rainwater that dripped into the trains or broke off the icicles that hardened and hung down from the edges of the roof.

I arrived there a very sick man and wound up lying in the Revere hospital. While in block sixty-three, I succeeded in arranging a minyan, and recited the Torah portion by heart, verbatim on *Shabos* and holidays to a group of Drohobyczer landsmen that supported and protected me from the beatings of the Kapos.

Amongst the prisoners there were a few rabbis. I tried to help the people around me by teaching and preaching with an appeal not to lose hope or spirit at this point. The war ended on April 13 of 1945.

I was in terrible physical condition, practically at the point of the breakdown of my entire body, when a divine miracle happened and I met a man who was the chief Chaplain of the Polish Army in Exile under General Andrews, Dr. Hershel Klepfish. He rescued me from the Revere and assigned to me the duties of acting chaplain. My mission was assisting Polish Jewish citizens in Buchenwald. He returned me to my duties as a Military Chaplain, as I had done in Drohobycz. I got involved immediately in this work and it helped bring about a very quick recovery of my physical and spiritual state of mind. (See more details in the Dr. Klepfish article.)

Ten months later, I arrived in the United States with the help of some relatives and friends whom I contacted from Germany through the UNRA (The United Nations Rehabilitation Agency) military mail. It is worth mentioning their names. They are Rabbi David Leib Levine of New Jersey who had obtained an official position for me as a rabbi in an American Congregation. I was able to receive a visa to enter the United States and because I had a job, I would not be a burden to the United States Government.

In the States I found two cousins in Brooklyn, N. Y. They were Yaakov and Avrum Avigdor, sons of my uncle Rabbi Sholom Avigdor. On my mother's side, I found Harry and Leah Rosner, and Ruth and David Mayer. They were extremely helpful settling me in a new country. Amongst the others were Mr. Yoshe and Regina Rubenfeld, owners of the Monsey Park Hotel.

In the year 1947, I obtained a position as Dean of Yeshiva Rabbi Solomon Kluger on the lower East Side of New York City. About the same time, in April of 1947, I was elected rabbi of Congregation Chovevei Torah on Eastern Parkway, in Brooklyn, New York.

My son Abraham arrived in New York shortly after. A year later my older son, Yitzchok came. He traveled two weeks by boat from Rotterdam, Holland to Mobile, Alabama. He then took the final leg of his journey with a two day train ride to New York City's Grand Central Station for our reunion. A host of friends and family greeted and welcomed him. It was a very emotional moment for all.

We tried to sustain ourselves and rebuild our lives. Without having a government to fear, we found some peace and started vigorously putting our lives together in a free land. We were led to the brink of human existence, but we never lost hope.

After six years, I entertained the thought of leaving New York for another community, which desperately needed spiritual leadership. The first position I tried was in Buenos Aires, capitol of Argentina and then later I finally decided to settle in Mexico City, Mexico.

The Twin cities:

DROHOBYCZ–BORYSLAW

My home town and surroundings

where my father

RABBI YAAKOV AVIGDOR

Became Chief Rabbi in the year 1929

At the age of 24



Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor – 1920
when elected as Rabbi of Drohobycz, Boryslaw

The Surroundings (The Golol) of Drohobycz-Boryslaw

When Rabbi Jacob Avigdor accepted the position as Chief Rabbi of the twin cities Drohobycz-Boryslaw, the surrounding area consisted of eighty towns and villages. Some of the towns had several thousand Jewish residents. They had their own rabbis, *schochtim*, and synagogues. Some of the outstanding communities were: Tistanovitch, Miraznitza, Uritch, Kotuv, Stare-Sambo, Schidnitza with their own synagogues and mikvah. Smaller villages such as Ribnick, Dolhe, Kopivnick, Urich, Medinitz, Pitbush, had a schochet, rabbi, synagogue and mikveh. Truskawitz was famous as a resort with mineral baths, salt and bitter waters, hot and cold mud baths and was nestled in the midst of a deep forest with many rivers. The resort attracted thousands of guests for the two summer months. It was generally considered that Drohobycz-Boryslav and their surroundings (*Hagolel*) had close to fifty thousand Jewish residents.

Drohobycz had its own Rabbinic Court, known as a *Beis Din* under the leadership of Rabbi Jacob Avigdor with a body of eleven coordinating rabbis: Rabbi Zev Nissenbaum, Rabbi Shalom Labin, Rabbi Chayim Rubin, Rabbi Eliyahu Goldberg, Rabbi Meyer Bander, Rabbi Israel Rokeach, Rabbi Sender Labin, Rabbi Chayim Aeberstark, Rabbi Jacob Lustman, Rabbi Leibish Rokeach and Rabbi Moshe Eichenstein. These rabbis covered their rabbinic duties between the twin towns and the surroundings, according to the daily needs. Cases with halachik difficulties were referred to the Rabbinic Beis Din in Drohobycz for further consultations.

The resort town of Truskawitz deserves special mention because it attracted thousands of guests from all over Poland to the various palatial hotels, most of which were Kosher.

Rabbi Avigdor and his family lived in a cottage during the summer months and commuted several times weekly to Drohobycz-Boryslav. That trip took twenty minutes. I, the oldest son, went every summer with my family accompanied by my rebbie, the great scholar Rabbi Moshele Gruber. We studied Talmud every day without interruption. Our house was the official address for most of the out-of-town guests where they received assistance and directives for obtaining free passes into the bath-houses and other privileges from the resort's many offerings.

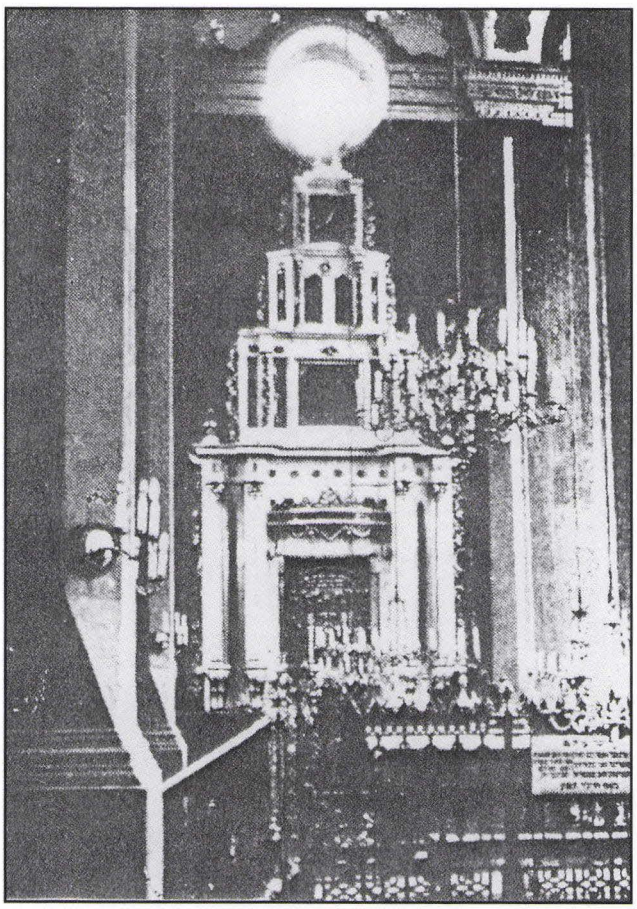
My father called it "His window to the world." This summer retreat gave us the unique privilege of having the opportunity to personally meet the foremost Jewish leaders of our generation.

Drohobycz-Boryslav was an industrial center because of its natural resources of oil, salt, minerals and wax. As a result of this, the Rabbinate was preoccupied with many legal business matters that the Jews encountered in their course of business. They had the best medical doctors equipped to treat various sicknesses amongst the many guests that came for the baths.

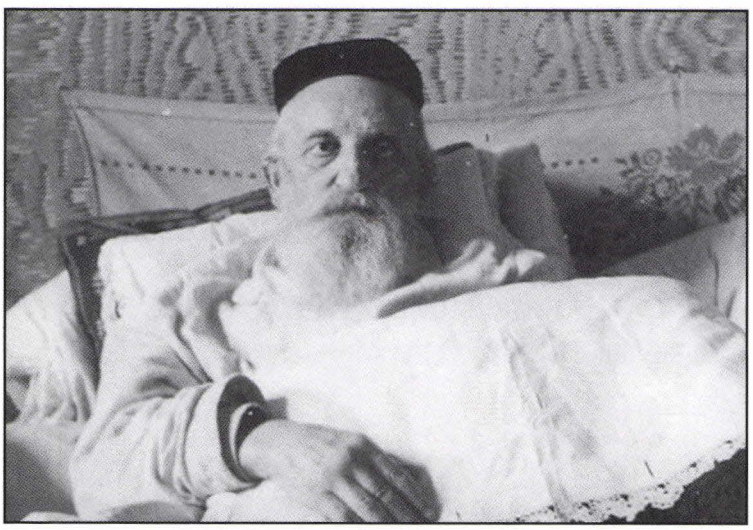


Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor – 1939

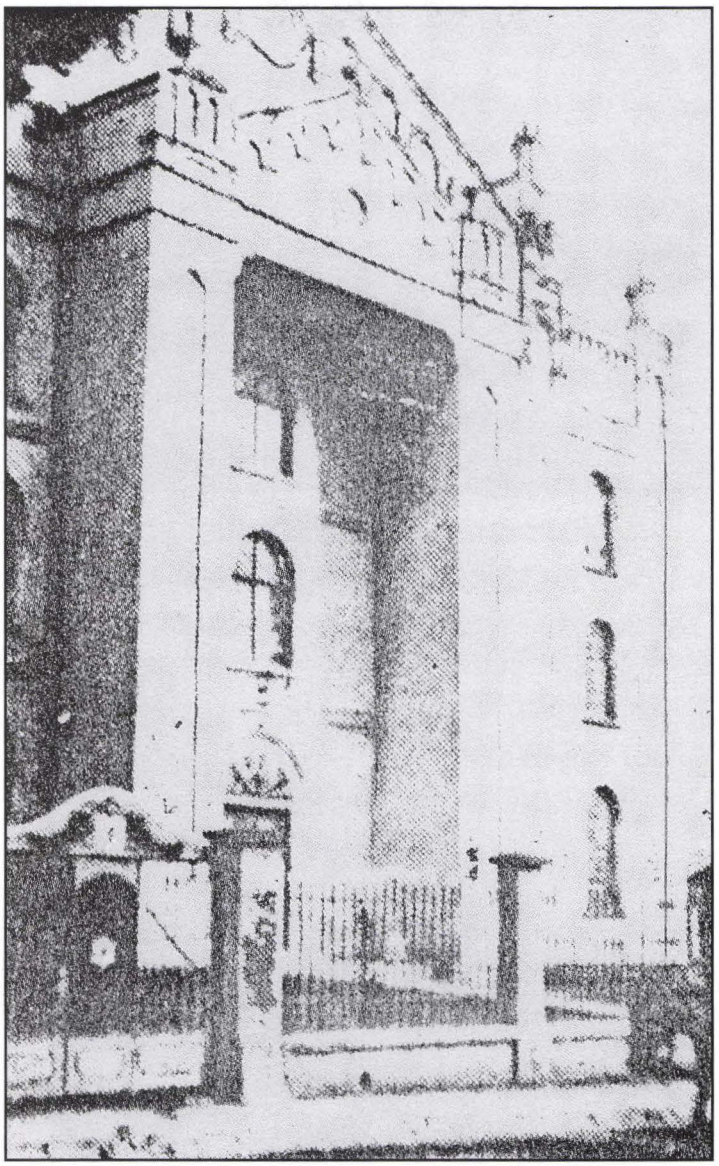
After the Russians closed the Main Synagogue in Drohobycz



Interior of Central Synagogue in Drohobycz.
One of the largest and most impressive houses of worship in Poland. Seating capacity of over three thousand people.

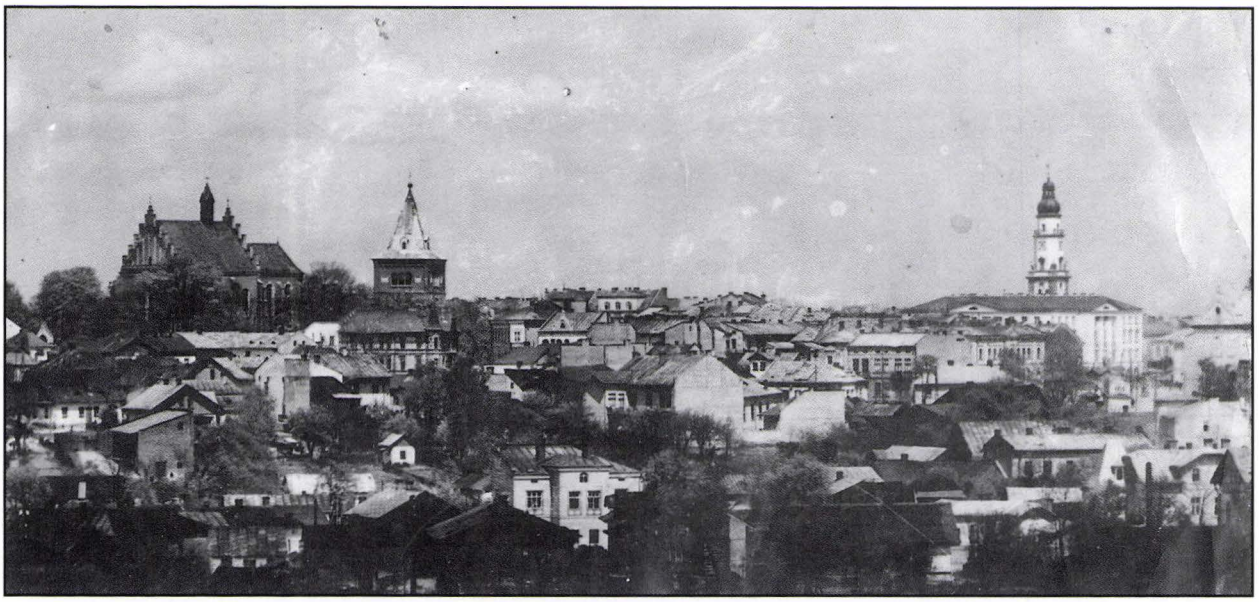


Reb Yonale Orenstein
A local winery merchant was the lifelong president of the Synagogue

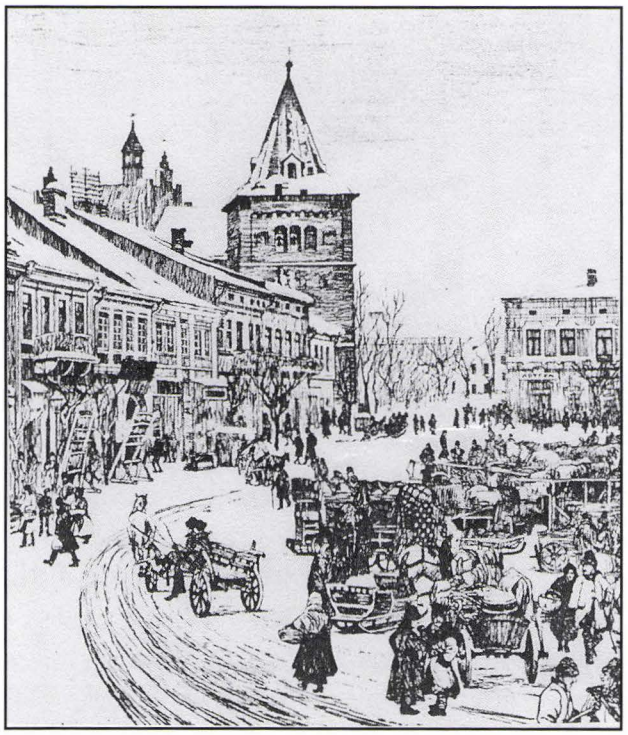


The Central Synagogue of Drohobycz, Poland

It was located on the "Ian", a large field located near the Jewish quarters, and near the hospital, cemetery and other Jewish institutions. This large piece of real estate was purchased by Don Isaac Abarbanel for the purpose of Jewish settlement after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, in the year 1492.



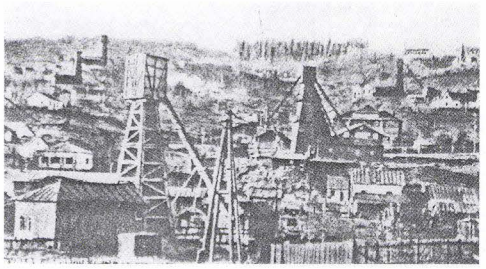
Panoramic view of Drohobycz
with the tower clock facing in four directions

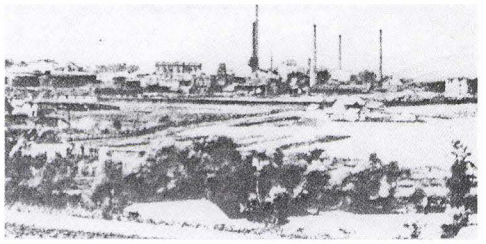


Drohobycz Market Place
Etching by Ephraim Moses Lilien hometown landsman.
While in Jerusalem, Betzalel Art School

Board of the Kehilla in Boryslaw
President Leon Schutzman (center left)







General views of Boryslaw
Center of Oil Industry



Top: Reception for Dr. Leon Reich and Dr. Leon Tannenbaum, the Kehilla in Drohobycz.
Bottom: Members of Board of the Kehilla.

PERSONAL CHRONOLOGY OF RABBI YAAKOV AVIGDOR AND TIMELINE OF THE ANNIHILATION OF THE TWIN CITIES DROHOBYCZ-BORYSLAW AND IT'S SUBURBS BY THE GERMANS

Population 40,000 Jews as of 1939

1939 ~ September 18	Initial occupation by the Germans.
1939 ~ September 24	German retreat and occupation by the Russians.
1941 ~ June 30	Re-occupation by Germans, at the outbreak of the German Russian War.
1941 ~ July 20	Order to wear white armbands with star of David as Jewish Identification.
1942 ~ May 18	First "*Akzia*" (MASS RAID), deportation of 4,000 Jews
(2 Sivan, 5,702)	by the German S. S.
1942 ~ August 5	"Akzia" of 10,000 Drohobycz-Boryslaw residents transported to Belzetz, Gas Chambers.
1942 ~ October 1	Order that all Jews must live in the Ghetto.
1942 ~ October 23	Major *Akzia* of 8,000 Jews taken from the Ghetto and executed on the outskirts of town.
(12~20 Cheshvon)	(So were other sporadic executions throughout June, 1944).
1943 ~ February 15	Liquidation of Ghettos
1943 ~ May 21 ~June 7	Liquidation of *Arbeits-Lagers* Small Concentration Camps on the outskirts of town, the Ziegelei" (Brick factory) and part of Carpathian (Oil Refineries).
1944 ~ April 12	Liquidation of Carpathian Oil Lager and the deportation of about 3,000 Jews to the main Concentration Camp in Plashow, Kracow.
1945 ~ April 13	Liberation from Buchenwald by American Army.

In Israel the established Memorial Day for Drohobycz-Boryslaw landsmen is 12 days in Adar

BIOGRAPHY OF A RENOWNED SCHOLAR

Author Of 32 Books

Rosh Yeshiva of Rabbi Solomon Kluger, NYC

Chief Rabbi Of Argentina

Chief Rabbi Of Mexico City

Officer of Polish Legion
with General Andrew Under British Forces

Founder of Vaad Hatzalah

Established Rabbinic Court in Bergen Belzen
issued the first Heter Agunah

Chaplain of the Polish Army in the Major
Concentration Camps of Post War Europe, 1945-46

Intervention for Jewish Children
to be taken out from Church hideouts

BELZER REBBE'S VISIT TO DROHOBYCZ

During Summer of 1936

Belzer Rebbe's Visit to Drohobycz During the Summer of 1936



Reb. Areleh Rokeach, Zatzal



From left to right: Reb. Areleh Rokeach, Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor, Reb. Berl Bilik, seated in a gala welcoming wagon driven by a pair of horses led by a chossid Moshe Dickman (Gold). Polish police guard up front.



Group of Chassidim around the Rebbe seated in center

Belzer Rebbe, Arele Rokeach, Zatzal, Visits Drohobycz

A very rich Jewish man from Spain, Don Isaac Abrabanel, (Don, was a title like Lord) intervened on behalf of the Spanish Jews to King Kazimir the great of Kracow, Poland for the purchase of a tract of land upon which Jews could settle and live peacefully.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth century, Tomas Torquemada, carried out the inquisition of Jews by killing thousands who refused to convert to Christianity. Jews, trying to avoid this evil decree were hiding or finding refuge out of Spain. They were called Moranos. Some say that the fearful conditions of Jews under Torquemada led to the main initiative of Columbus to start his famous journey to the new world.

There are opinions that Columbus was of Jewish origin. The land that King Kazimir sold to Abrabanel was in Drohobycz, Poland and that particular parcel became known as the "Lannes". The news that Jews were accepted and allowed to dwell in Poland spread quickly and the Lannes in Drohobycz became populated with Jews in no time. They lived comfortably in small houses. Soon after, a synagogue was built and called, the *Lann Beis Medrash.*

There were rich deposits of oil in the town of Boryslav, at the outskirts of Drohobycz. Crude oil was pumped out of the wells of Boryslav and sent to refineries in Drohobycz for processing.

There is a river that flows through Boryslav and Drohobycz called the

Tishmenitza. Both the river and the air always smelled of oil. Fish did not survive in the river for very long because of the polluted waters. Even the fish themselves smelled of oil. The Jewish community grew quickly because Drohobycz turned into a rich oil-producing center. The oil wells themselves were in Boryslaw, the next town over.

The Jewish community consisted of hard working men in every profession and included engineers, scientists and lawyers. It became an industrial town producing, not only the oil itself but also by-products of oil, such as grease, vaseline and lubricating materials. This provided jobs for many thousands of people.

The leaders of the Kehillah hired a great scholar to be their rabbi. His name was Reb Itzikel Drohobyczer. He led the Jewish people in the Lann Beis Medrash and was a friend and colleague of the Baal Shem Tov, who was the founder of *Chassidism.*

Reb Itzikel immediately involved himself in the community affairs and had a Mikveh built on top of an original water well located in the basement of the Beis Medrash. You had to go down two flights of very steep steps to approach it. He also started a Talmud Torah and surrounded himself with Chassidim of the Baal Shem Tov. The Jewish community grew, but amidst the citizens of the community, Reb Itzikel had some opponents who brought about his expulsion from Drohobycz and he eventually wound up in a village nearby known as Stebnick. There, he became seriously ill and word reached his mentor the Baal Shem of his sad condition. When the Baal Shem heard the news, he immediately decided to go visit him from Mezibetz, in the Ukraine. By the time the Baal Shem came to Drohobycz, he was very disappointed not to find Reb Itzikel there. He attended the *Lann Beis Medrash* and made use of the *Mikveh* in the Synagogue.

Until World War II, in 1939, there was a plaque in the Shule reading, "On this chair sat the Baal Shem Tov during his visit to Drohobycz." The story of the Baal Shem's disappointing visit and his attendance in the Synagogue was recorded in the official *pinkus* (the diary) of the *Kehillah* and for my reading pleasure, I reread it several times.

The Baal Shem's visit to Drohobycz became known throughout Poland and the Ukraine and the story of his relation with Reb Itzikal was talked about throughout my many yearly visits to Truskavitz, a resort town where hundreds

of rabbis would come to cure all sorts of ailments. They came for the salt-water baths, the drinking of the mineral waters and mud soaks. The *Lann Beis Medrash* became a tourist attraction for many to visit and see the chair of the Baal Shem in the synagogue.

My father, Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor, would deliver his annual *Shabbos Teshuva* speeches in the Lann Beis Medrash. The building itself was old and falling apart on the outside. The Mikvah beneath, built by Reb. Itzikal did not function because the original steps were all out of shape, slimy and crooked.

The Belzer Rebbe's visit to Drohobycz stirred up a lot of excitement throughout the community, especially amongst the Belzer Chassidim. He stayed at the house of a Mr. Wilf on #1 Kowalski Street . He was welcomed at the railroad station by hundreds of his *chassidim* with much pomp and ceremony, as seen in the picture on the previous page. A pair of horses and an eloquent buggy awaited him with my father, Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor, extending official greetings on behalf of the city. Friday night services were held in the main synagogue, built by Reb. Eluzer Nissan Tittlebaum. The *seudos* (feasts) were held in the adjoining, *Lann Beis Medrash.* That Friday night, I was given the honor of lifting the cup of wine for Kiddush for the Rebbe. It was a most exciting time in my young life. Friday afternoon I escorted the gabbai (his personal assistant) and some other *Chassidim* to the *Mikveh* and was in the dressing room helping the Rebbe with preparations for the immersion. I hung up his clothing and arranged his shoes. The Rebbe wore his *yarmulke* until the moment he had his head under the water. The *yarmulke* was passed around from hand to hand and I had the honor of holding it on the outside until the end of the whole procedure. During the actual immersion I was outside the mikvah. The whole course of action was fascinating and awe inspiring to me. It was a scene which I can never forget. I boasted about it for years after. This privilege was obtainable to me simply because I was the son of Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor, the Drohobyczer Rav. I was very proud of my father and myself for this rare opportunity to serve the Belzer Rebbe.

The Rebbe was very friendly to my father and paid a personal visit to our house on the *Rynek* before he left. During the week, the Rebbe received hundreds of people who gave him "*kvitlach*" (written requests for various personal needs, such as health, matchmaking of children and parnasah, livelihood.) The Rebbe's welcome, was very well organized by his local chassidim. One name stands out

in my mind amongst the many who were in charge of organizing the visit and that is Reb Beryl Bilik.

Many preparations had to be arranged before the Rebbe's visit. My saintly father did his share in the groundwork also. In the center of the town was the City Hall with a giant clock tower that reached skyward. Around this City Hall was a Plaza, called the *Rynek* that surrounded the well-designed brick houses and elegant stores on street level. Above the stores were high priced apartments with big porches from which the inhabitants viewed the area activities and parades. We lived on the Rynek No. 32.

All major stores on the *Rynek* were open on Shabbos and owned by Jews. There was only one exception and that was the tavern owned by Reb Yonahle Orenstein, the gabbai of the Great Synagogue who kept his store closed every *Shabbos*. My father made it his business to contact all the owners of these stores and asked them to, please keep their shops closed on this special *Shabbos* when the Belzer Rebbe would visit the city. Reluctantly, but with respect, they complied. After the Rebbe's visit, a joke circulated in town for months. It seems that two of the merchants who had closed on this *Shabbos*, purchased lottery tickets that week and won the grand prize. They attributed it to the fact that it was their reward for closing on *Shabbos*.

The Rebbe's visit invigorated the *Chassidim* for many months to come. They kept up their spirits with continuous letters and donations to him and sang songs of praise to his name.

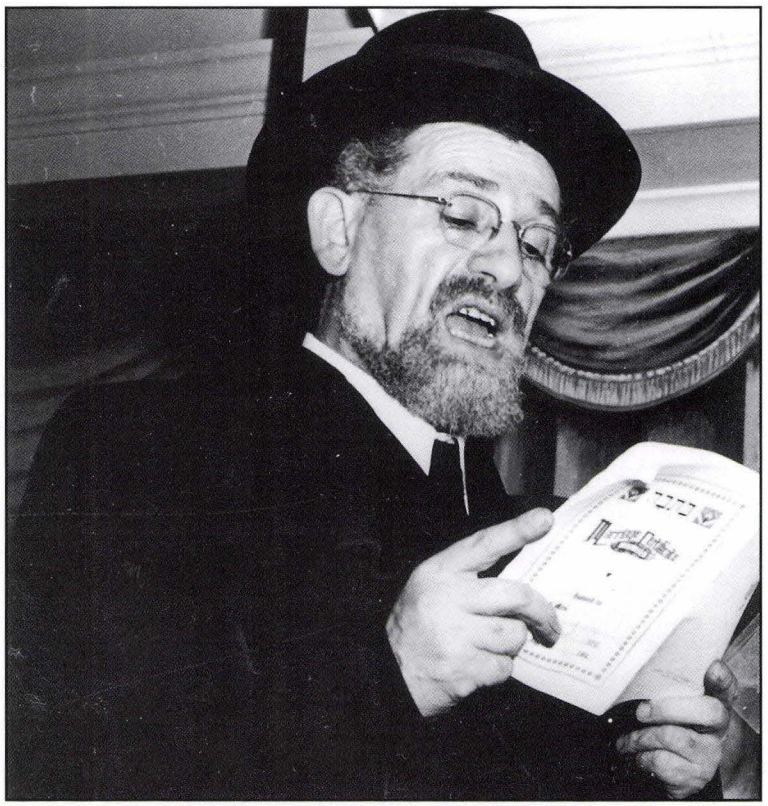
Gala Hometown Wedding of Menachem & Alisa Begin

I was a seventeen year old yeshiva student and Belzer Chassid when Menachem Begin came to my hometown of Drohobycz in 1935. He came to work as an intern for a good friend of our family, Dr. Zvi Arnold, a prominent lawyer. Polish law required every law school graduate to spend two years as an adjutant (apprentice) in an established law firm. This was also the general procedure in the field of medicine. (Ironically, all European lawyers carry the title of "Doctor" although they know nothing about medicine.)

Anti-Semitic feelings in pre-war Poland were strong. There was a "quota system" that limited the number of Jewish students in universities. A special working permit was required for apprentices. After Menachem Begin finished his law studies at Warsaw University and before practicing as a lawyer, he had to find a firm that would accept him as an apprentice. He also had to have his application approved by the Regional Lawyer's Union. He came to Drohobycz, Poland, because Galicia didn't have any limitations for Jewish apprenticeships. In the division of Poland between the three major powers of Russia, Austria and Germany, Drohobycz was part of Austria known as Galicia, which had relaxed laws in various legal and business enterprises. When Poland was re-established after World War I, the Austrian governmental changes remained, hence it was easier to get into the system of the legal profession than in any other parts of the country. Begin took advantage of this lenient change to be accepted as a lawyer in the community. The lawyers union was ninety percent Jewish and had a positive attitude towards young legal students.



Menachem and Alisa Begin



Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor officiated at the wedding ceremony of Menachem Begin and Alisa Arnold in the resort town of Truskavitz in 1939 at the elegant Eden Hotel.
Amongst the guests was the great revisionist leader, Zev Jabotinsky.

By being accepted in Dr. Arnold's office, Begin achieved two important goals. He got his professional independence and found his wife to be, Alisa Arnold, who was one of Dr. Arnold's twin daughters. Ala, as we called her, was nineteen years old at the time, the same age as I, and we shared some high school classes. Begin, born in 1913 was seven years older than Ala. In a very short while, he became extremely popular in the community. Other Zionist figures spoke of making immediate aliya and leave Anti-Semitic Poland. Begin also spoke of Torah and tradition, using Biblical phrases and *Chassidic* tales to make his points.

The audiences loved Begin's oratory when he spoke at mass Zionist rallies in fluent Polish and a colorful Litvishe Brisker Yiddish. I was mentally drawn to him, although my father, Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor, and my uncle, Rabbi David Avigdor, were well-known leaders of the Mizrachi movement in Poland and preached similar philosophies.

About twenty young boys from Rabbinic and Chassidic backgrounds formed a new revisionist group called *"Brith Yesburun."* It's name came from *"Betar,"* whose initials in Hebrew spell "Brit Joseph Trumpeldor." We met on Saturdays in the basement of our home. At these *kumsitzes,* as we called them, we spoke about Zionism, read articles written by Zev Jabotinsky in the Warsaw Jewish Press, Heint and Moment. We sang Jewish revisionist songs such as "Two Sides of the Jordan" and read other poetry or prose. We were in contact with the religious head of the party, Dr. Joseph B. Schechtman, and the local Drohobycz branch organization, but Menachem Begin had the greatest influence on us all, myself included. As the national Betar leader, Begin traveled throughout Poland. His speeches and organizational skills were limitless.

When Ala Arnold's engagement to Begin was announced in town, there was much talk about it. Other girls were extremely jealous of her, because of how prominent Begin had become. They would joke about how Begin would be unable to recognize his future wife, from her twin sister. They were like two identical drops of water.

In May of 1939, the Arnolds began preparing for the wedding of Menachem and Ala. Drohobycz was too small a city for the national crowd they hoped to attract, especially when it became known that Zev Jabotinsky himself would come from Paris to participate in the festivities. The family decided to take advantage of the nearby town of Truskavitz, a summer resort that offered first class accommodations for guests seeking curative baths and mineral

drinking waters. Our family always rented a summer place in Truskavitz, which was a fifteen minute car ride from Drohobycz. It was the last stop on the Lvov/Lemberg railroad line before the Karpathian Mountains near the Hungarian border. Hundred of rabbis, Chassidic rebbes and yeshiva students used to come to Truskavitz annually for the mineral cures. Because of this attraction, I had the opportunity to meet dozens of Torah sages of the time, along with political leaders and influential businesspersons of prewar Poland.

The elegant Eden Hotel was chosen as the wedding site. My father, as the local chief rabbi, had control of *kashruth* over these hotels, with *mashgichim,* (supervisors) on site. These hotels were closed for the winter season. It became apparent to the Arnolds that it was the perfect place for the wedding, and the mild month of May was the ideal time of the year to have it. The ceremony took place in the Truskavitz Synagogue and the reception and dinner were held at the Eden Hotel, just a few blocks away.

In April, about a month before the wedding, my father received a telegram from Zev Jabotinsky, who was then in Paris. In the telegram, he inquired about the *kashruth* of the Begin wedding. My father responded through the Arnold's that *kashruth* at the wedding would be strictly observed. Jabotinsky's inquiry about *kashruth* became the talk of the town for a month.

Jabotinsky always visited my father during his frequent visits to Drohobycz, which became known as the center of the Revisionist Movement. Whenever my wife Esther and I visited Israel, we made it our business to see the Begins in Jerusalem.

I corresponded continuously with Alisa Begin and even received a letter from her when she was in Hadassah Hospital before her death. Menachem Begin himself wrote the foreword to one of my books, in which a whole chapter is devoted to Alisa's memory.

Throughout their many years of struggles and victory, in their fascinating life together, the Begins' proved themselves heroes in their achievements for their people and the State of Israel. Amongst the various and unusual attributes of morality and their high ethical standards, the Begins distinguished themselves in their loyalty and dedication to their friends and comrades. Even foes, political and personal, always respected and recognized Menachem Begin as a gentleman and a great man in Jewish history.

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

MENACHEM BEGIN
Jerusalem

My dear friend,

Thank you very much for your letter. It brought back memories from old times.

I shall be only too happy to meet you during your stay in Israel. Please phone the office, Jerusalem 528147 and ask for a date. It will be easily done.

I hope to see you soon.

Jerusalem, 15.5.79.

Yours sincerely
Alisa Begin

BUCHENWALD CONCENTRATION CAMP

HOLOCAUST TO REDEMPTION
משואה לתקומה



Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor, May 7, 1945
Inducted as Captain in the
Polish Exile Division of the British Army



Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor, Apr. 11, 1945
on day of liberation from
Buchenwald Concentration Camp

The dramatic change in Rabbi Avigdor's looks within two weeks through the enormous efforts of Major Chaplain Rabbi Hershel Klepfish and the help of G-d



Photo taken by famous photographer Margaret Burke White
during the visit of General Dwight D. Eisenhower to Concentration Camps,
May 7, 1945. Arrow points to Rabbi Avigdor

הרב דר. העשעל קלעפפיש ע"ה



Memorial Tribute by Rabbi Dr. Hershel Klepfish

Chief Chaplain & Major in Polish Legion Exile Division
Of the British Army on the Eastern Front

Today, on the *Yahrzeit* of Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor, my esteemed colleague, friend and associate officer of the Polish Legion, his personality appears in my mind. His memory reminds me of cases we worked on together and especially of the first time when we met in Buchenwald, Germany.

I see before me an outstanding Jewish leader, famous as a prominent rabbi, when Poland was still free and independent. He was still young in those days and yet around him swarmed a legend. He was generally known for his depth of learning as expressed in the various books that he authored, dealing with correspondence between colleagues about Halachic problems. He entered into the depths of the Talmud and law to find various new interpretations. He mastered the Polish language and authored a book on the Talmud in that same tongue.

Rabbi Avigdors' erudition, analytical mind and writing talents were a rare synthesis. He wrote of intellect and heart and it was shared with readers from all over. He, with his multi-phased personality foretold the arrival of a new generation of rabbis who will know how to lead the Jewish people in times of crisis and storm.

I was the editor of an orthodox weekly journal in Warsaw and tried to attract Rabbi Yaakov Avigdor, the Drohobyczer Rav, as we called him to join the ranks of our editorial staff. This was our great aspiration for a long while.

Not many years past and the catastrophe of the Holocaust came upon us, brutally tearing apart the golden period of Polish Jewry.

When the Second World War was over, Rabbi Avigdor found himself in Buchenwald, as the chaplain of the Polish Exile Army on the Eastern front. We traveled together across the length and width of Germany visiting Concentration Camps, checking on the lives of the survivors and trying to identify them.

I recollect Rabbi Avigdor, immediately upon liberation, more like a shadow, than a human being. He was very thin, just skin and bones, pale and broken up. However, it was enough, to just hear him open his mouth and speak, to be convinced that his spirit was far from having been extinguished. His pain and sufferings did not disturb his rock-strong faith. From him radiated the greatness of Jewish spirit.

Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor gained a victory on the Buchenwald battlefield. I saw the conflicting uniqueness of the role of a giant in Jewish spirituality battling his physical weakness and remaining strong. He was breathing the holiness of past generations.

I have seen, observed and admired him for several months as he wandered throughout Germany searching and visiting all the camps. What was his purpose? He gathered lonely, forlorn and orphaned Jewish children. With unusual dedication he founded educational institutions and Hebrew schools. He had the fortitude to throw himself into the work of the *Vaad Hatzalah*, to save the remaining survivors from physical disappearance and spiritual breakdown. He was weak and plagued with various sicknesses that he himself had undergone during the nightmare of his past, and yet remained active, full of gusto and initiative, with sacrificial readiness to all involved in the mission of again rebuilding the destroyed Jewish life.

Listening to his speeches during the rescue missions, while visiting the new Jewish settlements in Germany, Holland and Belgium, was like medicine to the survivors. He expelled the depression and sadness within the hearts of all. The rescue activities he carried out revived and renewed the spirits of the people who remained. His mission of revival and resurrection became a bright chapter in his life.

I noticed that his physical health was poor and his condition concerned me. I realized that his health was worsening and unless help would be extended to him immediately, he might not have survived. He had to leave Germany and the miserable post war atmosphere.

Accomplishing that lifesaving act for Rabbi Avigdor was not an easy task. Army Military laws strongly forbade anyone leaving the borders of Germany. Permission to cross the border would usually take many months.

In this case, however, with Rabbi Avigdor not having the time to wait because of his bad health, I signed a document giving him permission to cross the German border, despite the fact that I was not authorized to do so. I dressed him in a military uniform, which I was not allowed to do before official induction, and I seated him next to me in a military truck. I then proceeded to smuggle him through the borders of Germany, Holland and Bellguim, which were all manned by military guards. Had they caught us, I would have been arrested and penalized for violating military laws, while in the service as a Major in the Polish Legion, (which was part of the British Army.) I took this risk and we arrived in Brussels peacefully. We went directly to the house of the Chief Rabbi of Belgium, Rabbi Mordechai Shlomo Ullman.

There, I turned Rabbi Avigdor over into his care, describing to him the outstanding personality he represented and the historical duty of having his health restored and his life saved.

The rabbi of Kotzk once said, "There is no more whole thing than a broken Jewish heart." Rabbi Avigdor's heart was fearfully broken but also wonderfully whole. I visualize him today, on the eve of his yahrzeit, as a rare personality, one of the great minds in the history of Polish Jewry. May his memory be a blessing to all.

(Dr. Klepfish later became the Chief Rabbi of Panama)

הרב יעקב אביגדור

(צו זיין 25טן יאָרצייט; ח"י אדר ב')

פֿון ד"ר העשיל קלעפּפיש

ס'איז א יאָרצייט נאָך הרב יעקב אביגדור און אין געדאַנק שווימט אַרויף עך, זיין פֿערזענלעכקייט, די פֿאַרשידענע פּאַלן, ווען איך האָב זיך מיט אים צונויפֿגעטראָפֿן.

אָט זע איך אים פֿאָר זיך אין אום־אָפּהענגיקן פֿרילן, עטלעכע יאָר פֿאַרן אויסברוך פֿון דער צווייטער וועלט־מלחמה, איידער עס האָט זיך אָנגעהויבן דער חורבן. ער איז צו יענער צייט געווען איינער פֿון די באַוואוסטע דערטע רבנים אין פּוילן. נאָך פֿאַר־העלטניסמעסיק יונג; און שרין האָט אַרום אים זיך געשפּינט די לעגענדע. ער איז געווען א גאון אין לערנען אָן געשריבן – אויסער בענדער מיט שאלות־ותשובות, וועלכע זענען אַריינגעדרונגען אין די וועגן און שטעגן פֿון תלמוד אָן פֿון דער הלכה – אויך וערק וועגן פֿילאָסאָפֿיע אין דער פּוילישער שפּראַך.

איך האָב דאָמאָלט רעדאַגירט אין וואַרשע אַן ארטאָדאָקסיש וואָכנבלאָט אין פּויליש און דאָס אַריינציען הרב אביגדור – אַדער ווי מיר האָבן אים געוווּנען, דער דראָהאָביטשער רב – פֿאַר א מיטאַרבעטער איז געווען אתזער גרויס אַמביציע. זיין שטענ־דיקע ערודיציע, זיין אַנאַליטישער שכל, זיין שרייבעריישער טאַלאַנט, דער זעלטענער סינטעז, וואָס ער האָט מיט זיך פֿאַרגעשטעלט פֿון אינטע־לעקט אָן האַרץ, האָבן אַרויסגעשיינט פֿון אַלע דיינע שאָפֿונגען; אַן אונטער־שיד וועלכע טעמע ס'איז געווען אין זיין באַהאַנדלונג. ער האָט מיט זיין פֿילוזיטיקער פֿערזענלעכקייט אַנגע־זאָגט, אז א נייער דור רבנים קומט אַריף אין אידישן פּוילן, וועלכע וועלן ווייסן צו פֿירן דאָס פֿאָלק אין דער צייט פֿון איבערברוך און שטורם.

ס'זיינען פֿאַרבייגעגאַנגען א סך יאָרן. עס האָט אַנגעדוקט דער חודבן, וועלכער האָט ברוטאַל איבערגעריסן דעם גאַלדענעם פֿעריאָד פֿון פֿוילישן אידנטום. די צווייטע וועלט־מלחמה האָט זיך נאָרווייַאָם געהאַט פֿאַרענדיקט אָן איך האָב זיך באַגעגנט מיט הרב אביגדור אין בוכענוואַלד. ווי דער רב פֿון דער פּוילישער גלות־אַרמיי אויפֿן מערב־פֿראָנט, בין איך אַרומגעפֿאָרן איבער די נאָרוואָם כאפֿרייטע און געפֿענטע אומבאַרעגע־לאָגערן כדי צו זען אויב ס'איז נאָך עמעצער אין זיי פֿאַרבליבן בייַם לעבן.

ער שטייט נאָך אין געדאַנק פֿאָר מיר, מער שאָטן ווי פֿערזאָן. אַפּגע־דאַרט, הויט און ביינער, בלאָס, צעבראָכן. אָבער עס איז געטו געווען אַנצוהייבן רעידן מיט אים, כדי זיך איבערצוציינג, אז זיין גייסט איז חיות נישט אויסגעלאָשן געוואָרן. די ליידן און פֿיינינקונגען האָבן נישט געקענט צעשטערן זיין סעלזן־פֿעסטע אמונה. פֿון אים האָט אַרויסגעפֿינקלט די גרויסקייט פֿון דער אידישער נשמה.

הרב יעקב אביגדור האָט באַזיגט בוכענוואַלד. איך האָב געוווּסט פֿאַר דיר, אַרך אין מצב אין וועלכן ער האָט דיך געפֿונען, א ריז פֿון אידישער נייַסט־קייט. אין דער פֿיזיקער שוואַכקייט איז ער פֿאַרבליבן שטאַרק. ער האָט געאַטעמט מיט דער אידישער קרישה פֿון דורות.

איך האָב אים געזען, אַבסערווירט אין באַוואוסטזיַן עטלעכע חדשים שפּעטער, וועו ער אליין האָט אַרום־געהאַנגלט אין דער כריס און לענג פֿון ייִשטשלאַנד. מיט וועלכן צוועקז ער האָט צונויפֿגעקליבן עלנטע, פֿאַרלאָזטע, פֿאַריתומ־טע אידישע קינדער; ער האָט מיט מסירת נפש נעגרינדעט פֿאַר זיי דערציאונג־אַנשטאַלטן; ער האָט מיט התלהבות זיך אַריינגעוואַרפֿן אין דער ארבעט פֿון הצלה. דאָטעוווען די שאריית הפּליטה פֿון מידשן אונטערגאַנג און נייסטיקן פֿאַרלענד. אַליין נאָך שוואַך אָן אונטערן ליידן פֿון די שרעקלעכע קראַנקהייטן, וואָס ער האָט אַדורכגע־מאַכט, אַליין אונטער דעם קאָשמאַר פֿון די פֿאַרגאַנגענהייט־געשפּענסטער; און שוין אָקטיוו, טעטיק, מיט אימפּעט און איניציאַטיוו, מיט קרבנות־גרייטקייט, כולו פֿאַרטאָן אין דער אויסגאַבע, וודיער אויפֿצוריין דאָס תורב־נעהאָרענע אידישע לעבן. די דרשות, די רעדעס וואָס צר האָט דאָמאָלס געהאַלטן אין די פֿונדאַמענ־טאַלסטע אידישע ישובים אין רייטשלאַנד און דערנאָך אין האַלאַנד אָן בעלגיע; די רעטונג־טעטיקייט, וואָס ער האָט אַדורכגעפֿירט, האָבן אַרויפֿגעגאַנגט די מוטלאָזיקייט און אבלות. זיינע אויסטרען פֿאַר דער פֿאַלקס־באַציאונג אין דעם נאָך־חורבן פֿעריאָד האָבן צוגענומען. נאָך אַן אַנשטענדיק און ליכטיק קאַפּיטל אין זיין לעבן.

„גישטאָ קיין מער גאַנצע זאָך, ווי א צעבראָכן אידיש האַרץ", האָט אַמאָל געזאָגט ר' מענדעלע, דער רבי פון קאָצק. הרב אביגדור'ס האַרץ איז געווען מוראַדיק צעבראָכן. אָבער אויך וואונדערלעך גאַנץ. ס'איז זיין יאָרצייט און איך זע פֿאָר זיך דער זעלטענע געשטאַלט פון הרב יעקב אביגדור, אייגער פון די לעצטע גאָר גרויסע פֿערזענלעכקייטן פון פּוילישן אידנטום. זאָל זיין אַנדענק זיין געבענטשט. כ

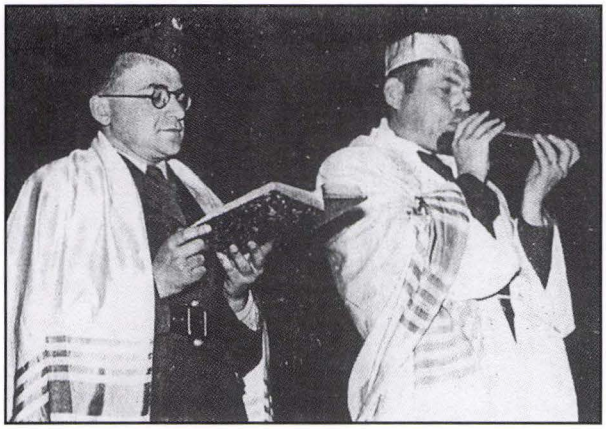
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אברהם ווילק — רעדאַקציע־סיטוליד

MARCH 13, 92



On the left, Chaplain Hershel Klepfish, Rosh Hashonah, 1943 – Shofar blowing



Jewish soldiers of the Polish Legion attending High Holiday Services



Extreme left Major Hershel Klepfish attending meeting in Buchenwald.
Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor on right (encircled, seated)
Others are officers of the Polish Legion



Soldiers of Polish Exile: Division upon landing in Normandy

THE CONTINUOUS ASSISTANCE TO SURVIVORS UNDER GENERAL ANDREWS

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PWR/AM/MW

20th August 1945.

Chaplain Rabbi Dr. Avigdor,
603, Mil. Gov. Det.,
B.L.A.

Dear Rabbi Avigdor,

Thank you for your letter and postcard which I received today.

I was glad to hear that you received the 3 parcels of clothing and shoes, and I hope you will receive in good order, the other parcels which we use to send you regularly every week, from now onwards.

I have sent you during the course of the last week parcels of religious requisites, and I hope you will make good use of them.

I will send you tomorrow 2 Shofaroth and some Machzorim for Rosh Hashoneh and Yom Kippur. I am also sending you some Selichoth.

In your last letter you asked us to send youa Schilchan Aruch. I will try and get you one, but for the time being I will send you a Set of Mishna Berira, and I hope this will serve your purpose meanwhile.

P.T.O.

די לעצטע חדשים אין בוכענוואַלד

• פון יוסף פרידענזא

דאָס אידישע וואָרט • אייר־סיון

ל לייענער וועלן זיך זיכער חידושן דאָס צו לייענען. ווּבער דער אמחער ו איז. אָז די דייטשן האָבן געהאַט אַ גרויסע צאָל קליינע אומבאַקאַנטע רן. וואָס האָבן געשטעלט אין שאָטן די "גרויסע" און "וועלט־באַרימטע" ענטראַציע לאַגערן. אָזאַ לאַגער איז געווען "אַרדרוף", בלויז בערך רט מייל אַוועק פון בוכענוואַלד. אייזדער איך בין געקומען קיין וואַלד, האָב איך מיטגענומאַכט אַ פאָר וואָכן טאָקע אין אָט דעם יוף". א לאַגער וואָס איז געווען א ברענענדיק גיהנום, מיט אַלע צרות פון יסע לאַגערן, נאָר מיט אַ צולאָג פון שרעקליכן כאַאָס, פון נאָך א גרעסערן נגנען וואָס איך האָב ניט געהאַט אין קיין אַנדערן לאַגער.

מיט אַ מדרש תנחומא אין בלאָק 67

לע וואָס האָבן איבערלעבט די לאַגערן, איז דאָס צו פאַרשטיין פון יכע קליינע נסים און הצלות. און אַזוי איז עס אויך געווען מיט מיר. אויך ארייגפאַל אין "שאָנונגס"־בלאָק 67 איז געווען אַזאַ נס. כ'וויים ניט וויאַלט אויסגעהאַלטן וועלן איך פאַל. חלילה, ארײַן אין אַנדערע רטער".

ר "שאָנונגס" בלאָק איז וויכטיג געווען פון "שאָנונג". די ענגשאַפט אויף די עם איז געווען אַזוי גרעסיק, אַז מיר האָבן תמיד געמוזט שלאָפן אויף א די דאָזיקע ענגשאַפט האָט מיט זיך געברענגט אַנדערע צרות, וואָס לאָזן ט אַרויסשרייבן. די שפּייז־ראַציעס זענען אין דאָזיקן בלאָק געווען ר ווי אַנדערשוואו, ווייל מיר האָבן ניט געאַרבעט און די כסדר־דיקע . אַז מען וועט אונז "קומען נעמען". — האָט אונז פאַרשאַלגט אפילו אין

ער דעם "שאָנונגס"־בלאָק האָט געהאַט א מעלה. וואָס ער איז אנגעפירט ן פון אַצאָל לינקע דייטשע געפאַנגענע, וואָס האָבן אונז אידן (די יט אין בלאָק זענען געווען ניט־אידן) ניט אויסגעטיילט קיין ספעציעלע לויט דייער איינשטעלונג זענען מיר אַלע נעווען "קאָמעראַדן" אין ס־זענען" און אַזוי באַראַפט טראַקטירט ווירן. די כלומרשט "פולע אַרעכטונג" אין בלאָק איז ניט געווען אַזוי "פול". נוען די לינקע בלאָק־ ער האָבן ניט געהאַלטן קיין אויג האָבן די גרויאישע "קאָמעראַדן" אונז ט און געפיניקט. דאָך אַבער איז דאָרט פאָרט נעווען לייכטער ווי אין ג באַראַקן; וואו אויך די "קאַפאָס" אין בלאָק־אויפזיער זענען געווען שונאי־ישראל און סאַדיסטישע אַכזריים.

גרעסטער נס פאַר מיר איז געווען, וואָס אין זעלבן בלאָק האָבן זיך ן אַ צאָל פרומע אידן, וואָס האָבן זיך טיף נעקלאַמערט אין זייער אמונה ן זיך אַרויסגעשטאַלט אַביסל בטחון. דאָס צוזאַמענזיין מיט אָט די אָט מיך געשטאַרקט און מיר צוריקגענעבן אַביסל כוחות. דער הונגער וּאָקע אומאויפהערלעך זענאַגט און פון דער ענגשאַפט אויף דער ע, האָבן די ביינער ווייַ געטאָן. אָבער אין דער סביבה פון די דאָזיקע אידן ען פאַרט ניט געהערט קיין קללות און ניבול פה. ניכער האָט מען דאָ ס א גוט וואָרט פון איינעם צום אַנדערן און מען האָט פרובירט זיך טיק צו שטאַרקן. אָט די היימישליכע אַטמאָספערע פון פריינטשאַפט נגוייטיקן מיטגעפיל האָט געהאַלפן, אַז מען זאָל כאָטש אויף א פאָר אין טאָג קענען פאַרגעסן אינ׳ם הונגער און קענען אָפּלענקען דעם מות ס הארץ פון די פחדים וואָס האָבן אומאויפהערליך פאַרפאָלגט.

בלאָק 67 בין איך עטוואָ צוזאַמען מיט דעם דראָהאָביטשער רב הרב ר׳ ביגדור ז״ל. איך ווייס ניט וויַ אַזוי, נאָר הרב אביגדור האָט מיט זיך א מדרש תנחומא. אין וועלכן ער האָט כסדר געלאָזט און פון מאָל צו ס אויסגאַרנט צו איינעם פון אונז. נאָך העכער דריי יאָר, ניט ייק געווען פאַר זיך א אידיש אות, איז דער מדרש געווען א שטיק ן. ס׳האָט אריינגענעבן אַביסל נייַ חיות. דאָך זענען גראָד געווען די ון די סדרה׳ס וואָס דערציילן וועגן גלות מצרים, וועגן די מכות, וועגן ם סוף, שירה, מתן־תורה און מלחמת עמלק און די חז״ל אויף יענע זענען פול מיט רמזים אויף השפּחה און ישועה כהרף עין. כ׳קען זיך רמאָנען וואָס מיר האָבן דאָרט געלערנט. אָבער כ׳געדענק, אַז די נגען וואָס מיר האָבן דאָרט געפונען האָבן געטרייסט, געגלעט און געבן א קוואַל פון בטחון וואָס מען האָט שוין כמעט ווי געהאַט ן.

נו האָבן מיר א גרופע אידן מיט הרב אביגדור יעדן שבת געהאַט א מנין. הרב אביגדור האָט געקענט די חמשה חומשי תורה בעל־פה און ט פאַר אונז געלייענט די סדרה פון דער וואָך באַלעק. דער

קאָמוניסטישער "שטוכן־דינסט" פון אונזער בלאָק, האָט דערויף געק א כייז אויב, און האָט הרב אביגדור דערפאַר גערופן צו. ער האָט גו אויסגעקליבן צו פאַרשידענע ארבעטן. אָבער הרב אביגדור האָט געלאָזט אָפּשרעקן. איך האָב אַמאָל געפרעגט הרב אביגדור, אויב מען איינרייַס, מיטן דאָזיקן פוילישן שייגעץ, אָבער הרב אביגדור ה אויפגעקלערט, אַז היות ווי ער איז זיכער אַז דער גוי וועט אונז ניט מכ די דייטשן, דאַרף שפּן זין ניט שרעקן אָט דער באַלעק — האָט ער מיר צו פאַרשטיין, — איז ניט א שונא־ישראל, נאָר א פאַרברענטער קָא ס׳איז דער קאָמוניס וואָס ברענט אין אים. ער איז נעמלעך חושש אַז אָנדערע אידישע געפאַנגענע, גיבן הרב אביגדור א טויל פון אונזער ב

זאָל זיך פאַר אונז "מאַדליען". ווי א קאָמוניסט האָט ער דאָס ניט טאָלערירן. עס האָט געמוזט א שטיקל צייט ביז מיר האָבן דעם קאָמו שייגעץ ענדליך: אַריינגעקלאפט אין קאָפּ, אַז א רב איז ניט קיין גלח; אַלע קענען זיך אַליין ׳מאַדליען׳ (דאָוועניען) און אַז אויב מיר קומע מיטן רב, איז עס נאָר דערפאַר ווייל ער נעדענקט אַביסל מער די "ביבל קען מיט אונז לערנען. איך ווייס ניט אויב ער האָט דאָס מקבל געווען א איז געווארן צו ביזי מיט אַנדערע קאָמוניסטישע טעטיקייטן אין לאַגי אופן האָט ער מיט דער צייט אונז אפגעלאַזן און ניט געשטערט מ "מאַדליען" זיך.

לעצטער פסח אין בוכענוואַלד

דאָס ערשטע וואָס דאָס אונז דערמאַנט אין אַנקומענדן פסח איז געווען הרב אביגדור. אינ׳ם "גרויסן לאַגער" וואו עס איז געווען פיל בע ביי אונז, האָבן זיך צעפונען א פאָר דראָהאָביטשער אידן און זיי פלע זונטאג קומען באַזוכן זייער רב. היות ווי אָט די אידן פון גרויסן לאַגער ארויסגיין צו דער ארבעט אין די דערפער נעבן ווימאָר, האָט זיי הרב א בעבעמ צי נעדענקען אַז ס׳נייט צו פסח. וועגן אמתע מצות, איז נאַטיר געווען וואָס צו חלום׳ן. אָבער ער האָט זיי געבעטן צו פאַרשאַפן אַביס עס שנעל פאַרקנעטן און אפּקאָכן אויף א הייסן אויוון. בסך הכל ה געברענגט א פאָר מצה׳לעך אין גרויס פון אונזערס א קוואַרטער אָדער דאָלער, אָבער די פאָר "מצה׳לעך" האָבן צווישן דער גרופע פרומע א בארַאָק געשאַפן א "פסח־אטמאָספערע", און א דערוואַרטונג אַנקומענדיקן פסח.

געהאָלפן צו דער דערוואַרטונג איז פון האָט אויך דאָס וואָס מיר געמומען איינזען, אַז דער פראָנט דערנענטערט זיך. טאָקע אין אָוונט פאַ האָט דער הימל גענומען אויסבליצן מיט פייערלעך און מיר פונדערווייטנס גענומען הערן עכאָס פון דעטאָנאַציעס. די לינקע אינ׳ם ל וועלכע האָבן געהאָט א צוטריט צום דייטשן ראַדיא, האָבן אונז שוין געזאָגט, אַז די אַמעריקאַנער דערנענטערן זיך. אָבער מיר האָבן ניט געג איצט האָבן מיר שוין געקענט מערקן אַז זיייערע נייעסן האָבן א האָפ

די פאָר מצה׳לעך וואָס די דראָהאָביטשער אידן האָבן געברענגט זיי האָט געפירט דערצו, אַז מען זאָל אין אונזער בלאָק אפּריכטן א "סדר" א ערשטער נאַכט פון פסח. כ׳קען מיך כשום אופן ניט דערמאָנען וואָס מיו געהאָט, און צו מיר האָבן בכלל עפעס געהאָט צום "סדר". כ׳געדענק כל ערב פסח האָט מען יענעם טאָג אונז געגעבן קאַרטאָפל און מיר געהאָט באַשלאָסן עפעס צו באַהאַלטן פאַרן סדר. צי מיר האָבן עס ן געדענק איך ניט. אָבער כ׳געדענק גוט, אַז מיר האָבן זיך אין אָוועקגעזעצט א צאָל אידן אין פינסטערניש צווישן די פריטשע שטילערהייט געוואָנט יעדער א פאָר פזמונים פון דער הגדה. כמעט יעדי זינט דער באַפרייאונג אין די אָוונטן פון סדר, פרוביר איך אריספריש זכרון פון דעם ווי דאָ האָט אויסגעזען יענע "סדרי־נאַכט" אין בוכענ אָבער דער זכרון דינט ניט, אַלעס וואָס איך געדענק אי אַז איך בין אַ דערסרישטער, עפעס מיט נייַע כוהות און מיט א באַנייטן רצון צוט

סאַראַן א פאָר זכרונות פון יענעם פסח וואָס האָבן זיך יאָ טיף איינגע אין נעדענטנים. אין דער פרשטער ווי זענען דאָס יענע פאָר וואונדע אידן אין אונזער בלאָק וואָס האָבן בייַ זיך אפּציאַלע ניט צו עסן קיין חו מכה. א טייל זענען געווען פון אינזער גרופע און געווען אויך אַנדערע שכנים, וואָס איך האָב שוין קיינמאָל ניט געזען ביי אונזער "מנין". אי אַנדערן עק פון אונזער בלאָק.

All Survivors of the major concentration Camps will bear witness to the fact that during the period after liberation, when the Germans retreated, was a difficult time to bear. Sickness, insecurity, fear, confusion, depression and not knowing where to go prevailed. Hundreds survived the war but died after liberation. The Germans left the storehouses empty. If there was any time during which the survivors needed assistance of every kind, it was during that period. Regretfully, there was no organized immediate help forthcoming. Minor assistance was offered by the Joint Distribution Committee and the United Nations Rehabilitation Association. The help that Dr. Klepfish and Rabbi Yaakov Avigdor extended was immediate and lifesaving.

The following pages are some

TROOP MOVEMENT CERTIFICATES

Issued to Rabbis Dr. Hershel Klepfish and Dr. Yaakov Avigdor

In service as Chaplains for "Hatzalah" (Savior Campaign)

They traveled in a Polish military truck with a Jewish soldier Mr. Shlomo Brach, as driver.

They crossed the Belgium, Holland and German borders twenty-two times, bringing in loads of supplies such as medicines, candy, books and religious materials that were distributed to the Holocaust Survivors of various concentration camps in Germany.

The project was conducted in conjunction with Agudas Yisroel of America and the Joint efforts of Mr. Heinrich Landau – Brussels, Belgium The Sternbuch Family – Switzerland and Dr. Yitzchok Griffel – Milan, Italy

1945-1946

TROOP MOVEMENT ORDER

The following are required to proceed:

From Milan (Sta)

To Brussels via route determined by O/C (Sta) Receiving Unit Polish Forces

Personnel				Vehicles			Baggage not loaded in unit vehs.		Nature of Duty
Offi-cers	Other Ranks		Bicy-cles	Motor-cles	Other		Tons	Cwts	
1									

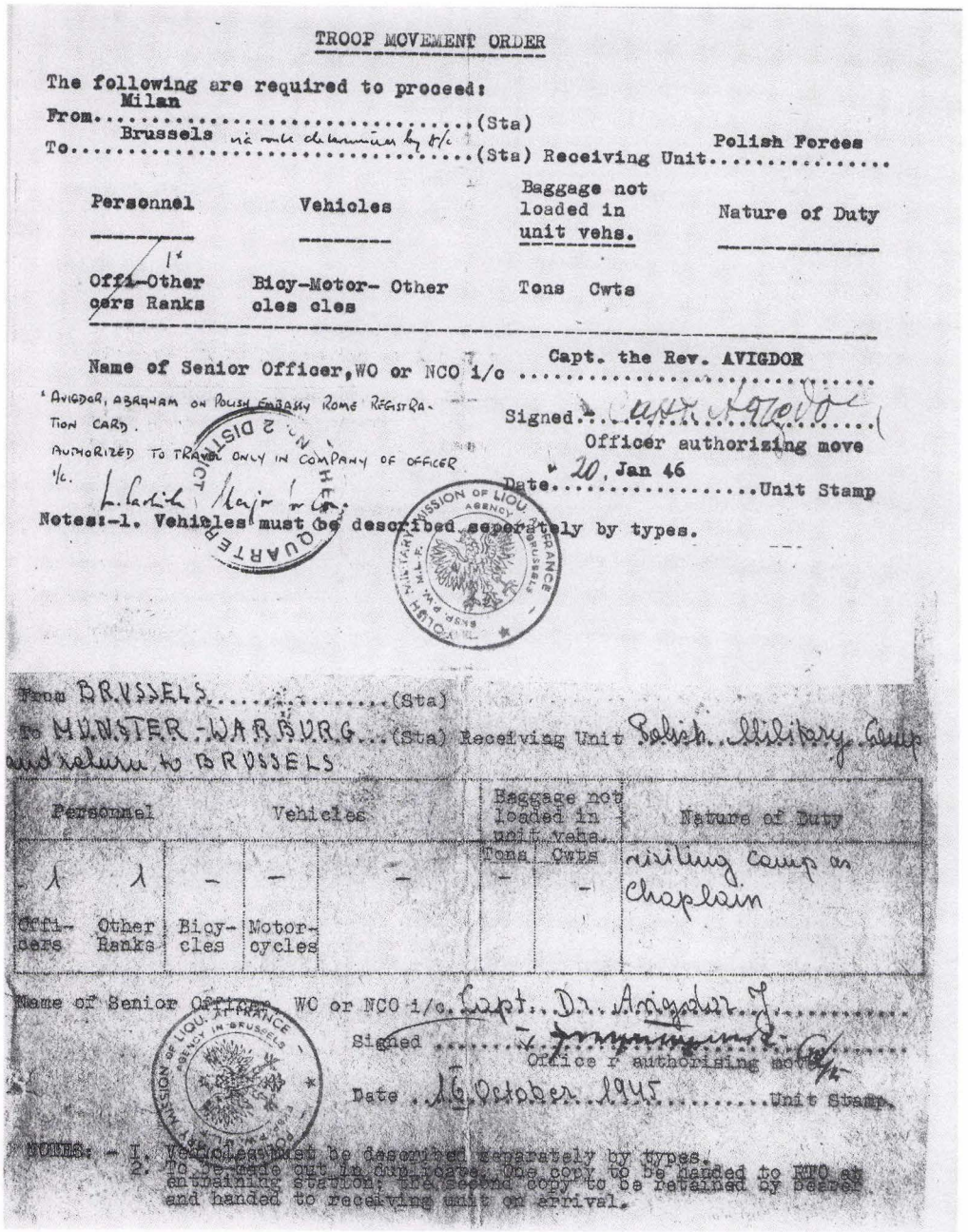
Name of Senior Officer, WO or NCO i/c Capt. the Rev. AVIGDOR

'AVIGDOR, ABRAHAM ON POLISH EMBASSY ROME REGISTRATION CARD.
AUTHORIZED TO TRAVEL ONLY IN COMPANY OF OFFICER

Signed [signature]
Officer authorising move

Date 20 Jan 46 Unit Stamp

Notes:-1. Vehicles must be described seperately by types.



TROOP MOVEMENT ORDER

The following are required to proceed:

From Milan (Sta)

To Brussels via route determined by O/C (Sta) Receiving Unit Polish Forces

Personnel		Vehicles			Baggage not loaded in unit vehs.		Nature of Duty
Offi-cers	Other Ranks	Bicy-cles	Motor-cycles	Other cles	Tons	Cwts	
1							

Name of Senior Officer, WO or NCO i/c Capt. the Rev. AVIGDOR

'AVIGDOR, ABRAHAM ON POLISH EMBASSY ROME REGISTRATION CARD.

AUTHORIZED TO TRAVEL ONLY IN COMPANY OF OFFICER i/c.

L. Lech Major i/c.

Signed Capt. Avigdor

Officer authorizing move

Date 20. Jan 46 Unit Stamp

Notes:-1. Vehicles must be described separately by types.

From BRUSSELS (Sta)

To MUNSTER-WARBURG (Sta) Receiving Unit Polish Military Camp and return to BRUSSELS

Personnel		Vehicles			Baggage not loaded in unit vehs.		Nature of Duty
Offi-ders	Other Ranks	Bicy-cles	Motor-cycles		Tons	Cwts	
1	1	-	-	-	-	-	visiting camps as Chaplain

Name of Senior Officer, WO or NCO i/c. Capt. Dr. Avigdor J.

Signed

Officer authorising move

Date 16 October 1945 Unit Stamp.

NOTES: - 1. Vehicles must be described separately by types.
2. To be made out in duplicate. One copy to be handed to RTO at entraining station; the second copy to be retained by driver and handed to receiving unit on arrival.

In lieu Army Form W. 5164

TROOP MOVEMENT ORDER

The following are required to proceed:

From Milan (Sta)

To Brussels via route determined by O.i/c. (Sta) Receiving Unit Polish Forces

Personnel		Vehicles			Baggage not loaded in unit vehs.		Nature of Duty
Officers	Other Ranks	Bicycles	Motor-cycles	Other	Tons	Cwts	
1*							

Name of Senior Officer, WO or NCO i/c Capt. the Rev. AVIGDOR

Signed Capt Avigdor

Officer authorizing move

Date 20 Jan 46 Unit Stamp

* AVIGDOR, ISAAK on Polish Embassy Rome Registration Card.
AUTHORIZED TO TRAVEL ONLY IN COMPANY OF OFFICER i/c

Notes:- 1. Vehicles must be described separately by types.
2. To be made out in duplicate. One copy to be handed to RTO at entraining station or S&T Area at location of departure; second copy to be retained by bearer and handed to receiving unit on arrival.

In lieu Army Form W. 5164

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.

M. Elton

REV: MICHAEL ELTON, C.F.
JEWISH CHAPLAIN.

ARMY FORM W. 5164.

TROOP MOVEMEMENT ORDER.

The following are required to proceed:

From BRUSSELS.....(Sta)

To MUNSTER-WARBURG...(Sta) Receiving Unit Polish Military Camp and return to BRUSSELS

Personnel		Vehicles			Baggage not loaded in unit vehs.		Nature of Duty
					Tons	Cwts	
1	1	-	-	-	-	-	visiting camp as Chaplain
Officers	Other Ranks	Bicycles	Motor-cycles				

Name of Senior Officer, WO or NCO i/c. Capt. Dr. Arigazzi J.

Signed .....
Officer authorising move

Date 16 October 1945 .....Unit Stamp.

NOTES: - I. Vehicles must be described separately by types.
2. To be made out in duplicate. One copy to be handed to RTO at entraining station; the second copy to be retained by bearer and handed to receiving unit on arrival.

Ekspozytura
Polskiej Wojskowej Misji Likwidacyjnej
we Francji

Zaswiadczenie

Zaswiadczam niniejszem, ze kapelan wojskowy rabin
kpt.dr. A w i g d o r J a k u b
udaje sie na teren Niemiec celem niesienia pomocy swym wspolwyznawcom i rozdzielenia darow zebranych przez kolonie zydowska w Brukseli.
Wykaz darow:
brylantyna, shampoon, puder, pomadki do warg, pasta do zebow, kolczyki.
Dary te przeznaczone sa w przewaznej czesci dla obozow kobiecych na terenie Niemiec.
Prosze wszystkie wladze polskie o udzielenie pomocy kpt.dr. Avigdorowi w razie potrzeby dla ulatwienia mu jego dzieła charytatywnego.

Szef Ekspozytury
kpt. A. Krzysztoporski

Bruksela 15.X.1945.

POLISH MILITARY MISSION OF LIQUIDATION IN FRANCE P.W.M.L.F. BRUSSELS

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: MICHAEL ELTON, C.F.
JEWISH CHAPLAIN

ARMY FORM W. 5164.

TROOP MOVEMEMENT ORDER.

The following are required to proceed:

From BRUSSELS (Sta)

To BELSEN - FRANKFURT (Sta) Receiving Unit Polish Military Mission

And return to BRUSSELS

Personnel		Vehicles			Baggage not loaded in unit vehs.		Nature of Duty
					Tons	Cwts	
1	1	—	—	—	—	—	Report to Chief Liaison Officer with 4th ET
Officers	Other Ranks	Bicycles	Motor-cycles				

Name of Senior Officer, WO or NCO i/c .....

Signed ..... Capt.....
Officer authorising move

Date 15 October 1945 .....Unit Stamp.

NOTES: - 1. Vehicles must be described separately by types.
2. To be made out in duplicate. One copy to be handed to RTO at entraining station; the second copy to be retained by bearer and handed to receiving unit on arrival.

TROOP MOVEMENT ORDER

The following are required to proceed:

From Milan (Sta)

To Brussels via route determined by O/C (Sta) Receiving Unit Polish Forces

Personnel		Vehicles			Baggage not loaded in unit vehs.		Nature of Duty
Offi-cers	Other Ranks	Bicy-cles	Motor-cles	Other	Tons	Cwts	
1*							

Name of Senior Officer, WO or NCO i/c Capt. the Rev. AVIGDOR

Signed [signature]
Officer authorizing move

Date 20 Jan 46 Unit Stamp

* AVIGDOR, ABRAHAM ON POLISH EMBASSY ROME REGISTRATION CARD. AUTHORIZED TO TRAVEL ONLY IN COMPANY OF OFFICER I/C. [illegible] Major i/c.

Notes:-1. Vehicles must be described seperately by types.

Judenrat Boryslau
PRÄSIDIUM
Komitet Żydowski

Nr 65/42/PR

Boryslav, den 6.2;1942

B E S C H E I N I G U N G

Hiermit best"atigen wir, dass,
Kabbiner Isak A W I G D O R , geb.2.12.1920 Neu-Sandez

Mitglied des Judenrates, als Leiter der
Friehof Abteilung und Matrikelamtes

besuh"aftigt ist.

Diese Bescheinigung dient als Passierschein ausser dem Judenviertel, wie auch fürr freie Bewegung nach den Polizeistunden.

JUDENRAT BORYSLAU

Der Vorsitzender,
W.EISENSTEIN

Gültig bis 31.7.1942.

Pass to be able to go in and out of Boryslav Ghetto
June 2, 1942


TROOP M
The following are required to
from BRUSSELS
To MUNSTER-WARBURG
Personnel
Vehicle
Offi- cers
Other Ranks
Bicy- cles
Motor- cycles
Name of Senior Officer WO or
NOTES. - 1. Vehicles must be
No baggage outside
entraining Sta
and handed to re

In lieu Army Form W. 5164

TROOP MOVEMENT ORDER

The following are required to proceed:

From Milan (Sta)

To Brussels via route determined by O.i/c. (Sta) Receiving Unit Polish Forces

Personnel		Vehicles			Baggage not loaded in unit vehs.		Nature of Duty
Offi- cers	Other Ranks	Bicy- cles	Motor- cycles	Other	Tons	Cwts	
	1 X						

Name of Senior Officer, WO or NCO i/c Capt. the Rev. AVIGDOR

X AVIGDOR, ITZHAK ex Polish Embassy Rome
REGISTRATION CARD
AUTHORIZED TO TRAVEL ONLY IN COMPANY OF
OFFICER i/c.

Signed Capt Avigdor
Officer authorizing move

Date 20 Jan 46 Unit Stamp

Notes:- 1. Vehicles must be described seperately by types.
2. To be made out in duplicate. One copy to be handed to RTO at entraining station or S&T area at location of departure; second copy to be retained by bearer and handed to receiving unit on arrival.

In lieu Army Form W. 5164

In lieu Army Form W. 5164

TROOP MOVEMENT ORDER

The following are required to proceed:

From.....Milan.....(Sta)

To.....Brussels via route determined by O.i/c.....(Sta) Receiving Unit.....Polish Forces

Personnel		Vehicles			Baggage not loaded in unit vehs.		Nature of Duty
Officers	Other Ranks	Bicycles	Motor-cycles	Other	Tons	Cwts	
	1						

Name of Senior Officer, WO or NCO i/c ..... Capt. the Rev. AVIGDOR

AVIGDOR, ITZHAK ... POLISH EMBASSY ROME
REGISTRATION CARD
AUTHORIZED TO TRAVEL ONLY IN COMPANY OF
OFFICER i/c

Signed - Capt Avigdor
Officer authorizing move
Date: 3rd Jan 46 ..... Unit Stamp

Notes:- 1. Vehicles must be described seperately by types.
2. To be made out in duplicate. One copy to be handed to RTO at entraining station or S&T area at location of departure; second copy to be retained by bearer and handed to receiving unit on arrival.

In lieu Army Form W. 5164

Dr. Jacob Avigdor
Progreso 191 - 101
México 18, D.F.
M E X I C O

Az.: 101 204 II Rüst MM/Ne
1. Juni 1962

Amt für Wiedergutmachung des Landes Rheinland/Pfalz in Berlin
Stauffenbergstrasse 11/13
Berlin W 30

Sehr geehrte Herren !

Betr.: Heilverfahren

Bezug: Ihre Zuschrift vom 25.4.62

Ihre freundliche Zuschrift beantworte ich wie folgt:

1.- Anfangs Juni 1945 verliess ich Buchenwald, als ich von der polnischen Regierung zum Militärkaplan und Seelsorger der noch verbliebenen Juden in Westeuropa mit dem Sitz in Warburg ernannt wurde.
In Ausübung dieser Pflichten musste ich in der Zeit zwischen August 1945 und Juni 1946 Belgien und Frankreich bereisen.
Ich benützte naturgemäss diese Reisen, um wegen meines schlechten Gesundheitszustandes die nötige ärztliche Hilfe in Anspruch zu nehmen, was insbesondere in Belgien, und vornehmlich in Brüssel geschah.
Ich lege ein zufällig aufgefundenes amtliches Dokument in englischer Sprache bei, welches in deutscher Übersetzung lautet:

" Polnische Militär Mission in Liquidation in Frankreich Agentur in Brüssel Brüssel, den 15. Oktober 1945 An alle, die es angehen mag es wird beglaubigt, dass Haupt Kaplan Rabbi Hauptm. Dr. A v i g d o r J. und Korp. L a n d a u H. sich nach Warburg begeben, welches (welche Stadt) die Basis der Aktivitäten von Hauptmann Avigdor als Kaplan der polnischen Streitkräfte und der D.P. und P.W. X. Lager ist.
Alle alliierten militärischen Autoritäten werden ersucht, Hauptm. Avigdor alle nötige Hilfe und Beistand zu gewähren, und insbesondere den Transport zu deren Bestimmungsort zu besorgen. "

Solche sog. "Offene Befehle" erhielt ich natürlich in Ausübung meiner Tätigkeit in Menge, so dass es tatsächlich der Wahrheit entspricht, dass meine Basis wohl in Warburg war, dass ich mich aber in der Zeit von August 1945 - Juni 1946 mehrmals im Monat in Belgien aufhielt und dort in ärztlicher Behandlung war.

2.- Ihrer freundlichen Empfehlung, mich mit der Gattin des verstorbenen Dr. Hauser oder sonstigen Zeugen in Verbindung zu setzen, werde ich selbstverständlich nachkommen und Ihnen dann das Ergebnis meiner Nachforschungen mitteilen.

Mit vorzüglicher Hochachtung

1 Original-Beilage
Luftpost

The German Authorities "Amt fur Wiedergutmachung" in Berlin acknowledge the need for the security and cooperation with Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor in his missions on behalf of the Holocaust survivors in the various camps throughout Germany.

QUOD BONUM, FELIX, FORTUNAM, FAUSTUNQUE SIT !

An Seine Eminenz
Hochehrwuerden Kardinal von Belgien

Von den vielen tausende juedischen Gelehrten, Rabbiner und Oberrabbiner Polens die fuer das spezifisch juedische wie auch allgemeine spkulative Wissen jahrhundertelang gewurkt haben, bin ich als einziger durch wundervolle Goettliche Fuegung aus den Ghettos und Konzentrationslagern errettet worden.

Auf meinem Wege nach Uebrsee, habe ich einen kurzen Aufenthalt in dem ersten freie Lande, Belgien. Zu meiner grossen Freude habe ich hier erfahren, in welch grossartiger Weise, die Roemisch Katholische Kirche und ihre Geistlichkeit Sich um die Rettung der hier lebenden Juden bemueht hat. Als Oberrabbiner fuer die am Leben gebliebenen Juden polnischer Herkunft und als Representat derselben , fuehle ich mich verpflichtet, Seiner Hocherwuerden Eminenz, meinen innigsten Dank zum Ausdruck zu bringen.

Dass gerade die Kirche uns in der Zeit unsere aergsten Not bruederlich zur Seite stand, ist mir ein Beweis fuer das Walten der absoluten Gerechtigkeit in der Geschichte. Vielleicht ist durch die Taetigkeit der Kirche gerade jetzt etwas gut gemacht worden was in der Vergangenheit an uns gesuendigt wurde. Dass wir unschuldig leiden und gelitten haben, zeigt schon der Umstand, dass im Mittelalter wir nur deshalb litten, weil wir Weiland bekreuzigt haetten, dagegen hat der Nationalsozialismus unsere Ausrottung sich zur Aufgabe gestellt, gerade weil wir der menschheit den Christus und Seine Lehre g e g e b e n haben. Tempora mutantur.

Wir religioesen Juden wissen, dass alle unmenschliche Taten, die an uns veruebt wurden, durch logisches Denken nicht zu erklaeren und zu verstehen sind. Wir sind das auserwaehlte Volk sagt die Bibel. Darunter verstehen wir, dass wir das Volk der Ausnahme sind, auserwaehlt auch zu leiden. In der juedischen Geschichte haben Leidenszeiten schon immer das Entstehen neuer grosser Epochen eingeleitet. Nachdem schweren Leiden des juedischen Volkes in Aegypten kam die Offenbarung am Berge Sinai, nach dem Untergang des juedischen Staates, kam die Befreiung der Welt vom Heidentum durch die christliche Lehre. Unsere Leiden in der juengsten Vergangenheit werden auch nicht vergebens gewesen sein, davon sind wir zutiefst ueberzeugt.

Die gute Tat der Kirche wird erst dann fuer uns eine wahrhafte sein, wenn die fuer uns Geretteten, dem juedischen Volk wiedergegeben werden. Niemals wird es vergessen werden, dass die katholische Kirche in Belgien viele hunderte von Kindren in ihren Kloestern und Kinderheimen vor der Vernichtung bewahrt hat. Diese Grosstat fuer das judische Volk wird aber erst dann vollend sein, wenn man den unsagba kleinen Rest, der am Leben blieb, fuer die Schaffung neuer Generationen, die Menschen wiedergibt, die zu ihm gehoeren und di man ihm gerettet hat. Nicht nur dass das juedische Volk zu klei ist um auf diese Menschen verzichten zu koennen, was bedeutet e fuer die Kirche einige hundert Menschen gewonnen zu haben gegenueber der gewaltig grossen Tat diese Menschen fuer das Juentum gerettet zu haben, welches jetzt seine schwerste Pruefung durchgemacht hat.

Durchdrungen von der Ueberzugung das s Seine Hochehrwuerden Eminenz dem Kardinal von Belgien dieses Problem noch nicht vorgetragen wurde, erlaube ich mir die Aufmerksamkeit Seiner Hochehrwuerden Eminenz hierauf zu lenken mit der Bitte, zu veranlassen, dass alle Institutionen Seiner Geistlichen Jurisdiktion angewiesen werden, die Kinder den juedischen Organisationen wiederzugeben und damit die gute Tat der Kirche zu einer wahrhaften zu vollenden.

mit Ehrfurcht ergebenst

Oberrabbiner Dr. Jakob Avigdor

...r. Hochehrwuerden Eminenz werden mir die Moeglichkeit geben, der grossen Welt zu verkuenden, dass die katholische Kirche in Belgien dem juedischen Volk eine wahrhaft gute Tat erwiesen hat.

Ich erlaube mir, Seiner Eminenz Gottes Segen darzubieten und zeichne,

A letter of thanks in German to the Cardinal of Belgium from Rabbi Dr. Y. Avigdor for hiding and later releasing Jewish children from their churches during WWII

THE ONLY JEWISH HANDWRITTEN CALENDAR THAT SURVIVED BUCHENWALD

The Camp Calendar of Buchenwald

The Jewish calendar, or luach, has for ages shielded and supported the Jewish people. The colorful panorama of laws, customs, and traditions Jews observe would be impossible without our calendar. In the harmonious symphony of wisdom, such as math, astronomy, astrology, economics and politics, and in both the oral and written Torah, the calendar plays first fiddle and is an integral part of Jewish life.

Why did G-d deem the calendar to be so important that its complicated calculations were given to Jewry even before the Exodus? Why did it have to be done in the month of *Nisan* and not three months later in *Sivan* at the Sinaitic revelation of the Ten Commandments? Why did Jewry need a new time reckoning to replace the one used during 210 years in Egypt?

Our sages endeavored to answer these questions in different ways through various Midrashim. The importance of the calendar is most evident by the fact that the text, "This month shall be for you," relating to the lunar order is chronologically the first mitzvah given to the Jewish people as a whole, listed in the Bible (Exodus 12:2).

Actually, Genesis should have begun with the first precept of the calendar, rather than with creation, since the main purpose of the Torah is the precepts it contains. Rashi relates that the reason for commencing with creation is to justify the allocation of the Holy Land of Israel to Abraham's children: for G-d, being the creator of the universe, can assign any part of the world to whomsoever He desires.

It would be easier to understand and evaluate the importance of our calendar by studying the history of anti-Semitism. All restrictions on the practice of Judaism took into account the Jewish calendar. Haman used it in his astrological calculations to determine when it would be lucky for him to annihilate Jewry. Antiochus, the Syrian tyrant in Maccabean times, used the calendar in his attempt to exterminate us. The first three letters of the name "*Chasmonai*" in Hebrew are the first letters of the words *chodesh, Shabbos,* and *moed* (month, Sabbath and holiday).

Spanish and Portuguese Moranos, at the time of the Inquisition, risked their lives to find out the correct date of *Kol Nidrei* so they could go into hidden catacombs and observe *Yom Kippur.* At least once a year, they identified as Jews. In modern times, Stalin and his henchmen chose to attack our calendar during seventy long years of Communism. The *Yevsekes* (Jewish Communists) sought to destroy every vestige of Shabbos and the holidays, so that their observance of traditions would be impeded. At one time, a five-day-a-week calendar was imposed on the country so that the real Saturdays would occur on various days of the week. Our enemies realized that without a calendar, Jewish observances would not take place and eventually would be forgotten.

Our reckoning is a lunar one, in contrast to the solar calendars of Greek and Egypt. When it comes to months, it is easier to be oriented by the different phases of the moon, which is visible without a telescope. We can tell by the full moon that we are half way through the month. The crescent's position indicates the time of the months' first or last quarter.

The sun, however, tells us nothing about the months, nor can we stare directly at it. We can understand the seasons of spring, summer, fall and winter from the temperature changes caused by the sun. There is an anecdote about a certain man from the town of Chelm, when asked which meant more to him, the sun or the moon? He answered, "The moon means more, because during the daylight hours I can see anyway, but at night without the moon, I can't see a thing and I would fall into the muddy Chelmer ditches. The moon at night is my greatest pleasure."

Ever since Moses' time, Jews have calculated the months by the moon. They knew that a month is a total of days from one molad (appearance of the moon) to the next. Prior to the exile, it was the duty of the *Sanhedrin* (Jewish high court) to proclaim each Rosh Chodesh (first day of the month). Even the

very illiterate people could know when to observe the holidays (except Rosh Hashanah) without a calendar, by the phases of the moon. With regard to the differences between the lunar and solar years, a system of leap years was introduced so that Pesach is always at springtime and Sukkos, the season of ingathering of produce, is in the fall.

The Moslem calendar is also lunar, but the difference between the solar isn't balanced. Hence, *Ramadan* falls behind in different yearly seasons. Fasting in short winter months is certainly less arduous than during the long summer days.

Wherever Jews lived, they always needed a calendar to decide whether *Rosh Chodesh* was one or two days, or when a *yahrzeit* or a holiday would occur or when a *ketubah* or *get* (marriage or divorce certificates) or other documents could be issued.

Before World War II, even the poorest Jew bought a luach from a peddler. After the Nazi onslaught, one of the greatest ordeals was not having a luach. In the concentratioon camps no one knew the day of the week except for Sunday, because there was no work then. After 1940 no new calendars were printed. My father, Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor of blessed memory, took upon himself the task of creating from memory a Hebrew luach, synchronized with the dates of the general calendar. He considered this a holy duty, a mission in his role as a rabbi.

The Nazis drove us out from our home in Drohobycz in September of 1939, and we lived in the attic of the *Yishrei Lev* Shule. Then we moved to the ghetto, later to a smaller ghetto, until we were brought to the *Zwangslager* camp next to the oil refinery in our town of Drohobycz. We hid in a bunker on the Aryan side for three months.

We were discovered and sent by cattle train to one camp after another. My father finally reached Buchenwald, and I was shipped to the infamous Guzen II branch of Camp Mauthausen. We were separated for almost a year. Buchenwald and Mauthausen were known as slaughterhouses, since every month new transports came from Poland, Hungary and Lithuania.

At every stop of these trips, the Nazis stripped us naked and confiscated all our belongings. Books, pictures, etc, were burned. One luach after another was destroyed. Yet my father always reconstructed a new calendar, so that when asked about a *Yom Tov* or a fast day he could answer correctly. Even the *muselman*

(sick, starving prisoners at death's door) collected strength to continue life, when told in a whisper of a forthcoming holiday, like "tonight is Purim or Kol Nidrei." Only a Holocaust survivor can appreciate what this meant.

The last luach my father made at Buchenwald is a masterpiece, written on yellow scraps of paper torn from cement bags but clearly legible, each letter like a pearl. When the war ended and he became a free man, in the Spring of May, 1945 the calendar survived along with him. It too had escaped the gas chambers and crematoria. It was a happy day when the American Army liberated him from Buchenwald.

Twenty years after his demise, I was searching through his manuscripts and found the original notes and calculations used in creating each of the pages.

I believe these originals to be historical documents, a testament of my father's spiritual resistance to the evils of the Holocaust. This manuscript has been ceremoniously received by Israel's Chief Rabbi Mayer Lau and Dr. Joseph Burg, president of Yad Vashem Museum. It was submitted to the Holocaust Archives in Jerusalem, where it can be viewed under the registered number 10154. Participating in the solemn presentation in the office of Chief Rabbi Lau, were Mr. Ted Dubitsky resident in Caesarea and Natan Frankel from Tel Aviv on behalf of the family.

It is known amongst Holocaust scholars, that the original manuscript of the Buchenwald calendar is an historical document and spiritual testament to my father's unique resistance to the evils of that period.

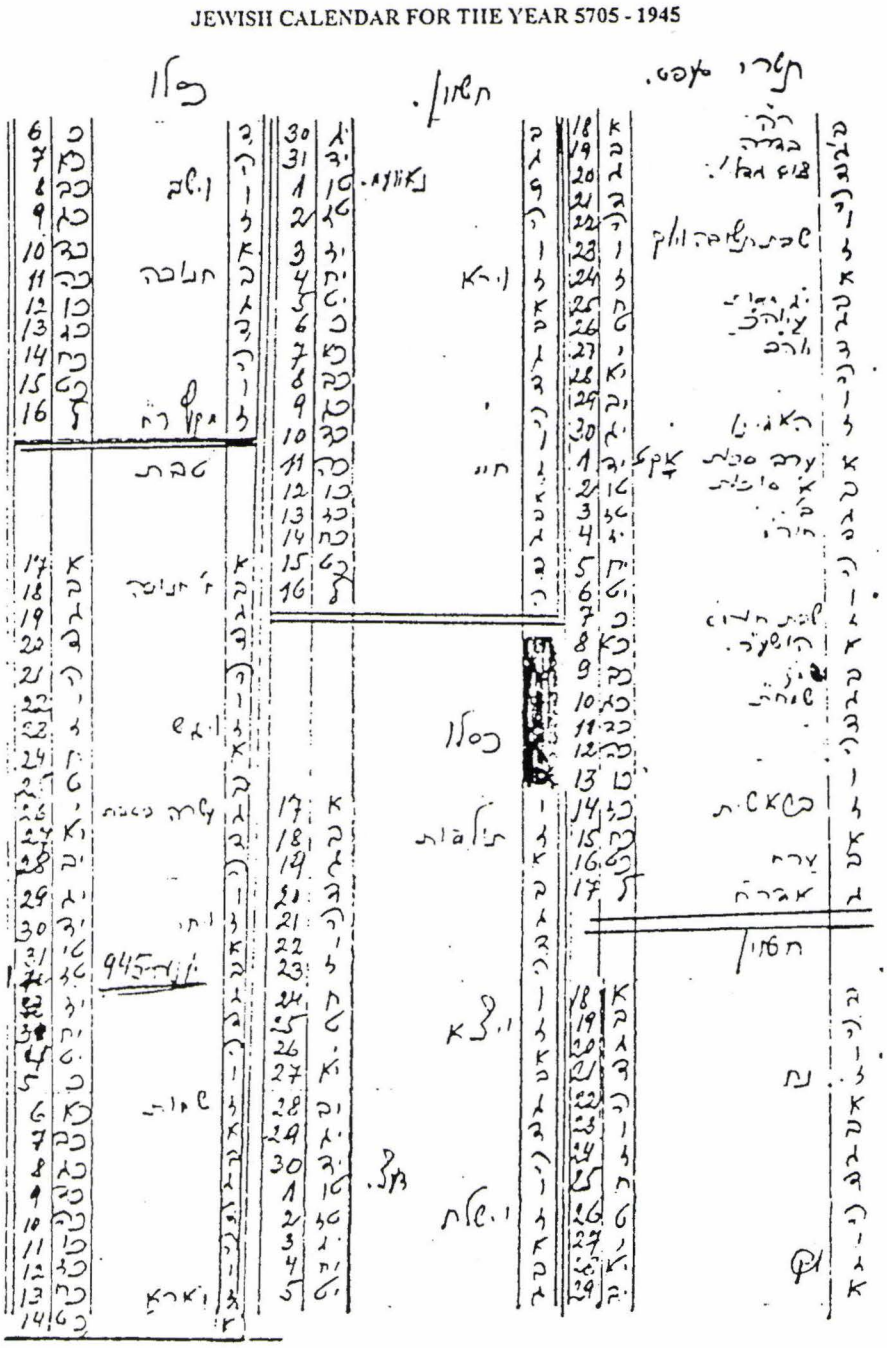


לוח בוכענוואלד

The Camp Calendar Of Buchenwald

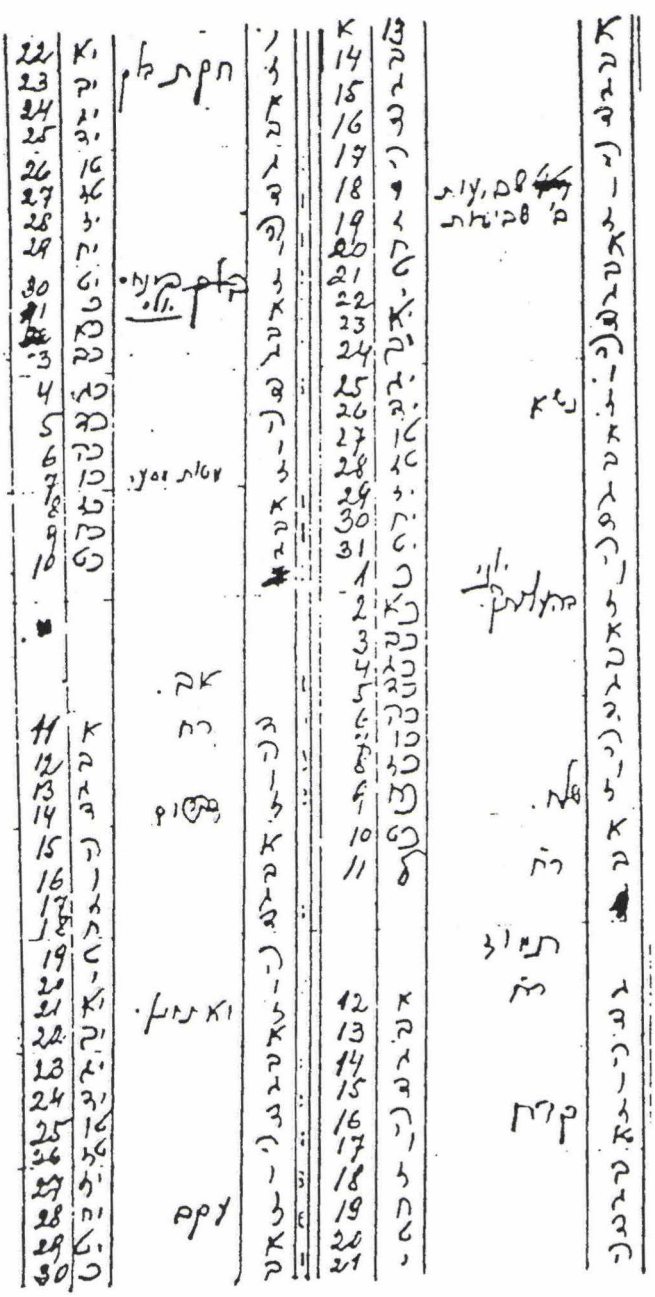
Chief Rabbi Israel M. Lau and Dr. Joseph Burg, President of Yad Vashem inspect and receive the hand written calendar from Rabbi Avigdor in Jerusalem

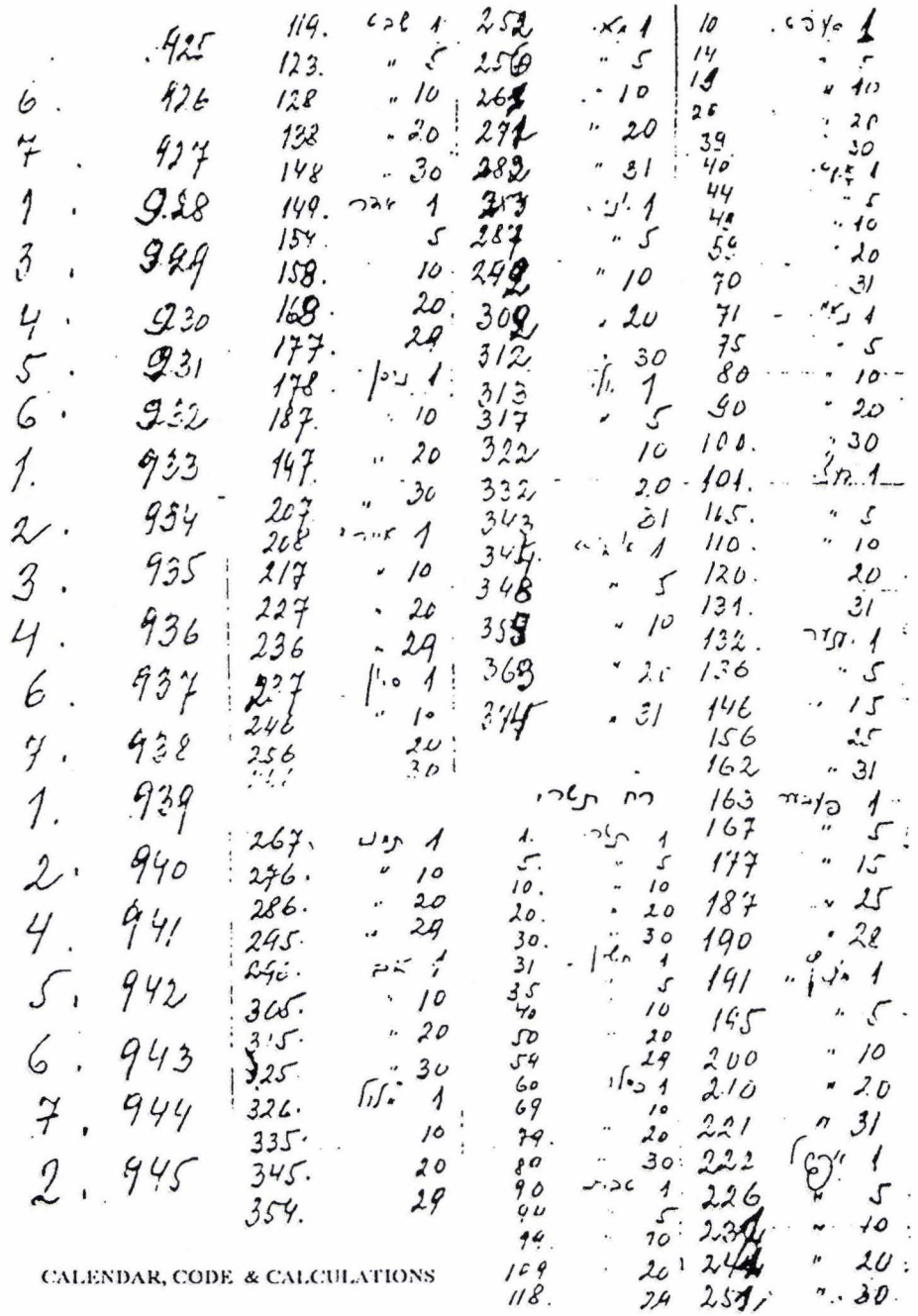
Left to Right: Rabbi Avigdor, Rabbi Lau, Dr. Burg
Jerusalem, Israel



Hand written Jewish calendar by Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor in Buchenwald, on only available paper, from triple layered cement bags. The original is now in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

JEWISH CALENDAR FOR THE YEAR 5705 - 1945





CALENDAR, CODE & CALCULATIONS

Eli Zborowski, Chairman
American and International Societies for Yad Vashem

On Photo:

Eli Zborowski greets and welcomes Rabbi Dr. Isaac C. Avigdor as his guest at the 20th Annual Tribute Dinner at the Sheraton New York Hotel on Sunday, November 7, 2004 saying, "You are the continuous important historian of Yad Vashem archives, telling the world about the rare and unusual atrocities committed by the Nazi's. "Your new book 'Faith After the Flames' is a documentary."



THE ROLE AND CATEGORY OF SURVIVORS

My Reluctance To Start a Family After the War

Considering the fact that I often participate in wedding ceremonies, various thoughts come to mind regarding the Jewish marriage rite.

At the wedding of my third son Meir old questions surfaced, intermingled with the problems of my generation of Holocaust survivors. The questions are many, but let us consider a few of them.

First: There is an important statement in the Talmud that says that one is obligated to cheer the bride and groom with five sounds: "The sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the sound of grooms and the sound of brides, the sound of people saying 'Thank the G-d of Hosts'" (*Berachos 6b*). (Rabbi Nahman bar Isaac adds that doing so is equivalent to rebuilding one of the ruins of Jerusalem.) The question arises: Why should they be sad on their wedding day as they stand under the bridal canopy, which is supposed to be the happiest moment of their lives?

Second: If solemn thoughts, or even sad feelings, are present at a wedding, they exist in the hearts of the two sets of parents. It may be more fitting - perhaps even the fulfillment of a religious duty, to regale the parents, rather than the bride and groom.

Third: Under the bridal canopy, the bridegroom recites the ancient formula as he places the ring on the bride's finger: "You are hereby consecrated to me,

according to the law of Moses and of Israel." When performing other religious rites such as the *bris milah* (circumcision), *pidyon ha-ben* (redemption of the first born), or bar mitzvah, we do not recite an equivalent formula. Why is this done only in the marriage ceremony?

Forth: When a child is born, the parents recite the blessing, "Who is good and beneficent." They thank G-d for having granted them the gift of a child who will be a source of pride and joy. A time comes when that very same father announces in the synagogue at his son's bar mitzvah: "Blessed be he (G-d) for freeing me from liability for this one's (the bar mitzvah boy's) wrongdoing." The father says, as it were: "This gift you have given us, G-d, is a great burden, and we thank You for relieving us of this stress, and of the liability for the boy's sins, which he henceforth bears." The time distance is not great, between "Who is good and beneficent" and "Blessed be He for freeing me" at the *bar mitzvah*, but the contrast between them is like the contrast between black and white.

Fifth: Why is the figure of the mother-in-law universally such a negative one? She is the symbol of dissatisfaction and is stereotypically someone who is impossible to please. How does the sweetest mother in the world turn into a bitter mother-in-law?

Sixth: Why when children grow up, do they start rebelling against their parents? Many even go as far as to develop hatred and run away from home. Instead of respect and love, children can bring their parents disgrace and aggravation. The conflict between the generations is an eternal one, and not only amongst Jews. It is a painful problem, one that afflicted Adam, the first human being, and our Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The Torah clearly relates episodes concerning grief caused by children.

Seventh: It is difficult to understand the Talmudic assertion that "matching up men and women for marriages is as difficult as the parting of the Red Sea was in the time of the Exodus" (Talmud Sotah 2a), in spite of the efforts of commentators over the ages to explain it. What is the analogy between the miracle of splitting the sea and a couple's getting married? There is certainly no obvious similarity between the two.

It is worthwhile to analyze carefully what takes place when a man and a woman get married.

As early as in the Book of Genesis, in the account of the creation of Adam and Eve, mankind is told "Therefore it is man's duty to leave his parents and

establish a permanent bond with his wife." The implementation of this command, however, is not so simple. There are children who are so attached to their parents that the obligation to become separate involves a great sacrifice on their part. I know many men and women who have never married on account of their fathers or mothers.

Our Patriarch Abraham's fulfillment of G-d's commandment to leave his father's house was the first of the ten tests to which G-d put him. The Torah's decree to leave one's parents, conflicts in a way with the fifth commandment which orders us to honor them.

This is why, under the bridal canopy the groom says to his betrothed "You are hereby..." He is saying, in effect, "I know that you feel as badly about having to leave your parents' home as I do about leaving mine. But it is all 'according to the law of Moses and of Israel.'" That is what G-d wishes, and the Torah commands us to do two things: "to leave our parents and to cleave to each other, body and soul, as a harmonious couple." Implementing the command to separate ourselves from our parents and leave them is a serious matter in the lives of two people. Moreover, this is why the couple is solemn and perhaps even sad on their wedding day. It is up to the wedding guests to regale them and lift their spirits, as a special *mitzvah*.

It is an equally difficult moment for the parents, whose children are leaving them and giving all their love away to "strangers." A mother's emotions on her child's wedding day are expressed in the commandment to drive the mother bird from the nest before taking her chicks. The Torah understands a mother's heart, even the heart of a mother bird, and the pain she would suffer seeing her chicks being taken away from her. Therefore, when we wish to take chicks from a nest, we must first send away the mother so she does not directly experience the loss (Deuteronomy 22:7).

If we are consistent with that commandment, we should send away parents of children getting married while the wedding takes place. Everybody understands, especially the mother of a bride or groom, that a child has to marry in order to complete his or her happiness. Meanwhile, however, her soul is torn to pieces. The more devoted a mother is, the more jealous she is as a mother-in-law. The same applies to fathers, albeit in a slightly different fashion. At any rate, it is certainly true that the wedding day is a serious day for both the newlyweds and the parents.

Perhaps this is what the Talmud has in mind when it compares matching up a couple to the splitting of the Red Sea. At a wedding, too, there is a "splitting" of the laws of the natural, innate love that a child feels toward its parents, and parents toward their child. I remember one of our sons once burst into tears and begging us to let him live with us forever. He said he did not want to get married. However, that happened when he was ten years old.

What does the Master of the Universe do? He comes to help us bear the discomfort of the division that takes place upon the implementation of the above-mentioned Biblical "leave" decree. First G-d manages to fill our hearts with an infusion we call "love." The potential of human love between members of the two sexes is great. *Aza kamavet ahavah* (Love is as powerful as death) (Proverbs 21:14). Love helps the lad and the lass overcome their longing for their parents. The "cleave" is the cure for the "leave."

G-d uses another means of helping the parents and children and that is by planting jealousy and hatred, the very opposite of love, in their hearts. When children grow up a bit, they develop a tendency towards individualism, oppositionism, and rebelliousness vis-à-vis their parents. They constantly find themselves being wronged and find shortcomings in their elders, and they find cause to be piqued and to pout. These quarrels serve a special purpose in both directions: they wean the child of their dependence on their parents' home, and they prepare the parents for the day of separation. The atmosphere at home becomes so tense that the parents thank G-d at finally being rid of their son or daughter. That is where the "parting of the Red Sea" comes in, the parting of the two generations. Later on, things ease up a bit. The parents no longer have to be regaled, because their children's marriage is salvation from heaven for them. Thank G-d.

If all these problems are eternal and universal, the emotions of a Holocaust survivor escorting one's child to the bridal canopy are different. We who returned from that "other planet" react differently, both psychologically and physically, on such occasions.

When I was in the Mauthausen concentration camp, I often wondered what I would do regarding marriage if I survived the war. I had many doubts whether I would be able to take that step for several reasons. I fleetingly excluded the possibility of starting a family. Even after the liberation, I thought about the time of Aaron, Miriam, and Moses' father Amram in Egypt, and the period of

the destruction of the Temple and the horrendous persecutions, when Jewish men did not cohabit with their wives, in order to not bring children into the world to be murdered by the enemy. I have never been able to erase from my memory the image of children being murdered by the Nazis and flung aside like slaughtered chickens.

Another thought terrified me. Who knew what the Germans had done to contaminate our bodies? Who knew what kind of cripples would be born of a father who over the years had suffered illnesses such as typhus, cholera, and the like? Who knew what had been mixed into the concentration soup cauldrons?

Indeed, I married late. Various girls were suggested to me in Europe and in the United States especially. I was unable to make up my mind. Nightmares and dark dreams continued to haunt me. I was afraid.

Once, after my father, OBM, repeatedly asked when I would marry, I poured my heart out to him. He gave me the answer that Miriam gave her father Amram in convincing him to go back home to her mother and have more children.

"What gives you the right to play G-d?" my father argued. "We have our duty, and leave the rest to the Master of the Universe."

"Secondly, no Jew, especially not a survivor, is allowed to continue carrying out Hitler's plan to exterminate the Jewish people, G-d forbid. Our not marrying would be tantamount to national suicide."

I got married in 1949, and when my wife became pregnant with our first child, I promptly notified my father. Here is what he replied: "Have no fear or worry. For having so devotedly fulfilled the commandment to honor your own parents, your progeny will be healthy and you will derive much joy from them, please G-d, and they will be a glory to our people and our family."

My father's blessing has materialized, thank G-d. Unfortunately, however, he did not live to escort a single grandchild to the bridal canopy. I have often thought what a joyous celebration it would have been if he had lived to do so.

May his merits protect us and the entire Jewish people.

Ketubah for Isaac and Esther Avigdor
Hand written by Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor
June 14, 1949

What Did it Take to Survive the Holocaust?

In order to have any hope of living through the Nazi nightmare, every one of us had to possess many rare qualities. The list is long. First, and above all, one had to have common sense, intuition, quick orientation, courage, stubbornness and a continuous drive to overcome inconveniences, cash or things of value for trade. We needed to be able to obtain instant help from friends or family and last, but not least, a faith in G-d, in His providential assistance to assure that you would be one of the few individuals to overcome fate and survive. In spite of this long list of values, it would have been useless without mazel, luck, a lot of luck.

My father continuously had to work on hiding his identity. He did this from the first day of the German reoccupation of the Russian territories on June 30, 1941. He was always incognito even when he was taken away from our home town of Drohobycz on April 12, 1944 to Plashov, Krakow and later on in Buchenwald, the large concentration camp in Germany. Throughout the entire four years, father was mostly in hiding, what we would call *"farshteckt"*. When he had to appear in public, he was one hundred percent in disguise, in essence, masquerading. No one could recognize him without his beard and sideburns. He was thin as a rail and bent over as though he was carrying a heavy load on his back. Instead of his former elegant head-dress for which he was famous, he wore a woolen cap that had holes in it. On his body were old ragged and worn jackets and pants.

The Russians, and later the Germans searched for him. His position as

Chief Rabbi of the town and his official role as Chaplain of the Polish Army made him a high value target. We knew in advance that Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor had to disappear from the public eye. Without a beard, and the way in which he was dressed, it was difficult for anyone to recognize him.

A myriad of times he hid in various places. He went underground, into Jewish and non-Jewish homes, in cities and villages, in forests and fields, in the heart of the ghetto and outside. He hid in the midst of the *"Arbeitslager"* the working camp on Zupna Street and towards the end, for a full four months in a bunker buried underground on the Arian side.

Occasionally, father went into hiding with my mother and sisters together. Most of the time however, he was by himself, as it was much easier to obtain a hideout for one person than for a group.

Normally, I was his contact person to the outside world. I provided the hideouts, bringing him there and back. The most difficult task for me was obtaining and delivering food at least once a week.

Along with the food supply packages, I would advise him of the news of the day and bring along letters from my mother. I would also bring communal and individual *halachick* questions for him to respond to. From the start of the war there were no other rabbis in town. Most of them were seized at the beginning of the liquidations. I was stopped several times going to and from the hideouts and was somehow able to escape, based on my work in the *"Nafta"* refinery, which was under the authority of the War Ministry and not from the S. S. A few times during my work days I managed to escaped with a mere whipping as a punishment for having gone out of the ghetto or from the camp. The supplies I carried were not visible on the outside. I wrapped them around my legs, so that they were not visible through my pants. Upon my return to work, I was not bringing anything with me and usually not searched. I wore an armband with a big letter R, which stood for (*ristung*). That stood for "employed by the army". It seemed to carry a certain amount of respect in the eyes of the Germans.

Once, during the night of February, 1943 during the liquidation in the Ghetto the Germans caught and loaded several thousand men, women and children into trains and delivered them to the *Yanover lager* in Lvov. I was caught in the roundup by a Ukrainian while on my way to my father's hideout. He took me with an army truck to the *"zamulshteleh"*, (gathering place) at the railroad

station. It was a dark and rainy night and while assessing the situation, I saw a temporary fence, pushed it aside and slipped away. Though I felt and heard that I was being chased, they did not catch me. I was afraid to move during the actual S. S. raid. I could not let myself out to go to my father. I wandered around for two nights and a day in the fields between the non Jewish farms on the outskirts of the city.

Potatoes, beets and turnips were plentiful in the grounds of the farmers and I ate them with gusto without salt or fats that I used to love to top them with at home as a child. In that state of hunger in which I found myself, I ate them raw as though they were a gourmet meal. I filled up my pants and pockets with whatever I could find in the fields by digging underground with a stick. I moved around only in the dark of night to avoid detection. I made sure not to make contact with or be spotted by the farmers, for fear of being released to the Germans. Finally, on the third day, when things seemed to calm down, I made my way to his hideout.

Climbing up the stairs to the attic where my father was hiding, I admired his patience and endurance. Looking into his face, I asked him how he was doing or whether he was lonely? He quoted the rabbi of Kotzk who once said, "There is no more whole thing than a broken Jewish heart." Father became very emotional with the minutest details about any bit of news I told him. I unloaded all the goodies and he accepted them with gratefulness.

In his hideout he had a few books, a pencil and paper for notes and observations to fill the time. Regretfully all those scriptures and notes were lost, burnt and confiscated during the various trips and wanderings from camp to camp and especially on the way from Plashow to Buchenwald.

Father appeared healthy, alert and actually happy whenever he used to see me after several of my interval visits. He expressed his thankfulness to me by saying, "You are fulfilling the fifth commandment of honoring a father, above and beyond the call of duty." Ten years later in a speech while installing me as the rabbi in Hartford, Connecticut, he repeated this statement in front of my congregation. He said that, "Only because of my son's help have I remained alive." I used to credit the hiding places we located as being his *mazel* to survive.

In my heart, I felt that besides the *mitzvah* of the fifth commandment, I was fighting with all my strength against the Germans. I had to prove the fact that despite their decrees and restrictions, I would guide and guard my father to

remain alive and survive as one of the "*Sherit Haplayta*" the remaining few. He continued to survive and to rise and become one of the famous post war rabbinic personalities of Poland.

Jews would ask me, "How is your father?" and I would promptly reply, "*Baruch Hashem*", thank G-d for each moment at a time. We lived with minutes and seconds, not with days. People would usually answer, "Oh, good, good, see to it that he survives, we need him to be a witness to the destruction that occurred to us.

Most of the rendezvous I had with my father were emotional, heroic and hopeful, but this time when I opened the door to the attic, I saw a completely different face. He appeared to me as though he was covered with a mask and not quite the same person. His eyes were glossy, like in a hypnotic trance. He seemed aware that my delay of three days from the last meeting had something to do with some unusual circumstances. He was despondent and apparently in a different world. I barely recognized him. I was scared and worried at the same time and I asked him how he was? This time he did not answer. When I told him what happened to me in the last three days, he calmed down and said that he felt that I was in some sort of unusual danger. In those perilous days no one needed to be a prophet to imagine that my delay was on account of a serious matter.

The dramatic image of my father's stone-like face when he first saw me, stands before my eyes. I will never forget it as long as I live. These were rare moments of depression requiring tremendous spiritual heroism to overcome. One had to be very strong to find the answer to the questions, "Why and for what are we going through all this? How long would this hellish exile last and when would it finally end?

Both the Martyrs and Survivors, Deserve the same Holy Title of "Kdoshim"

Why write? Hasn't enough been written, published, studied and preached about the death of our six million brothers and sisters? Is there a need to go on writing? There exists libraries, museums, exhibits and archives full of historical documents, thousands of testimonies, movies and video's given by survivors which detail our national Jewish tragedy. Why dwell on the subject again and again?

Over fifty years have passed since the end of World War II, yet interest in the Holocaust decreases with each coming year, to the extent that no book publishing company is interested in accepting a book on the subject. There are no buyers they say and people don't want to be reminded anymore.

Again the question begs to be asked. Can we afford to forget, while Jewish law asks of us to observe the tragedy that occurred two thousand years ago on the ninth day of Av, when the destruction of the Temples took place? We fast, we remove our shoes in the synagogue, and we read the Book of Lamentations in order not to forget. Do we dare forget what happened just fifty years ago?

Today, everyone believes that the six million *K'doshim*, (holy martyrs) who sanctified G-d's name, died for one reason only, being born a Jew. Initially, in the

early years after the war, this honorable recognition of the title *K'doshim*, was not readily granted.

The world, besides remaining silent, also tried to ignore and depreciate the survivors, as well as the dead victims. This served mankind as a means of cleansing it's conscience for not having done enough to save us.

The option of open or even underground struggle for European Jewry was unrealistic. There was no chance against Hitler's mighty armed S. S. forces. There was only one choice, to flee or hide, in order to evade the death sentence hovering over us.

Such choice involved great risks and not everyone was given a chance to even try. Most of those who attempted escape perished. When a Jew was found hiding, he was subjected to hideous torture which was sometimes worse than death itself.

Struggling to stay alive, despite the Nazi's hunt, by living in forests, fields, bunkers or on false forged documents, was in itself an act of Kiddush Hashem.

Those who saved themselves, not only waged a struggle against the barbaric, cruel Germans, but also their anti-Semitic Polish, Ukrainian and Lithuanian collaborators. They were sometimes more savage to the Jews than the Germans themselves.

Today, there are apologists who want to deny the Polish role in the Holocaust saying, that the extermination of Polish Jewry was part of the rape of Poland by Hitler. They say that when Poland was victimized, it was the Germans not the Polish people, who simultaneously mass murdered the Jews.

As one who was born in Poland and who grew up in a Polish intellectual atmosphere, with Polish as my mother tongue and where Polish literature was read, studied, admired and loved, I must admit that such an answer (Polish defense) is historically false. Today I see the anti-Semitism of the Polish people as genetically implanted in their being. We found out way after the war was over that there were some "righteous Christians."

Taking into consideration Poland's pre-war anti-Semitic policy of "Ovshem", in the venomous speeches of the Polish priest Chechiak on the floor of the Senate before World War II, and its wartime record, down to the post-war pogrom of Kielce, one must conclude that there was a historic partnership that the Poles had with the Nazis.

The excuses of innocence are designed politically in a feeble attempt to clear their names in the eyes of the world while simultaneously retaining the loot plundered from three and a half million murdered and exiled Jews. The Polish policy towards Jews before, during and after the war remains to be examined and clarified.

True anti-Semitism is not the same as mass murder. The fact remains however, that anti-Semitism was the ideology of the Polish people and certainly contributed to Hitler's mass murder. Germany was the hammer while Poland was the anvil by which the destruction of European Jewry was consummated. This fact is proven by the blood and tears soaked into the soil of five hundred years of Jewish life in Poland.

In such an atmosphere, survival of a Jew required struggle, endurance, perseverance, hope, trust in G-d and considerable *mazel*, luck. All those breaks gave you one in a hundred chance of survival. Of those who fled and hid, one out of a hundred lived to tell the tale.

If *Kiddush Hashem* is measured by how much and how long one suffered under the Nazis, then survivors are more deserving of the designation as martyrs, than those who perished in the crematoria and the Warsaw Ghetto revolt. Undergoing this hellish experience required more strength and courage than getting killed. We underwent torment from beginning to end, and the "end" wasn't ever really an end.

For those who perished, dying was sad but easy. It terminated their suffering. For survivors, the Holocaust's effects continued long after liberation. Many of us were virtually dead, and our revival was a "*Techias Hamaysim*", a physical and spiritual resurrection. Isn't coming back from death to life a miracle? Weren't we, deserving enough to be recognized as heroic victors in "*Kiddush Hashem*" for life? Our psychic and physical sores will never heal, our wounds will remain forever.

In spite of our extraordinary pain, many of us went about our daily lives during the Shoah, filled with pride and hope. We sang and lived the words of *Ani Ma'amin*, (I believe). Interestingly enough, there were no suicidal despairs. While we were tempted by the idea, and indeed some of us even carried poison in our pockets, up to the last day of our liberation, none of us used it.

We sanctified the name of G-d by sanctifying life, with our stubborn will to live and a refusal to acquiesce to Hitler. We defied his design to eliminate the Jewish people, with the method of self-destructive suicide. There were no suicidal cop-outs in the ghettos and camps. People did not take their lives voluntarily. The motto of faith, on the lips of all was: "*Aushalten*" – "Endure!" I don't think that there is another people on earth, under the same circumstances, that could have displayed such strength and courage in sanctifying life as we Jews did under the Nazis.

There was no way in the world to get even with Hitler. We learned the hard way that our survival alone was the means to get "even" and every day, every hour we lived, was an act of defiance.

While lying on my straw cot, known as the "pritch" in Mauthausen and secretly writing poetry, I not only sustained myself with my writings, but also many of my co-prisoners as well, whom I helped to survive by lighting a spark of hope in that hopeless, hellish environment of gas and ashes.

If today there are learned professors who, despite our living testimony, dare to call the Holocaust a fabrication, one can only imagine what the world would have said 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 the Nazis actions. It would not have been recorded or regarded as an historical event without parallel in the annals of humankind.

This very mission, of refuting the lies that the world might have accepted as truth, is the greatest act of *Kiddush Hashem*. We must write, speak and publish books and articles without an end. If our survival is holy, then everything we write is holy, and by writing about it we are carrying out the last will and testament of the six million who, up to their dying breath pleaded not to be forgotten. They begged the rest of us not to remain silent.

The horror of those years was not just what was done to us, but that a plan to exterminate an entire people could be designed and 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. He was the first to prove motivated and capable of implementing his wish. The possibility of loading Jews into freight wagons,

transporting them to extermination centers built especially for the diabolical purpose of mass murder was without precedent in human history. We witnessed the unbelievable. In the twentieth century it was possible for a civilized and cultured nation to choose to massacre millions of people. The world stood by with stoic indifference seeing, hearing and saying nothing.

On the *Shavuos* holiday we read a poem known as "*Akdamot*", authored in Aramaic by Rabbi Mayer of Worms in the eleventh century. In his opening verses he says: "Even if all heavens were parchment, the forest quills, all oceans ink, as well as all earth's inhabitors scribes, they could not describe the glory of G-d." These same paraphrased words are true about the tragedy of the Holocaust.

Whenever I hear people express their sympathy to me about what happened, I visualize the feeling of friends coming to visit mourners during the week of shiva, the seven days of mourning. In my professional career as a rabbi this is a familiar scene. None of the visitors fully feels the pain of the immediate family. All they can do is express words of sorrow, but they never fully feel the pain of their loss.

To all those who put the victims and the survivors on the defense by asking them, "Why were you so ineffective, on the threshold of oblivion? Why didn't you resist?" Here are some answers.

It is not with a sense of shame that we remember the fallen, but with 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 as well as acts of passive heroism. We valiantly struggled to preserve the image of G-d in man in the face of the cruelest tyrant of all times. Ours was the courageous act of remaining true to our Jewish destiny, and by accepting our fate proudly and fearlessly.

For the nutrition starved inmates in the camps, making a candle out of a precious tiny portion of their margarine ration and lighting a wick heroically in the barracks in honor of *Chanukah* was defiance. Fasting on *Yom Kippur* while we were already on a starvation diet to begin with was heroic. Hundreds of such minor acts were displayed as passive behaviors of resistance to the Nazis.

As for the question, "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 *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 eventually know what we endured. My father once said that "A person and his memories die, but the book remains." Perhaps, they will have a glimmer of understanding of the meaning of *Kiddush Hashem* and will make a vow of "Never Again".



A Father's Startling Discovery that his Two Sons have Survived

During the first four years of the Holocaust, we experienced the beginnings of the miserable, degrading future that was in store for us. We witnessed mass public executions, expulsion from our homes and businesses, robberies, rapes, hunger, loneliness, frightening bombardments and sickness. The German establishments of ghettos, the wearing of armbands were painful, but bearable. Our family was still intact. My mother, grandmother, two sisters and my brother were together with my father, trying to survive through hiding and camouflaging their looks and identities in order not to be recognized. The Germans were looking to liquidate influential Jewish leaders, especially rabbis.

In my various other books, I have described, for history's sake, hundreds of stories dealing with that crucial transition from normalcy to holocaust and its challenge of life and death.

More than half way into the war years, we still managed to stay together as a family. My mother was shot and killed in the second year of the war. A few months after her death, the Germans caught my grandmother and led her to the gas chambers. What remained of the family were my father, two sisters and both boys.

We went from one hiding place to another, always with an eye on guarding and protecting my father. I went into a joint venture with some other young

people to build a bunker for the five of us. The bunker was to hold some twenty others. Ironically, it took us longer to make the bunker than we actually lived in it.

The *haupsturmferer* Hildebrand together with S. S. police dogs discovered us in there, after only three months time. They dragged us out and shipped us by cattle trains to a concentration camp known as Plaszow, near Krakow.

When my father realized that we were going to Plaszow, he said with relief, "Plaszow, Shmashow it will always be better than being in the bunker." These few words, correctly described the unbearable conditions filled with frictions, quarrels, jealousy, humiliation, cramped quarters and foul odors.

When we arrived in Plaszow, we were ordered to split into two groups. My father and sisters went to the right and my brother and I went to the left. We realized that the separation meant that the younger people would go to work and the elders and women would wind up elsewhere. After two weeks of quarantine and isolation, we were sent to Mauthausen via Auschwitz. My father was sent to the famous Buchenwald Concentration Camp and my sisters to Studgart. The separation was impossible to bear. None of us knew where the others were until months after liberation. In our hearts, we always feared that my father would not be strong enough to tolerate the dreadful ordeals.

Miraculously though, my father did manage to survive and became the chaplain of the Polish Legion under General Andrews, serving the survivors of Polish citizens in various camps. He was the head of the Jewish "*Beis Din*" court in Bergen Belzen.

My brother and I spent an altogether different sort of life in Mauthausen. We were assigned to very hard work carrying stones and lived in bunk houses with six hundred other men. Our daily ration was a piece of black bread and soup. A pack of cigarettes was distributed to each of us once a week. Trying to keep kosher made the situation worse for an observant person. We even traded our cigarettes for extra bread or vegetable soup.

Our day of liberation came in Guns Kirchen, Austria on May 5, 1945 by the American Army. The Israeli Brigade, which was part of the British Army, came in two days later. They smuggled us over the Tirollian Mountains away from Guzen to Modena, Italy. We took shelter in Mussolini's old military quarters. My brother Bob and I were lucky to find a landsman from our hometown named Junek Pine (Tannenbaum) who was an American officer. He

was born in Drohobycz and left Poland for America before the war on a business trip. When the war broke out he could not return home. After a while, he joined the American Army and was sent to the European front. He sought out survivors from his home town Drohobycz to help them. When we heard his announcement, we immediately applied to see him. We talked about our town and the people we knew and we became very friendly. He took us with an army jeep to Milano to the center of the city and clothed us from top to bottom with new suits, shirts and shoes and underwear. He helped us start a kibbutz (a communal settlement), gathering Jewish youngsters who survived, for immigration to Israel.

I arranged different groups, and my duties were to organize all necessary classes, programs and work orders for the day. We trained the youngsters for eventual settlement in the Holy Land. Reading, writing and understanding Hebrew was our first priority. We managed to get a sefer torah from an old synagogue in Milano and that enabled us to hold real prayer services every day with "*kriyas hatorah*".

One nice sunny day, I was walking in the streets of Milano near the Plaza, when I recognized a young woman who was the daughter of the former Cantor Burach Gross of Drohobycz. I called to her. At first, she did not recognize me because of the physical changes in all of us. When I asked her what she was doing there, she told me that she had gotten married in the ghetto, and her husband was taken to a concentration camp. She was searching for him everywhere, trying to find out if he perhaps landed somewhere in Italy.

I was shocked when I heard her husband's name because this fellow was my age, and he was in the same block with me at Guzen in Mauthausen. I personally saw him being carried out on a stretcher, dead and placed in the "Appel" line (taking attendance) for the daily morning count. You had to be there dead or alive. I did not want to suddenly reveal the sad news to her on the sunny streets of Milano. Since this, per-chance meeting was on a Friday, I decided to invite her to come to the *kibbutz* for Shabbos assuring her that she would enjoy herself in the company of many others.

Saturday night, after *havdalah*, she walked into my office all dressed up and ready to leave. I then told her the truth about her husband and that she was wasting her time searching for him. She broke down in tears and refused to take the note I had written, stating that, "I, Rabbi Isaac C. Avigdor, attest to the fact

that—-her husband, was not amongst the living and that she was free to get married." She kept on saying, "I love him and will love him forever, and I will never marry any one else." I hated to see her leave in such a state of shock, and I forcefully slipped the note into her purse.

In Milano, she joined another group of young people searching for relatives amongst the holocaust survivors. This group went back into Germany and wound up in Bergen Belzen. She shared her story with others and there befriended a young fellow who became close to her. Eventually they got serious enough to want to get married. Such episodes happened frequently after the war because loneliness was such an overwhelming feeling amongst the thousands who survived.

The couple went to the Rabbinic Court, which was established after the war in Bergen Belzen to specifically deal with such matters for both young and old survivors. Surprisingly, she found a very large crowd knocking at the doors. There was a sign on the wall stating, "Due to the lack of documentations, no marriages can be performed here at the present time."

She forcefully pushed herself through the crowd towards the door. She passed the guard, and got herself closer to the desk in front of the room and threw the certificate she had on the table. She simply said, "I have a document." The rabbi sitting at the desk was a tall thin uniformed man who picked up the paper and focused seriously at the signature. In great astonishment and a tremor in his voice, this rabbi immediately asked her, "Where did you get this paper? What was the name of the rabbi? Did you see him with your own eyes? Is he still alive? When did you see him last? Angrily she answered, "I know him personally from Drohobycz. I knew his family. He was the son of the rabbi of Drohobycz, and I am the cantor's daughter." My father's eyes filled with tears and he said, "This is my son's note. I did not know that he was alive." My father got very weak and sat down to regain his composure and continued to inquire about more details regarding the whereabouts of his other son Abraham. She told him what she knew and that I am the head of a *kibbutz* in the town of Abiate Guazona, Italy and worked for Aliya Bet, the illegal immigration network of young people who absconded in small boats from the Italian shores to Israel.

Mr. Victtorio Mayer, an older Italian Jew who was the owner of a paper mill, hid in Switzerland during the war. He had a palatial summer home in Abiate Guazona amongst the rolling hills of Italy. I met Mr. Mayer through

Junek Pine Tannenbaum. I asked him for permission to use his summer home to prepare surviving boys and girls to go to *Eretz Yisroel.* He graciously consented.

A few weeks later, I received a letter and twenty dollars from my father and a statement that, I should believe that due to the mitzvah of freeing this woman from her state of agunah, G-d had granted his survival to allow him to be reunited with his family after two years of separation. G-d works in mysterious ways.

We met two months later in the train station of Milano. I brought him to the *kibbutz* for that Sabbath. This was a very memorable weekend with a large assembly of guests. We all cried together, but these tears were tears of joy.

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



Kibbutz 'Torah Va'Avodah' in Abbiate, Italy

An Argument

In our efforts to save ourselves from the Nazis, the Jews would hide underground. Deep, inside cellars or in the canals, under the town streets we dug ourselves homes sometimes' rather palatial homes - which we called bunkers.

In the damp, chilly, stuffy darkness whole families and groups of friends lived. Building the bunkers was an ordeal. The work had to be done in strict secrecy. It had to be kept secret not only from the Germans, but also from fellow Jews - not, G-d forbid, for fear that Jews would inform on each other, but lest others come and occupy one's bunker.

As a result, a sharp instinct for finding good hiding places developed, and fantastic feats of engineering were performed in the building of bunkers.

Once, a group of 30 Jews got together to build a common bunker. Fifteen of them were laborers who were supposed to do the building, whereas the other 15 provided the money for the purchase of the materials and a year's supply of food. When the bunker was finished, it turned out that it could hold only 25 people - and even that was too much.

After hearing all the details, my father ruled as follows: The 15 workmen were to stay in the bunker, if for no other reason than that everyone of them knew exactly where the bunker was and how to get to it. As to the remaining 15, who had no idea of the bunker's location, each of their names would be written on a slip of paper and lots would be drawn.

There was no choice: five people would have to be kept out of that bunker.

Since all 30 had an equal share in building the bunker, which five would be left out?

All 30 of them were crowded into our apartment, all of them weeping and wailing and begging the rabbi to decide.

When the lots had been drawn, the five bunkerless people started shouting at my father that he was a murderer, etc. But - the lots had been drawn, and that was that.

"That was that" was not the end of the story. Only shortly afterwards, the Germans discovered the bunker and its 25 inhabitants were promptly executed. The five who remained outside were later taken with other Jews of the town to the Plaszow concentration camp, where they lived to see the end of Hitler.

They were the only ones, of all the 30, to survive.



A Din Torah in a Ghetto Hideout

It is well known that during the Holocaust, rabbis were the very first category of people whom Hitler set about exterminating. The plan was to remove the Jewish people's spiritual leaders as early as possible, so that the Jews would be left, "as sheep without a shepherd, without a leader" and thus, make it that much easier for the Germans to liquidate the masses.

From other towns, closer to the German border, we had heard about the slaughter of rabbis and lay leaders. That is why my father of blessed memory, as Chief Rabbi, and our entire family, went into hiding the day the Germans marched into Drohobycz.

The impression was to be that, the rabbi had fled the town in fear and no one knew where he was. My father shaved off his beard and wore ordinary clothes so that no one would recognize him, and he even ventured out into the street from time to time. Communal dignitaries and personal friends came to visit us in our hideaway from time to time, to chat, discuss politics, and even to hear a lecture from my father. The few Jews, who knew where we were, kept our existence in town a secret.

The first 12 months under the German rule were an extraordinary time for us. The Jews wore a Star of David armband, while they worked outside the ghetto. Unusual circumstances created various problems between individual Jews. Since there were no courts, litigations between people were settled by

arbitration. Of course, those who knew my father preferred to come to him with their problems and questions. There were plenty of the usual kinds of troubles, but for those who did not experience the turmoil it is difficult to imagine the sort of arguments that had to be settled in those circumstances. There is a saying: "Happy people are all happy in the same manner, but trouble and misfortune come in different forms and each person suffers in a different manner."

One day an elderly man came and complained to my father that another Jew had swindled him in a deal. We knew the alleged culprit, and he came as soon as my father summoned him.

The first Jew stated his case. Life had become bitter, and he could no longer stand it, so he bought some poison from this man. The moment came when he felt that life was very unbearable and he swallowed the poison he purchased, but it had turned out not to be poison at all. He waited and waited but death did not come. The man had sold him some fake powder.

The defendant argued: "What do I know about poison? Neither I, nor any of my ancestors, ever dealt with poison. I only sold him what I bought for myself. I too, must have been fooled but I just passed on what I received. I'll tell you what rabbi, I'll give him back his money."

The claiming Jew began moaning: "What shall I do with money? What I need is poison to die with because I can't take it any longer. Rabbi, I want you to order him to provide me with real poison."

My father sat there thinking and listening. How could he rule? To be sure, the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) covers misdeals, but what is involved here, are not money matters, but questions of life and death. The opponent was willing to return the money. Jewish law forbids suicide as a cardinal sin. It even forbids minor physical self-afflicted injuries. Our life and body are in the hands of G-d. We must always believe and pray that miracles may occur and evil will not last forever. We survivors are witnesses to many miracles. To remain alive after the Holocaust was a divine destination. Choosing one's own death as being discussed in the courts nowadays, is a basic violation of Jewish law.

Witnesses who escaped from the line of Jews waiting at the gate of the gas chambers later told of hearing the song of *Ani Maamin*, "I believe in G-d", whispered by most of the martyrs up to the last minute."

הק' יעקב (המכונה ד"ר) אביגדור
רב ואבדפה"ק מעקסיקא והגליל יצ"ו

היתר עגונה

AGUNAH (Heb. Lit. "tied,") (Ruth I:13), is a married woman who for whatsoever reason is separated from her husband and cannot remarry, either because she cannot obtain a divorce from him (see "Divorce"), or because it is unknown whether he is still alive. The term is also applied to a *yevumah* (a Levirate "widow"), if she cannot obtain *chalizah* from the levir or if 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 in great detail in *halachic* literature.

Essence of the problem. The *halacha* prescribes that a Jewish marriage can only be dissolved by divorce or 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") to his wife. Hence, the absence of the husband or his willful refusal to deliver the *get* precludes any possibility of a divorce, and the ability for the wife to remarry.

Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor
Mexico 18 D.F.

One of the most complicated Halachic *issues after the liberation at the end of World War II was the problem of Agunot. Hundreds of women were prevented from remarrying, since they had no proof of the death of their original husbands. Jewish law bars them from remarrying. They are called* "Agunot", *which means "Shut off", "Restrained" or "Tied up". The following is a unique* "Halachic *response" on the subject.*

Basic Information About Agunah

Agunah refers to a married woman who, for whatever reason, has been 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 treasury of Jewish response") - Jerusalem, 1954, legal Encyclopedia, are devoted to it.

The *Halacha* prescribes that a marriage can only be dissolved by divorce, or the death of either spouse. According to Jewish law, divorce is effectuated 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 insufficient for a declaration of the court recognizing the wife as a widow and proclaiming that her marriage, was 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 for example as a result of the Nazi Holocaust. The problem has also arisen during the World Trade Center disaster or the recent Tsunami in Asia. The problem can also occur 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 the permission granted may, inadvertently, be given to a truly married woman to enter into a second marriage in error. That would be adulterous and may result in the children, from such a second marriage being *Mamzerim* (*Halachic* bastards not allowed to marry into the Jewish people, 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 *Halacha* that facts are to be determined by the testimony of two witnesses. However, the *Mishnah* attributes to Rabon Gamliel the Elder of the *Takana* edict, 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* 16:1). At the time of Rabbi Gamliel 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, slaves, a handmaiden, or relatives (which classes were otherwise religiously incompetent as witnesses). The underlining Talmudic legal logic given to these far-reaching rule changes was that the wife herself would endeavor to be certain of her husband's death before remarrying. A mistaken incorrect marriage would result in her becoming prohibited to both men if it later transpires that the first husband was still alive, and her other rights, especially pecuniary ones would 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 husband and his absence is not due to war conditions. The reason being that certainly she has made careful inquiries herself before seeking to contract another marriage (*Yevamoth* 93b, 114-116, and *Poskim.*)

The *Halacha*, 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 of the purportedly deceased spouse must be established. Detailed rabbinic rules establishing identity attempts to achieve maximum certainty under the circumstances. Thus evidence as to circumstances from which death would likely result in a majority of cases, is not considered sufficient proof of death itself, since it may be merely the opinion of the witness that the husband died, but not testimony 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 falling into the sea and purportedly drowned in "water having no end" (where one can see only the sea but not its surroundings). His purported death not having actually been witnessed is unsubstantiated since he may have been rescued. If, however a witness testifies that he was later present at the funeral of the husband or testifies as to 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 would be considered, *Halachically* substantiated, and the *Agunah* permitted to remarry, because 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 OH 17-42, esp. 32).

Finding a way to permit an Agunah to remarry is deemed a great *Mitzvah* (Responsa Asheri, 51:2). Indeed, overly strict onerous application of the law, without justification, in cases where there is no suspicion of deception, is regarded, not only as a failure to perform a *Mitzvah,* but even a transgression itself. In view of the danger of legalizing a possibly adulterous union however, it is customary for an *Agunah* to be permitted to marry only after consultation with, and consent of other leading scholars.

An *Agunah* who remarries after Rabbinic permission is generally entitled and granted the payment of her *Ketubbah* (Yevamoth 116b: 117a;l Maimonides *Yud, Ishut* 16:31; *Shulchan Aruch,* 43, 44). If an *Agunah* remarries with Rabbinic approval and her first husband reappears, her legal position is that of an *"Eshet Ish"* (a married woman) who has had an adulterous illicit union with another man, thus rendering her Halachically prohibited to both men. Accordingly, she requires a *Get* from both. Any children born to her from her second husband would be Mamzerim.

In view of the dubious straits in which an *Agunah* is likely to find herself, ways were sought to take precautions against such eventualities. Thus, already in early times it was customary, for anyone "going to the wars of the House of David, to write a bill of divorce for his wife" (Ketuboth, 9b, Rashi and Tosefos). This *Get* was a conditional one, i.e., becoming effective only should the husband not return from war at a specified date, whereupon the wife would become a divorcee and be entitled to marry another man. Even today in certain countries, this practice is adopted by those going to war. Complications may ensue since the rules and consequences of a Get of this nature, are beset with Halachic problems, 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.)

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 *Bet Din* (Rabbinical 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 Halacha, 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 had actually gone to death, and he has the right to decide, on the basis of overwhelming probability, that the man in question is dead. Thus Rabbi Yaakov 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 marshaled to support a certain legal investigation and so, are in a different mode 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 dilemmas 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 this chapter to him.

YITZCHOK CHAIM BEN RECHEL BRAINDEL

ORIGINAL AGUNAH DOCUMENT

November 1945
Antwerp, Belgium

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



ספר
תחית יעקב

קובץ מאמרים ומכתבים בהלכה שכתבתי אחרי אשר אני הגבר, ראיתי עני ושבר, כשבאו זדים 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

לסנים רב ראשי ואב"ד דקהלות דרהאביטש ובאריסלאוו והגליל וכעת

והנה יודע אני את ערכי ושפלותי כעת, אחרי אשר ישבתי שנים רבות בחשך ואפלה, וראיתי עני בשבט עברתו. עירום נכנסתי אל הרבע היחודי, ועירום נכנסתי אח"כ לגעטטא, וחייתי גם על הדרך המוביל אל כבשן 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, וחנחתי 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 הנייר. אבל רצוני לומר, שיודע אני בעצמי, שכמו שלקיתי בכל מיני מדוה בגופי, כמו שגופי הי' משך שנים אחדות מלא פצעים, חבורות ומכות טרויות, ועדיין רשמי המכות הללו נראים על גופי, כמו כן חש אני גם בנפשי פנימה, שגם היא, כלומר רוחי ונשמתי נלקו במדה מרובה, 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 הנחוץ בענינים אלה, וגם פה בבלגיא מחוסר ספרים אנכי, ואין אומן בלא כלים.

I realize at present, my lack of resources and unworthiness after many years in the black darkness of 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 finally reaching 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 pain 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, relates that judges who have personally witnessed an event need not call for formal testimony. They are the witnesses and 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 times) 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 overwhelmingly compared to that of good; pursuant to Raavad's learning. However, "And their sin is heavy" alludes to quality, and 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 prospective bride. Assuming then, that the soldier wishes to prevent her from marrying anyone else and is concerned with the possibility, then he would certainly not facilitate that possibility by granting 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 does a husband have a way of binding 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 than 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 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, 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 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 of 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 *Mishnah* relates, (*Kidushin 2*) "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) to 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 in 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 takes 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. Therefore, the minority was taken to work while the great majority was led to the furnace or grave.

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

(4) From the minority of the minority left, some died during the "Liquidazia" and after liberation from the plague and evil diseases of cholera and 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 cannot 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 a 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 did not detract from the awesomeness of the fate of the general population. The minority of survivors cannot 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 the 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 the 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 the 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 our subject then, it can be said that the essence of permissibility 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 *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 43:14*) 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.



RABBINICAL LIFE IN MEXICO CITY

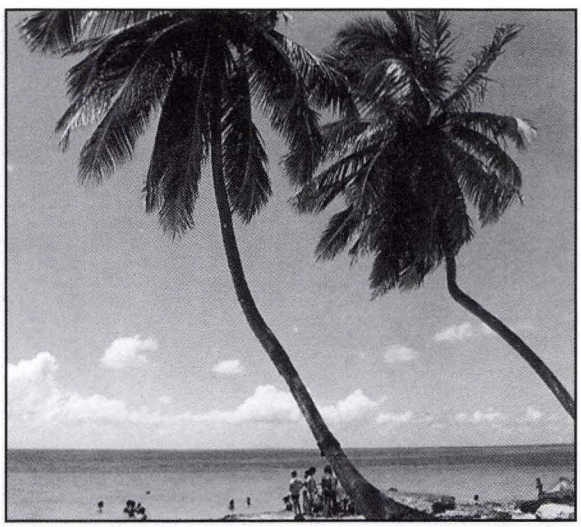
Mexico

What did Mexico City have to offer to Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor o.b.m. to become its Chief Rabbi, leaving behind such great international metropolises as New York City, and Buenos Aires?

This is a question that people have asked me throughout the years. I always found it hard to answer. Today, January, 2005 thirty-seven years after his demise, I researched and studied his library, his works, manuscripts and correspondences with other rabbis, and I derived the following reasons for his choice to leave N.Y. and go to Mexico City.

He had first gone to Buenos Aires for an interview but refused their kind offer. He did not like, and feared their form of government, which was under the leadership, at that time, of Pres. Eva Peron. He expressed his feelings very briefly even to the point of saying, "I had enough of fascism under Germany and Russia in my life."





He fell in love with Mexico for ten basic reasons:

1) He was impressed with the magnificent capital of the country, Mexico City, with its twelve million people, a giant metropolis, uniquely possessing a small Jewish community, resembling a "shtetle" like in Poland. It had one major synagogue, with one rabbi, a kosher slaughtering-house, three Jewish newspapers, where his articles appeared on a regular basis, along with top-notch world famous Jewish writers.

2) Mexico offered him a nice private residence with peace and security, and a servant in the kitchen to help his wife.

3) As a holocaust survivor from concentration camps, *Zsvankslagers*, bunkers, ditches and cellars for hiding, he suffered a lot from arthritis and the dry warm climate agreed with him.

4) His pre-war condition of diabetes required him to have plenty of fruit and vegetables in his diet. These products are available year round in Mexico in abundance, and he enjoyed them. They agreed with him, he lost weight and kept in good shape.

5) The Mexican *Kehillah* offered the only kosher kitchen and hotel in the country, called the "*Aishel*" located in Cuernavaca with a built in synagogue as a home for the aged with many rooms for guests and a permanent rabbi as supervisor, "mashgiach."

6) My brother Dr. Abraham Avigdor married Sheindel (Schojet) Avigdor, and their three children, Dr. Zvi Avigdor, Engineer Israel Avigdor and Rachel Avigdor, gave father much joy and assistance.

7) One could live in Mexico much cheaper than anywhere else in the world.



8) He would often enjoy the city of Cuernevaca, (city of eternal spring), Cuautla and even Acapulco.

9) When he traveled through Mexico, he often admired the beauty of the countryside itself with its lovely mountains, hills, luscious vegetations, flowers and farms. He would often say that it makes him imagine that he lives in Israel with its many palm trees and citrus fruits.

10) The *Kehillah* owned a large traditional cemetery, where my father was buried, thirty-seven years ago. They built him an elegant mausoleum, representing three books on the outside. Each volume bears the name of the country he lived and preached in, Europe, America and Mexico. The impressive mausoleum has a capacity to hold a "*minyan*" (ten people) inside. Hundreds of people who generally make visitations to the cemetery usually stop to say prayers there and pay respect to his memory, all year round.





Rabbi Dr. Y. Avigdor addressing a mass
Memorial Meeting in Mexico for the Six Million

Preface to Life in Mexico City

The relationship I had with my father in Mexico was always close, but always from a distance. We corresponded with each other almost on a daily basis, exchanging family news along with thoughts of Torah and literary works that he was always involved with throughout his 15 years in Mexico.

Although I frequently traveled there to visit him and participated in some of the Jewish Community's events, I never kept appropriate records of the chronology of my father's endeavors during his tenure as Chief Rabbi of Mexico. When it came to editing this book in honor of my father, I was faced with the difficult task of choosing someone from Mexico City who knew him closely as a friend and teacher, and who could remember details of his life there. I also thought it important to document the historical and religious background of the Jewish Community as related to my father's taking his position there.

I was lucky and fortunate to have been directed by my nephew Dr. Zvi Avigdor to contact Dr. David Cymet, who could perfectly fill the role I looked for. Dr. Cymet is someone who met with father frequently, attended his classes and lectures and assisted him in editing and designing several of his works in Spanish.

The following essay by Dr. Cymet is a general review of fathers' total personality, his work and activities as the chief rabbi of Mexico and the numerous works that he published. David Cymet P.H.D. now living in Brooklyn, N. Y. was a distinguished Mexican architect and is known for various writings that he published.

I thank Dr. David Cymet wholeheartedly for accepting my request and producing such a meticulous and enlightening work. The admiration and friendship between our families shall endure.

The Author

Rabbi Yaakov Avigdor Spritual Leader of the Ashkenazi Community of Mexico

By: Dr. David Cymet

The beginnings of the organized Jewish Ashkenazi community of Mexico go back to the early twenties soon after the end of World War I (1914-1918) and the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). Newly adopted immigration quotas in the USA greatly reduced the Jewish-immigration flow to the US and Jewish organizations began to look for new havens for the persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe.

Mexico, which had suffered an enormous population loss during its Revolution (1910-1920), showed friendly interest in Jewish immigration at the Constitutional Assembly of Queretaro in 1917. The post-revolutionary Presidents Calles and Obregon acted accordingly and opened the doors in the early twenties.

The American Jewish organization Bnei Brith sent a representative to Mexico City to assist the new immigrants. The immigrants would generally arrive by boat to the port of Veracruz and then by railroad to Mexico City. Most of the Jewish immigrants concentrated in old downtown Mexico in the streets

surrounding the *Zocalo*.

There already existed at the time, a Sephardic Jewish community under the name "Monte Sinai" with an established synagogue and a cemetery founded by Jews from the Turkish Empire at the beginning of the century. Some of the new immigrants would frequent the Monte Sinai synagogue but they soon began thinking about taking care of their spiritual, educational, and cultural needs on their own, although they were only taking their first steps in the new country and had to cope with the difficulties of earning a living and learning a new language.

The first *Ashkenazi* synagogue was established in 1922 by Russian Jewish immigrants under the name of Nidjei Israel on Avenida Cinco de Mayo. The congregation adopted the Ashkenaz nusach in their prayers. Their first Rabbi was Harav Orliansky, followed in the middle thirties by Rabbi Dovid Shloime Rafalin, a Slabodka alumnus who in 1936 became their official Rav after he had been the Rabbi of the Cuban Jewish community. On the eve of World War II, Nidjei Israel built its own synagogue on Justo Sierra 71 in downtown Mexico City.

The second synagogue named Beis Hamidrash Agudas Ajim, adopted *nusach Sefard* and was initiated in 1928 in my parent's home by my father R' Israel Cymet together with other Polish Jews. It was located originally on Moneda Street in old Mexico and now functions on Montes de Oca Street in the Colonia Condesa. The first Rabbi of Agudas Ajim was Harav Yaacov Goldberg followed many years later by Rabbi Meyer Rosenbaum. The third synagogue named Tiferes Israel was established by Polish Jews on Donceles Street who eventually brought over Harav Hillel Chelminsky as their Rabbi from Poland. Synagogues were established in two suburbs, Colonia Alamos under the name of Adas Israel and in Tacubaya. The Alamos Shul survives until today but the Tacubaya Shul was very short-lived and disappeared in the early thirties.

Shojatim were employed very early on by the new immigrants, both in the central slaughterhouse of the city and in the main city markets where they would provide the needs of the growing community. A major event in the history of the Ashkenazic Jewish community was the opening of an *Ashkenazi* cemetery in 1928 by the Nidje Israel congregation. Until then the *Ashkenazim* were using the Monte Sinai cemetery of the Sephardic community in case of death. Through the cemetery, Nidje Israel not only acquired an important source of income but the unique power in the community over the rest of the other *Shuls* as the de-

facto Kehila of the Ashkenazi community.

Many of the immigrants, especially the younger generation, arrived from Eastern Europe and were strongly influenced by the secular non-religious movements developing in Europe and Mandate Palestine. The *Yiddisher Kultur Club* in Tacuba 15 played a very significant role in bringing them together to lectures in the Yiddish language and social activities. They endeavored to establish in their new country, cultural and political organizations that reflected their break-away from the tradition of their Orthodox homes.

Every Jewish political group, such as the Zionists, the Bundists, and the Communists established their own political organizations. The Zionists were by far the majority group. The elderly gave much of their attention to activities of the Zionist fund, the *Keren Kayemeth,* and the younger ones organized a Maccabi group that stressed sport activities. The early Maccabi group was the catalyst for the Jewish Sports Center which was founded years later and which developed into a major cultural institution.

Jewish education for their children was a priority for the new immigrant families. The first institution was an afternoon *Talmud Torah* established by Nidje Israel. In 1925, the first elementary day school the Yiddishe Shule was established at Colombia Street, with Meyer Berger and Joseph Winietsky as teachers. The school grew over time to become a major institution where the first generation of Mexican-born Jews received their education. Although some of the parents demanded a traditional education to perpetuate Jewish consciousness and practice, the institution adopted a secular program mainly based on the Yiddish language and literature following the model of similar schools in Poland. My father *z"l,* both as a parent and member of the founding board strongly advocated that *Chumash, Nach,* and *Mishna* dominate the curriculum, but he found himself a lonely voice among the founders. Nonetheless the original program included at the very beginning a half an hour of *tefila,* which was soon eliminated.

Some of the immigrants with literary aptitudes began to publish periodicals and very soon the Mexican Jewish community had two Yiddish-language newspapers that were published two and three times a week, *Der Weg* and later the *Die Shtime.* These newspapers played a vital role in keeping Jews well informed and connected locally and with the wider Jewish world. The relative proximity of Mexico to the USA played a very great role in shaping the Mexican Jewish

community.

Mexican Jews subscribed to the New York *Yiddish* newspapers *Der Tog* and *Der Forwerts* which were avidly read and discussed. The community was also very often visited by well-known Jewish lecturers, writers and political leaders, who dominated the American Jewish scene. They would draw significant audiences of interested Jews and would go back with a feeling of appreciation for the liveliness of the community. As a result, Mexican Jews were very much tied spiritually to Jewish life abroad.

The demographic growth of the community was significantly slowed down when the Mexican government imposed restrictions on Jewish immigration in the thirties with the rise of the Nazis in Germany. Nonetheless, the Jewish community still grew in the thirties, reaching its upper stable demographic limit at the end of the decade prior to World War II. The war brought an economic boom for Mexico in general that was very visible in the maturing community.

With economic advancement, many Jewish families began moving out of downtown Mexico to the modern Colonia Hipodromo neighborhood and sometimes later to the more affluent Colonia Polanco. A reduced number of Jewish refugees, mainly from Western Europe, were fortunate enough (in spite of rigid restrictions to obtain Mexican visas during the first two years of the war) to arrive safely to Mexican shores. The small wave of war refugees mostly established their homes in the Colonia Hipodromo, although the beautiful neighborhood still lacked the necessary Jewish community infrastructure. The area had no synagogue until 1939 when refugees, some of whom were fully observant Orthodox Jews rented a small ground-floor apartment on Avenida Mexico 9 and established a *nusach Ashkenaz* synagogue under the name Bais Tefila Hipodromo.

Some members of Beis Tefila Hipodromo who had recently arrived from war-torn Europe, in particular the brothers R' Yaakov and R' Yechezkiel Brachfeld, were deeply concerned for the religious education of their children. They were instrumental in bringing over from Canada Rabbi Eliezer Axelrod, an English born Hebron alumnus, who led with great dedication and love the first afternoon yeshiva in Mexico in the small Shul. There, I and other youngsters, learned from him my first *bletter Gemarah*. Sometimes later, Rabbi M. Ch. Merzel from New York took his place. As the news of the total destruction of European Jewry was becoming known, Rav Feivel Mendlovitz in far-away New

York instructed R. Merzel to influence youngsters south of the border to come to learn in American *yeshivos*. I was one of the first two Latin American youngsters who left in 1944 to learn in Mesivta Torah Vodaath. We were followed right after the war by other Mexican and Latin American students. At the time, Rabbi Yehuda Braver, previously the respected Rav of Kansas City became the Rabbi and Rosh *Yeshiva* of the Eitz Chaim congregation.

New and very significant developments took place in the area of Jewish education during World War II. A *Tarbut School,* with Hebrew as its language of instruction, was established by Avner Aliphas with the support of the Zionist organization, and a traditional Zionist Yavne School was established by Rabbi Rafalin with the support of *Nidjei Israel.* Rabbi Zelig Shifmanovich was its principal. Some years later, after World War II a third secular day school, the Naie Yiddishe Shule was created by Avrohom Golomb after breaking away from the Yiddishe Shule, whose principal he had previously been.

In view of the shift of the Jewish population from downtown Mexico to the Colonia Hipodromo, Nidjei Israel decided to open a Shul in the new area. The nusach Sephard members of Bais Tefila Hipodromo on their part wished to run a Shul according to their custom. As a result, Bais Tefila Hipodromo split into two congregations: The *nusach Sephard* members established the Eitz Chaim congregation, which found its final location at Amsterdam Street and the *nusach* Ashkenaz group joined with Nidjei Israel and established a *Shul* on Yucatan Street 15 in Colonia Hipodromo.

As a result of internal frictions in the newly formed *Yucatan Shul,* the congregation split internally into two separate Shuls, *Nidjei Israel Yavne* in the upper floor and *Bais Tefilah Hipodromo* in the lower floor of the building. While Rabbi Rafalin served as the official Rabbi in the Yavne Shul, the lower congregation was without an official Rabbi.

The need of a dual Rabbinate was given recognition by the Kehila Nidjei Israel and a search for a second Rabbi *a-la-par* to Rabbi Rafalin began in the late forties. The first candidate was the late Rabbi Eliezer Zev Kirzner, a prominent alumnus of the Telshe Yeshiva in Europe who had occupied rabbinic positions in South Africa and England and who translated Mesechta Baba Kama for the Soncino Talmud into English. Rabbi Kirzner took the post for a short period, but for family reasons declined the offer and took instead the *Rabanus* of the *Bnei Yehuda Shul* in Borough Park.

The candidacy of Rabbi Yaakov Avigdor came into focus when the Kehila president Shimshon Feldman and board members Yoshua Schoijet, Moishe Dulzin, Elimelech Dlugatch, Avrohom Rubinstein, and others learned that the Rav of the Chovevei Torah synagogue in New York and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Rav Shlomo Kluger, who had miraculously survived the Holocaust, showed interest in the post after he had decided to decline the offer to become the Chief Rabbi of Buenos Aires and Argentina. Rabbi Avigdor was invited officially for an extended visit and after the High Holidays was officially offered a joint *Ksav Rabonus* on *Chol Hamoed Succoth* 1952 in the name of the Kehila Nidjei Israel, the Agudas Achim Shul, and the Eitz Chaim Shul. The contract established complete parity between the two Rabbis in every respect. In addition to sharing equally the normal responsibilities of the Rabbinate with Rabbi Rafalin, the Ksav Rabonus stressed his responsibility to maintain a permanent lecturing activity in the areas of *Torah, Mussar,* and *Chochmas Yisroel.* On both counts, Rabbi Avigdor fully carried out his commitment to the Mexican Jewish community whose sorrows and joy he shared in the 15 years that he lived in Mexico until his untimely death in 1967.

The private correspondence of Rabbi Yaakov Avigdor contains valuable testimonies of this important step in his life. The Chief Rabbi of the Holy Land, Rav Yitzchok Isaac Herzog, sent a warm letter of congratulation and blessing to the community, that was privileged to accept as their Rav such "a great man in Torah, wisdom and piety as their spiritual leader."

Many other great rabbinic figures, from all over the world expressed their congratulations upon his appointment as Rav in Mexico. The eminent *Posek* Rav Yoseph Eliyahu Henkin, a good friend of Rabbi Avigdor, expressed his sincere congratulations, but at same time made the point, that he saw no reason for his leaving the USA and moving southward, unless the lofty aim of bringing about a spiritual revival of that community, moved him to do so. He cited the precedent of unique great Jewish personalities who were able to carry out spiritual revolutions in their newly adopted communities, converting them into strongholds of Torah and Jewish tradition.

Some time after Rabbi Avigdor's coming to Mexico, the separation of the two Shuls in Yucatan Street came to an end with the construction of a new large synagogue and office building on Acapulco 70 in the Colonia Condesa. Representatives of the different political groups of the community became part

of the advisory council of the *Kehila* which was named Ashkenazi Kehila of Mexico Nidjei Israel. Within the new compartmentalized organization of the Kehila, a Religious Department was created to which representatives of the different *Shuls* were incorporated. The two official Rabbis of the *Kehila* took their honorary seats with dignity at the two sides of the Holy Ark in the new synagogue.

Although Rabbi Avigdor identified with the Mizrachi movement, as Rabbi he always stood firmly above the intense struggle of the different Jewish political groups and parties. That was certainly not an easy task in a deeply fragmented post-war Jewish society. He came to Mexico with the firm decision to follow the same policy and be recognized and accepted by all circles as their Rav.

The congratulations of Rabbi Isaac Meyer Levin of Agudas Israel, and of R. Moshe Chaim Shapiro and Dr. Burg of Mizrachi to his inauguration are testimony of the excellent relations he maintained with these two groups. But his efforts to unite and not divide went much farther than that. He systematically forged his own outreach program in speech and in writing that aimed at bringing the secular Jews of the different political groups back to Shul and to the observance of *Mitzvoth*. He hoped at the very least to keep them from drifting even further away. Rabbi Avigdor was in no way under any false illusions. He knew that this was an uphill battle that one can only pursue on the basis of deep faith in the inherent goodness of the Jewish soul that longs to return to its roots. He justified the effort of acquiring a vast storage house of secular knowledge to allow him to reach out to the religiously affiliated, but intellectually stimulated Jew. He carried the effort until the last day of his life.

As a gifted speaker and lecturer, Rabbi Avigdor established a rigorous program of teaching activities in the community. He kept fully active throughout the years. Every Sabbath morning he would deliver original, brilliant *deroshos* from the pulpit of the Kehila Shul. In the Sabbath afternoon, he would give an illucidating *Gemarah shiur* in Eitz Chaim. He would lecture to the Jewish University students and Bnai Akiva youth on Thursday evenings. Sunday mornings he would deliver a philosophical lecture in the Kadima Club as spiritual revival to the community. It was attended by a large interested audience including many who had little or no contact to Torah, bringing them nearer to our common heritage through his unique understanding of their conflicting world views. The Yiddish-speaking audience, which included many European-

type Jewish radicals, secular Jewish teachers, and writers, realized that *Torah* Judaism was very far from being relegated to the dustbin of history. He was not afraid of choosing subjects that few Rabbis would dare come near to justify the *Torah* world, view. He would never agree to water down *Halacha* or compromise *Torah* values—the *Torah* and *Halachah* were eternal. Neither would he ever settle for surrogates to take the place of *Torah Mi'Sinai.* Chief Rabbi Yitzchok Halevi Herzog of Israel, who understood him well would always (in the honorary introductory titles of his letters) express his respect for his "Yiroso *Hakodemes Lechochmoso*"— his fear of G-d preceded all his wisdom.

In the same spirit of outreach, Rabbi Avigdor continued tirelessly to write and publish new *Seforim,* books, brochures, and essays in a beautiful style during his years in Mexico. He tried to get as many of his works as possible translated into Spanish to reach the younger generation. When I asked him on one occasion in Mexico why he felt such an urge to publish, he, a Holocaust survivor responded: "Paper survives." He was living proof that the indomitable spirit of the Jewish People would never be vanquished. In Poland he was one of the few Rabbis who began to write books in Polish to reveal the splendor of Jewish values to the many in the new generation who could only understand Polish. At the same time, he used his brilliant pen to defend Judaism from the ferocious attacks of the Polish anti-Semites. In the interest of protecting the Jewish *Shechita* in word and deed from the relentless attacks of the anti-Semites who wanted to ban *Shechita,* he would travel to coordinate efforts with the Gaon Rav Menachem Zemba in Warsaw.

Many polemical articles were written by local Jewish writers, some of them of lasting value, commenting on his books and lectures. Rabbinical journals in the USA and Israel, such as *Hapardes, Talpioth, Shana B'Shana,* and others published his articles as well as critical evaluations of his books. The great number of letters from prominent Rabbis the world over commenting on his works in his archive are a lasting testimony. The Oszerover Rebi, Rav Moshe Yechiel Epstein, the eminent author of Eish Daas expresses himself in the most admiring terms of the writings he reviewed, as precious and wonderful.

The Halacha problems that Rabbi Avigdor faced in the new environment were often far from simple or routine. Rabbi Avigdor came with great rabbinical experience under different environments. He had led a well-organized Jewish community in prewar Poland, had experienced the takeover and persecution of

the Soviets, and the indescribable tragedy of the total annihilation of his community by the Germans. After the war, he again undertook the new challenges of seeking solutions for the daunting problems of the agunos in the DP camps and again in America as *Rav* of a great congregation. As he had done in Europe, he would often consult with the highest rabbinical authorities in the Jewish world, although he would ultimately make his own decisions. The volumes of *Responsa Abir Yaakov, Cheilek Yaakov,* and *Heishiv Yaakov* which include his *Halacha* correspondence with many of the great Rabbis of the prewar period such as Rav Nochum Weidenfeld of Dombrowa, Rav Yechezkiel Lifshitz of Kalish, and Rav Aaron Lewin of Reisha were published before the war. In Mexico he led a correspondence on some of the *Halacha* problems of the city with the leading posek Rav Josef Eliyahu Henkin. Two teshuvos personally handwritten by the recognized posek of the generation Rav Moshe Feinstein to Rabbi Avigdor also survived in his personal correspondence. They show the great esteem in which he was held by these rabbinic authorities. The Halacha problems they discussed and the points on which they differed merit by themselves a separate detailed discussion.

The Holocaust had taken from him his beloved wife, mother and two daughters, his community, his eminent rabbinical position, his library, and his health. But it did not break his spirit or his deep faith in G-d. The suffering of the war years did not tear him away from his deep *Chasidic* roots, which nurtured him through all his life. He was vibrant and alive, not embittered and vitally engaged in every problem of the community of which he became an organic part. He would participate in the Ghetto commemoration ceremonies and would eulogize the millions of innocent Jews murdered by the Germans and their helpers "with blood from his heart," in the words of the redactor (editor) of the *Shtime* Moshe Rubinstein. While giving homage to the heroic deeds of the Warsaw Ghetto fighters he would remind the audience that the heroism of the other millions who tried to survive was in no way less admirable.

Rabbi Avigdor himself would rarely detail his own tragic experiences during the years of the Holocaust, but others have fortunately given us some glimpses. R' Yosef Friedenson the editor of the Agudas Israel Yiddish periodical Dos Yiddishe Wort who was with Rabbi Avigdor in Block 67 in Buchenwald, his last stop before the liberation on April 11, 1945, wrote an invaluable essay of his exemplary role there. Himself emaciated, he instilled hope in the downtrodden

and the dying Jewish inmates. Rabbi Avigdor, blessed with a privileged memory, secretly organized a Shabbos Minyan in the "Smaller Camp" of Buchenwald and would 'read' from memory the weekly portion of the Torah. He would lift their spirit and instill in them hope and a will to survive. The *Midrash Tanchuma* that he miracuolosly kept, would circulate from hand to hand and console their broken souls. With the help of his townspeople of Borislav and Drohobycz in the "large Camp" who visited him on Sundays, he somehow managed to bake some little Matzos, the size of a quarter, and with bitter tears as maror, celebrated with undying faith with his fellow inmates, the Pesach Seder.

In 1956, the *Kehila* celebrated Rabbi Avigdor's sixtieth birthday and honored him by publishing the two volumes of *Sh'Biksav* and *Sh'Baalpe*. In 1962, to the fiftieth anniversary of his taking the position of Rabbi in 1912 at Terawa Woloska, as heir to his saintly father, at the tender age of 16 years, the Kehila together with the congregations Agudas Achim, Eitz Chaim, Adas Israel, Tiferes Israel, Bnai Akiva and the then newly established *Shul* of Polanco *Bais Yzjaj* honored him. The congratulations that the *Gaon Hador,* his lifelong friend in the Polish rabbinate, Harav Dov Berish Weidenfeld, the Rav of Chebin sent from Jerusalem to the Kehila in Mexico on that occasion are worth quoting here:

> I have known your *Mora D'Asra* for many years, and I can testify that even then he was known as one of the great, well-recognized and talented rabbis, although then he was only a young man. With age *Talmidei Chachamin* add knowledge and their wisdom multiplies.

In his private letters, the Rav of Chebin addresses Rabbi Avigdor already in Mexico, with great honor as *Hagaon Hagadol.* The Rav of Chebin comments in a letter in highly favorable terms on the text of a presentation to the Kehila he had sent to him for evaluation; in another, he graciously asks Rabbi Avigdor to send him his every new sefer, as soon as it is published. Rabbi Aaron Pechenik, a nephew of the third Rav of Belz, in his published eulogy on Rabbi Avigdor, bears personal testimony to the high regard in which he was held, at that early age by the eminent Chasidic Rebbe of Belz, Rav Isochor Dov, and by his two sons the famed Rav Aaron and Rav Mordechai, who spoke then and in later years with admiration about the greatness and dignity of the two young Iluyim, Rav Yaakov and his younger brother Rav Dovid Avigdor.

The moral responsibility that every Jew bears on his shoulders for his fellow Jews, particularly if he is a spiritual leader of his people, compelled Rabbi

Avigdor to speak out forcefully where he felt his word could make a difference. Deeply saddened by the spiritual disorientation and dismal results of the Jewish educational system in Mexico, he would use the most sacred moments of the High Holidays to issue his calls for change. The fact that an impressive educational infrastructure was planting the seeds of assimilation of the community and undermining its own future, hurt him deeply. Rabbi Avigdor did not live to see the disappearance of the two Mexican Yiddish newspapers and the standstill of the Yiddish secular activities, but he sensed the tragedy of secular Judaism in Mexico that was in the making. What F. H. Jacobi had written long ago comparing the Spinozean philosophical system to a mighty windmill producing no flour, Rabbi Avigdor with eloquence applied to the Jewish educational system in Mexico:

> When as a child, Jacobi was taken by his father to visit a great flour mill in activity; the wheels were turning, the belts moving, the giant stones were grinding and the noise was deafening, but no flour was coming out. When he asked where the flour was, his father explained that the operator had not put in the wheat to grind. What is the purpose of such a formidable system, empty of *Torah* and *Mitzvot*? What results can we ever expect? The old cheder there was a soul, in the schools there is none!

Despite the relationship of love and appreciation between him and the Mexican Jewish community, which grew over the years in breath and depth, Rabbi Avigdor felt he belonged in the Land of Israel. His dream was to find a proper position in Israel, and he never gave up his efforts and hopes to achieve that dream that never came true. The terrible years of suffering in the ghettoes and camps left deep scars in his physical health, but not in his spirit. In 1967, he collapsed on the pulpit of the *Nidjei Yisroel* Synagogue after the Sabbath prayers and was rushed to the hospital. A few days later, as he turned 71, he returned his soul to his maker on the 18th of Adar II, still young in spirit and creative power. He was mourned by all the sectors of the Mexican Jewish community and in the wider Jewish world. They grieved for a man who had served his people with exemplary loyalty, holding alive the unadulterated eternal message of Mount Sinai among them.



Visiting the gravesite of Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor in Mexico City, Mexico.
Tombstone is in the shape of Three Books depicting the arenas
where Dr. Yaakov Avigdor served as rabbi: Europe–America–Mexico

L-R: Rabbi Dovid Avigdor, grandson; Rabbi Isaac C. Avigdor, below Mrs. Esther Avigdor;
Dr. Abraham B. Avigdor, presently still living in Mexico.

Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor's Weekly work Schedule

To the Honorable Administration of the Ashkenazi Kehilah Nidchei Yisroel – Mexico City, Mexico

I ask you to please publicize the various lectures and classes that I am giving weekly here in Mexico.

1) Every Shabbos before 11 O'clock, I deliver a sermon at the Beis Medrash Yukatan about the weekly portion of the Torah.
2) Every Shabbos at 5 P.M. I give a special class in Talmud with our interpreters and Tosefot explaining various complicated Halochos in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud.
3) Every Sunday at 11 A.M. I deliver a lecture in the Kadimah about Philosophical topics.
4) Every evening, afternoon and night services, I give a class in the Tractate of Brachos.
5) Each Thursday, 8:30 P.M. I lecture at the Jewish University Youth group about history of Jewish Philosophy.

All the above classes and lectures are open to the public free of charge and have the potential to attract new listeners, increasing the attendance, which would be a blessing for the entire community.

During the week, I am usually very occupied with answering many "Teshuvos", letters of inquiries in Halacha about various problems in America as well as Israel. The letters are from leading rabbis, and due to respect, they deserve immediate answers. I eventually hope to publish a book about the subject of "Shailos and Teshuvos."

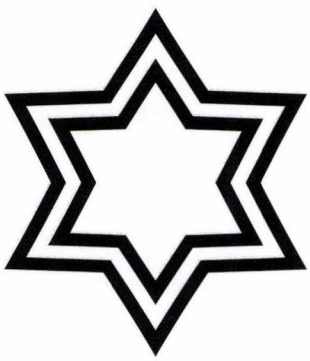
With honor and blessings,

Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor

In my frequent reflections of father's happy years in Mexico, I always remember one name

MR. SHIMSHON FELDMAN, O.B.M.

who became his most reliable friend
and about whom he would say:
"There isn't another Shimshon Feldman in the world."
In addition to being head of the Mexican Kehillah
Shimshon Feldman is known internationally for his
devotion to Israel, the Jewish people and Yiddishkeit,
materially and spiritually.



Avigdor Post War Family

One of the most heartbreaking realities of the holocaust is the fact that after having a large family of of pre-war Europe over seventy souls, only three of us remained alive, my father, my brother Abraham Bob Avigdor and myself.

Upon liberation, we went our separate ways, but met up again in the United States, each of us arriving to these shores at a different time. My father and I decided to continue our traditional line of work in the rabbinate, the lineage that went back almost a hundred generations. My brother Bob, found a job in a clock factory but soon after volunteered and joined the American Air Force and remained there for four year. Why my brother decided to join the Army, after having gone through six years of the holocaust, always puzzled me and broke my heart? It led me to believe that he joined their ranks becuase he was so impressed by the American Army and their victorious liberation march into Buchenwald and Mauthausen where they paraded with impressive heavy tanks and bomber planes overhead, so triumphantly. I guess it was the realization that he witnessed the destruction of Germany and the victory of the Allies. He finally saw first hand the downfall of the enemy. He saw their cities bombed and burnt, and must have felt a need to share this pride by eventually joining their mighty army, the army that brought the gallant and magnificent American victory over the Nazis.

Contrary to my brother's ambitions, my father and I lived by the principles of King Solomon, who for 40 years of his reign had no war, no army and no soldiers. The name Solomon actually indicated "Shehashalom shelo" peace was

his. Solomon was not like his father King David, who slept each night with a sword and a harp at his side.

My father o.b.m. was officially appointed Chief Rabbi of Buenos Aires, but after a short stay, he left for the serenity of Mexico. Upon my questioning him as to why he left, his answer was short. "I had enough of fascism, war, and holocaust in my life." Argentina was then under the rule of Juan and Eva Peron where there was much unrest at the time.

When my brother returned to the United States from the Philippines, he lived alone in Brooklyn but shortly after joined father in Mexico City. There he married Sheindel Schoijet, the daughter of Sr. & Sra. Ovchi Schoijet, prominent members of the Kehillah. He entered medical school in Mexico and finished as a dentist and opened an office in the city.

They had three children, two sons, Zvi and Israel and a daughter Raquel. Zvi, the oldest had the great privilege of learning basic Judaism and Talmudic studies from my father but his professional leanings were not towards the rabbinate but in medicine. After several years of general studies in Israel, he returned to Mexico City, started medical school where he excelled and got his doctorate in pediatrics. Dr. Zvi Avigdor, presently lives in Queens, N. Y. and is a full time attending pediatrician at St. Vincent's Medical Center in New York.

His brother Israel, whom we call Srulik, became a commercial engineer and lives in Polanco, Mexico. Their sister Raquel lives in Colonia Hipodromo near her mother Sheindel Avigdor.

Sheindel Avigdor, my sister in-law, was always very close to my father, helping him for the many years of his rabbinate in Mexico. She assisted him in translating most of the books that he wrote, from Yiddish into Spanish, the language of the land. She herself taught in major Jewish Schools of Mexico City and recently got a well-deserved award for her fifty years of continuous, dedicated teaching services to the Jewish community. She still continues to volunteer at the Kehillah.

"Yaakov Avinu Lo Meis"

(Jacob Our Father Did Not Die)

By Rabbi David Avigdor

I was once asked, "What are the earliest memories of your life?" No one remembers his or her birth or the infancy of youth. Few people remember their first steps even though their parents worked for weeks and months to perfect the balancing act of life. I find it amazing that no one remembers their original baby carriage even though we spent so much time in them. What do people remember of their youth? People remember important events. We remember a childhood toy or a doll. Other than parents and siblings, we usually do not remember people until we are much older. As a child born in Brooklyn and raised in Hartford, CT, my earliest and fondest memories were those of my grandfather. Shortly after I was born, my Zeida moved to Mexico City where he became the Chief Rabbi of Mexico. My father spoke of him often and wrote to him all the time. The most indelible highlights of my earliest memories are images of my grandfather in our home in Hartford CT, and several exciting trips to Mexico City that I made with my parents.

I remember accompanying my father to visit my Zeida in Mexico when I was only five or six years old. Mexico was a strange and foreign place and I was anxious about the protective high walls of the courtyard around his apartment, the top of which was studded with shards of glass to keep out the uninvited trespasser. The sounds and smells of the locals were very new to me but I was

comforted by the welcome we received. Inside the Zeida's apartment was a large living room dining room, a small kitchen, one small bedroom and two huge libraries filled with books from floor-to-ceiling. My grandfather was a giant of a man with a velvet black top hat that reminded me of Abraham Lincoln. He was torn between his *seforim* and his new guests and balanced his work with the requisite time that we needed to spend with him. I wondered what he did with all these books? He told me that he was preparing to send them to people and needed help packing and shipping them. I was very excited when he asked me to help him with his work. For days I was sorting, wrapping and tying up packages for delivery to the post office. When I finally finished my work, I was equally delighted when Zeida gave me a handful of pesos for my efforts. I marveled at the hours of intense conversation between my father and grandfather that lasted into the night and the love that they shared between them. I watched with intense interest one afternoon as my father presented a gift to Zeida. My father brought new *Tzitzis* from New York and they both proceeded to tie the strings on one of my grandfather's old Taleisim. The Zeida held the Talis and my father wrapped the strings for each corner. It was the image of that experience that taught me how to tie Tzitzis to this very day.

While in Mexico in order not to waste my days without study, my Zeida and father enrolled me in the local yeshiva where I encountered a most perplexing problem. There were hundreds of children but no one in the school spoke my language. All of the classes were in Spanish, which I didn't understand at all, and I was forced to speak Hebrew or Yiddish. At that tender age my Hebrew and Yiddish was not very good. What saved me from weeks of embarrassment and boredom was my love of music and my G-d given ability to sing. I loved to daven for the *Amud* and was asked to lead the children's *Minyan*. My American accent, foreign musical style and pure courage impressed the kids at the school. I was thankful that I was embraced by the local school classmates and was treated very nicely.

Shabbos was a very special time of the week. We walked to *Shule* and davened in the massive Nidchei Yisroel synagogue. It was an experience to see the building teeming with Jews of all backgrounds. Many of course were of Mexican origin but many Holocaust survivors were present as well. I recognized them because the holocaust survivors would speak in Yiddish while everyone else was speaking Spanish. Zeida always took every opportunity to speak words of

Torah. I remember being amazed that he spoke in Spanish, then Yiddish, then Hebrew, but to me he spoke in English. Even though I was too young to remember what he said, one thing sticks in my memory. At the conclusion of the service, the Zeida greeted everyone with the traditional "Good Shabbos." His "Good Shabbos" however was very special. It wasn't what he said but how he said it that has reverberated in my head all these years. When the Zeida uttered those special words, he sang them with a melodic vibrato that seemed to echo into the cavernous expanse of the high ceilings of the Shule. It was a holy way of saying the words that fulfilled the *mitzvah* of "Remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy."

There was one event that stands out among the many images of my visits in Mexico, that is burned into my memory. A powerful earthquake shook the city and brought-down many buildings. I vividly remember inspecting the cracks in the walls of the Zeida's building while being held by a member of the family. I wasn't really frightened but understood that it was a serious time filled with fear by everyone around me. Today whenever I hear about an earthquake in Mexico, South America or anywhere in the world, I recall the cracks in the walls of my grandfather's house and the worry that everyone felt at that time.

There were also many happy times during our stay. Day trips to beautiful gardens and parks. Overnight trips to quaint towns like Quautla and Curnevaca, nearby the Mexican metropolis were very pleasant. We swam in the tropical waters, ate the luscious mangos and napped on the comfortable hammocks that hung in the Mexican courtyards.

As I grew older, I came to realize the depth of my grandfather's greatness. People would tell me how lucky I was to have such a wonderful mother, father and illustrious grandfather. On one of the visits that my Zeida made to Hartford, we were sitting in the home of the synagogue *shamus*. Mr. Kraus welcomed us as honored guests and he and his wife laid out a Kiddush of Hungarian delicacies fit for a king. After the sumptuous meal Zeida asked me what I learned that week in yeshiva. I explained that I just began learning gemorah and completed the first page of "*Gittin*." Zeida wanted to see how much of the *gemorah* I absorbed and so I began to read and explain the first page of the *mesechta*. I remember seeing the pleasure on his face as he enjoyed listening to me reading the words of our sages. Afterwards he gave me a hug and a kiss with the admonition to study hard.

Chazal teach us that the most difficult *mitzvah* in the Torah is the obligation to honor parents. It is required at all times and in all places. It is most difficult when parents and children cannot get along. As a child I watched my father treat my grandfather with such *Kavod* and love, that I still cannot understand what is so hard about honoring and loving your parents. On one occasion I remember my father and mother discussing whether he should fly to Mexico to visit Zeida. She wanted to travel with him but couldn't because she had to care for her three children. My father needed to go and used the following Talmudic argument to convince her that it was the right thing to do. "If I travel to Mexico and honor my father, then I will be rewarded with long life, as the Torah states "Honor your Father and Mother so that your life will be lengthened on the face of the earth," my father claimed. "Then I will be able to spend more time with you later in life" he reasoned, once his father is no longer alive. So it was, that my father has merited an even longer life than my grandfather lived, based, I believe, on that merit.

Zeida and my Dad were like close friends. I remember when Zeida stopped in New York on route to Israel. He had a very short three-hour stopover at Idlewild Airport to change planes and was only able to spend an hour with us. We drove from Hartford to New York and waited at the airport to spend a mere fraction of time with him. Every minute in his presence was like a treasure. After finding him and exchanging hugs and kisses, my father pulled out a One-Hundred Dollar bill and gave it to him as a gift. My father knew that the devalued peso had very little trading value in Israel and wanted his father to have the needed spending money to enjoy the trip. Zeida was very touched and reluctantly accepted the money. A moment later my father pulled out another hundred-dollar bill that Zeida said was not necessary, but my father insisted. Again, a third time my father took out another bill that Zeida accepted only if it was the last one. I watched in awe as I observed Kibud Av at its best.

I was the only grandchild privileged to have the Zeida at his Bar-Mitzvah. He traveled from Mexico for my special event even though he was burdened with the enormous responsibilities of the Mexican Jewish community. He helped me put on my tefillin with his own hands and gave me his personal blessing. He stood up in my fathers large Shule and spoke to an enormous crowd that came from near and far. That was the last time I saw him. It was not only a great loss to our family; it was a tremendous loss to "*Klall Yisroel*" as well.

The *Gemorah* in *Taanis* 5B states *"Yaakov Aveenu Lo Mais"* Jacob our forefather did not die. How can the Talmud make such a statement, we all know that Yaakov was buried by his sons in the Tomb of the Patriarchs. The Torah relates that it was one of the largest funerals of all time. Chazal teach us that Yaakov Aveenu did not die, because Yaakov lives on in all of us. Like Yaakov Aveenu of old, our Zeida Yaakov did not die because he too lives on in our minds and our Torah thoughts. If his offspring, students, congregants, people married by him, and people who read his *seforim*, are alive and continue to study the Torah, then he lives on in all of us. We all hope that this new volume will ensure that our Zeida's memory never ever dies.

COLLECTION OF PICTURES AT VARIOUS TIMES AND PLACES

משרד הסעד

בתשובה נא להזכיר

המשרד .....

מספר לשס/511/שי"ג

לשכת השר

ב"ה. ירושלים, כ"ז בניסן, תשי"ג
12 באפריל, 1953

לכבוד
הרב ד"ר יעקב אביגדור,
מקסיקו.

שוכט"ס !

יקבל־נא באורח זה את ברכתי
הלבבית להכתרתו כרב ואב"ד במקסיקו
- להצלחה בתפקידו הנעלה למען חיזוק
החיים הדתיים, הרמת קרן התורה
והאצלת אורה על חיי הכלל והפרט
ביהדות מקסיקו.

בכבוד רב ובברכה,

מ. שפירא
שר הסעד והדתות

A greeting from Israel's Minister of Welfare and Religion, Moshe Shapiro

הסוכנות היהודית לארץ־ישראל

המען הטלגרפי: "JEVAGENCY"
Code : Bentley
טלפון 24671 — ת. ד. 92
חשבון בנק הדאר מס' 1970

בתשובה נא להזכיר:
המחלקה עליה
מספר עב 001/7

ירושלים כ"ה בניסן תשכ"ה
27.4.65

לכבוד
ידידי הנכבד
הרב הגאון דר' יעקב אביצדור
מכסיקו

ידידי הנכבד,

הריני מאשר בתודה ובשמחה את קבלת הספר "השכל וידוע" חלק שני, שכיבדתני בו ונהניתי ממנו כמו שנהניתי מספריו הקודמים.

ספריו הם מסגולה מיוחדת, המטפלים בבעיות הדור ומתמודד עם הבעיות הללו מבחינה יהדותית ובצורה שהדור, אשר מתלבט בבעיות, יכול למצוא בהם תשובה.

יוסיף לך ה' כח וחיל להמשיך בעבודה זו עד מאה ועשרים שנה ואור תורתך יאיר את מחשכי הנפש, שהאדם בימינו לקוי בהם.

בכבוד רב,
ש. ז. שרגאי

שזש/בל

A greeting from the head of Jewish Agency, Sholom Zalmon Shragai

30 BOOKS AUTHORED BY RABBI DR. JACOB AVIGDOR

PUBLISHED IN POLAND:

"NAUKA TALMUDU"	Lectures in Talmud, Polish
"CHELEK YAKOV"	2 Volumes Responsa, Hebrew
"ABIR YAKOV"	2 Volumes Responsa, Hebrew
"HESHIV YAKOV"	Responsa, Hebrew
"METAFIZYKA JUDAISMU"	Jewish Philosophy, Polish
"TORAT HALASHON"	Lectures on Hebrew Language, Hebrew
"AYEH SOFER"	Eulogy and Memorials, Hebrew
"EMUNA UPHILOSOPHIA"	Philosophical Essays, Hebrew

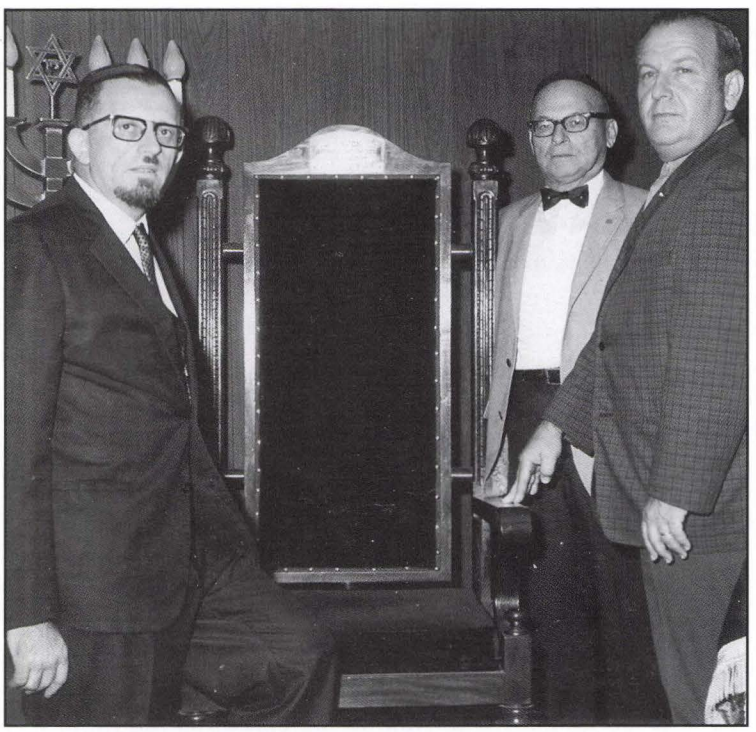
PUBLISHED IN NEW YORK AND MEXICO

"SHEBEKTAV V'SHBAL PE"	Sermons, 3 volumes, Hebrew and Yiddish
"MACHSHAVA VELASHON"	Sermons, Yiddish
"REFLEXIONES SOBRE LA TORAH"	Biblical commentary, Spanish
"LA VISION del JUDAISMO"	Philosophical lectures, Spanish
"TECHIATH YAKOV"	Halachick correspondence, Hebrew
"MAIMONIDES"	Biography and review of writings, Spanish Essays
"THE JEWISH WOMAN"	Yiddish, Spanish
"TORAT HATALMUD"	Introduction to study of Talmud 2 Volumes, Hebrew
"HEGYON YAKOV"	Sermons, Yiddish
"HASKEL VEYADUAH"	Sermons and Lectures, 3 Volumes, Hebrew
"HASHABAT"	About the Sabbath, Yiddish and Spanish
"MASOTH V'MECHKARIM"	Essays, Hebrew
"MIKDASH ME'AT"	About the Synagogue, Hebrew
"MUL BAYATH HADOR"	Essays on contemporary issues, 2 Volumes, Hebrew (Recipient of Kessel Literary Award, Mexico)

Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor was miraculously saved from destruction, and like a monument he stood up to the immediate tasks in the new role he had to face in his career as the rabbi of our community. His writings, articles, books and lectures will forever remain recognized as the most heroic defense in the war against German and Nazi culture.



Rabbi Isaac and Esther Avigdor with sons David, Mordechai and Meir, presenting the United Synagogues in W. Hartford with "Keter" in memory of their sainted zeida and father Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor



Father's pulpit chair shipped from Nidje Yisroel Synagogue, Mexico City to son, Rabbi Isaac Avigdor, West Hartford, CT. After his retirement it was handed down to son Rabbi David Avigdor, of Bikur Cholim Syn. New Haven.
(L. to R. Rabbi Isaac C. Avigdor, Ben Neikrie and Edward Golden, Pres.)

לייז
37

זכרונו לברכה

פון זיין זון יצחק חיים אביגדור
צום זיבן און דרייסיקסטן יאר
זייט זיין פטירה אין ח"י אדר

געווידמעט מיין גרויסן פאטער הרב יעקב זצ"ל
וואס אפילו ווען באהאלטן אין קעלער און קאנאל,
אין א בונקער אדער א בוידעם,
האט תמיד געלעבט על התורה ועל העבודה.

מיין טאטע עליו השלום, פארטראכט אין זיין טיפן חלום ...

אין אלטן בית מדרש אלס בחור געזעסן
פארטיפט מיט זיין גאנצער נשמה
פון עולם ומלואו לגמרי פארגעסן
פלעגט ער שפרינגן ביי דער גמרא
פון מהרש"א'ס א שארפער סברא.

ווער מיר קשיות, ווער מיר ספקות
געשטראלט האט זיין גליק ביז גאר
ווען זייענדיק עוסק אין הזיקות
איז מיטאמאל אלץ געווארן קלאר
כאטש ס'האט געהאנגן קוים אויף א האר...

אסך אסך יאר האט זיך אזוי געלעבט
ביים אויוען, וואו פייער און פלאם
פון קוימען צום הימל האבן געשוועבט
זענען די געדאנקן געשווימען געשווינד
ווי די פיש אין בריייטן ים

יענע צייטן פלוצים פאראיבער
געבליבן בלויז רעשטלאך זכרונות
ווען געקומען איז א נייע עפאכע
פון בייזע, וויסטע חלומות
אז א איד זיין איז נישט כהלכה !

א וועלט א גאר- נייע דערשינען
די היים און אלצדינג דרינען,
דער מארק, די שוהל און די דירה
דער טאל און די שטערן פון הימל אמאל
אלץ האט געקריגן א נייע צירה.

אין א בוידעם שטיבל, דער טאטע באהאלטן,
ביי א ליכטל, וואס האט אנגעהויבן צאנקן
איז ער מיט א ספר אין דער האנד געזעסן
פארבלאנדשוועט אין טיפע געדאנקען
ווען איך האב אים געבראנגט זיין עסן.

נאר טיף אין זיין מוח אליין
געקריצט איז דאס אמאליקע בילד אריין
ווייל די אמת'ע אלטע היים
א תוהו ובוהו, וויסט און לעער
פארוואגעלט און עלענד, נישט געווען שוין מער!

דער קיום, דער תכלית פון א יידנס לעבען
וואס וועט דער עתיד אונז געבן ?
געוואלד און געשרייגן
דער גלות איז אזוי לאנג, אזוי שווער
האט נישט געגעבן קיין רוה אן אויפהער !

געגריבעלט האט ער זיך אויף דער קשיה'ס א תירוץ
ווי אזוי פון קאשמאר זיך צו ווקן
און דעם שמערץ געבן א נחמה
וואס זאל די סודות אויפדעקן
פון אדם און אדמה ...

פארוואונדערט אזוי און פארחלומט
געווסמען האט ער דאס עסן פון דער טיר
און א קוק געטאן אויף מיין פנים
מיט אויגן פארבענקט ווי א קינד
פארנעפלט מיט א טרויער, ווי בלינד !

A Yiddish poem in memory of my fathers' 37th Yahrzeit, 2004



Rabbi Isaac Avigdor (center) with wife, Esther, and son Mordechai, sending a Torah dedicated to the memory of Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor to Rabbi Chaim Pinchus Scheinberg's Yeshiva, Torah Ore in Jerusalem, Dec. 16, 1973.



At home during a live interview by the Steven Spielberg filming crew.



Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor hand writing the Ketuba (marriage certificate) at his son's wedding in the Bronx, N.Y. on June 14, 1949.
On left is Mr. Moses Horowitz, bride's father. Seated on right is Dr. Zev Gold,
president of the National Council of Hapoel Hamizrachi.



Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor presenting silver fruit bowl from Mexico to his son and daughter in-law, Rabbi Isaac Avigdor and his wife Esther, upon the occasion of their 10th wedding anniversary in Hartford, CT



Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor presenting a Kiddush cup to his son Isaac upon his installation as rabbi of a Congregation in Hartford, CT - 1956



Fiftieth wedding anniversary of Rabbi & Mrs. Isaac C. Avigdor held at Bikur Cholim Sheves Achim Synagogue in New Haven, Connecticut in June, 1999 with children and grandchildren

A composite of pictures at various times in the life of Rabbi Dr. Y. Avigdor





At right: Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor celebrating birthday of his first grandson David, together with his son Reb Yitzchok Chayim and daughter in-law Esther, Mexico City, 1954



Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor in West Hartford celebrating the Bar Mitzvah of his first grandson

From left to right: Fred Singer, Gabriel Levine, Burtrum Hoffman, David Chase, Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor, William Singer, Alan Singer, Rabbi Isaac C. Avigdor, below, son Mordechai Avigdor



Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor, first man on left at the Bar Mitzvah of his grandson David Avigdor, center, Rabbi Isaac C. Avigdor, upper right.
Ladies: From left to right, Mrs. M. Steinberg, Mrs. Yetta Yalovsky, Mrs. Yetta Haverback, and looking on are the brothers Merrill and Mordechai Avigdor.





Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor at different times

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION



Receiving a Torah for Jr. Congregation of Ateres Knesset Israel in Hartford is Martin Sack, from founder of Syn., Mr. Barnett Golden. Looking on are Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor of Mexico City and rabbi of Cong. Rabbi Isaac Avigdor.

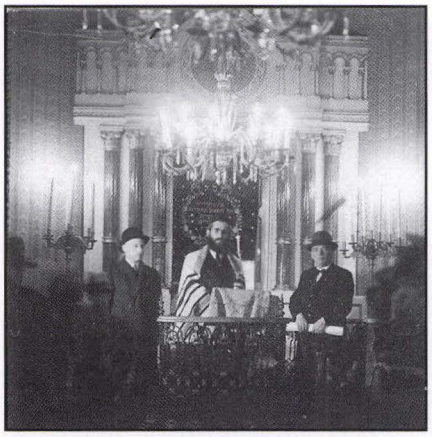




Father in Marinbad – 1934



Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor and son Rabbi Isaac C. Avigdor taking pride and watching the rebuilding of the Holy Land. Their first visit to Eretz Yisroel, 1950





Top (L): Rabbi David Avigdor (brother of Rabbi Yaakov) in his Synagogue in Androchov, Poland. Top (R) Summer in Truskavitz: Walking with Rabbi Israel Spiro (1936), the famous Grodzisker Rabbi of Warsaw.



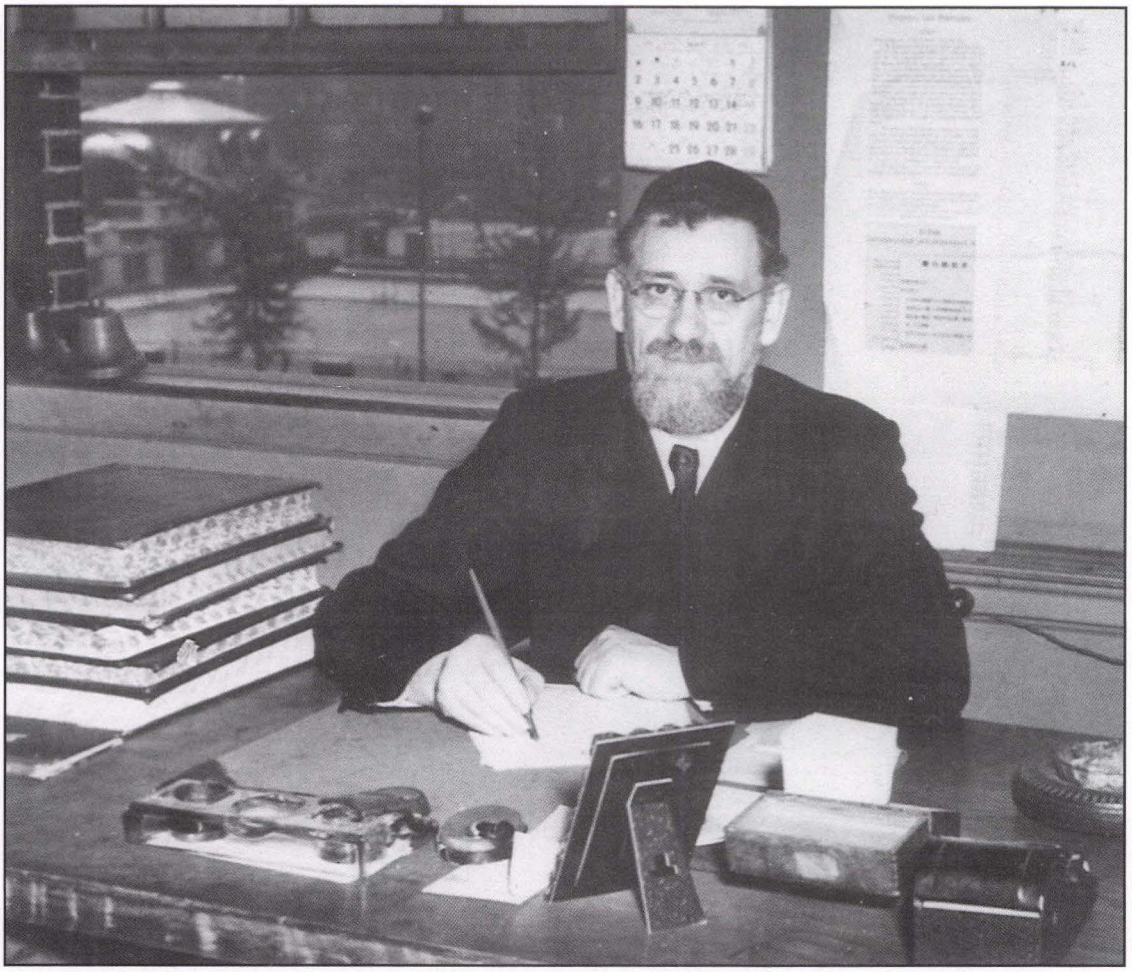
Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor addressing a group of landsmen in Tel Aviv, Israel 1952



Rabbi Yaakov Avigdor (seated - center) with students at a daily class in Drohobycz



Reception for Dr. Leon Reich at the Kehillah in Drohobycz



Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor at his desk in the Yeshiva Rabbi Solomon Kluger on Houston St. New York City - 1946. In background: Pitt Street Park



Two brothers, Rabbi David and Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor



Strolling in the resort town of Truskavitz, Poland are (from left to right) Avraham Avigdor, Rebbitzen Rechel Breindel Avigdor, Chana Frankel Navon, my sister Lila, and Father, Rabbi Yaakov Avigdor.

הרב ד"ר יעקב אביגדור
רב ואבדפה"ק מעקסיקא והגליל יצ"ו

בהוצאה מיוחדת על ידי בן המחבר:
הרב יצחק חיים אביגדור

CHRISTIANITY
ACCORDING TO THE LAWS AND CODES OF HALACHA

RABBI DR. JACOB AVIGDOR
MEXICO 18. D. F.

האמונה הנוצרית
לאור ההלכה היהודית

פתרונה של בעיה אקטואלית זו מנקודת ראות תורתית מסורתית

My father's essay on Christianity that follows, is a response written in the year 1964, a few years prior to his passing. In the entire essay, he meticulously avoids criticizing Christianity and its practices. He pleaded with me to publish this essay under my name rather than his. Mexico and its' population are a strict Christian community and as chief Rabbi of Mexico City he did not want to antagonize anyone. I agreed to respect his request and in that year, I published his booklet in Hebrew under the title, "Christianity in Light of Jewish *Halacha*." The text does not mention the historical fact that the roots of Christianity, are basically Jewish, accepting G-d and the Bible as the Holy Book.

Despite its Jewish antecedents and perhaps because of it, Catholic history falsely depicted barbaric concepts of inquisitions, blood libels and other accusations against Jews. They inflicted torture of all kinds and preached hatred of their Jewish progenitors. There is little doubt that Christianity proved to be the mother's-milk that nurtured Hitler's maniacal plans and spurred the Nazi movement in the killing of six million Jews in the Holocaust. Christianity abandoned the laws and practices of the Bible to the degree that most churches have resulted in becoming mere displays of pagan idolatry, the worshipping of wooden and clay idols, an act anathema to its Jewish Biblical origins.

One of the basic and first rules of the Bible for all mankind and nature, is the command "to be fruitful and multiply," yet the church priests have for generations elected to adopt celibacy, and not to marry. Throughout the ages, but especially in our times, perhaps as a result of this celibate practice, negating the law of the Bible, hundreds of priests were molesting women and children. The newspapers are full of cases charging priests with moral wrong doings. The following essay makes no mention of these faults, but perhaps as a result recently there is an undeclared war between Muslims and Christians all over the world, threatening world peace. In contradistinction, all that the following essay demands from Christianity is that the Church leave Jews alone. We do not desire any conversions as some missionaries forcibly attempt upon Jews. We still extend respect to Christianity by saying that versus other religions, Christian people believe in our G-d. They are not idolaters.

Rabbi Dr. Isaac C. Avigdor
Author

Christianity in Light of Halacha (Jewish Law)

By: Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor

"The mountain gave birth to a mouse" – this hackneyed expression came to mind when I read in the newspapers Pope Paul VI's proclamation concerning the Jews.

In recent years rumor followed rumor that the Vatican was inclined to "exonerate" the Jews of the charge of crucifying Jesus. Because of behind-the-scenes political machinations, this did not come to pass at the first session of the Ecumenical Council during the reign of Pope John XXIII or at the final session during Paul VI's papacy.

Now we have learned that Paul VI has received a delegation of 120 Jews, and behold – all this fuss has led to a brief papal announcement that the Jews and the Christians believe in the same G-d, and that the Christians also believe in the Jewish Torah that is contained in the "Old Testament."

Not one single word was said about all the blood libels and persecutions and murders and tortures of the Inquisition and the "auto-da-fe" burnings at the stake and the Crusades and all the humiliations and bloody onslaughts that representatives of the Christian Church perpetrated against the Jews for nearly two thousand years. The sole innovation here was that Christianity believes in G-d and in the "Old Testament."

See what the Church leaders have achieved in the middle of the 20th

century, after the resurrection of the Jewish people and the restoration of Jewish national sovereignty in the ancestral homeland, in the State of Israel! Every Jew knew this "innovation" a millennium ago! The Jew never viewed the non-Jew from the perspective of race, nationality, or emotion, but from the perspective of the Torah. *Halacha* (Jewish law) alone defined the Jews' attitude to the Gentile world.

Now what does *Halacha* teach concerning relations between Jews and non-Jews?

One of the fundamental ideas of Judaism is that from the very beginning, human beings were not unrestricted creatures, but were already subject to certain laws and prohibitions of a purely humane nature, which obligated all humans. These are known as the Seven Noahide Laws. Two of these laws concern relations between Man and G-d — the bans on idolatry and on blasphemy; two concern inter-human relations – the bans on bloodshed and stealing; two concern the individual – the bans on sexual promiscuity and on eating limbs torn off living animals; and one concerns society – establishing a system of law and order.

These seven laws obligated humanity more than five thousand years ago. Already then it was commonly understood that those who observed these seven laws were decent people, while those who violated these laws were wicked and corrupt.

Many years later, at Mount Sinai, the Jews alone received the 613 Commandments. But by no means are the Jews permitted to view non-Jews, who do not observe the 613 Commandments, as indecent people. The non-Jew who observes the Seven Noahide Laws is assumed to be a decent person. Moreover, we are taught that a Gentile who observes the Seven Noahide Laws is considered to be on a much higher level than a Jew who violates some of the Torah's commandments. The former is considered a decent Gentile, while the latter is considered a criminal transgressor. Maimonides even rules that a Gentile who observes the Seven Noahide Laws is assured a place in the World-to-Come. Since the Torah obligates only Jews, the Jews never sought to missionize non-Jews to accept the Torah.

But the Torah forbids Jews to help a Gentile transgress a Noahide law. Jews living among idolatrous nations before the latter accepted Christianity often faced serious dilemmas regarding their relations with the Gentiles. Jews having

business relations with Gentiles had to beware lest they find themselves somehow aiding them in their idol worship. Jews were prohibited from selling Gentiles any appurtenances that might serve them in their idol worship. In this connection, the ancient Jewish Sages laid down a whole network of laws comprising the Talmudic tractate "*Avoda Zara*" (Idolatry).

Later, when Christianity replaced polytheism and many nations accepted the Christian faith, the Jewish legal authorities ruled that Christians are not to be considered idolators and Jews are permitted to do business with them even if this somehow helps them in their religious observance. This ruling is based on the fact that only the Seven Noahide Laws, which do not command worship of the G-d of Israel but only prohibits idol worship, bound the Gentile nations. Christianity is not idolatry, as it is based on belief in G-d. To be sure, Christianity makes the One-G-d a partner in the "Holy Trinity," but the Gentile Noahides are not commanded to worship the One-G-d. This commandment binds only the Jews: "Hear, O Israel, G-d, our G-d – G-d is One."

This law is not mere abstract theory, but a practical day-to-day obligation. Every rabbi who hands down rulings regarding matters such as *kashrut* must be well versed and experienced in the application of this law. It is known, for example, that if an animal somehow becomes ritually unfit after it has been ritually slaughtered, the Jew is permitted to sell it to a Gentile. But if the animal becomes ritually unfit by breaking a leg while it is still alive, the Jew must amputate the broken leg and discard it before selling the animal to a Gentile, because Gentiles, too, are forbidden to eat limbs taken off living animals.

What novelty, then, is there in the ringing proclamation of Pope Paul VI? Did ever a Jew contend that Christians do not believe in G-d? The Jews have never accused the Christians of being idolators, and have never complained to Christians about their faith. Christians, on the other hand, have from the very beginning of Christianity not ceased to rage against the Jews because of their faith.

It is an historical fact that the Jews have never protested against non-Jews for preferring Christianity over Judaism. On the other hand, no sooner did the non-Jews adopt Christianity than they already complained against the Jews for being Jews. This fact puzzles great scholars. Logically, the situation ought to be just the opposite. A terrible wrong was done to the Jews when strangers came and distorted the Jewish Torah and faith beyond recognition, so it would be proper

for the Jews to protest loudly and strongly. The Gentiles, on the other hand, obtained through Christianity a number of principles from the Jewish Torah and faith, without the Jews doing them any harm whatever. What, then, is the source of the Christians' great hatred of the Jews?

The chief claim of the Christians against the Jews has always been: You murdered our messiah! For 1,500 years this claim served as the main justification not only of abysmal hatred, but also of horrendous blood vengeance. They always slaughtered and burned Jews with the savage cry: You crucified Christ!

Lately, with the convening of the Ecumenical Council at the Vatican, it was proposed to blame Jesus's crucifixion on all of humanity, not on the Jews alone. It is worthwhile examining the nature of this "charge" in the past and in the present.

It is not surprising that already more than a thousand years ago it was clear to the Church Fathers that the Jews had no part in Jesus's death. Today it is an established fact that this lie was spread with malicious intent, just as in the course of centuries the execrable blood libel was spread that the Jews use the blood of Christians for soaking the *matzot* during the Passover festival – a libel that caused the spilling of rivers upon rivers of blood of innocent Jews, and which today serves psychological researchers as scientific proof that a blatant and foul lie can take root in the consciousness of masses so deeply as to be extremely difficult to extirpate. Into this category of canards falls also the historic lie that the Jews are to blame for Jesus's crucifixion.

What is the scientific view of this matter? The great variety of opinions regarding the crucifixion calls to mind Sholem Aleichem's story of the Jewish woman who cracked a pot she had borrowed, and when the lender sued her before a rabbinical court, the borrower replied: First of all, I never borrowed a pot. Second of all, the pot was cracked to begin with. And third of all, I returned the pot to her a long time ago.

Some scholars maintain that Jesus never existed. They reject Christianity's mystical dogmatism, and they declare that the person Jesus is a figment of someone's imagination. Others maintain that even if there did exist someone named Jesus, he clearly was never crucified and certainly was not resurrected after crucifixion. Yet others contend that even if there did exist someone named Jesus who was crucified, then clearly it is not the Jews who crucified him, as the Jews were not authorized to deal with capital offenses. The sole responsibility for the

crucifixion lies with Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator, who was a blatant anti-Semite.

This is not the place to detail all the theories regarding this matter. But it is worthwhile mentioning that Georg Brandes deals with it at great length in his book, in which he treats all the opinions on this subject. But Georg Brandes cannot be the final word on the subject, since he was a Jew. It was the well-known Christian priest Terenbrun who in his book, "Jesus – An Historical or a Mythological Figure?" expresses the view that the Church Fathers needed a figure like Jesus in order to promote their religion, so they created such a figure. Such German scholars as Warda and Dreves came to the conclusion that there never existed such a person as Jesus.

A well-known professor of theology writes in his book that the Christian world has only a Christian faith but no well-founded history regarding Jesus's existence. Professor Goodhart maintains that people who had need of such a legend wrote the crucifixion story. The interesting thing is that these Christian scholars based their denial of the existence of Jesus on our Talmud. They maintain that if there had been such a figure as Jesus, the Talmud would have mentioned him. To be sure, it was once argued that that Christian censors deleted all Talmudic passages mentioning Jesus, but we know today that this is not true. Even the early Talmudic tractates do not have a single reference to Jesus. As for the disciple named Jesus mentioned in the Talmud – it has been determined that he is not Jesus of the Christians, as the references to the former Jesus pertain to a different period from the one in which the Christians' Jesus is said to have lived.

In the light of all this, it is astonishing that the Jesus lie has struck such deep roots in the human mind. It is clear that although the fathers of Christianity knew that their Jesus was only a mythical figure, they declared again and again that the Jews had crucified their messiah, and they incited the populace to take bloody revenge on the Jews. How shockingly true is that above-mentioned joke about the non-existent broken pot, and how many rivers of blood were spilt because of such "pot claims"?

As we know, Christendom fought Judaism and the Jewish people not only by committing atrocities and shedding blood, but also through ideological disputations they imposed on Jewish Sages. The same process took place here. The Jews never summoned the Christians to a disputation – it was Christian

scholars, priests and cardinals who ordered the Jews to take part in pointless disputations that always had the same outcome: a wave of anti-Jewish repression.

It is interesting to note that the same absurdity manifested in the Christians' acts of "vengeance" against the Jews is also present in their arguments against Judaism. Whether they like it or not, the Christians must concede that their faith is based on elements taken from Judaism. If Jesus indeed existed, he was of Jewish origin. The Apostles and the first Church Fathers were all born Jews, and the early Christian sects had no writings other than the *Tanach* – the Jewish Bible. It seems right, then, that the Christians should treat Jews with a certain degree of appreciation and respect. In fact, however, the Jews are a thorn in their side, and since the beginning of Christianity the Christians have not ceased to humiliate and oppress the Jews.

What is the reason for this? What is the cause of this great hatred of the Jews?

Hundreds of Jewish and non-Jewish scholars have pondered this question and have come up with a variety of explanations for this worldwide hatred of the Eternal People. Some explained it in economic terms – that is, the Jews were always serious competitors of the non-Jews in commerce and industry, and this roused the non-Jews' envy of, and animosity toward, the Jews. Others thought that ever since the destruction of Jewish national sovereignty by the Romans nearly two thousand years ago and the subsequent exile of the Jews from their homeland, the rootlessness and homelessness of the Jews evoked Gentile hatred. Others attributed the hatred to the fact that the Jews lived apart from the Gentiles. Some said the cause was the hatred of the Jewish Torah and the Jewish religion. But none of these explanations could fathom this abysmal Jew-hatred or get to its roots. All these explanations were nothing more than red herrings. The delusion has long prevailed that if we were to get rid of these elements, there would be an end to Jew-hatred. Well, we are living in a time when nearly all these elements no longer exist. Mankind has undergone a total change. Behind the Iron Curtain there is no room for Jewish competition in the spheres of commerce and industry. The religious element also does not exist there. With the re-establishment of Jewish national sovereignty in the ancestral homeland – the State of Israel – the Jews have ceased to be homeless, and in the Diaspora they no longer live apart from their Gentile neighbors. Notwithstanding all that, Jew-hatred has not decreased one bit.

It is worthwhile considering one point that is usually shrugged off, but which is most likely to clarify this issue.

The phenomenon of Jew-hatred raises another question of an entirely different nature. We are living in an era in which utmost importance is attached to the study of ancient history, one of the most important areas in human culture. Every archeological discovery of value galvanizes the entire civilized world. Shards, pieces of clay pottery and other vessels containing inscriptions in an ancient language that millennia ago passed into history along with the people that spoke that language are virtually the most valuable objects in our present-day world. There is even a widespread opinion that a person's or a society's cultural level is gauged by the extent of their interest in archeology. The question then arises: If antiquities are of such great cultural importance, then shouldn't the Jewish people certainly be entitled to great esteem being such an ancient people whose language is as old as humanity, and who are a living embodiment of the remote past?

This question occupies the minds of many great thinkers. They are struggling to comprehend why the Gentile nations so hate the most ancient people in the world at the same time that they so avidly seek shards and pottery that were buried millennia ago. Why do they go digging for utterly meaningless inscriptions, and through them try to distort the Sacred Scriptures, the *Tanach,* the Bible that this ancient people, this living people, has been bearing for three thousand years? Those Christian professors who are deeply immersed in the study of those ancient pieces of pottery and spend their days and nights poring through magnifying glasses over some dead hieroglyphics – why do they so abysmally hate this living ancient people and avoid all contact with it?

This enigmatic phenomenon clearly proves that the world's hatred of the Jews derives from a different source, a source of a blatantly psychological nature. It is therefore difficult to believe that this hatred will pass in the near future, or even in the distant future. There are psychic factors deeply rooted in Man's emotional fabric that are almost impossible to overcome.

Many scholars maintain that the root of Jew-hatred lies in the non-Jewish civilized world's inability to forgive the Jews for being at once both ancient and alive. It is in the nature of antiquities to be dead and buried. And the deeper they are buried, the greater their antiquarian value. But a live antique, and a quite modern one at that, is intolerable. The Gentile world knows very well that all the

ancient peoples that were ever in contact with the Jewish people have long since vanished from the face of the earth, and it is only vestiges of them that are being excavated from their piles of rubble. The Jewish nation is different. They lived in the family of nations comprising such ancient nations as Assyria, Egypt, Canaan, Babylon, Greece, and Rome, and which today, too, seeks to live in the family of nations of the world comprising England, France, etc. The Jew takes pride in being eternal, and for this the Gentile world cannot forgive him.

Indeed, there exist such nations as India, China, and the like, which are also considered very ancient. But these have exerted no influence on modern humanity. The new world has practically no accounts with them. On the other hand, all the nations admit to having received a great deal from Judaism. There are two kinds of receiving: by inheritance, or by gift. One receives an inheritance from a dead person without incurring any obligation to the deceased. But one receives a gift from a living person, and this involves certain indebtedness to the giver. Sometimes, courtesy even requires a reciprocal gift. That is why the Gentiles would prefer to see the Jews as a museum exhibit. They would gladly accept the role of the Jews' heir. Things even reached a point where it was once argued that today's Jews are not the "Children of Israel" of yore, that the Jewish people has vanished from the world and its legacy has passed onto the Christian Church.

From the very first the Jews were a stumbling block to the Church Fathers. By their calculation, their power would have increased exponentially if only there were no longer a single Jew alive. They would have been able to concoct all sorts of beliefs and myths and base them on primeval Judaism. They would have been able to disseminate without interference the belief that they are the heirs and bearers of the ancient Israelite ideal. But they were unable to do so because the Jews and Judaism were very much alive. The Jews were a living refutation of all the dreams and imaginings of the Church Fathers. The ancient Israelite ideal continued living in the Jewish people.

Add to this another psychological factor. It is well known that human beings cannot remain indifferent to those who have given them anything at all. Some mutual relationship must be created between giver and recipient. This relationship cannot be one of indifference, but must express itself in either a positive or a negative fashion; either through gratitude or through hate. By the same token, the relationship between a father and a son cannot be one of

indifference; it must express itself through either love and admiration or hate and contempt. Clearly, all things being well, the relationship between giver and recipient, or between father and son, is always cordial and suffused with gratitude. But when external circumstances interfere with the sense of fraternity, the relationship cannot remain one of indifference and must turn to one of hate. That is the way of the world: if for whatever reason the recipient is unable to live at peace with the giver, he turns bitter against him and stones him.

The non-Jewish world is unable to remain indifferent to the Jew, to ignore him. The non-Jewish world has many accounts to settle with the Jewish people, accounts the sum total of which is heavily in favor of the Jews. The non-Jewish world owes the Jew a big debt, because it received a great deal from him. This debt cannot be denied, because the account is writ large in the annals of the human race.

If the people of the new world came to recognize the futility, the absurdity, of idolatry and came around to faith in One-God – where did it acquire this faith? Not from Athens and not from Rome, but from Jerusalem. The first Christian evangelists were Jews. All of mankind, all the poets and authors, were unable to create a single worthy prayer or paean of praise and thanksgiving, but had to resort to the Book of Psalms composed by the Sweet Singer of Israel, David. The source of Christian ideals is not to be found in Plato or Aristotle, nor in Virgil or Horace, but in the Prophets of Israel. The Christian festivals were directly influenced by the Jewish festivals. It is no wonder, then, that Christendom and Christianity cannot remain indifferent to Judaism and the Jewish people.

And not only Christianity, but all of civilized mankind has many accounts to settle with the Jewish people.

In recent times, Jewish thinkers such as Hermann Cohen, Max Brod, and Martin Buber have tried to show the world the great contribution of Judaism to world civilization. I shall not analyze this matter here, but only say that in fact, the Jews themselves do not fully appreciate the magnitude of this contribution. Everybody agrees that the Jews brought the belief in One-G-d to the world. But the Jewish idea of monotheism isn't merely a quantitative thing – belief in one G-d as opposed to the belief in many gods. As Judaism sees it, one can believe in one G-d and still be a flagrant idolator. There have always been religions that worshipped one G-d. Judaism utterly revolutionized the concept of faith. The

Hebrew term for faith, *emuna*, cannot be translated into any language, for the nations of the world never fully grasped the true significance of *emuna* and therefore did not create a correct equivalent to this term. A word for "faith" exists in all languages, but none of them expresses the Jewish significance of the concept. The Hebrew word *emuna* connotes many things: truth – *emet*; trust – *bitachone*; Amen (It is so); clear recognition; certitude; security. In the Torah we read, "And at night you will be afraid, and in the daytime you will not believe – *taamin* — in your life" – that is, you will not be sure – *batuach* — that you will remain alive. Prophet Micah tells us, "Do not believe – *taaminu* – a friend, do not trust – *tivtehu* – an intimate." Prophet Isaiah says, "If you have no faith, you will not be secure." The Jewish concept "*emuna* in G-d" really means that the believer reinforces his spirit thanks to his faith in G-d. The faith, the belief, that G-d is the *causa causarum* – the cause of all causes – gives the believer a firm grip on life. Yet it must be clear to us that the *emuna* itself is of G-d.

Let us not be tempted to think that this is merely a religious matter. It is a profound and sublime philosophical matter. The greatest thinkers of our time have pondered this matter hard, and have placed it at the center of human thought. They maintain that thinking and intelligence — understanding — are as essential for human beings as food. Descartes asserted that understanding is the fulcrum of the human race – "*Cogito, ergo sum.*" — "I think, therefore I am." And our contemporary thinkers know that intelligence itself requires a fulcrum.

The matter will perhaps be clarified if we examine a little booklet that describes an encounter between philosopher Albert Einstein and poet Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore had no questions for Einstein, because the work of the great scientist was a closed book to him, and Einstein's mathematical formulas were like hieroglyphics to him. But Einstein had some questions for Tagore. He asked: Is beauty a self-sustaining entity, one that exists even if there are no human beings on earth, or is it only a concept that Man created, and therefore does not exist without a human presence? Tagore replied that beauty is a product of the human spirit, and if Man is not, then beauty is not. Einstein agreed, and added that even if the fine arts raise the quality of human existence, they are still no more than human concepts.

Einstein went on to ask: Is truth, like beauty, also no more than a human creation? Is "truth" a mere intellectual concept, and if there were no Man, there would be no intelligence and therefore no truth? Or is truth, unlike beauty, a self-

sustaining entity, with no connection whatever with human existence and intelligence? To this Tagore replied that in this regard he saw no difference between beauty and truth, both being abstract concepts created by Man. Here Einstein disagreed. He maintained that truth is an absolute and has an existence of its own beyond human existence. He added that even though he could not prove it, it was clear to him beyond any shadow of a doubt that the existence of truth in the universe does not necessarily depend on the existence of Man.

In this dialogue we see the fundamental difference between Einstein the Jew and Tagore the non-Jew. The poet is interested only in Man, in life, in the imagination. Man is his sole point of departure. That is why he maintains that truth also originates in Man. Beauty differs from truth only in that it is relative to the taste of individuals or societies. On the other hand, truth is more or less the same for all. In any event, truth and beauty are both products of the human spirit. Einstein the scientist cannot concur in this. It is clear to him that truth does not depend on Man. Man did not create the concept truth; he only came to know it and recognize it.

The fulcrum of this dialogue, as far as we are concerned, is Einstein's declaration that he could not scientifically prove the certitude of it, but he was convinced that truth does not radiate from Man but radiates into Man from the sublime spheres above.

The dialogue occupies an important place in the contemporary *Zeitgeist*. The non-Jewish world remains incapable of digesting Einstein's idea that truth is an absolute entity that exists beyond human understanding. That world has not yet freed itself of the conventional idea that Man dictates what is true. That is to say: unanimous agreement on a certain idea signifies that it is true. That was also the view of the Nazi "philosophers" Alfred Rosenberg and Josef Goebbels. They shrieked day and night that the entire German nation came to a unanimous decision to murder and rob and to drown the world in blood, so that is "true," and therefore the idea must be implemented without delay. This idea is also the source of the opinion that all of humankind must be granted the right of self-determination. That is to say: each and every society of people is entitled to define its own concepts of truth. Therefore, the Jewish idea concerning the superiority of truth over Man is a thorn in the side of mankind, and one of the causes of Nazi and Communist Jew-hatred.

From the very beginning the Jews proclaimed the idea of unity also in our

manner of thinking. We allowed no partitioning in our understanding of things. We follow a unified, consistent line in our thinking. Hence, we could never brook the idea that Man possesses a number of souls – one soul for truth, one soul for beauty, another soul for art, and so on. Regarding beauty, too, we have always maintained that this is not merely a function of human taste, but that it, too, originates in supernatural spheres. Jewish poetry does not speak of mere human experiences; we did not sing of erotica and wine orgies, of magnificent palaces, and not even of beautiful trees and oasis. We sang of the Creator who created beauty and established the marvelous harmony of the universe, of Divine Providence, and of the sublime emotions that elevate the human soul.

The publication of the Einstein-Tagore dialogue created a storm in philosophical circles. The overwhelming majority of non-Jewish philosophers categorically rejected Einstein's views. This is not the place to go into details of the various views, but it is worthwhile pointing out one interesting characteristic that has a bearing of utmost importance on the topic we are discussing.

Einstein, as we know, turned the scientific world upside down. Just as Copernicus in his day turned the science of astronomy upside down, so did Einstein do to the world of philosophy. This revolution is expressed in the dialogue between him and Tagore.

The first detail that stands out is that Einstein is the questioner and Tagore the questioned. Tagore, representative of poetry and literature in general, has no questions. Nothing bothers him. He has flights of fancy, he floats in space, he has no borders, no inhibitions. Einstein, on the other hand, representative of science, struggles with questions and problems. His way is not smooth. He encounters stumbling blocks, blatant contradictions.

Now the two of them reach agreement that the concept beauty was created by Man. They are divided, however, as to the concept truth: Tagore maintains that truth, like beauty, is a human creation, whereas Einstein maintains that there is pure and absolute truth beyond human consciousness, and that truth is in no way dependent on Man.

Einstein here summed up the entire content of his well-known Theory of Relativity. That is to say, what Man holds to be true is relative, not absolute. Even truths like rest and motion are not absolute, but relative. For example: a person sees two objects, the first at rest relative to the other and the second in motion relative to the first, though it is actually possible that the situation is

precisely the reverse: the first is in motion and the second is at rest. Even the simple proposition that 2 + 2 = 4 is relative. Einstein proved scientifically that the chasm between Man and absolute objective truth is beyond human comprehension. In Einstein's view, there isn't the slightest doubt that there exists absolute objective truth, despite the fact that Man is unable to comprehend it. This is called Einstein's "cosmic religion."

The scientific world protested vigorously against this line of thinking that removed truth from the scientific sphere to that of faith. According to this line, faith takes precedence over science. Whereas science deals with concepts that were created by Man and are therefore not absolute truths. Faith, deals with the consciousness implanted in Man from his very creation and is therefore closer to the truth. Already in Immanuel Kant's time the scientific world maintained that human consciousness is subjective and "Heaven's daughter." Along came Einstein and brought intelligence down to earth from Heaven and proved that it is a human creation, without an iota of absolute truth.

We conclude, then, that whatever is linked to Man does not fall into the category of absolute truth, and hence human life is also not true. This may be compared to a spider's web. When we look at the symmetrical weave of a spider's web we see how much wisdom and intelligence is invested in it. But no one will say that the web constitutes a firm truth. A single exhalation will destroy it. The same applies to the tremendous weave of modern science. There is not an iota of truth in any of its tremendous achievements. If there were no human beings, television, jet planes, atomic energy, and the entire heavy-metals industry, would be utterly without value. In other words, all the advanced modern technology is like the weave of a spider's web. The threads are useful to the spider, and technology is useful to man. The difference is only of relative respective value, and neither possesses any element of truth.

The Torah teaches, "You are to follow G-d your G-d." The Talmud elaborates: Just as He – G-d – is compassionate, so are you to be compassionate; etc." In other words, every human action has to stem from Divine inspiration. Whenever a Jew sets out to do something, he says, "G-d willing." For as Maimonides points out, everything depends on G-d's will, and stems from Him.

Here it should be noted that both believers and non-believers must admit to this truth, that deifying material human inclination brings catastrophe on humanity. Setting Man's animal desires as life's supreme ideal, drags man down

to the level of the beasts and leads to envy and hatred to the point where people literally devour each other. That is why idol worship was prohibited as soon as Man was created, and this ban is one of the Seven Noahide Laws. We have seen with our own eyes how low idol-worshipping Man can sink. The newspapers described the last moments of Adolph Eichmann, blast his name, and reported, among other things, that as he stood on the gallows, he declared that he believed in G-d. Such a person, whose hands were soaked with the blood of millions of innocent people and myriads of mothers with their children – what is the meaning of his declaration that he believes in G-d? It means that the concept of G-dliness has been degraded, defamed, profaned in a manner such as never was seen since Man appeared on Earth. And the cause of this was that twisted approach to faith, the approach that is apt to destroy the world.

Let us return to our main topic, the Christian faith. It came to pass some two thousand years ago, when mankind finally came to its senses and became aware of its errors and realized that a life of inebriation and sensuous orgies could not possibly be ideals worthy of worshipping. The close contact with the Jews gradually exposed the terrible error by which people were living. A movement arose calling for recognition of a supernatural G-dhead. This movement went to the opposite extreme, and began to describe human existence as full of sin, bearing the burden of Adam's "Original Sin." And so they created a division between the spiritual world and the material world. The material world was regarded as all impurity and sin, teeming with all kinds of demons and evil spirits, whereas the spiritual world existed in the sublime spheres above.

What is more, if the gap between these two worlds is so vast, how could there be any contact between them? This outlook required a certain bridge that would link the two worlds. The Church fathers built this bridge on the basis of the Jesus myth, according to which Jesus came to this world to redeem sinful mankind and to form a link between mankind and "the Kingdom of Heaven." The Holy Spirit was materialized in his crucified body, and by his crucifixion he expiated the sins of the world. There is no other path to expiation and salvation, for there is no other link between Man and the spiritual world. This is the axis

on which turns the entire content of the Christian faith.

I shall not dwell on the tenets of Christianity, but the above summary should suffice to clarify the background to the deliberations of the Ecumenical Council in the Vatican. The core of the Christian faith is the crucifixion of Jesus, the purpose of which was to redeem sinful mankind. Hence, all of mankind is guilty of the crucifixion, for if it had not sinned, he would not have had to be crucified. Hence it is ridiculous to blame the Jews for this crucifixion.

The Ecumenical Council did not deal with the oppression and persecution of the Jews by the Christian world. It did not deem this subject worthy of deliberation. For the Jews do not believe in Jesus, and so have not been cleansed of their sins, and sinful impure people are fit to be persecuted and tortured.

Let us come back to the Jewish point of view, which is quite clear. We have never regarded Christianity as idolatry, for the simple reason that it does not deify natural forces and material human inclinations. Moreover, it even considered nature and human existence as impurity and sin. That is why we were pleased to see the Christian faith gradually replacing polytheistic idol worship. For Christianity finally settled on an idea, on spirituality, on the repudiation of sin, and so on. But notwithstanding all that Christianity drew from Judaism, it is still very far indeed from it. As a matter of fact, the appearance of Christianity reaffirmed the eternal truth that non-Jews are not fit to accept the Torah of People Israel. Humanity has arrived at the recognition of the existence of a sublime spirituality, but it accepted this idea only after it was materialized in a human body. They were compelled to transform spirit into matter. They extol matter. For us Jews, who at Mount Sinai heard the words, "You shall have no other G-d's before Me," that sort of religion is regarded as tantamount to idol worship. Such a faith is the diametric opposite of the teaching of our holy Torah that we are to elevate the material to the spiritual plane. We believe that therein lies the secret of Man's creation, "And G-d formed Man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.." Into this crude matter, the dust of the ground, the breath of life was breathed that is of the Supreme Divine. That is the mission of Man on Earth, to breathe spirit into matter, and to elevate material life to sublime spirituality. Human existence is not necessarily steeped in sin. Man can live materially and still be holy and spiritual. In Moses, "man of G-d," we see a man who lived a human existence, but one filled with G-dliness. The Prophet says, "For I shall pour out My spirit upon all flesh" –

every material concept widens, deepens, and is refined by the infusion of spirit. On the other hand, in the way they materialize all spiritual ideas, the non-Jews constrict and distort them.

We can see this abysmal contrast all the more sharply during the Chanukah season, when the Jew lights candles to commemorate the victory of the Maccabeans over the Greeks by emphasizing not the physical victory on the battlefield, but the rededication of the Temple, and the miracle of the cruse of ritually pure oil – that is, on the spirit in the material. The Christians, on the other hand, light up the Christmas trees that symbolize precisely the opposite – spirit materialized in the form of a flesh-and-blood child; that is, the materialization of the spirit. This is not to mention the fact that the materialization of the spirit by that boy has yet to be proven as a historical fact; in other words, that whole story is no more than a human creation.

All this is in keeping with what the ancient Jewish Sages said: "When God revealed Himself to give the Torah to the People of Israel, He revealed Himself not only to Israel, but to all the nations... And they told Him they could not accept the Torah... But when he came to Israel, they said: 'We will do and we will hear.'" The Gentiles are incapable of understanding the Jewish people's Torah. But we have no complaints on that score. The Gentiles are commanded to be decent human beings, and are not commanded to be Jews. Our Sages also said: The time will come when the Blessed Holy One will place a Torah Scroll on his lap and say, "Those who busied themselves with Torah may now come and collect their reward. The nations of the world will come and plead before God: Master of the Universe, did You compel us under threat of annihilation to accept the Torah, as you did Israel, and we rejected the Torah? And the Blessed Holy One will reply: Did you at least observe the Seven [Noahide] Laws?"

Here we come to the sorest point in the relations between the Jews and Gentiles. We have always been condemned as chauvinists with a Chosen People complex. They have complained bitterly that we are haughty people who look down on the rest of mankind as though we were something special. But even here the Gentiles have misunderstood us. The concept of Jewish chosenness is not some figment of poetic imagination, some vainglory, some egotistical braggadocio. Many nations have had poets with rich imaginations and superciliousness, who considered themselves to be above the common run of their fellow countrymen, considered themselves to be the cream of humanity,

with all the others not even being worthy of being alive in the same world with them. On the other hand, the concept of chosenness has an entirely different significance. We have always emphasized that all the nations and individuals who observe the Seven Noahide Commandments are considered decent people who are fulfilling their obligations as human beings. The Jews, for their part, took upon themselves another 606 commandments in addition to the above seven, all of which together organize the Jew's daily life to the point where the banal is elevated to the level of holiness and spirit. Observing only the Seven Noahide Commandments, as noble as that is, does not suffice to create a medley of matter and spirit and to imbue the consciousness with content and purpose. It does not suffice as a link between transient living and endless spiritual joy. That is why the Torah tells the People Israel, "For it is you whom G-d has chosen" – in order to show that it is possible to live a material life in holiness and purity. This is the uniqueness of the Jewish people. It is a fact that nobody but Jews observe the 613 Commandments. The Christian world considers material life to be impure and riddled with sin. Judaism, on the other hand, propounds the idea that the observance of the Torah's 613 Commandments transforms material life into a life of spirit and holiness. Living according to the Torah is what distinguishes us from the rest of the nations. This uniqueness, however, does not bestow any material privileges on us, but only the responsibility to spread the idea of the sanctity of life. If we were not a chosen people, that would have meant that everybody would have to live as we were living and that as long as the whole world did not accept the Torah, there was no mankind in the world. But this idea does not jibe with the law of the Torah. Clearly, then, we were compelled to adopt the "Chosen People" outlook in order to preserve the dignity and importance of humanity as a whole. The chosenness of the Jewish people, then, is of moral significance not only for us but for all mankind.

This may be compared to a man with musical talent who devotes his entire life to music, and considers himself special. Otherwise, it would mean that he thinks that all people have to be musical, and that those who do not understand music and do not occupy themselves with music are not human. This idea is absurd, and it sullies the honor and dignity of mankind.

Maimonides declares in his "Laws of Kings" that Messiah will come not to the Jews alone but to all of mankind. Everybody will then understand the secret and purpose of life. Everybody will see how human existence is interwoven in

the fabric of eternity. All will feel the true sense of spirituality. Until that time, however, the Jews alone are unique in bearing this eternal idea.

We have noted the fundamental difference between the Jewish Hanukka candles and the Christian Christmas tree. It is fitting, then, to conclude our discussion with a poetic dialogue between the Hanukka candles and the Christmas tree, which usually meet in one time span.

The Christmas tree towers in all its glory and beauty in the most public places, places that teem with people coming and going, and its loud lights radiate with shrill pride in all directions.

As for the Hanukka candles – how humble and noble is their light! How pleasant and placid is their flickering in the windows. Sometimes they can see the flashy Christmas trees with their multitudinous lighting. Is it possible not to see them?

The Christmas tree proclaims to hundreds of millions people that some two thousand years ago there was born in Bethlehem in Judea a marvelous Divine child. The Holy Spirit was revealed in this woman-born person and brought new tidings to the world. Idolatrous nations fought furiously against this new message, but in the end the message won. Mankind forsook idol worship and accepted the new faith.

The Hanukka candles, on the other hand, gently tell how some two thousand years ago the Hasmoneans overcame the Greeks, re-dedicated the Temple in Jerusalem, which had been desecrated by the Greeks, purified the Temple, and set about to rekindle the holy Temple candelabrum. They found only one cruse of pure oil, which would have sufficed for only one day, and a miracle came to pass and it continued to burn for eight days... The candles relate this miracle not to hundreds of millions, but only to small pockets of Jews scattered throughout the world.

The Christmas tree looks down on the Hanukka candles and asks contemptuously: Of what value and significance are you as compared to my profusion of colorful lights?

The Hanukka candles respond softly: Your blaze of colorful lights say nothing to us. The wonder-child in whom you believe did not bring any new idea

to us. Already two thousand years before his birth our ancestors believed in the true, eternal G-d. Already then our Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob rebelled against the idolatrous world and spread the light of truth all over the world. Then Moses brought down from Mount Sinai the Tablets of the Covenant containing the Ten Pronouncements [erroneously called commandments]. Later Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem. There the light of the spirit was kindled that radiated its aura to the entire world. We never went to war or shed blood for our light, whereas they, the idol worshippers, attacked us and extinguished the light. Seventy years later we returned and again raised the holy light in our Temple. But the idol worshippers did not rest, and once again they desecrated and polluted the holy shrine. It seemed that our candle no longer had the strength to continue to shed light. And lo and behold, that remarkable miracle occurred: Jewish heroes expelled the idolatrous foe and rekindled that light, which continues to burn to this very day. Are you colorful Christmas trees aware of the fact that if not for us Chanukah candles you would never have come into being? For if the Greeks had succeeded in extinguishing the candle of Israel, Christianity would not have come into being two centuries later.

The upright crest of the Christmas tree bowed somewhat, and it said: We must indeed concede that we stem from you. But you also have to concede that we bear a message to hundreds of millions of people, while you send illumination for only a small handful.

Chanukah Candles: This is where you are grossly mistaken. We have never denied your great accomplishment on behalf of humanity. You extirpated idolatry from the world. You taught mankind the history of the Jewish people and some of the sublime ideals of the Jewish faith. You instituted in your houses of worship the singing of the Psalms of the Sweet Singer of Israel, King David. Thanks to you we became known throughout the world. You accepted many of the moral and ethical values of our Prophets. We have always appreciated your contribution to humanity, and we have never come complaining to you. (There is the well-known instruction of the *Baal Shem Tov*, the founder of the *Hassidic* movement, not to travel together with a Gentile who does not doff his hat before a crucifix.)

Christmas Tree: That being the case, why don't you join us?

Chanukah Candles: Oh, no! Why should we join you? Never! It is true that a spark of ours kindled your light, but this light is so strange and alien to us. It

draws upon alien sources. You do not grasp the Godhead without tangible materialization. You need a physical framework for each and every one of your ideas. You paint and sculpt your ideas. To be sure, the ideas you possess are basically Jewish ideas, but you have invested them with material images. Even your belief in G-d is not a direct approach to spirituality and Divinity. You first turn to a G-d in human form: a G-d born of woman who lived, was tortured, and was crucified, and it is in honor of this god that you spread your dazzling profusion of lights everywhere. This is not the case with us Jews. Ever since the event at Mount Sinai we have inherited a direct approach to G-d. We believe in the one and only One-G-d Who endows all flesh with His Spirit. You are very far from our refined faith. But this does not cause us to have anything against you. We are just very hopeful that when Messiah comes, when we will see the fulfillment of the prophecy that "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of G-d as water covers the sea" – then will all of humanity be ready to fathom the true spiritual concepts, and then mankind will come to us.

Christmas Tree: I grant you that there is much truth in what you say concerning those who conduct their entire lives in holiness and purity in keeping with your sublime ideals. But you yourselves don't exactly live according to your ideals. You modern Jews seek to base your lives on simple physical and material foundations. You want to be a nation like all other nations. Your dreams are entirely of a political and nationalistic nature. That being so, why don't you accept our light and truly become a nation like all the other nations? Our missions have succeeded in bringing many nations under the wings of our faith, so why should your nation not do so as well?

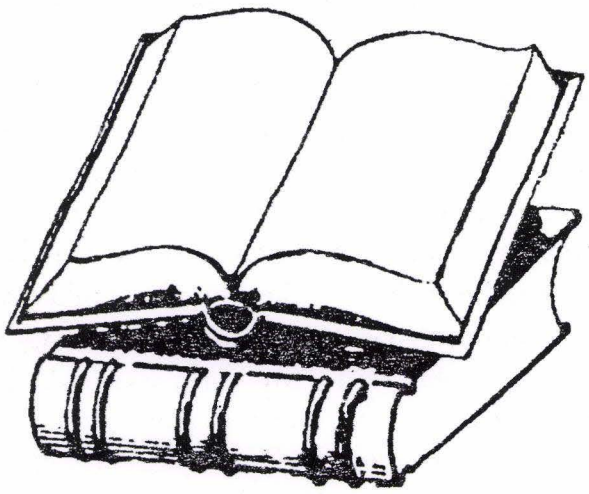
Chanukah Candles: Yes, we know that, and that is why we illuminate the homes of Jews – to remind them that more than two thousand years ago there prevailed almost the identical situation. And then, too, many Jews forsook their Judaism and aspired to be Greeks. But a handful of Jews remained who were loyal to their religion and faith. That was a very small, weak handful. It seemed as if the candle of Israel was about to die. For what could that small minority do against the powerful many? But they did not despair. They believed in "Not by strength and not by might, but by My spirit, says G-d." Judaism does not believe in physical power, but in the supremacy of spirit. This deeply rooted belief led to that handful of people bringing the Jewish masses to the true source of the truth of the Jewish ideal. With few forces they overcame the alien

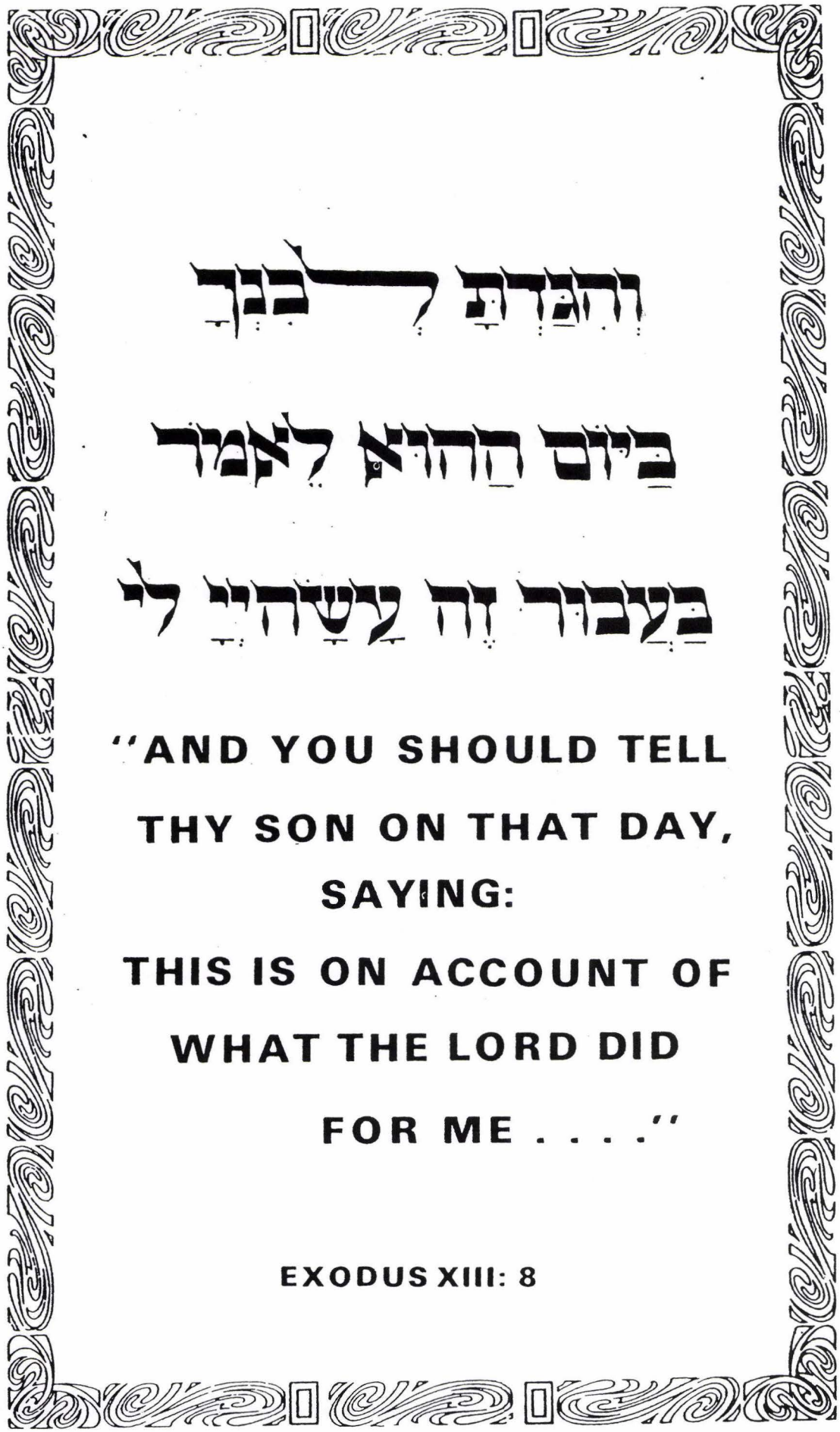
transplant in the soil of Israel and uprooted it. Once again our pure candles, our holy candles, burn bright and radiant. If history repeats itself, if today, too, alien winds blow among a substantial part of our people – our hands shall not fail, and we shall not despair. The Jewish candle burns and casts illumination upon many handfuls of faithful Jews, and we are firm in our belief that in the end it will banish the darkness of those alien influences, and its everlasting light will once more radiate upon the entire Jewish people.

Christmas Tree: In other words, you are contemptuous of me and hate me?

Chanukah Candles: Contempt? Hatred? Perhaps as mortal human beings we really ought not only to hate you, but also to curse you and grind you into the dust for all the harm, the travails, the murders and tortures that you put us through for two thousand years. But as Jews, we do not do so. The Jewish ideal is far removed from hatred and vengeance. Our sole request is: Please leave us alone! We have never tried to persuade you to accept our Torah – so please, you too, cease sending us your missionaries, and please stop trying to incite our children to forsake their faith. You worship in your way, and let us worship in our way.

Christmas Tree bends its crest somewhat and its lights dim somewhat..The Chanukah candles flare up and radiate an aura of eternity...





וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר

בַּעֲבוּר זֶה עָשָׂה יְיָ לִי

"AND YOU SHOULD TELL
THY SON ON THAT DAY,
SAYING:
THIS IS ON ACCOUNT OF
WHAT THE LORD DID
FOR ME . . . ."

EXODUS XIII: 8

Comments

At the very outset of planning this book in my father's name, O.B.M., I had to make many decisions regarding the form, shape, size, style and character it should take.

I wanted the book to take the form of an album of Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor's biography, to depict his early years as rabbi of Drohobycz and Boryslaw, his martyrdom in the Holocaust, followed by his concluding years as the chief rabbi of Mexico.

While I thought of having the book written totally in English, I had to change my mind, after having studied and researched an unprecedented treasure trove of letters and articles. Some of them are of major historical importance, and are printed in their original Hebrew or Yiddish texts to verify to the reader the veracity of the subjects that were being presented.

Another problem for me was selecting the fitting pictures with my father in them, for insertion in the book. It is known that amongst the tragic experiences that we holocaust survivors feel today, is the destruction of albums, books and pictures from before the war. What I have inserted are pictures given to me by relatives from Israel and other parts of the world. We treated those photos as though they were precious jewels. Without the pictures of the past, the images of our dear ones would have faded away forever.

Last, but not least, I had some friends that consulted with me suggesting that I have a forward written by a leading personality assessing and appraising the book. I discarded this idea and decided instead to include a small group of original manuscripts written to my father by the brightest luminaries of our century. They include: Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog, Avrum Yitzchok Cook, Harav Soloveichik, Rav Henkin, Rabbi Tzvi Frank, Sephardic chief rabbi, the Lubavitcher Rebbi, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, and the Tshebiner Rav, Dov Berish Weidenfeld, all of blessed memory. They all used foremost praise, in their oft correspondence with my father, before and after the War. There could be no greater honor than that.

Although the letters are yellow with age, some of these manuscripts are highly valued on the Jewish book market because of the original signatures.



FROM A VAST COLLECTION OF CORRESPONDENCE

Between Father and the most Illustrious Scholars of his Generation



RABBI YAAKOV PERLOW
1589 - 47TH STREET
BROOKLYN N.Y. 11219

יעקב פרלוב
קהל עדת יעקב נאוואמינסק
ישיבת נאוואמינסק - קול יהודא
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בס"ד יום ג' חמשה עשר בשבט תשס"ה

בנועם ובקורת רוח קבלתי הידיעה על הופעתו של הספר אשר חיבר חרב הנכבד והנעלה הרב יצחק חיים אביגדור שליט"א רב בעיר הרטפורד, על אביו המנוח הרב הגאון ר' יעקב אביגדור זצ"ל שהי' רב אב"ד בק"ק דראהביטש לפני המלחמה וחיבר הרבה ספרים בהלכה ולאחר שנות הזעם שימש ברבנות בברוקלין ובמעקסיקא סיטי ושם מנוחתו כבוד.
רבות שמעתי במי נעורי על הרכ אביגדור זצ"ל, אף כי לא זכיתי להכירו אישית, ובעיקר על מעשיו הכבירים עבור אחב"י במחנות המצוקה בימי שנות ההשמדה, ולאחר מכאן לעם שרידי חרב שנשאר בחיים בחסדי השי"ת. והדראהביטשער רב התחזר לאחיו ההיהודים לאחי עזר בחומר וברוח, במזון ובמחי' ובהוראת הלכה ובהיתור עגונות, כדרכם של מנהיגי העדה הגדולים שבעבר. ולזאת דבר נכון לחשוב עליה בנו הרב שליט"א לעשות יד זכרון לאביו המנוח ז"ל ולהנציח את קורות ימי חייו למען ידעו הדורות הבאים, והנני חותם בהוקרה וברכה על כל המפעל של בן יכבד אב, וגם מכיר אנכי את יוצאי חלציו של הרב זצ"ל, כדור ישרים יבורך, הממשיכים מסורת התורה והיראה, ומגדלים בנים אהובים לה' ולתורתו לאורך ימים טובים.

בברכת כל טוב

יעקב פרלוב

יעקב פרלוב
ראש ~~נשיא~~ אגודות ישראל באמריקא

TRANSLATION

This is a free translation of the original letter of Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, Rosh of Agudas Yisroel of America, recognizing his pleasant satisfaction from the fact that Rabbi Isaac C. Avigdor of West Hartford, CT is publishing a new book, in blessed memory of his father Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor.

The departed, was before the war Chief Rabbi of Drohobycz-Boryslaw, Poland. Along with millions of other European Jews, he was incarcerated by the Germans into several concentration camps. In spite of the inhuman circumstances, he has shown active assistance to holocaust survivors in Buchenwald supplying them with food, religious materials and the resolving of the Agunos problem. He was liberated from Buchenwald on April 11, 1945.

Upon liberation, Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor has heroically risen physically and spiritually to occupy leading rabbinic positions in New York, to eventually become Chief Rabbi of Mexico. During his active service with the community, he published thirty books, which became famous historic post holocaust literature. Rabbi Avigdor is most honorably buried in a special mausoleum in the Jewish Cemetery in Mexico City.

Rabbi Perlow points out in his letter that it is noteworthy and a great satisfaction to him to see a son honoring his father post mortem, twenty eight years after his demise and publish his life story so that future generations can remember the tragic events that occurred to our people in this generation.

Personally signed, Yaakov Perlow

רוב בעריש ווירזנבערג
אב"ד דק"ק טשעבין ור"מ דישיבת "כובס מיעקב"
כעת בעיה"ק ירושלים תובב"א
רחוב אבן שפרוט 19 (רחבי)
ת. ד. 7037

ב"ה, ירושלים

ISRAEL MEIR LAU
CHIEF RABBI
TEL-AVIV-JAFFA, ISRAEL

ישראל מאיר לאו
הרב הראשי
תל-אביב-יפו, ישראל

בס״ד, יום שנבראו בו המאורות לסדר ״ברית מלח עולם היא״, כ״ב בסיון תשס״ה

להוד כבוד
ידיד נפשי, ידיד ה׳ וישראל
הרה״ג יצחק חיים שליט״א אביגדור
רב דאיחוד בתי הכנסת
הרטפורד – קונטיקט
ארצות הברית

אחדשה״ט באה״ר,

שמחתי באומרים לי כי כת״ר שליט״א עומד להוציא לאור את הספר ״הרב ד״ר יעקב אביגדור זצ״ל בגיא צלמות״. הספר יכיל סיפור חייו של אביו הגאון זצ״ל בתוספת מאמריו החשובים וחידושי תורתו המפכים כמים חיים.

אכן, זהו נר נשמה להאי גברא רבא ויקירא מגדולי רבני הדור האחרון ומי שהיה משיירי אנשי כנסת הגדולה של רבני פולין המעטירה, רבה של ק״ק דרוהוביטש ולאחר המבול כיהן כרבה של מקסיקו ופיאר כבוד התורה והרים קרנה ברחבי תבל.

אביו זצ״ל היה אוד מוצל מאש ומבשרי חזיתי זאת, שכן אף אני זכיתי בחסדי שמים כי לא תמנו ולא כלו רחמיו לצאת מגיא ההריגה בבוכנואלד ולהלך בארצות החיים.

אכן, הנצחה ראויה שיש בה גם משום זכוי הרבים שייהנו מאורו ומאור תורתו של הגאון הרב יעקב אביגדור זצ״ל.

ותיכף לת״ח - ברכה. הנני מעתיר שפע ברכות לכת״ר שליט״א כי יזכה עוד רבות בשנים לעמוד על משמרת הקדש מתוך בריות גופא ונהורא מעליא.

הכו״ח בלונ״ח ובאהבת עולם

הרב ישראל מאיר לאו

לשכה: רח׳ אורי 1, ת.ד. 9, תל-אביב-יפו 61000 - טל׳ 03-6938911, פקס: 03-6938991
OFFICE: 1, URI ST., P.O.B. 9, TEL-AVIV-JAFFA, 61000, ISRAEL - TEL: +972-3-6938911, FAX: +972-3-6938991
e-mail: harav-lau@mail.gov.il :דוא״ל

39.10 אביגדור

TRANSLATION OF CHIEF RABBI'S LETTER

Dear Rabbi Yitzchok Chaim Avigdor, נ"י

United Synagogues of Greater Hartford
West Hartford, CT

With love and greetings:

I was happy indeed being told that you are preparing to publish a book in memory of your Father, Rabbi Dr. Jacob Avigdor O. B. M. "Faith After the Flames." It will contain the life story of your father including other of his essays.

This is a memorial light to a great man, one amongst the dearest luminaries of the last generation, the rabbi of Drohobycz, Poland. Rabbi Avigdor later served in New York and became Chief Rabbi of Argentina and Mexico. Your father, O.B.M. was a ray saved from the fire and what I personally experienced with my own eyes since I was in Buchenwald and witnessed the shadows of death.

This book is destined to be admired by many who enjoyed his wisdom and his teachings.

I wish you all the blessings that you should have the privilege to continue standing on guard in protecting Judaism, physically and spiritually on behalf of G-d and our people.

With eternal appreciation

Rabbi Yisroel Meir Lau
Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, Jaffa, Israel

(Translation of Original Document)

Original Proclamation for the Founding of the Vaad Hatzalah and Rabbinic Court:

We the undersigned are assembled here today together, on the Fast of Gedalia in the year 5706, (corresponding to September 10, 1945) here in the city of Brussels, the capital of Belgium, and after much deliberations and arguments we established the rule according to the law of the Torah, as to what should be done about the subject of Agunos, and men whose wives were lost during the Holocaust. We have all come to the conclusion, with one opinion, to found a single organization that would be involved in these questions, and there in the Bes Din should be discussed all these subjects and upon this, with the help of G-d, on the above mentioned date and community, we sign:

Rabbi Mordechai Shlomo Ullman
Rabbi Chayim Yaakov Rottenberg
Rabbi Akiva Asher Blumenfeld
Rabbi Maer Fierberger
Rabbi Yisroel Shapiro
Rabbi Yaakov Avigdor

(The original proclamation has hand written signatures)

It was unanimously decided that this Rabbinic Court be located in the Camp of Bergen Belzen, Germany, where the majority of survivors were assembled.

ישיבת הגאון מטשעבין „כוכב מיעקב" בעיה"ק ירושלים תובב"א
בנשיאות הרב דוב־בערוש וויידענפעלד שליט"א · אב"ד דק"ק טשעבין · ת.ד. 7037
TORAH HIGH-SCHOOL «KOHAV MIYAACOV» JERUSALEM ISRAEL
Under the Presidency of H. R. Rabbi DOV-BERISH WIEDENFELD · Formerly Chief Rabbi of TRZEBINIA · P.O.B. 7037

Date ב"ה, ירושלם נדר"ח כסלו תשכ"ג

לכבוד
הקהילה הקדושה האשכנזית נדחי ישראל
אשר בפקסיקו לידי הנשיא ולידי יו"ר ועד
החגיגה, ד' עליהם יחיו

שלום ורוב ברכה,

רק לפני יומיים שלוש קבלנו המכתב אשר נשלח אל רבינו ראש ונשיא הישיבה המדושה גאון דורנו גאב"ד טשעבין שליט"א על חגיגת היובל של הסרא דאתרא שלכם הגאון הנודע החכם השלם הרב ד"ר יעקב אביגדור שליט"א, והמכתב היה לטראה עינינו ברבינו ועל פי בקשתו כותבים אנו המכתב הזה ראשית להתנצל על האיחור בהברכה אשר לא בשמחנו, ושנית להביע בשמו את הברכות הלבביות לחתן היובל ליובלו החמישים מאז נכנס תחת עול ההנהגה הרבנית, הרב הסרא דאתרא שלכם סוכר לרבינו מאז שנים מרובות ויכול להעיד כי עוד אז נודע לאחד הרבנים הגדולים המובהקים והמוכשרים למרות שאז עוד היה לצעיר לימים וכבר נודע כי תלמידי חכמים כל זמן שמזקינים דעתם נתוספת וחכמתם מתברכת, והרינו בזה ברכה כי יחזק הש"ת כוחו ואונו להרבות חיל ולהפיץ מעיינותיו מעיינו התורה חוצה להגדיל תורה ולהאדירה לשמחת לבו ולבב מהילתו המדושה ולבב כל מקשיריו ומכבדיו,

הכותבים וחותמים בשם מרן שליט"א



ווערטפולע ווערק

פון אליעזר שאפירא

„אין וואָרט און שריפט", פון הרב ד"ר יעקב אביגדור שליט"א, 2 בענדער, מעקסי־קא.

* * *

די צוויי ביכער „אין וואָרט און שריפט" פון מרא דאתרא הרב יעקב אביגדור זיינען שוין גע־וואָרן די מעמע פאר א סך אפ־האנדלונגען פון לאקאלע רעצענ־זענטן, ווי אויך מחוץ מעקסיקע. די אנגלויטישע אפשאצונגען און באלויכטונגען זיינען אויף א הויכן ניוואָ און געבן איבער אין אלגע־מיין די גרויסע באדייטונג פון דער אייגנארטיקער ליטעראַרישער שא־פונג אין דער מאדערנער ייִדישער עטיש־פילאָזאפישער יהדות־ליטע־ראטור, ווי ס'איז דאָס ווערק פון הרב אביגדור.

הרב אביגדור איז פון די געצייל־טע באגאבטע רבנישע דענקער, וועלכע זיינען דורך א גם ניצול געוואָרן פון די קאניבאלישע נאצי־שע מערדער. די שאפונגס־פערל פון זיין גייסט האבן א נאציאנאל־דער־ציערישן און עטישן ווערט פאר אונדזער דור פון אידענטלאזיקייט און אויסגעלייקטקייט פון גייסט־עמיגן און רעליגיזען אינהאלט. די יידישע ליטעראטור האָט אין איר אוצר פילצאליקע ווערק איבער יה־דות, יידישער־עטיק און יידישער־פילאָזאפיע, אבער די צוויי ביכער „אין וואָרט און שריפט" זיינען א ווערטיקער ביישטייער צו איר סיי צולייב זייער תוך סיי צוליב זייער פארם און סטיל, אייגנארטיקער אינטערפראטאציע און באלויכטונג.

די איבערוועגנדע מערהייט פון אונדזער פאלק איז אפגעפרעמדט און דערווייטערט פון די יידישע קולטור־אוצרות. און ענגיאלע שא־פונגען פון אונדזער קולטור־גענשיכ־טע; די נביאים תנאים, אמוראים, די פארפאסער פון תלמוד בבלי און ירושלמי, משנה, אגדה, רש"י תוס־פות, די גאונים־עפאָכע, די מקוב־לים, אין שאפונג־פראצעס פון טויזנטער יארן, דאָס אלץ איז כמעט ווי ארכיוו־מאטעריאלן.

ווען א מאדערנער ייד לייענט איבער אויפמערקזאם און גרינט־לעך די ביכער „אין וואָרט און שריפט", ווערט ער שטארק באַ־ווידקט און איבערראשט. עס שפרו־דלט אויף אן דערוואָכט אין אים א נעפיל פון יראת־הכבוד און באַ־וואונדערונג פאר דער יידיש־טרא־דיציאנעלער־עטיק, פילאָזאפישער־פארמולירונג און לעבנס־באגעגנ.

הרב אביגדור הייבט אָן פון פר־שה בראשית און מיט יעדער פרשה אנטפלעקן זיך פאַרן לייענער ברייט טע האָריזאָנטן פון לעבנס־פילאָזא־פיע, לעבנס־חכמה און לעבנס־עטיק אין הסכם מיט פסיכיש־איינגעבוי־רענע איינשאפטן פון דער מענטש־לעכער נאטור: די אבות, אברהם, יצחק און יעקב; די אמהות שרה, רבקה, רחל ולאה; די שטורמישע עפאָכע פון משה רבנו, ווי ארכי־טעקטן פון א ספעציפישן יידישן לעבנס - באגעגנ, יידישער לעבנס־עטיק און יידישער אמונה, — וועי־רן געשילדערט און פארגעשטעלט ווי פראַקטאטיפן פון אידעאלאָגן, לערער און פרעדיקער פון אייביקע אמתן; און דאָס ווערט דורך הרב אביגדור געמאכט מיט דיסציפלי־נירטע לאגיק, קינסטלערישן ריטם און סטיל.

א שילדערונג, אן עפיזאָד, א דערציילונג פון אלענאריישער באַ־דייטונג, — ווערן דורך זיינע פאר־מולירונגען דערהויבן צו א סים־טעם און מעטאָד, צו לעבנס־נאָר־מען אויף יסודות פון הומאניזם, מענטשלעכקייט און סאציאלן גע־וויסן; א באגעמונג פון אונדזער מוטער שרה, א באמערקונג פון אברהם אבינו וועגן דער פאזיציע און אויפגאבע פון דער לעבנס־באגלייטערן, — און הרב אביגדור אנטוויקלט א פרעכטיקע פארמולי־רונג פון יידישן סטאטוס פון מאן און פרוי אין דער פאמיליע, פון דער אידעאלער יידישער משפחה־אינסטיטוציע, מיט דער אויסשטרא־לונג פון גייסטיקייט, ציבאַוואוסט־זיניקייט און דערהויבנקייט פון בויי־דע פאמיליע־שותפים.

אן עפיזאָד, אן אינצידענט מיט דער גויאישער וועלט פון דער בראַ־שית־עפאָכע — און עס ווערט פארמולירט און פעסטגעשטעלט דער גורל פון ייד צווישן די פעל־קער פון דער וועלט פאר אלע דו־רות. די יידישע יום־טובים, יידי־שע ריטואלן — באהויכט הרב אביגדור מיט וויזיע און שוואונג פון גייסטיקער דערהויבנקייט און שלימות פארן וואוילזיין פון דער מענטשהייט, שלום און ברידערלעכ־קייט, עקאָנאָמישע גלייכגעוויכט און ישרדיקע מענטשלעבע צווישן־בא־ציונגען.

עס איז נישט מיין אויפגאבע צו געבן אן אויסשפנדיקע, אלזייטי־קע קריטישע אפהאנדלונג פון די צוויי בענד „אין וואָרט און שריפט" פון הרב אביגדור, — דאָס איז אין דער קאמפעטענץ פון ספע־ציאליסטן, ליטעראטור־קריטיקער. מיין אויפגאבע איז א ספעציעלע: איך האָב א שווערע טענה צו הרב אביגדור, און ער בכבודו ובעצמו איז בארופן די טענה צו פארענט־פערן.

זייט פיר יאָר, פארמאנענט און אונטערברעכונגען, גיט הרב אביגדור יעדן זונטיק א לעקציע איבער פילאָזאפיע און יהדות. דאָס איז ניט נאָר א געשעענים פאר דעם קליינעם מעקסיקאנער יידישן ישוב — דאָס וואָלט געווען א סענ־סאציע אויך פאר ישראל, ניו־יארק און בוענאָס־אירעס. זיינע שקא־דעמישע לעקציעס זיינען פערל פון יידישן דענקען און פילאָזאפיע אין אלגעמיין. עס וועט נישט זיין אי־בערגעטריבן, ווען איך וועל באַ־טאָנען, אז פיל פון זיינע לעקציעס זיינען פון אומשאצבארן ווערט און העכסטער וויכטשאפטלעך־פילאָזא־פישער קוואליטעט. ווען דאָס וואָלט געווען פארבונדן מיט אן אויסגא־בע פון טויזנטער דאלאר צו געבן די געלעגנהייט א יידישן ישוב אויסצוהערן און גענימן פון זיינע געניאלע לעקציעס, — וואָלט יע־דער פריי־ווילליקער בייטראג צום זעכציקיערקן יובילי פון הרב אביגדור און דריי־יארקן פע־ריאָד פון זיינע לעקציעס אין „קדי־מה", איז באשלאָסן געווארן בקוי־רם, אז די לעקציעס זאלן דערשיי־נען אין א בוך־אויסגאבע. דאָס וואָלט בלי ספק געווען א וויכ־טיקער בייטראג צו דער יידישער ליטעראטור פון אונדזער צייט. הרב אביגדור איז געווען צופריידן און איינשטימיק דאָס צו רעאליזירן, ער האָט פארזיכערט, אז די טעקס־טן פון אלע לעקציעס זענען ביי אים אפגעהיט. בין איצט אבער האָט ער עס ניט פארווירקלעכט.

מיר באגריסן אונדזער חשובן מרא דאתרא הרב אביגדור מיט זייטע צוויי ביכער „אין וואָרט און שריפט"; אבער פון אויסערגעווייני־לעכער וויכטיקייט וואָלט געווען, ווען ער פילט אוים דעם באשלוס און פארעפנטלעכט זיינע לעקציעס אין א בוך־אויסגאבע.

עס איז צום באדויערן, אז די ווערטפולע לעקציעס, וועלכע זענען אן אינווסטירונג פון ענערגיע, מיפולער ארבעט און אינטעלעק־טועלער שאפונג, זאלן בלייבן אין כתב־יד. זיינען די לעקציעס קאָנ־סטרוקטיוו און באלערנד, דארף אויך די אויסגאבע אין בוך־פארם אויפגענומען ווערן אין א קאָנ־סטרוקטיוון גייסט, ספעציעל פון דער רבנישער משפחה.

הרב אביגדור האָט שוין דורכגע־טראגן פארלאג־פראבלעמען אין מעקסיקע. און אויב זייַנע א פאר־ענטפערונג פאר ניט אוים אוים־פירן דעם עפנטלעכן באַ־שלום וועט ער פארבינדן מיט פארלאג־שווערישקייטן, — וואָרף איך קאטעגאריש אפ דעם ארגו־מענט. עס איז דער וואונטש פון זיינע פילצאליקע צוהערער, און עס איז דער פארלאנג פון דעם ישוב, זיינע לעקציעס צו פארעפנטלעכן אין א בוך־אויסגאבע. הרב אביג־דור איז ביכולת דאָס צו פארווור־קלעכן און באַרייכערן די יידישע ליטעראטור, מיט א וויכטיקער שא־פונג, סיי פארן יידישן מאסן־לייע־נער סיי פארן יידישן אינטעלי־גענט און וויסנשאפטלער.

פֿאַפּיר און פּאַרמעט

פון חיים ליבערמאן

פּורים לייענט מען די מגילה. לייענט מען זי פון פּ א ר ט.

תשעה באב לייענט מען „איכה". לייענט מען עס פון א חומש אדער תנ"ך, דאס הייסט פון פּ א פּ י ר.

איז די קשיה: ביידע זאכען געפינען זיך אין תנ"ך; ביידע זאכען זיינען דערויבער גלייך חיוליג; פּאַרוואָס זשע זאָגט מען די קינה „איכה" פון פּאַפּיר, און די פּורים'דיגע מגילה מעג מען זאָגען נאָר פון פּאַרמעט?

דידאוויגע אַלטע קשיה פרעגט הרב דר. יעקב אביגדור אין אייערע פון זיינע דריי ספרים וואָס זיינען אַרויס, אין אידיש, אונטער'ן נאָמען „אין שריפט און וואָרט". און ער ברענגט דעם ענטפער פון אַן אַלטען פּוסק, דעם „לבוש". וועלכער האָט געזאָגט, אַז די סופרים האָבען ניט איינגעשטעלט צו זאָגען „איכה" פון קיין פּאַרמעט, ווייל זיי זיינען גע־וועז פּול מיט גלויבען, אַז די מעשה פון „איכה" האָט געטראָפען בלויז אין טאָל און וועט זיך מער ניט איבער'חזר'ען, און אַז תשעה באב וועט ניט אייביג זיין א טרויער טאָג, נאָר וועט נאָך פּאַרוואַנדעלט ווערען אין א טאָג פון פרייד, ווען די גאולה וועט קומען. פּורים אָבער וועט קיינ־מאָל ניט בטל ווערען, ווייל אַזעלכע געשעהענישען ווי אין מגילת אסתר וועלען זיך איבער'חזר'ן פון ציים צו ציים. דערפאר האָט מען די גע־שיכטע פאַרשריבען אויף פּאַרמעט.

הרב אביגדור, וועלכער איז דורכגענאַנגען דעם היטלער־גיהנם אין דער לעצטע צייט פון דער בריט, באטראַכט דאָן די מעשה אין מגילה אין ליכט פון דעם היטלער־חורבן, אין ער ברענגט אַרויס אייניגע זעהר טיפזיניגע און איבערראַשענדיגע געדאַנקען.

מגילת אסתר, שרייבט ער, איז פון ליטעראַרישען שטאַנדפונקט, א מייסטערווערק. די געשטאַלטען זיינען כמעט ווי לעבעדיגע און די ביל־דער זיינען גמאַלען מיט גרויס קינסטלעריישקייט. דאָך, דער תוך פון דער מעשה איז תמיד געווען א היפּש ביסעל אומפאַרשטענדליך. למשל: המן דערצעהלט דעם קעניג, אַז ס'איז פאַראן א פאָלק וואָס לעבט צוזייט אין צושפרייט איבער די הונדערט זיבען און צוואַנציג מדינות פון זיין אימפּעריע, און דעם מלך לויבט ניט „לחניהם", זיי זיי צו לאָזען. דערפאר זאָל אַרויסגענעבען ווערען א דעקרעט „לאבדם", זיי אומצוברענגען, און ער, המן, וועט אריינבאצאָלען דעם קעניג'ס קאַסע צען טויזענט צענטנער זילבער.

קומט צוגעהן דער מחבר און פרעגט: וואָס איז די באדייטונג פון די ווערטער „דעם קעניג לויבט ניט זיי צו לאָזען"? און וויי אזוי פון פאַרוואָס האָט המ'ן געלויבט צו באצאָלען אזוי פיל זילבער זיי אומצו־ברענגען? פונוואַנען וועט ער נעמען די צען טויזענט צענטנער זילבער? פון זיין אייגענער קאַסע? פאַרוואָס איז ער גרייט אונטצוקומענדען אזא גרויסע סומע? צוליב זיין פּערזענליכער שנאה? מיט אזא „פערזענלי־כען" פּאַראַלאַג קומט מען ניט צו קיין קעניג.

דאָן דערצעהלט די מגילה, אַז דער קעניג האָט אייניגעמאָל צו שרייבען און צו התמ'ענען „והעם לעשות בו כטוב בעיניך" — א דער־לויבעניש המ'ן, אַז ער קען טאָן מיט דעמאָלטיגען פאָלק וואָס ער וויל. אויב אזוי, וויי קומט עס, אַז נאָכ'ן שרייבען און נאָכ'ן התמ'ן אזא גזר דין, און נאָכ'ן גרויסישקיין פון די לויפערס און קוריערען האָט קיין איד דערפון ניט געוואוסט? בלויז איין מרדכי האָט געוואוסט, און אפילו אסתר המלכה האָט נאָריכ'ט געוואוסט...

נאָך א קשיה ארט אונזער מחבר, הרב אביגדור: דער עפיזאָד מיט מרדכי'ן און דעם קויזעלכיכען פערד. ווי קומט עס אַז דער קעניג, נאָכ'ן אויסערשרייבען דעם גזר דין אויפ'ן גאַנצען אידישען פאָלק, און וויסענדיג אַז מרדכי איז א איד — וויי קומט עס וואָס ער האָט באַפוילען המ'ן צו נעמען דעם איד מרדכי און אים פירען אויף דעם קויזעלי־כען פערד? המן פּראָטעסטירט נאָרניט: ס'טויטש, מרדכי באַלאַנגט דאָך צו דעם פאָלק וואָס מיר האָבען ביידע באשלאָסען אויסצורא־טען פון דער וועלט?!

דאָן קומט דער העכסטער פונקט. דער קעניג, המן און אסתר זיי צען ביי דער סעודה, און אסתר קומט ארויס מיט רייד. שטעלט דער קעניג ארויס א פּאַר קעלבערנע אויגען און פרעגט תמ'ענדיג: „מי הוא זה ואיזה הוא", ווער איז עס וואָס האָט געוואָגט צו פּאַראַטאָטען אזא פּלאָן? גלייך ער וויים נעבער נאָרניט! ער האָט דאָך אליין אוי־טערגעשריבען דעם דעקרעט!

וווייטער באַמערקט הרב אביגדור און זאָגט: אומפּאַרשטענדליך איז אויך די באַמערקונג פון אסתר ביי דער סעודה וועז זי זאָגט „ואילו לעבדים ולשפחות נמכרנו החרשתי" — וועז מיר וואָלטען, הייסט עס, פּאַרקויפט געווארען פּאַר קעלבט און דינסטען וואָלט איך געשוויגען: וואָס עפעס אונטערקויפען א נעדאַנק פון פּאַרסיפען איידען פּאַר קנעכט און דינסטען? ווי קען א שטאָלצע אידישע טאַכטער זאָגען, אַז זי וואָלט אויסגעגאַנגען אויף פּאַרקויפען איר פּאָלק פּאַר קנעכט און פּאַר דינסטען?

אויף די אלע פראגען ענטפערט דער חשוב'ער מחבר, אַז לויט מדרשים, האָט די מעשה גאַנץ אַנדערש פּאַסירט. המן, קומענדיג צום קעניג, האָט ניט פּאַראַלאַנגט אפען און דירעקט ערלויבעניש אויסצו־הרג'ענען דאָס אידישע פּאָלק. המן האָט גע'מענה'ט ווי א „שטאַטס־מאַן": ס'איז דאָ א גאַנץ פּאָלק, וואָס בראַנגט דעם שטאַט קיין שום נוצען ניט. עס געהט אַרום לוידיג, עס איז ניט פּראָדוקטיוו, לויגט ניט דעם קעניג „לחניהם", זיי צו לאָזען גלאַט אזוי לעבען, אהן נוצלויכער אַרבעט. דערויבער זאָל אַרויסגענעבען ווערען א דעקרעט „לעבדם" — צו מאַכען זיי אַרבעטען! המן האָט דעם קעניג געזאָגט „לעבדם" מיט אַן „עין", ניט „לאבדם" מיט אַן „אלף"? מיט אַן „אלף" מיינט — פּורים לייענט מען די מגילה. לייענט מען זי פון פּ א ר ט.

תשעה באב לייענט מען „איכה". לייענט מען עס פון א חומש אדער תנ"ך, דאס הייסט פון פּ א פּ י ר.

איז די קשיה: ביידע זאכען געפינען זיך אין תנ"ך; ביידע זיינען דערויבער גלייך חיוליג; פּאַרוואָס זשע זאָגט מען די קינה „איכה" פון פּאַפּיר, און די פּורים'דיגע מגילה מעג מען זאָגען נאָר פון פּאַרמעט?

דידאוויגע אַלטע קשיה פרעגט הרב דר. יעקב אביגדור אין אייערע פון זיינע דריי ספרים וואָס זיינען אַרויס, אין אידיש, אונטער'ן נאָמען „אין שריפט און וואָרט". און ער ברענגט דעם ענטפער פון אַן אַלטען פּוסק, דעם „לבוש". וועלכער האָט געזאָגט, אַז די סופרים האָבען ניט איינגעשטעלט צו זאָגען „איכה" פון קיין פּאַרמעט, ווייל זיי זיינען גע־וועז פּול מיט גלויבען, אַז די מעשה פון „איכה" האָט געטראָפען בלויז אין טאָל און וועט זיך מער ניט איבער'חזר'ען, און אַז תשעה באב וועט ניט אייביג זיין א טרויער טאָג, נאָר וועט נאָך פּאַרוואַנדעלט ווערען אין א טאָג פון פרייד, ווען די גאולה וועט קומען. פּורים אָבער וועט קיינ־מאָל ניט בטל ווערען, ווייל אַזעלכע געשעהענישען ווי אין מגילת אסתר וועלען זיך איבער'חזר'ן פון ציים צו ציים. דערפאר האָט מען די גע־שיכטע פאַרשריבען אויף פּאַרמעט.

הרב אביגדור, וועלכער איז דורכגענאַנגען דעם היטלער־גיהנם אין דער לעצטע צייט פון דער בריט, באטראַכט דאָן די מעשה אין מגילה אין ליכט פון דעם היטלער־חורבן, אין ער ברענגט אַרויס אייניגע זעהר טיפזיניגע און איבערראַשענדיגע געדאַנקען.

מגילת אסתר, שרייבט ער, איז פון ליטעראַרישען שטאַנדפונקט, א מייסטערווערק. די געשטאַלטען זיינען כמעט ווי לעבעדיגע און די ביל־דער זיינען גמאַלען מיט גרויס קינסטלעריישקייט. דאָך, דער תוך פון דער מעשה איז תמיד געווען א היפּש ביסעל אומפאַרשטענדליך. למשל: המן דערצעהלט דעם קעניג, אַז ס'איז פאַראן א פאָלק וואָס לעבט צוזייט אין צושפרייט איבער די הונדערט זיבען און צוואַנציג מדינות פון זיין אימפּעריע, און דעם מלך לויבט ניט „לחניהם", זיי זיי צו לאָזען. דערפאר זאָל אַרויסגענעבען ווערען א דעקרעט „לאבדם", זיי אומצוברענגען, און ער, המן, וועט אריינבאצאָלען דעם קעניג'ס קאַסע צען טויזענט צענטנער זילבער.

קומט צוגעהן דער מחבר און פרעגט: וואָס איז די באדייטונג פון די ווערטער „דעם קעניג לויבט ניט זיי צו לאָזען"? און וויי אזוי פון פאַרוואָס האָט המ'ן געלויבט צו באצאָלען אזוי פיל זילבער זיי אומצו־ברענגען? פונוואַנען וועט ער נעמען די צען טויזענט צענטנער זילבער? פון זיין אייגענער קאַסע? פאַרוואָס איז ער גרייט אונטצוקומענדען אזא גרויסע סומע? צוליב זיין פערזענליכער שנאה? מיט אזא „פערזענלי־כען" פּאַראַלאַג קומט מען ניט צו קיין קעניג.

דאָן דערצעהלט די מגילה, אַז דער קעניג האָט אייניגעמאָל צו שרייבען און צו התמ'ענען „והעם לעשות בו כטוב בעיניך" — א דער־לויבעניש המ'ן, אַז ער קען טאָן מיט דעמאָלטיגען פאָלק וואָס ער וויל. אויב אזוי, וויי קומט עס, אַז נאָכ'ן שרייבען און נאָכ'ן התמ'ן אזא גזר דין, און נאָכ'ן גרויסישקיין פון די לויפערס און קוריערען האָט קיין איד דערפון ניט געוואוסט? בלויז איין מרדכי האָט געוואוסט, און אפילו אסתר המלכה האָט נאָריכ'ט געוואוסט...

נאָך א קשיה ארט אונזער מחבר, הרב אביגדור: דער עפיזאָד מיט מרדכי'ן און דעם קויזעלכיכען פערד. ווי קומט עס אַז דער קעניג, נאָכ'ן אויסערשרייבען דעם גזר דין אויפ'ן גאַנצען אידישען פאָלק, און וויסענדיג אַז מרדכי איז א איד — וויי קומט עס וואָס ער האָט באַפוילען המ'ן צו נעמען דעם איד מרדכי און אים פירען אויף דעם קויזעלי־כען פערד? המן פּראָטעסטירט נאָרניט: ס'טויטש, מרדכי באַלאַנגט דאָך צו דעם פאָלק וואָס מיר האָבען ביידע באשלאָסען אויסצורא־טען פון דער וועלט?!

דאָן קומט דער העכסטער פונקט. דער קעניג, המן און אסתר זיי צען ביי דער סעודה, און אסתר קומט ארויס מיט רייד. שטעלט דער קעניג ארויס א פּאַר קעלבערנע אויגען און פרעגט תמ'ענדיג: „מי הוא זה ואיזה הוא", ווער איז עס וואָס האָט געוואָגט צו פּאַראַטאָטען אזא פּלאָן? גלייך ער וויים נעבער נאָרניט! ער האָט דאָך אליין אוי־טערגעשריבען דעם דעקרעט!

וווייטער באַמערקט הרב אביגדור און זאָגט: אומפּאַרשטענדליך איז אויך די באַמערקונג פון אסתר ביי דער סעודה וועז זי זאָגט „ואילו לעבדים ולשפחות נמכרנו החרשתי" — וועז מיר וואָלטען, הייסט עס, פּאַרקויפט געווארען פּאַר קנעכט און דינסטען וואָלט איך געשוויגען: וואָס עפעס אונטערקויפען א נעדאַנק פון פּאַרסיפען איידען פּאַר קנעכט און דינסטען? ווי קען א שטאָלצע אידישע טאַכטער זאָגען, אַז זי וואָלט אויסגעגאַנגען אויף פּאַרקויפען איר פּאָלק פּאַר קנעכט און פּאַר דינסטען?

אויף די אלע פראגען ענטפערט דער חשוב'ער מחבר, אַז לויט מדרשים, האָט די מעשה גאַנץ אַנדערש פּאַסירט. המן, קומענדיג צום קעניג, האָט ניט פּאַראַלאַנגט אפען און דירעקט ערלויבעניש אויסצו־הרג'ענען דאָס אידישע פּאָלק. המן האָט גע'מענה'ט ווי א „שטאַטס־מאַן": ס'איז דאָ א גאַנץ פּאָלק, וואָס בראַנגט דעם שטאַט קיין שום נוצען ניט. עס געהט אַרום לוידיג, עס איז ניט פּראָדוקטיוו, לויגט ניט דעם קעניג „לחניהם", זיי צו לאָזען גלאַט אזוי לעבען, אהן נוצלויכער אַרבעט. דערויבער זאָל אַרויסגענעבען ווערען א דעקרעט „לעבדם" — צו מאַכען זיי אַרבעטען! המן האָט דעם קעניג געזאָגט „לעבדם" מיט אַן „עין", ניט „לאבדם" מיט אַן „אלף"? מיט אַן „אלף" מיינט — אומבאַרעגענען, אויסראַטען, און מיט אַן „עין" מיינט — צו באַשעפטי־גען. דאָס הייסט, המן האָט געזאָגט: לאָז מיר, קעניג, און איך וועל זיי צווינגען צו אַרבעטען. ער וועט, הייסט עס, אַרגאַניזירען אַרבעטס־לאַגערן פאַר אידען, און פון זייער אַרבעט וועט ער אַרויסטראָגען די צען טויזענט צענטנער זילבער אין דעם קעניג'ס קאַסע.

אַבער זיין באַאַלטעניע כוונה איז געווען — דורך די אַרבעטס־לאַגערן זיי אומצוברענגען, טאָקע „לאבדם" מיט אַן „אלף". דער מלך טפּש האָט זיך אויף דעם ניט געכאַפּט. דערפאַר האָט ער מסכים גע־ווען און גענומען, טו ווי דו פאַרשטעהסט, גיב זיי טאָקע אַרבעט, פּראָ־דוקטיוויר זיי.

בלויז מרדכי האָט פּאַרשטאַנען המ'ס אמת'ע כוונה. און ער דער־קלערט עס אסתר'ן. און אסתר הייסט אַלאַרמירען דאָס פּאָלק, און פוב־דאַנען ווערען שוין אונז פּאַרענטפערט די קשיות וואָס זיינען אויבען גע־פרעגט געווארען.

עס ווערט קלאָר אסתר'ס זאָג וועגען „קנעכט און דינסטען". זי האָט אין אמת'ן געזאָגט אזוי:

וועז המן וואָלט אונז נאָר געוואָלט מאַכען פּאַר קנעכט און דינסטען, און נאָר דאָס אליין, וואָלט איך שוין געשוויגען. אָבער ער מיינט ניט בלויז אַרבעט פּאַר די אידען: ער מיינט זיי — דורך דער אַרבעט פּאַר־כיסטען. ער מיינט ניט בלויז „לעבדם", נאָר אויך „לאבדם".

דאָ ווערט דעם קעניג ערשט קלאָר ערשטען מאָל אויפגעקלערט המ'ס אמת'ער פּלאַן. איצט ווערט שוין פּאַרשטענדליך פּאַרוואָס ער האָט אויסגעשטעלט א פּאַר תמ'ענדע אויגען און געפרעגט: ווער איז דערדאָזיגער, און וואו איז ער?

דאָ ציט הרב אביגדור א פּאַראַלעל מיט דעם המן פון אונזער איי־גענער ציים, היטלער ימח שמו. היטלער האָט אויך ניט באַלד געזאָגט, אַז ער וויל אויס'הרג'ענען אַלע אידען. ער האָט בלויז געריידט פון אַר־בעטס־לאַגערן, פריער פּלאַנען די אידען דורך שווערער אַרבעט, און פון זייער אַרבעט טאָקע אויסקאַמירען „צען טויזענט צענטנער זילבער", און דערנאָך אפּקלייבען די וואָס זיינען שוין ניט פעהיג צו אַרבעטען און זיי פאַרניכטען.

עס איז דאָך א פּאָקס, באַמערקט הרב יעקב אביגדור, אַז אפילו די אידען אליין האָבען אין די ערשטע יאָרען קיין אחנונג ניט געהאַט וואָס דאָ קומט באמת פאָר, וואָס היטלער'ס אמת'ע כוונה און פּלאַן זיינען געווען. לייזדער האָט מען זיך צו שפּעט געקאַפּט. די גאַנצע וועלט האָט אַנגענומען דעם בלאַף אז היטלער וויל נאָר אידישע אַרבעט. אָבער די אַרבעטס־לאַגערן זיינען אין דער אייגענער צייט געווען פאַרניכטונגס־לאַגערן. ס'איז געווען בויידע זאַבען: „לעבדם" מיט אַן „עין", און „לאבדם" מיט אַן „אלף".

זעהען מיר, אַלזא, דורך דער וואונדערבאַרער אויסטוישונג פון דעם חשוב'ן רב און געלערנטען, וויי אזוי פריש אין ניי ס'איז די אלטע מגילת אסתר: המן חלפּט אונז פאַרשטעהן היטלער'ן, און היטלער העלפּט אונז פאַרשטעהן המ'ן. דורך היטלער'ס מעשים ווערען אונז פאַרשטענדליכער אייניגע געשעהענישען אין דער מגילה.

אט דאָס האָבען עס געמיינט אונזערע חכמים ווען זיי האָבען גע־זאָגט, אַז פורים ווועט קיינמאָל ניט בטל ווערען. דער רמב"ם האָט פאַר־בונדען פורים מיט דער אייביקייט, דערקלערענדיג אז אויב אפילו אלע ימים טובים זאָלען בטל ווערען, ווועט פורים אבער בלייבען אייביג.

פורים איז פיל בריטער און טיפער ווי יענע מעשה מיט המ'ן אליין. אפילו פאַר אונזער דור — שרייבט הרב אביגדור — וואָס האָט ווכה געווען צו מדינת ישראל, איז די מגילה זעהר אקטועל. די מדינה איז אַרומגערינגלעט מיט א סך המ'ס, און די המ'ס האָבען צוטרוי צו א סך אהשווארוש'ס טפּשים, מיט אַרמייען און טויטליכען געווער. פורים איז דערפאַר דער יום טוב וואָס איז אַנגענומען אויף אייביג ביי אידען אלע א צייכען פון האפענונג און טרייסט, אז אלע וואָס פאַרפאל־גען אידען ווערען סוף כל סוף אליין פאַרניכטעט.

הרב דר. יעקב אביגדור איז ביז דער סעודה „לחמה געווען רב הכלל פון די קהילות פון באַרוסלאַוו־דראָהאָבי־טיטש, פּוילען, און איז געווען בא־רימט ווי איינער פון די גרעסטע רבנים אין פּוילען. נאָכ'ן דורכגעהן דעם שמעלצטיגל פון דעם היטלער־חורבן איז ער ענקומען קיין אמע־ריקע. דאָ איז ער אויך שנעל באַרימט געווארען מיט זיין גרויסער לומדות אין תורה און געלערנטקייט אין וועלטליכער חכמה, און מיט א גרויסען טאַלאַנט אלס רעדנער און אלס שריפטשטעלער. ער איז עטליכע יאָר געווען רב און ראש אין ברוקלין אין ניו יאָרק, חיינט איז ער רב אין דער קהילה „בתי ישראל" אין מעקסיקא. זיינער א זוהן, הרב יצחק חיים אביגדור, איז רב אין האַרטפאָרד, קאַנעטיקאָט, אין דער „קהלת עטרת ישראל". הרב דר. יעקב אביגדור איז דער מחבר פון א גאַנצער רייע ספרים אין לשון קודש אין הלכה און דרוש, און די דריי בעזדער „אין שריפט און אין וואָרט", אין אידיש, זיינען א זאַמלונג פון דרשות און אפּהאַנדלונגען אויף די פרשות פון דער וואָך און אויף די ימים טובים, וווילכע ער האָט פאַרעפנטלאַכט אין נעררוקט אין דער פרעסע, זינט ער איז רב אין מעקסיקא. דאָס זיינען דריי בעזדער פול מיט גרויסען גייסט, געשעפט פון דריי קוואַלען: תורה, חכמה און חורבן...

אויגדור־מעקסיקו

מנחם מענדל שניאורסאהן
ליובאוויטש

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ב"ה, ימי הסליחות, ה'תשי"ח
ברוקלין, נ.י.

הרה"ג הוו"ח אי"א נו"נ עוסק
בצרכי צבור כו'
מוה' יעקב שי'

שלום וברכה!

לקראת השנה החדשה, הבאה עלינו ועל כל ישראל לטובה ולברכה, הנני בזה להביע ברכתי לו ולכל אשר לו, ברכה כתיבה וחתימה טובה לשנה טובה ומתוקה בגשמיות וברוחניות.

בכבוד ובברכה

אשר בת"ח קבלת שני ספריו.

ובפ"ע נשלח לכת"ר ממה שהו"ל לאחרונה.

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הרב הגאון הנודע לשם
תהלה וכו' אי"א מוה"ר
יעקב שי' אבידור

שלום וברכה:

לקראת השנה החדשה, חבאה עלינו ועל כל ישראל לטובה ולברכה, הנני בזה להביע ברכתי לו ולכל אשר לו, ברכה כתיבה וחתימה טובה לשנה טובה ומתוקה בגשמיות וברוחניות.

בכבוד ובברכה

יוסף אליהו ב"ר אליעזר ז"ל הענקין
(לפנים רב בסמאליאן ושאר קהלות)
מחבר ספר „פירושי איברא"
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דוב בעריש וויידענפעלד
ניד דק"ק טשעבין ורים דישיבת כותב מיעצב
כעת בעיה"ק ירושלים תובב"א
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לזכר פוז א צדיק הדור

פון — יהושע שוחט

יח' אדר ווערט א יאָר ווי הרב ר' יעקב אביגדור ז"ל האָט זיך געוענט מיט דער וועלט, איבערגעזאָט דאָס לעבן פאר אלע לעבעדיקע, און איז אַוועק אין דער וועלט פון אייביקייט, צוזאמען מיט אלע צדיקים, וואָס גייען אַוועק פון דער וועלט בעון הדור.

און וועו אזא קליין מענטשעלע, ווי איך ווייל עפעס זאָגן לכבודו, בעת זיין יאָרצייט, באפאלט מיר פּחד, באשאכטנדיק כּי אני, איך זאָל אָנרירן אזא טעמע, צוגיין צו אזא שאפע פול מיט ספרים, האָט געטריפט מיט תורה, און האָט אין זיין מוח געקענט אדורכפירן אלע לשטתות פון יעדן תנא ואמורא, ראשונים ואחרונים; א צאָן אויף א צאָן קלאפט אין מיר, איך האָב געזוכט אן עצה מיט וואָס זיך צו ראָטעווען מיין לאָגע, איך זאָל באשיצט ווערן מיט א העכערער קראפט צו קענען רעדן וועגן הרב ז"ל.

האָב זיך באמיט און געפונען; בעת דער גאון ר' עקיבא אייגער ז"ל האָט געוואָלט מספּיד זיין דעם ווילנער גאון ז"ל, האָט ער מורא געהאָט טאָמער וועט ער זאָגן ווייניקער שבח ווי ער האָט פאַרדינט, האָט ער צוגעבראכט א גמרא: די גמרא זאָגט: „אחים לי בהספּדאי דהתם קאיתנא", דאָס הייסט: דער נפטר געפינט זיך דאָרט ווו דער הספּד ווערט געמאכט און זאָגט: דערוואָרעמט מיך מיט דעם הספּד, און דער דין איז אז בפניו, אין די אויגן זאָגט מען נאָר מקצת שבחו.

אויף אזא פאַרנעם אין תורה ווי עס איז געווען הרב אביגדור ז"ל, וועמען מיר האָבן געהאָט די זכיה צו האָבן צווישן אונז זעכצן יאָר, די קרוין פון דעם יידישן הינגן ישוב, זעכצן יאָר, מער האָט הקבה' נישט געוואָלט, האָט דער נביא ישעיה געזאָגט: הצדיק אבד ואין איש שם על לב, ואנשי חסד נאספו באין מבין, כי מפני הרעה נאסף הצדיק.

מפני הרעה נאסף הצדיק, טייטשען אלע: דער צדיק ווערט צוגענומען פון דער וועלט ער זאָל נישט זען די צרות.

אונזער דור טראָגט איבער צרות אריבער די כוחות, פאר אונזערע אויגן ווערט אויפגעבויט די יידישע מדינה דורך חבלי לידה של משיח, יעדן ציגל אין ישראל איז אדורכגעקנאָטן מיט יידיש בלוט, פון די קרושים וטהורים, יונגע נשמות וואָס ציען אוים זייערע העלדזער אן שום פחד און אן מורא אויף דעם יידישן פאָלק, וואָס דאָס איז דער כבוד פון נאָט.

אונזערע מוחות זענען אָרעם צו קענען גרייכן פאַרשטיין דעם אויבערשטנס וועגן.

אונזערע גרויסע מפרשי התורה האָבן אָנגעוויזן אויף דעם נאָר א ווונק: (פ' תצא) וכי יהיה באיש חטא משפט מות, והומת, ותלה עותו על העץ, אלע טויט-משפּטן וואָס דו מענטש וועסט אפּפרעגן, זאָלסטו אָנהענגען על העץ: אויף דעם חטא פון עץ הדעת.

מען קען נישט און מען טאָ נישט מהרהר זיין אויף די כּוונות פון נאָט, אָבער דער אריבעו מענטש קען זיך נישט באנוגענען בלויז מיט דעם תירוץ פון על העץ דאָס איז דאָך נאָר אן אנווייזונג אויף דער סיבה, אָבער עס בלייבט דאָך די קשיה אויף דעם פּלאָץ, פאַרוואָס אזא גדול ווי עס איז געווען הרב אביגדור ז"ל, א נאָנצן מעת-לעת געשריבן און געלערנט תורה, האָט געקענט ביי 72 יאָר במבעית נאָך לעבן עטלעכע יאָר און פאַרשפּרייטן תורה? איז דער תירוץ ווי מיר האָבן פריער געזאָגט, מפני הרעה! נאָר אנדערש געטייטשט: עס איז שלעכט, און דער צדיק באצאָלט.

דער ציל פון א הספּד איז צו ברענגען זיך און א צווייטן צו א, ערנסטן מאָמענט, מאכן א חשבון פון דעם לעבן, ביז צוקומען צום סוף, איז נוצלעך צו ברענגען א וואָרט פון דעם חסידישן דבין ר' מאיר פרימישליאנער ז"ל.

צוקומענדיק איינמאָל שבת, בעת קריאת התורה, צום דאָזיקן פסוק ופשט את בגדיו ולבש בגדים אחרים והוציא את הדשן אל מחוץ למחנה, האָט ער זיך שטאַרק צעווויינט און אויסגעשריען: ווי! ווי! זאָל זיך יעדער מענטש באַרעכענען און גענקען; עס וועט קומען א טאָג וועו עס וועט זיין ופשט את בגדיו מען וועט אראָפנעמען זיינע קליידער, ולבש בגדים אחרים, מען וועט אים אָנטאָן אנדערע קליידער, והוציא את הדשן מחוץ למחנה, מען וועט ארויס ציען דעם מענטשלעכן אש אונטער שטאָט.

אז מען זעט אז אזוינע מענטשן בויסער ווערן פאַרשניטן פון דער וועלט דורך דעם טויט, באדאַרף יעדער מענטש זיך פאַרטיפן אין זיך. און ווערן א חכם הרואה את הנולד, און דאָס וועט ברענגען צו לעבן ערלעך, א לעבן פון געפינען חן ביי נאָט און לייט, דער זכות פון דעם גרויסן נפטר וועט מגין זיין אויף אונזער דור, מיר זאָלן באשיצט זיין דורך דער בחינה פון הבן יקיר לי אפרים, און אז א מאָטע איז מוחל, איז זיין כבוד פאַרגעבן, מלכות ישראל זאָל זיין באשיצט מיט שלום, צוויישן דעם שלום אויף דער נאָנצער וועלט.

ת'נ'צ'ב'ה'.

Rabbi H. P. FRANK
President of the Beth Din
Jerusalem

צבי פסח הכהן פראנק
ראב"ד
בעיה"ק ירושלם תובב"א

ב"ה. ירושלם תי"ו, יום ... לחדש ... שנת תר"צ (

Address: Grand Rabbi H. P. FRANK JERUSALEM Palestine.

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ד דק"ק טשעבין ור"מ דישיבת כוכב מיעקב
בעיה"ק ירושלים תוכב"א
ב אבן שפורט 12 (רחביה)
. 7037

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מוהר"י אביגדור שליט"א.

ואחדשכת"ר בידידות.

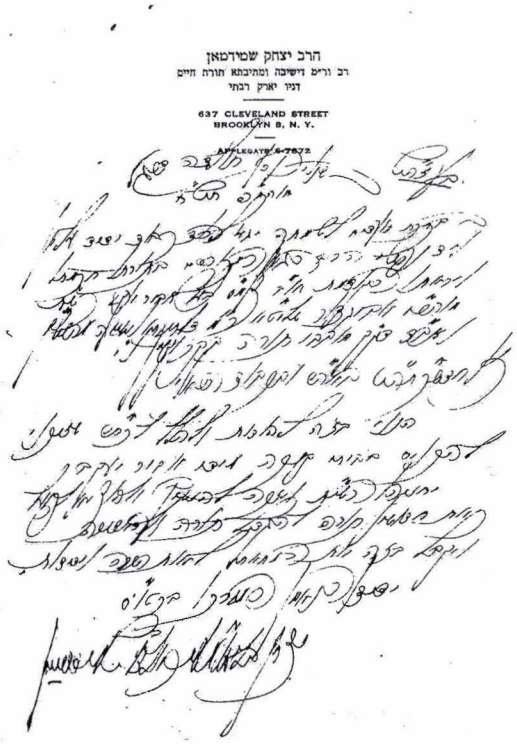
הגיעני העתק הרצאות דבריו אשר השמיע לפני קהל ועדה
יפת העם בקהלתו. ואכן נהניתי מדברי כת"ר שהנם באמת
"ם נאמנים וכלול בהם רעיון נפלא ואמיתי שזהו באמת דרך
ורה הכתובה והמסורה הסלולה לנו ממאורינו ואבותינו הקדושי
ורי דורות ותיתי לכת"ר על פירסום דברים ישרים אלו. והדברי
ה כל הך ברורים ואמתים עד אשר אי אפשר לחלות חילוקי דעות
יטה זו.

והנני מסיים בברכת גמר טוב תורה על ברכות כת"ר
ומשיב ברכה מקרב לב ומצפה תמיד להיות שומע ולהשמי
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הרב יצחק שמידמאן
רב ורים דישיבה ומתיבתא תורת חיים
דנין יארק רבתי

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טלפון 5393

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TEL. ORchard 4-2540

ב"ה י"ט שבט
תשי"ט

לכבוד הגאון איש האשכולות מהר"י אביגדור שליט"א
שלו' וברכת כל טוב.

[illegible] ברכה להרה"ג לנסיעתו להעיר והמדינה
מעקסיקו - יהי רצון שילך בכחו וכשרונו הכבירים
להושיע את ישראל, לרומם רוח התורה בקרבם ולהקים
הדת על תלה. וכבר ידענו מאנשים גדולים יחידים שהחיו
את המדינות שבאו לשם ברוח התורה והמסורה.
ויהי כן כאחד מהם. כי בלי מסירה נפשו כזו
אין חשבון [illegible]
ורק הרוצה להחכים - את אחרים - [illegible]!
ותיכף לברכה רוחנית יבורך גם בגשמיות בשלום
ובכבוד וכל טוב. [illegible]!
דכבוד יוסף אלי' הענקין

משום חולשה - קשה לי לבוא [illegible] הפרידה - ואת הסליחה.
כן איננו נוהגים לבוא לעתונות דברכות!

אהרן הלוי סולובייציק
RABBI AARON SOLOVEICHIK
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דקהלת מקסיקו. שלום וברכה.

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לכת"ר בענין מצות ושאר מיני מאכלים
לחג הפסח. מובן מאליו שכת"ר
העומד בראש קהלה [illegible]
[illegible] לפני השאלה
איפה מצות ואיפה אוכל לספק
את קהלתו לקנות לחג הפסח.
לכן רבוני [illegible] לפני את עמדתי
בענין זה.
ראשית כל אודיע לכת"ר כי המאפיה
למצות של שכינו עומדת עכשיו תחת
השגחתי. בתור ממלא מקומו של
הרב ר' אשר ניסן לוין ז"ל
הנני מעיד שהמאפיה מתנהלת בתכלית
הכשרות אפילו למהדרין מן המהדרין,
כמובן הכוונה העיקרית למצה מכונה.

צבי הירש דאכאוויטץ
רב בבראנזוויל
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ב"ה ג' לחדש ניסן שנת תש"ט 11 April 1948

[illegible]

A. I. KOOK
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OF THE HOLY LAND
JERUSALEM

אברהם יצחק הכהן קוק
הרב הראשי לארץ ישראל
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בתשובה נא לחזכיר את המספר

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PHONE DAYTON 9—1753

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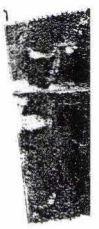
לכבוד הרבני הגביר המכובד הנדיב הפעיל איש רוח ורב פעלים להחזקת התורה ולומדיה"
כ"ש מוה"ר יחזקאל שרגא נ"י .
בורלינגמאן .

שלו"ב ברכה .

אחדשה"ט . נתכבד להודיעו שקבלנו מכם היקר יחד עם השטק ע"ס מאה דולר 100 #
נדבת לבו בעד חסוסר הקדוש „כולל אבות" לימוד ולומדים לעורך חג השצות הבעל"ם
מאד כיוון מעכ"ה את השעה כי בצירוף מזה וזהי" בידינו לימן תיכופת ללומדי הכולל
לחוג את חג השצות הבעל"ם בהרגשה־חסוך בכל בית ישראל .
בשם הלומדים הגדולים הללו הננו מביעים למעכ"ה תודה וברכה בעד נדבתו ותשתדית שם
הואיל בחסדו לבוא ולסיד בכל שנה ושנה עזרת חסוסר הגדול והקדוש הזה, שהוא חביב
ויקר לו מאד . ישלם ה" בפעלו אלפי פעמים ככה ויזכה גם לבוא להיות שותפין דאורייתא
אשר אתכם סלה שתוך רוב עושר וכבוד עבודתו .
והננו מתכבדים לבקש את מעכ"ה גם על העדיר לזכור לטובה אהחסוסר הקדוש הזה שמצבו
החמרי קשה מאד מאד . ובגלל זה יתברך את ה" ברוב חיים ושלו והצלחה רבה בכל ענייני
וכל טוב ואושר סלה ובחג שמח וכשר כנפו ונפש טוקיוו ומכובד בעריכו הרם

בכבוד ויקר ובברכת התורה הכ

מנהל הכולל





הרב שמואל אלטער
מחבר ספרי „לקוטי בתר לקוטי"
על כל התורה

RABBI SAMUEL ALTER
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TEL. PRESIDENT 4-3609

[illegible]

המשרד הפרטי של הרב הראשי
OFICINA PRIVADA DEL GRAN RABINO
SERRANO 959 — FONO 60269
SANTIAGO - CHILE

בע"ה יום י"ז מנחם אב תשכ"א לפ"ק

בעהי"ת
לכבוד הוד
הרב הגאון המפורסם שמו נודע ביהוד' לתורה ולתעודה
הרב דר.יעקב אביגדור שליט"א
אבד" דק"ק מעקסיקע ד.פ.
שלו' וברכה!

המעטפה על שלחני כבר זמן כביר,מזמן שקבלתי השובתו על מכתבי כי מכבדי אכבד.אבל חבילי טרדות בעבודת הצבור סבבני ועתה באתי להודות כי לא אמנע טוב מבעליו.
מכתבו הנעים מז' מנחם אב קבלתי ומובן מאליו שחבר אני לכל אשר יראון.ומהיות טוב לשלח לי מקודם כל הספרים שהם לפי מכתבו וכתב ידו במחיר 16.10 דאלארס ואשלם ע"י שער תומ"י.
ומדי קראי בהם אדבר בעדם עם האנשים שיש להם ענין להפיצם להגדיל תורה ולהאדירה.

והנני בבברכת נחמת ציון וירושלים
המכבדו ומוקירו כערכו הרם
[illegible]

הרב משה יחיאל עפשטין
אושעראווער רבי
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Grand Rabbi M. Ch. Epstein
1532 Hoe Ave. Bet. 172nd & 173rd Sts.,
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בעזהי"ת

ISAAC HERZOG M.A.D.LITT.
CHIEF RABBI OF THE HOLY LAND
JERUSALEM

יצחק אייזיק הלוי הרצוג
חרב הראשי לישראל
החופעה"ק ירושלים ת"ו

ב"ה א' בניסן תשי"ג.

שלום וברכה לידידי הרב הגאון הג' החכם השלם ויראת ה' אוצרו
ר' יעקב ר"ר אביגדור שליט"א.

אחדשה"ט.

סכתבו הגיעני והנני ממהר לשלוח לו את ברכתי
בלבבית להתסנותו לרב ואב"ד בק"ק מקסיקו, ד.פ. יצ"ו. ברכתי
שלוחה לכ"ג מחר גיסא ולקהלתו הכבודה הי"ו מאידך גיסא
שזכו לגברא רבה בתורה בחכמה וביראה כמותו!

יהי רצון שיהדותנו הנאמנה תפרח ותעלה מעלה
מעלה וה' ישכן שלום אמת בין אחינו בעיר הגדולה ההיא.

בברכת התורה והארץ ובברכת חג כשר ושמח
למעכ"ת ולכל הנלוים בצלו, הי"ו
ידידו מוקירו מאז בערכו הרם והנשא,

יצחק אייזיק הלוי הרצוג
ראש הרבנים לישראל
החופעיה"ק ירושלים ת"ו.

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מכסיקו.

אחדש"ת,

הריני לאשר בתודה קבלת מכתבו מיום ד' לחולף,
בצירוף נאום ההספד שלו שנשא על האי גאון ישראל, הודו,
פארו, הדרו ותפארתו מוהר"ר אהרן קוטלר זצוק"ל.

גדולה האבדה מנשוא ואין להתאושש הימנה, איננו
מוצאים ניחומים כי האבדה היא ללא תמורה ממש, חבל על
דאבדין ולא משתכחין.

התרשמתי מאד מדברי ההספד של כת"ר והעברתי
זאת את"כ לעיונו של ר' משה עקיבא דרוק שי'.

יה"ר שלא נוסיף לדאבה עוד ונזכה להתבשר
אך בטוב סלה.

ר' משה עקיבא שי' הי' אמנם חולה זמן־מה,
אולם כבר שב לאיתנו ב"ה, הוא אמר לי, כשאמרתי לו
דרי"ש כת"ר ותפיהתו על אי־שמיעתו הימנו, שבינתים
כבר כתב אפי' לכב' ובודאי כבר הספיק גם לקבל מכתבו.

בכל הכבוד,

מנחם פרוש

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רב אבד"ק פאטאק זלאטי
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Brooklyn, N. Y._____193

Reaction in Rabbinic Press

With reviews about Rabbi Avigdor and his works

From "The Hatzofe" by Akiva Zimmerman

Jewish history was fortunate to have been blessed in past generations with spiritual leaders of great knowledge, in addition to the Talmudic and Halachic treasures with a formidable knowledge of mankind's subjects like medicine (Maimonides, Nachmanides) philosophy, astronomy and others. Their influence was spread out universally, especially amongst Jews.

Regretfully, the Holocaust has destroyed most of such brilliant minds to the point that their numbers have shrunk and often completely disappeared. It is nowadays most difficult to find rabbis who are strictly observant in Judaism while, involved in teaching and study in Torah who also carry on scholarly correspondence with other colleagues.

In my younger years I met one of those rare examples by the name of Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor who was the rabbi of Drohobycz, Boryslaw before the Holocaust (he was the one who performed the marriage of Aliza and Menachem Begin, of blessed memory.)

Later, post Holocaust, Rabbi Avigdor became the Chief Rabbi of Mexico until his demise in the year 1967.

I was fortunate to meet him at a family gathering while he was visiting Israel, seeing before me a Rabbi dressed *Chassidically*, wearing a *shtreimel* on Sabbaths and

holidays and along with it drenched in literature, an author who has left more than thirty published books. The readers of the *Hatzofe* certainly remember the weekly articles that he published for *Sabbaths* and *Yom Tov*.

Imagine today, a *Belzer Chosid*, dressed like one that was a student of mathematics, theology and literature. He was able to speak Greek, Latin, Russian, French, English and Spanish...

It seems like he was out of place, seated next to the Rabbi at his table. Rabbi Avigdor was one of the inner circle of the Rabbi of Belz, Reb Aharon Rokeach, zatzal, because of their pre-war relation going back many generations. Rabbi Avigdor was ordained by the greatest of his time, like the "*Machze Avrahom*," Reb Avrum Steinberg and Rabbi Maer Arik of Tarnow and along with it he was the bearer of a Doctorate in Philosophy title from the University of Lvov on his work "Metophysika in Jewish Knowledge and Its Influence on the New Philosophy" in 1931. (Free translation from Hatzofe ,1950)

Boston University

University Professors
745 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02215
617/353-4566

Elie Wiesel, *Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities*

Rabbi Dr. Isaac C. Avigdor's biography of his late father, "Faith After the Flames" is a poignant and eloquent tribute to a great spiritual leader whose commentary on the pain and suffering Jews had endured, during the tragic Holocaust years, remains a lesson of courage and faith, to be shared by students and teachers alike.

Elie Wiesel

Good Deeds Aren't Forgotten

Hundreds of books have been written about peoples experiences during the Holocaust. I was thumbing through one such book recently, entitled: "To Vanquish The Dragon"-Feldheim Publishers, 1991 written by Pearl Benisch and much to my amazement, on page 290 the following paragraph was documented. This is rare testament to my sainted Father's work. Thank you Pearl for remembering him in your book.

"Soon after the war, UNRRA representatives came to visit us in the Bergen-Belsen DP camp. The hall was packed; everyone who could walk, came. One representative, a tall, handsome middle-aged man, spoke with warmth and compassion to the lonely people. "I am one of you," he cried. "I went through the hell you did. I was liberated only a few months ago, but look at me! I'm already back on my feet. You, too, will get well and start a new life." Suddenly he raised his voice. "Look there in the back: there is a group of Beth Jacob girls who sustained me and my colleagues at the library in Plashow. It is by their virtue that I am able to address you today." We looked up in bewilderment: who was this uniformed man? It was Rabbi Yaakov Avigdor, the Drohobiczer Rav, for whom we had "organized" extra food. How strange are the ways of Providence, that allowed us to peek behind the curtain to catch a glimpse of Divine Justice."



Rabbi Yaakov Avigdor, 1945
"All dressed up in his new uniform."

Another Page from the Buchenwald Diary

I frequently write in the Jewish Press. From time to time, I get responses to my articles. This response touched me to the core when I received it. It made me thank Hashem *for the unknown, good-hearted people who extended help to the survivors of the* Shoah *at moments when they were desperately in need of material things.*

Rabbi Isaac C. Avigdor

Dear Rabbi Avigdor,

When I read the article in the Jewish Press about your father of blessed memory, I remembered an incident in 1945, either in Brussels, Belgium or Frankfurt, Germany. At that time, I was in the U. S. Army and assigned to the Chaplain's office in the European Theatre of Operations. There, I was approached by a man, dressed in rags. He handed me a card, which read, "Chief Rabbi Capt. Dr. Jacob Avigdor." I was ashamed to see such a great rabbi dressed so miserably. I told him to come back to me later in the afternoon. Quickly, I approached various officers in the unit, and obtained every article of clothing, shoes, and Officer's hat I could find. When your father returned, I gave him the clothing and I can't tell you how elated he was!

He couldn't believe his eyes! Well, when he was all dressed up in that new uniform, handsome and tall, he certainly made quite an impression befitting his position. Restoring his dignity was one of the great moments in my life. Subsequently, many years later, I did see your father in a Shule in New York but I did not mention this incident to him. Just seeing him again gave me an immense feeling of inner satisfaction and pride.

With best wishes for a very happy Shavuos Holiday.

Sincerely yours,

Haskell Hollander

Books & Pamphlets By The Same Author

Kol Yitzchok The Voice of Isaac, Talmudic discourse, (Hebrew) Drohobycz, Poland -1933

Treren Nisht Fartrikente Yiddish poems, Antwerp, Belgium -1945

Ten for Two, Sermons for All Holidays, Judaica Press (English) Mexico - Hartford -1960

Christianity in Light Of Halacha (Hebrew) Mexico - Hartford, CT - 1962

Six Reasons Why You Should Keep Kosher (English) Hartford, CT -1965

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Hakol B'seder, Record, Family Model Seder -1970

From Prison to Pulpit, Sermons - English Sheingold Publisher -1975

Holy Wedlock, Wedding Traditions (English) -1977

One of the Holy Cast, Sermons (English) Judaica Press - 1987

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"וו החיבור"

"VUV HACHIBUR"

The Hebrew letter of continuance

"Vuv Hachibur"

The Hebrew Letter of Continuance

We the Jewish people are different from all other nations in the world historically, religiously and primarily linguistically. Hebrew is unlike any other spoken language.

Mankind has bestowed upon us the honorable title of being called "the people of the book." The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, making it a holy scripture forever. No other language possesses such a sanctity.

Hebrew offers a list of various differences, which usually stand out as stumbling-blocks in general literature. The differences are the grammar, the spelling, and the use of consonants without vowels, making Hebrew appear like shorthand.

The Bible should not be read quickly or superficially like any other book. It has to be studied. There have been many translations, throughout time, which some consider accurate or inaccurate. Each, presenting various problems, causing copious errors, scribal emendations and interpretations.

The Hebrew language is also condensed. It takes less time and effort to write or read something in Hebrew. Aside from the brevity and the succinctness, the absence of vowels and the capacity of using letters as numbers, indeed becomes complicated.

Hebrew is called "Lashon Hakodesh" not only because it is the language of the Torah, but linguistically, it has a body and a soul. The body of the language can be found in any dictionary or grammar book but the soul is the spirit, inherent both in a revealed and in a hidden fashion.

Deeper meanings can be elicited by means of illusions, mystical interpretations, acronyms and gematriaos (numeric values). The phenomenon

that words contain moral teachings, metaphysical concepts and mystical ideas has no parallel in any other literature.

For example, there is one Hebrew letter in it's alphabet that can play tricks with whole words and sentences, influencing their meaning, their tense, and changing it from past to future, using it as a continuous following to nouns or verbs.

I have taken the privilege of adding to father's book a collection of my essays written under his influence and in many instances with his own participation in the action. I have picked the topics because of their general interest and their novel conclusions and surprise endings.

I call this introductory chapter, with a technical term from Hebrew grammar called a "vuv hachibur" because of the classical role that the letter "vuv" plays and its ways of connecting and attaching. My father, of blessed memory, had a special way of clinging to me throughout life, despite our geographical distances. His impact on me is ever-present in his role as my major teacher and colleague when we studied together. He was my father, "chaver" and "brother in arms" during the trials and tribulations of the holocaust years and beyond. We were "achim l'tzorah mechubar" (brothers in trouble connected) walking hand in hand towards the, "survival day", and away from the nightmares we witnessed.

Rabbi Isaac C. Avigdor

Religious Observances in Buchenwald

From the Luach to legendary Sabbath services, to weekly Torah readings, to matzo baking, and Tefillin

The Jewish calendar known in Hebrew as a Luach, has for ages shielded and supported the Jewish people.

The unusual importance of the calendar is most evident by the fact that the text in the Bible (Exodus 12:2) relates to the lunar order by saying, "this month is necessary for you". The fact is that chronologically the *Luach* is the first mitzvah listed as a mandate in the Bible, (Exodus 12:2) and therefore had to be given before the Ten Commandments, in order that the Jews should become acquainted with the spirit of the Ten Commandments which were actually delivered three months later.

It will be easier to understand and evaluate the importance of our calendar by studying the history of anti-Semitism. Many restrictions on the practice of Judaism were directed against the Jewish calendar. Haman used it in his astrological calculations to determine when it would be lucky for him to annihilate Jews. Antiochus, the Syrian tyrant in Maccabean times, used the calendar in his attempt to exterminate us. The first three letters of the name *Chashmonai* are the initials of the words: *chodesh*, Shabbos, and moed (month, Sabbath and holiday, forbidden to be observed.)

Spanish and Portuguese Morranos at the time of the Inquisition risked their lives to find out the correct date for *Kol Nidrei*, so they could go into hiding

to the catacombs in order to be able to observe the Day of Atonement.

In modern times, Stalin and his henchmen chose to attack our calendar during seventy long years of Communism. The *Yevsekes* (Jewish Communists) sought to destroy every vestige of Shabbos as a seventh day of the week by forming a five days a week calendar so that Shabbos would occur on various days of the week. Our enemies of old times understood that without a Jewish calendar, Jews would surely become all mixed up and the Sabbath and holidays would all be forgotten.

The Nazis stripped us naked and confiscated all our belongings including books, notes, pictures, calendars and burned them up, therefore no printed *Luach* survived the German occupation since the year 1940.

The Luach that my father made upon arriving in Buchenwald was a masterpiece. It was hand-written on yellow paper taken from one of the four layers of a cement bag. It was clearly legible, each letter written smooth as a pearl. When my father was freed by the American Army this calendar survived along with him, escaping the gas chambers and crematoria, later to become recognized as one of the most valuable historic document of the holocaust. The original copy was received ceremoniously by Israel's Chief Rabbi Meir Lau and Dr. Joseph Burg, president of Yad Vashem museum, and was submitted to the Holocaust Archives in Jerusalem, where it can be viewed under the registered number 10154. It is historically, the only calendar of its kind and it served hundreds of inmates of the camps to keep track of their yahrzeits, Sabbaths and holidays.

In fact, Prof. Elie Wiesel has written to me saying, "Your father's calendar is a stunning document of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. I have studied and analyzed it personally with fascination."

Mr. Eli Zborowski, chairman of The International Society of Yad Vashem, acknowledged receipt of the calendar and wrote: "Your submission to Yad Vashem of the original hand written Hebrew calendar prepared by your father, Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor, in the Buchenwald concentration camp, represents the unchallenged document of spiritual resistance and is now proudly part of Yad Vashem's archival material. It is proof that the heroism to keep Judaism alive was upheld by some, even in the Camps, under most inhumane circumstances."

Wherever Jews lived, they always needed a calendar to decide when a

yahrzeit or a holiday would occur. Before World War II, even the poorest Jew bought a luach for his home. After the Nazi onslaught, one of the greatest ordeals was not having a luach.

The existence of my father's calendar quietly and secretly became known amongst the Jewish prisoners, who would come to barrack #67, where my father was assigned in order to visit and ask questions. They mostly came on Sundays when there was no mandatory work done except when called upon for special duties by the commander.

The interest and success of the *luach* led to another, much more dangerous activity in the Buchenwald concentration camp. My father found several individuals who had deep religious convictions and who were even ready to endanger their lives, and attend an early short Sabbath service in the morning. Amongst these individuals were several landsmen from Drohobycz who, from the first moment that father arrived, extended special care and concern to him. This project was, not only a forbidden act to carry out according the German rules but, if discovered by the S.S., those involved would be culpable to punishment of torture and even death.

In addition to the dangerous complications to just congregate, the small group needed someone to conduct services. There were no prayer books available, no Torah Scrolls to read the weekly portion from, nor even a printed copy of the Pentateuch.

Luckily, my father was ready for this. He offered to conduct services, and the prayers were repeated responsively with the participants. He recited the portion of the week by heart to the amazement and astonishment of all. He gave *aliyos* to individuals, permitting them to make the two Torah blessings without the presence of an actual Torah Scroll. He permitted them to say *kaddish* for the dead. There, were of course no *tallesim*, nor any other religious articles. The whole service lasted no longer than a half an hour, which often included a short sermon.

Amongst the people of the minyon was a famous writer, presently the editor of The Yiddish Vort, Mr. Joseph Friedensohn, who has described these episodes in more detail, in a series of his articles.

Regarding the observance of *kashrus*, each Wednesday, the camp officially offered a sweet barley soup. There were usually scuffles amongst the prisoners to receive the thicker part of the soup, that settled on the bottom of the pot.

Those who were first in line got only the thin top portion of the soup. For a while, we had a Jewish chef who prepared one soup kettle with cabbage that did not contain any meat in it and distributed it to selected *kosher* observant people that he knew.

Generally, observant Jews exchanged cigarettes and non-kosher soup for a portion of bread. This common custom of exchanging food for cigarettes resulted in thousand of deaths. Some preferred smoking to eating, which made them starve to death because of this addiction.

From father's "*luach project,*" evolved the Sabbath service attendances, which was then followed by matzo baking before Passover. The matzo was about the size of a half dollar coin.

To conclude this chapter of religious observances in Buchenwald, it is of major importance to record another unique historical fact. One day in the fall of 1945, a transport of several thousand Jews arrived from Lodz to Buchenwald because the Germans liquidated the Lodz ghetto. A few days later, someone approached my father and whispered into his ear that he had a secret to tell him. He had been successful in smuggling a very tiny pair of *tefillin* under his arms. Afraid of being caught, he hid them in his *pritch,* which was a sack filled with straw that he slept on. Nevertheless, he was always in fear of being caught and reported to the Germans. Having heard about Rabbi Avigdor, he decided to entrust the *tefillin* to him, with a condition that the rabbi should allow him to put them on from time to time. The tefillin did not have the customary leather straps so they managed with some black shoestrings.

I recall father mentioning that due to his own dangerous situation he accepted the *tefillin* but did not allow any one else to make use of it.

I was not with my father in Buchenwald. My brother and I were sent to Mauthausen. Most of these stories are recorded by Mr. Joseph Friedensohn in his articles. I also heard about them in my camp from other prisoners. Father rarely spoke about it and I discovered the tefillin in the drawer of his desk in Mexico City, after his demise. I still have them in my possession.

The original *tefillin* smuggler never showed up to claim them. He most probably never survived Buchenwald.

The Miraculous Rise of Chassidism

The holocaust has succeeded in destroying six million martyrs amongst which were thousands of *Chassidim*.

What is *Chassidus* and what does it mean to be a Chassid? The answer can be found directly in the *Mishna* (Talmud Avot 13-14) listing various types of people and assorting them into classes:

A) A person who says: Mine is mine and yours is yours is an average character who displays selfishness, negating the concepts of charity and benevolence.

B) On the other hand, the statement of mine is mine and yours is mine, is the language of a person who is considered a "*rasha*".

C) A person that states: Mine is yours and yours is yours, represents correct *Chassidic* behavior.

D) A person that states: Yours is mine and mine is yours, is an ignoramus because it may lead to stealing.

The *Mishnah* also lists four types of temperaments amongst people. Hence, of the eight classes, only two types are worthy to be given the title of a *Chassid*, and two other extreme individuals are categorized as being wicked.

My father and grandfather, of blessed memory, belonged originally to a *Chassidic* movement known as Belz, which lived by very strict *Chassidic* behavior, following the teachings of the "*Rebbe.*" Father used to make pilgrimages to Belz, especially on *Shavuos* and many times he took me along. Our family grew up in that *Chassidic* spirit for many generations and during the holocaust we were heart

broken by the fact that the Belzer movement, was decimated. Belz as a city, was wiped off from the face of the earth. Most of the *Chassidim* perished and the Rebbe disappeared. (In the *Chassidic* world, the rabbi is called a "Rebbe".) Our pain was deep and personal, because the root of the meaning of the word *Chassid* referred to a person who conducted his life above the call of the normal duties of correct Torah behavior as a religious Jew. We bewailed the loss of *Chassidism* as much as the loss of members of our own family because no one believed that without a Rebbe to lead us we could ever raise a new generation of *Chassidim.*

The Germans knew that in order to facilitate their holocaust plans of totally eradicating and destroying the Jews, they must concentrate in the very beginning on the elimination of all leaders first. Accordingly, all the rabbis and *Chassidic Rebbes* were on top of the list for liquidation. Most of the time they were executed in public, in order to frighten and ward off any possible uprisings or revolution. The S. S. liquidated most of the rabbis and *Chassidic* leaders first, leaving the Jews in the communities without leaders and with no guidance. The Germans established a system, whereby the Jewish communities remained leaderless before they completed their plans of having the country "Judenrein."

Escaping the Holocaust was only possible through hiding in the forests and fields, cellars or attics or in specially built bunkers in the ground. Fortunately and miraculously, a few *Chassidic Rebbes* managed to survive the holocaust by escaping into different countries away from the center of the scenes of the massacre.

The Belzer rebbe Reb Arale Rokeach was very popular during his years of residence in Poland and had many contacts with influential Hungarian Jews who were successfully organizing the Rebbes escape to Israel. *Chassidim* led the *Rebbe* across the Hungarian borders to finally get to the Mediterranean Sea and with a small boat reach Israel.

At the very first moment of his arrival there, he immediately formed a synagogue and started a yeshiva, which today counts in the thousands of students.

After his demise, his nephew, Reb. Yissachar Ber who became the successor of his uncle, built a new Synagogue providing for a much larger capacity than the original synagogue of Belz held in Poland. Amongst the main supporters for this new project was a landsman from Drohobycz and personal friend of mine, Reb Yaakov Gold. Besides him, there was another *chaver*, Rabbi Hillel Wind, who

became the personal Gabai of both Rebbes.

The escape of the Belzer Rebbe from Europe during the Holocaust is considered in history an heroic act of saving and preserving the *Belzer Chassidus.*

There was another Rebbe who luckily escaped the Germans and eventually reached the United States, to establish a strong leadership of a *Chassidic* movement and that was the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneersohn. Today the Lubavitcher movement counts in the tens of thousands of followers with hundreds of Chabad Houses (initials standing for *Chochma, Bina* and *Da'as*)—- (wisdom, understanding, and learning) and can be seen in all parts of the world.

The center of the movement is at 770 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn and is always bubbling with various activities. The powerful influence of the Lubavitcher Rebbe is felt to this very day amongst his *Chassidim,* although he passed away ten years ago leaving no successor.

At his recent tenth yahrzeit, thousands of his people gathered at the cemetery near his graveside and in *Chabad* houses all over the world where memorial meetings for the Rebbe were held simultaneously, post mortem.

The third Rebbe to escape the Holocaust and being credited with the assurance of the continuity of *Chassidus* is Rabbi Shlomo Halberstam of Bobov. Rabbi Halberstam escaped deep into Russia where he was hiding until the end of the war and then immigrated to the United States. A Bobover Yeshiva was re-established in Boro Park, Brooklyn, New York occupying several blocks and is maintained by followers. There they educate thousands of their young students. (I was honored to speak at the dedication services of a brand new building contributed by a friend from Mexico City, Reb. Leibish Katz.)

While Belz, Bobov and Lubavitch will be recognized in the history of *Chassidus* as heroic saviors of the *Chassidic* dynasties, style of living and behavior, it is worthy to notice that none of them actually experienced the bitterness and terror, the hunger and starvation, that the holocaust survivors had suffered during the war under the Nazis.

It is in this sense that I permit myself to list my father's name along side the three rabbis who were responsible for the rebirth and resurrection of *Chassidism* immediately after the war and rose up as religious leaders and teachers of our people.

My father, Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor, was a unique rabbi who after several

years of continuous hiding in Poland, was caught by the Germans and led into the concentration camps. The Germans discovered him in a bunker in Drohobycz from where he was driven and beaten by the S. S. on to a cattle train and sent to Plashow concentration camp near Krakow, Poland. There he lingered along with thousands of other Jews for months. They later sent him to one of the most notorious concentration camps in Germany called Buchenwald, known as the slaughterhouse. He became seriously ill and was astoundingly admitted into the hospital known as "the revere" which was a separate section of the concentration camp.

No one would have ever believed, that at my father's age of 52, suffering from diabetes, hunger and starvation that he could ever get out alive from Buchenwald. He almost did not survive, but somehow, towards the end of the war, he met and was helped by a colleague Rabbi Dr. Hershel Klepfish who was the chaplain of the Polish Legion, fighting along with the British Army. Dr. Klepfish gave him the rank of Captain and did everything possible to bring about the restoration of his health. Dr. Klepfish pointed out the fact, in several of his writings, that Rabbi Avigdor was the only Polish rabbi who lived through and experienced the most horrific years of concentration camps and yet was able to reach a new life in New York, Buenos Aires and Mexico. He was the only rabbi who became the victor of Buchenwald and other *Zwangslagers* and yet did not lose any hope towards continuing life and literary works, authoring thirty new books in various languages including Spanish.

The survival of the Rebbe's Belz, Lubavitch, Bobov, Satmar, Gur among others must historically be considered as heroic events, assuring the succession of *Chassidism* even to greater heights than it was before the war.

History must also recognize the heroic act of Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor and his role in the continuity and the preservation of Judaism and Jewish life for future generations. In both cases of heroism the Germans were denied their main plan of thoroughly destroying the Jewish people. Yet the heroism of survival differs by the fact that Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor went through the most horrible pains and torture, starvations, hunger, sickness, loneliness and isolation which the Rebbes were blessed to avoid.

Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor was miraculously saved from destruction and like a monument stood up to the immediate tasks in the new role he had to face in

his career in Judaism. His writings, articles, and books will remain forever recognized as most heroic acts in the war against Germany and their Nazi culture.

G-d's Forgiveness Makes Sukkot the most Joyous Holiday of the Year

The Jewish calendar lists all our holidays in the original months and days that they have historically occurred, according to the text of the Bible. Passover retells the story of the Exodus from Egypt on the fifteenth day of Nisan. Shavuos describes the scene of receiving the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai on the seventh day of Sivan. *Rosh Hashanah* marks the historical creation of the world on the first of *Tishrei*. *Yom Kippur* serves as the day of forgiveness on the tenth of *Tishrei*, while *Chanukah* on the twenty fifth of *Kislev* and *Purim* the fourteenth day of *Adar* remind us of the Maccabean and Haman story. These festivals occurred on historically proven dates of the months in which they happened.

The holiday of Sukkot is an exception, because it is completely separated from Passover, the story which happened in the month of *Nisan* and is marked to be observed almost a half year later, as a continuation of the fearful days of New Years and the Day of Atonement in the month of *Tishrei*. This change has being observed for thousands of years even though the Bible specifically mentions that *Sukkot* should be observed for seven days because, "I have settled the Jewish people in huts when I have taken them out from Egypt". (Levitcus 23:43) There is no difference of opinion about the exodus from Egypt, that it took place in *Nisan*. Why then, is the holiday of Sukkot, celebrated six months later on the fifteenth day of *Tishrei*? This is one of the many questions that our

great sages ask, and offer various explanations, none of which were favorably accepted by scholars throughout the generations.

There is a more puzzling question in the fact that New Years and the fast day of Atonement are considered the most serious and awesome days of the year. When that time approaches it brings a very frightful season that is preceded with a month of heartbreaking prayers and the blasting of the shofar to awaken G-d's mercy for the forgiveness of our sins of the past year. How come this season is to be so closely connected to *Sukkot,* which is referred to in the Bible as the z'man simchataynu, the happiest days of the year? Such a contradictory combination appears to be difficult for people to observe. It is not easy to spontaneously switch from sadness to gladness.

There is yet another question. What connection does *Simchat Torah,* rejoicing with the Torah, at the conclusion of the *Sukkot* festival, have to do with the story of the huts in the desert? If in historical order, it would best fit in on *Shavuos,* when the Ten Commandments were given to us at Mt. Sinai?

To explain these questions, one must thoroughly study the history and the background of the Day of Atonement as the Day of Forgiveness for sins committed. When and how, did Yom Kippur become a day of atonement to begin with?

The *Midrash,* which describes the story of Abraham's offering Isaac as a sacrifice to G-d, tells us that this was one of the ten tests by which Abraham had to prove himself to be worthy of becoming the first Jew, and the father of the Jewish people who would inherit the holy land. The offering of Isaac was the last and the hardest of the ten tests. Abraham accepted G-d's command to sacrifice his one and only beloved son without any complaints or rebuff. However, after the test has proven itself to be nothing but a test only, Abraham, having calmed himself down, and relieved from the fright of the test, revealed to G-d that in his heart, at the time when the test was proposed, he had an argument against it. A short while before this demand, G-d mentioned to Abraham that his son Isaac, will be the father of the Jewish people. So why did G-d demand that Abraham slaughter his son on the altar? Abraham, with all due respect to G-d, kept quiet and did not use this just complaint. Hence, he pleaded with G-d to reward him with a promise that on this day, when Isaac was brought on the altar, which was on the tenth day of *Tishrei, Yom Kippur,* G-d should forgive all his children, the Jewish people for sins that may have occurred

in the past. He should open the gates of mercy widely and forgive them for their transgressions. In response to Abraham's plea, G-d promised to do so and even gave a pledge that so it shall be, in generations to come.

To get a better understanding of the meaning of Yom Kippur, we have to delve deeper into the history, beginning with the Exodus. Yes, the Jewish people left Egypt on the fifteenth day of Nisan to enter the huts that G-d prepared for them, but it was not with a spirit of joy and happiness. The truth was, as stated in the language of the Bible, "*B'shalach Pharaoh,*" it was Pharaoh that chased the Jews out from Egypt, after he has suffered the punishment of the ten plagues. Had he not done so, the Jews would have remained there as slaves for hundreds of more years. During the time of the departure from Egypt, marching in the desert for forty nine days to reach Mt. Sinai, the Jews continuously complained to G-d, as to why he has taken them out from Egypt and they even pleaded that G-d let them return back.

The turning point was on the seventh day of Sivan, when G-d appeared for the first and only time on this earth of ours, to deliver his commandments personally to the Jewish people. The Jews accepted the Ten Commandments by saying, "*Naaseh V'nishma,*" we shall do and we shall hear. G-d protected the people with clouds of honor hovering over them.

The acceptance of the Ten Commandments is sometimes compared to an act of marriage between G-d, the Bible and the Jewish people as one, an inseparable unit forever. Yet, regretfully the honeymoon did not last very long.

Moses remained on the mountain to learn the laws of the Bible, which were not mentioned in detail at Mt. Sinai to the people at large. He was supposed to remain on the mountain for forty days, but because of an error, he was a day late.

The Jewish people who remained on the foot of the mountain waiting impatiently for Moses to return with the Ten Commandments got so impatient, fearful and depressed, that a group of them decided to build a golden calf as a new leader, to replace Moses in his mission to bring the Jewish people to the Holy Land.

G-d's anger was aroused and he told Moses "*Lech Raid*" get off the mountain. "I shall destroy these people who have just forty days ago pledged to accept my commandments and suddenly they turned around and forgot their solemn pledge, returning to idol worshiping. They are unworthy to become my people.

I shall make a new people out of you Moses and replace these golden calf worshippers."

As Moses descended the mountain and noticed the hundreds of men, women and children dancing and singing around the golden calf saying, "This is our G-d who will lead us into the Land of Israel". Moses seeing this scene became so angry that he smashed the Ten Commandments into a million pieces. He entered the camp and punished the rebellious people involved and several hundred Jews were killed. This was on the seventeenth day of the month of *Tamuz*, which became a memorable day of sadness in Jewish history, because G-d's hand written commandments were shattered. That day was forever earmarked as a fast day.

Moses ascends Mt. Sinai for the second time and finds that G-d had calmed down, to the extent that he complimented Moses by saying, "Good that you destroyed the commandments because they did not deserve my gift." Moses then begins pleading with G-d for forgiveness, and G-d ordered Moses to write a second set of tablets by himself. When they were completed, G-d sent Moses down again, saying *Salachti Kidvarecha*. Give them the commandments and tell them that I have forgiven them as you pleaded." That day was the tenth day of *Tishrei*, *Yom Kippur*, the day when G-d promised Abraham to forgive his descendants after he brought Isaac as a sacrifice on the altar.

The Jews heard the words of Moses and saw that G-d has forgiven them for the sin of the golden calf. They all looked up at the sky, noticing that G-d had returned the clouds of glory to protect them and they rejoiced with songs and dances.

There is an old humorous statement, which says, "Even the poorest man can sometime experience moments of great joy and delight, and that is when he suddenly finds a precious object that he once lost." The same happened to the Jews just after Yom Kippur. When Moses broke the Ten Commandments, the clouds of glory disappeared because G-d wanted to destroy them. Their sadness and heartbreak were beyond their strength to bear. When they suddenly found the clouds again, they rejoiced with full hearts.

Yes, the Jews received the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai, and said again, "We shall do and we shall hear," but it was not out of joy but of fear. The thunder and lightning that accompanied "the giving" scared them. Their souls shuddered with trepidation. According to one opinion, G-d has lifted a heavy

mount over their heads and threatened them by saying that, "If they do not accept the Ten Commandments, they will all die under the mountain." Yes, fear and threat brought about the acceptance of the commandments at Mt. Sinai. There was very little joy expressed. There was no occasion for celebrating a *Simchas Torah* at the Mount.

After *Yom Kippur* and G-d's forgiveness, the poor little Sukkah in the dessert turned into a palace and the heavenly manna served by G-d tasted like pure honey. The result was that they observed "Simchas Torah" later, with the joy of living by the Torah, kissing and loving it, dancing and singing like never before. That was what they could not do at Mt. Sinai because of the fear and solemnity of the scene.

Why we Celebrate a Second Bar Mitzvah

I am the son of Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Avigdor who was the son of Rabbi Avraham Issachar Dov Avigdor and the eldest child of my mother, Rechel Breindel, daughter of Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Horowitz, all of blessed memory.

It was once the custom to name a first child after a maternal ancestor. My grandfather was the grandson of the rabbi of Ropshitz, who was the grandson of a great Torah personage, Rabbi Yitzchok Halevi Ish Horowitz, rabbi of Hamburg and author of "*Mat'amay Yitzchok-Zera Kodesh*" and other halachic responsa. It was natural for my mother to want to name me after my Hamburg ancestor. At that time, many members of the Horowitz family named their male children after Reb Yitzchok'l Hamburger.

My father was a little concerned about naming me after this rabbi because he had died relatively young, at the age of 52. In order to allay my father's trepidation and avoid hard feelings, I was given a double name at my *brit milah* and that was, *Yitzchok Chayim* (the latter name meaning "life"). My family always took special care to call me by both names, not to omit the word *Chayim*.

I was born on the eighteenth day of the month of *Av*, a date, impossible for me ever to forget, since the letters of the date, *yud* and *chet* formed the initials of my name *Yitzchok Chayim* plus the *alef* of Av, standing for Avigdor.

Most Jews do not traditionally celebrate birthdays except when boys become

Bar Mitzvah at age thirteen.

That may even be the source of the dispute between the schools of Shammai and Hillel (Eruvin 13), which concluded with the assertion that "*Noach lo la'adam shelo nivra*". It would have been better for man not to have been created. If Adam, whom G-d had produced with His own hands, as it were, was unable to withstand his evil urge and sinned, then it seems that the supreme test of human existence, is the temptation to sin in life.

That is what King Solomon says in (Ecclesiastes 7:20) "There is no righteous person on earth who does only good, and never sins." Even Moses died a sinner. Moses committed his one and only sin when he struck the rock to bring forth water instead of speaking to it, as G-d had instructed him to do. That sin not only cost him his life, but was also the reason why he could not fulfill his liberation mission, by not only taking the Jews out of Egypt, but also leading them into the ancestral homeland.

Since my birthday, the eighteenth of Av falls in mid-summer and schools and *Yeshivas* are closed for the season, my *Bar Mitzvah* celebration was very elaborate. The participants included many rabbis and visitors who came to Truskavitz, a spa that was only half an hour from Drohobycz, where my father served as rabbi for the entire region.

My father invited a large throng of people to the synagogue for the occasion. He prepared me with a deep Talmudic discourse in which I answered eighteen questions with a single answer. I had a sharp mind and in my high-pitched voice, I proudly spoke, entirely by heart for half an hour, nice and clearly. All those present were very impressed with my talk, and the sumptuous feast, which followed.

All the rabbis embraced and kissed me and showered me with compliments and blessings. They said I should live to a hundred and twenty years, but there was one particular blessing, which remained forever, etched in my mind. That one, came from Rabbi Shalom Shachne Tcherniak, rabbi of Maczejov, Poland who came to Truskavitz every year to drink the mineral waters as a cure for his ailments. His wish was: "May you live to have a second *Bar Mitzvah*."

I had never before heard this blessing, so I asked my father about it and he told me that, "One may celebrate a second *Bar Mitzvah* when he is privileged to reach the age of eighty three." He explained that the custom is derived from the passage in Psalms 90, where Kind David writes, "*Yemay shnoteinu bahem shivim shana*"

meaning, the average span of our life is seventy years. Upon reaching that age, we may start counting from the beginning again thirteen years till age eighty three and then hold a second *Bar Mitzvah* celebration. However, not everybody is privileged enough to reach that age.

I was not entirely satisfied with my father's explanation, because I thought that one could become a *Bar Mitzvah* only once in a lifetime and I said: "If thirteen is the magic number, then in that case, when someone reaches the age of ninety six, he should celebrate a third *Bar Mitzvah.*" Furthermore, what about the *tefillin* of *Rabbeinu Tam*?

These questions went unanswered.

My *Bar Mitzvah* celebration made a powerful impression on me, as do all *Bar Mitzvahs,* on boys. The kind of person I had already become as a boy, became apparent in the request I conceitedly put to my father when he was working on the proofs of his book "*Cheylek Yaacov.*" "*Tate,* would you like to help me publish my *Bar Mitzvah* talk?" "Gladly" he replied. "But it's hard work."

I immediately got to work, and after intense, energetic efforts by me and the Zupnik Press, I printed five hundred copies of a twenty page book with my *Bar Mitzvah* speech. The title of it was "*Kol Yitzchok* - Isaac's Voice."

The president of the synagogue, Reb Avraham Frenkel, helped me with some money for the printing and with my father's guidance I became a published author at the age of thirteen.

It is worthwhile mentioning that only one copy of my little book survived the *Shoah.* Many years after the war, I found it through my father's friend, Rabbi Reuven Margolis, who was in charge of the Rambam Library in Tel Aviv. It was a veritable "ember plucked from the flames". I still possess that copy, seventy years after it was published.

That episode of publication eventually faded from my memory, especially during the years I spent in the concentration camps when death hovered overhead day and night and when every moment was part of *techiat hameisim,* (resurrection). But "*ma she-yaaseh hazman lo yaaseh haseichel*" - time can conceive what the mind cannot. When I became eighty years old, I suddenly remembered my Bar Mitzvah celebration and the Maczejover rabbi's blessing and I thought, since the master of the universe has granted me the privilege of living to the ripe old age of eighty, then I ought to give the matter some serious thought.

I started investigating the history of the custom of the second *Bar Mitzvah*

celebration. I asked various scholars and *Roshei Yeshivot* but they were not able to give me a satisfactory reply. As I scoured the *Tanach* commentaries, the question became even more complicated. The passage of King David's Psalm, that a man's life span is seventy years, became even more questionable, because that passage was actually spoken by Moses, as we read in the first verse of Psalms ninety: "*Tefilah Lemoshe* — A prayer of Moses."

Moses lived one hundred twenty years, whereas, it was David who lived only seventy years. So how could we speak of an average longevity? Even more problematic was the fact that none of the hundreds of commentaries on the Book of Psalms speak of a second *Bar Mitzvah* celebration.

Throughout my years of writing, I have labored according to the principle of the Talmudic Sages, "Do not believe those who tell you, "I tried but I couldn't find." (*Megilla 6b*) In other words, if you search and don't find what you're looking for, that means you haven't searched enough. You have to keep on looking and be sure you truly understand the question. For I have often found that difficult questions may have, what is really quite a simple answer.

One night not too long ago, while awake in bed, suddenly a very logical explanation flashed into my mind. That passage in Psalms ninety has a redundant word, "*bahem* - in them." I believe that this word is meant to tell us that the "seventy years" represent not a chronological term of age, but rather a valuable period in a person's life. Even if one lives to age eighty or ninety, and even if one does not reach the chronological age of seventy, one's life should contain "seventy years" of fruitful, creative achievements.

A person's life should not be measured from the day of his birth. The first thirteen years are of minor significance. A child is not yet a fully mature person at that time. A child's sins are not punished and the mitzvot a child observes are also not counted. A child does not possess virility, and is not held personally responsible for any sins. He cannot be included in a *minyan* count, have an *aliya,* and cannot testify as a valid witness. It is only when a boy becomes a *Bar Mitzvah,* that he becomes "ripe" for the observance of the Torah's precepts.

One is obligated to provide a boy with an education, till he reaches age thirteen. This may be why, at that age, a boy is called a "*Bar Mitzvah*" - one who is obligated to perform a mitzvah, and not "*Bar Mitzvot*" - obligated to perform many mitzvot. When a boy enters Jewish manhood on becoming a Bar *Mitzvah,* he is obligated to perform the Mitzvah of Tefillin, which is the first of all the

other obligations that he must now take upon himself. The rest of the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos follow later.

Thus, it transpires that the average active life of a person is no more than seventy years. Subtracting the first thirteen lawless years leaves him only with fifty seven years. Hence, it is only upon reaching eighty three, that one finds "*bahem* - in them" - full seventy years. Hence, the custom of celebrating a second *Bar Mitzvah* comes to make up for those first thirteen "minor years" before one becomes a full fledged responsible Jew. One cannot apply to those childish years the concluding words of that passage in Psalms, ninety, "*Verochbom amal va'aven* - The length of years are filled with toil and sorrow." Only adults may undergo such difficult years.

I hope that my children and grandchildren have learned something from their father and grandfather. I bless them with the Maczejover rabbi's blessing to me, "May you live to celebrate your second *Bar Mitzvah*."

Masquerades that were not Purim Fun

Only once a year, at Purim time, is it a Jewish custom to have some jolly *Purimspiel,* Purim fun, or play masquerading as heathens. Even though it is mentioned in the Jewish legal code, of the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Hachayim,* Section 696), few Jews know the reason for this practice and where it originated. There are many explanations offered by different scholars. American Jews imitate this Purim fun and call it "trick or treat."

I will now tell you a few serious stories about masks and disguises not related to *Purim* jollity, and about some terrible tragedies that befell our people in this generation.

The young men of today cannot imagine what military conscription for Jews was like in Europe before World War II. It was a terrifying experience for young men who wanted to observe *kashrut* or don *Tefillin.* Conscript service was a matter of at least five years, and in Tsarist Russia, ten, or even twenty years.

For Jewish young men, military service was a life-threatening experience. They tried every means and tactic they could think of, to attain exemptions from the army. One year before they had to report to the draft board, the young men began to "toil". That is, purposely injuring themselves by fasting for months, to become skinny and gaunt boys. They put pebbles inside their shoes in order to create flat footedness, feign deafness or muteness, limp, as though crippled, feign scoliosis and whatever other stratagem they could think of to have the draft

board judge them unfit for military service and get a "D" classification, meaning physically unfit to be a soldier.

In every European Jewish town, you could recognize in the synagogues, groups of dejected, skeletal-like young men called *plagers*, the toilers.

There were also "brokers", men who had military connections with people whom they used to bribe. It was usually an army doctor or some other higher ranked officer that could get the prospective soldier, exempt. Without a "D" classification, it was difficult for young men to find a suitable bride or to get a job.

When a boy was born to a family in a small *shtetl*, his parents did not immediately register his birth, because in those places there were really no authorities paying attention. I remember young men who were unable to get married legally because they lacked birth certificates and therefore did not exist legally. Such young men and their brides would come to the sexton or cantor of the local synagogue and have a Jewish wedding performed. Their children were registered with the mother's maiden name, and specified as "fatherless."

Another fashionable way of avoiding the draft was fleeing to America. They acquired false documents, changed their names and took off.

There was still another path to beat the nightmare of induction into the military. Polish law exempted rabbis from having to serve. This, however, was no simple matter. Only men who actually occupied a rabbinic post, were officially approved by the local municipal authority and recognized as bona fide rabbis. It was not enough to be a yeshiva student or even to have been ordained. In the United States all yeshiva and theological students in seminaries of all faiths, are exempt from military service, even in time of war.

My father, of blessed memory, once told us what happened to him upon the outbreak of World War I, when his family fled from Galicia to Prague. He suddenly realized, to his horror, that he had lost the official document declaring him, as the rabbi of Terewa-Woloska. It was perilous for a nineteen year old man to be on the streets, where military police were on constant lookout for deserters from the Austrian army, or people trying to evade service.

His younger brother, David Avigdor then sixteen, was with him at the time. He had extraordinary artistic talents. Seeing how worried his parents were, he said to them, "Stop worrying. I'll make him a new document that will look just like the original." Indeed, a few days later, my father had a paper certifying him

as a refugee rabbi. My uncle didn't want to tell anyone how he had produced the document, but apparently, he had already acquired experience falsifying documents for other relatives to be exempt from the draft.

My father kept the forged certificate as a memento. When he showed them to me one day, I was astounded to see the masterly job my uncle had done in forging the Austrian imperial red seal with the two-headed eagle and the Gothic German script. "The secret lies in the goose" he once told me. "I used a goose feather and a hard-boiled egg to do the job." I thought, my fun loving uncle was joking and I returned to the Yeshiva putting it all behind me.

Necessity is the mother of invention, goes that old saying. When World War II was in full swing, we had to endure a year under Russian rule. Jews started seeking ways to survive. They started fleeing from where they were or hid amongst the Gentiles. A desperate effort to acquire documents began, attesting to the fact that one was of "Aryan descent". My own sisters, like hundreds of other people, especially girls who had a chance to get out of the ghetto, became frantic to obtain some sort of new identification papers. With such papers, one was able to pose as a non-Jew and blend into the Gentile populace of a big town where no one knew them.

When my sisters Chana Gitel and Sheindel told me of their intentions to go to Lemberg as Polish girls, I asked my father about the Jewish law, if it was right for them to do so, and whether I was permitted to extend my help? "Not only was it permitted, but one was obligated to do everything possible to save one's life. That is the law," my father declared, adding that our situation was much graver than that of the Morranos in Spain. Torquemada wasn't out to murder the Jews but only to get them to apostatize. Hitler's aim was, like Haman's, to annihilate the Jews for no reason other than that they were born Jewish. Just as Esther disguised herself, changing her name and identity, so too, my father stressed, "Must one stop at nothing to save the lives of Jewish children."

Having heard my father's approval, I recalled my uncle's hard-boiled eggs and goose feathers, and I went to work figuring out how to forge an official seal. My father was always in possession of official forms, recording births and marriages, in his duties as the rabbi. Through one of our Christian acquaintances, I obtained a bunch of baptismal certificates. All I had to figure out now was how to forge a seal.

For several days, I struggled with hard-boiled eggs, but to no avail. During the course of my experimentations, I came up with a similar method. It was based on my uncle's principle, but was much easier, faster, and above all less dangerous. In case I should be caught, I could always cover the evidence. Like my uncle, I did not share my secret with anyone.

In Drohobycz I was, "the rabbi's son." I assisted my father in his rabbinic functions. No one thought of me as a person who could "make papers." They had some knowledge of my providing papers for people, but had no inkling that I was the one who actually made them. The people who turned to me for help, I told that I would try to supply, not "manufacture" what they needed.

I produced such documents for numerous girls and women. Not everyone who came was a good candidate for the role of a Gentile. I chose my "clients" very carefully, paying close attention to their Polish accent, intonations and mannerisms, before giving them the papers. I often procrastinated to get involved with certain clients that I thought were not eligible, I gave excuses, saying that, "It took me a long time to make the contacts." There were other people in town doing the same type of work, but I was never aware of their method. I just played the part of a middle-man.

I did not take money from anyone, but I was usually remunerated with supplies such as, sugar, flour, or butter. We were a large family and I wanted to accumulate food in preparation for hiding in a bunker. Naturally, I was in constant fear of being exposed, and uncovered by the *Judenrat*, Germans or Russians.

During the three years in the ghetto, I "disguised" more than a hundred Jewish youngsters as Gentiles and a lot of them did survive the Holocaust. I often meet my "masked actors" in America or Israel who thank me, and tell me how they used my documents to save themselves.

For a long time after the war, I was ashamed to speak of that "career of mine." I even had pangs of conscience, until one day my father said to me: "How do you think our patriarch Jacob felt when his mother told him to disguise himself as Esau? That too was dangerous and his act required heroism. That is exactly what you are doing."

מצבת זכרון

לזכר נשמותיהם של שאר בשרנו היקרה

אשת חיל, עטרת בעלה ותפארת משפחתה
חסד ואמת וצדקה גמלה כל חייה
הלכה לעולמה בזקנה ושיבה טובה

מרת ביילע בוימל ז"ל בת
הרה"צ מנחם מענדיל האראוויץ זצ"ל

עם בעלה היקר איש חסיד ישר לב והולך תמים

מר יוסף בן בנימין זאב בוימל ע"ה

***

אני בא להודות ולתת הכרת טוב כראוי
למר דוד פילער נ"י, ורעיתו שיינדל העדינה תחי'
וגיסס ר'בנימין זאב בוימל יחי' ורעיתו חנה תחי' וכל בני משפחתם
בעד עזרתם לדפיסת ספרו לזכר אמו"ר הרב ד"ר יעקב אביגדור זצ"ל.
זכותו של אבי הרה"ג זצ"ל תעמוד למשפחתם של הנ"ל בשפע ברכות והצלחה
מתוך בריאות הגוף והנפש לאורך ימים ושנים טובים אושר ועושר כי"ר אמן.
המחבר הרב יצחק חיים ד"ר אביגדור ורעיתו אסתר

This memorial page of "בגי וצלמות" is

lovingly dedicated to the everlating memory

of our dearest friends

ר' אליהו ב"ר דוב געלבוואקס ז"ל

נפ" י' חשון תשס"ה

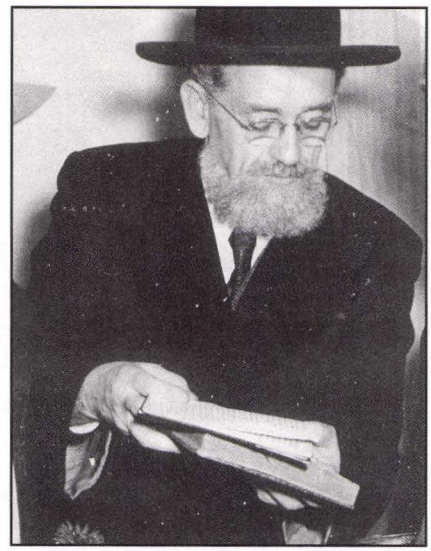
וזוגתו העדינה אשת חיל

מרת חי' בת ר' אבימלך ז"ל

as special parents, full of love and devotion to Torah,

Chesed and Eretz Yisroel.

They were dearly loved by all those who knew them.



Father always searching in books for references.

Destruction of Three Treasured Libraries of Rabbi Dr. Yakov Avigdor

I wish to express my deep appreciation to Mr. Chayim Shmuel Friedman for his masterful artistic design of the attractive book cover in honor and memory of my Father, Zatzal. The photo arrangement, besides being beautiful, fulfills the basic greatness of my father's personality as a constant bibliophile scholar, and collector of books whose three great libraries of his lifetime were destroyed by the Holocaust period.

a) An eight thousand book collection buried in a cellar of Szackiego 2 Street, Drohobycz, Poland in 1943, (now Ukraine). In spite of several

tries after the Holocaust, the hiding place of the books, was never recovered.

b) Three rooms filled with books on shelves from floor to ceiling at 1150 Lincoln Place, Brooklyn, N. Y. Mexican border regulations and expensive transport prevented the library from being taken from Brooklyn to Mexico. My father did, however give me, the author of this book, a good many of the volumes.

c) A new most valuable library, gathered while living in Mexico, was presented to the Kehilah Nidjei Yisrael by me and my brother, Dr. Abraham Avigdor, upon our father's demise. Unfortunately due to an earthquake, the library, the shelves and books were toppled over and dispersed. Through neglect, the library has regretfully disappeared as a community project in Mexico.

Thank you Mr. Friedman for placing a picture of book cases in a library, as an appropriate background for the jacket.

Rabbi Isaac C. Avigdor, Author

Maftir

(In connection with the previous chapter about "Our Masquerade")

There was one individual in our home town Drohobycz by the name of Engineer Naftali Backenroth who realized that fighting the Germans would not be feasible from the outside. He decided to do whatever was in his power to enter the ranks of the S.S. and get acquainted with the workings of the Gestapo and their leaders. By doing so he hoped to gain opportunities to save some Jewish lives.

Backenroth, was by profession an agricultural engineer who studied in Paris, France. He offered the Gestapo the establishment of an agricultural farm that would successfully provide them with vegetables of all sorts all year round. The project was overwhelmingly accepted by them and work was started immediately.

He also built an eloquent horse stable which the Germans enjoyed and admired. Backenroth continued to gain influence with the S.S. leadership and through these contacts was successful in freeing many doomed individuals from being sent to Concentration Camps across Poland. Knowing him as we all did, we were all convinced, that his involvement with the Germans was all for the purpose of saving Jews.

In August of 1942 eight thousand Jews were killed in Drohobycz and the rest of the population were forced to enter the Ghetto and stay closed within the walls. The head of the Gestapo whose name was Tola took a liking to Backenroth and because both were fluent in the French language, both conversed frequently together. The farm supplied the S.S. with fresh vegetables throughout the whole year. With his projects, Backenroth employed several hundred Jews and protected them for a few years.

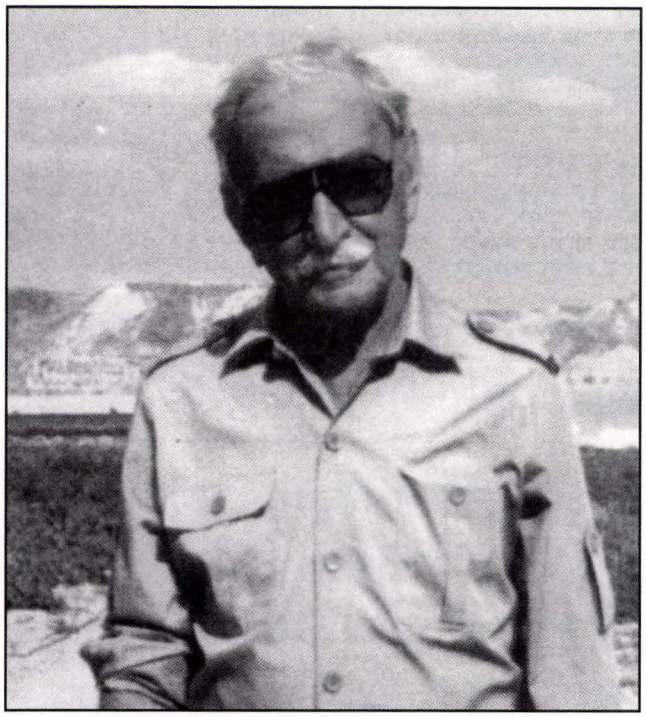
I was one of those who he manually pulled out with his own hands from the *zamulshtele* (place of assembly) in a group which was about to be sent to the Yanover Lager in L'vov.

The Almighty later granted me the privilege of saving his life and the lives of his family, by enabling him to change his name from the original Backenroth to Bronitsky. (Bronitza was the name of a forest where hundreds of Jews were shot and buried including his parents and my own mother, Breindel Avigdor, O.H. on the 2nd day of Shavuos, 1943).

His life was always in danger depending on the whims and whips of the German beasts that he served. He was the only individual in all the Polish cities to single handedly intervene with various Gestapo leaders and gain various favors from them. This change of his name enabled Bronitsky to carry on his salvation of Jews from the hands of the Germans as a non-Jew in their midst.

מהנדס נפתלי באקענראט ע"ה

Heroic Savior of Drohobycz Jewry

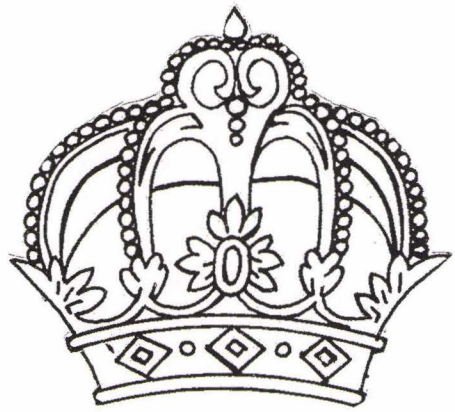


זה סיפור מופלא שלא סופר מעולם: מתברר שאוסקר שינדלר לא היה היחידי, רק שכאן מדובר ביהודי ששיתף פעולה עם הגסטאפו והציל מאות יהודים. נפתלי בקנרוט מאוקראינה שרת את הגסטאפו וכך סיפק עבודה ליהודים. בנו, יהודה ברוניצקי יצא למסע בעקבות אביו, מלווה במצלמתו של מוטי קירשנבאום

Backenroth established himself after the war in Israel and he has never forgotten the role that I played in his manipulations to overcome Hitler's German plans, to leave no Jew alive in Europe.

His family has risen to industrial greatness and financial success of international proportion and admiration. I don't know of any other town in Poland where one individual was able to obtain and achieve such colossal results for the benefit of the Jewish people. He acted in the same spirit as the famous "Schindlers List" in Kracow which resulted in the saving of hundreds of Jewish lives employed in his factory.

At the end of his life, Backenroth enjoyed the admiration of hundreds of living survivors that he saved.



עד החיבור הזה של תולדות יעקב אבי ועדה המצבה
ספר הזכרונות ומעשי מסירות נפש רבים וקידוש
השם של גדולי עמנו, השם ינקום דמם, עם כל אלה
שנשארו לפליטה אחרי החורבן הנאציס הארורים

אל מלא רחמים שוכן במרומים המצא מנוחה נכונה
תחת כנפי השכינה במעלות קדושים וטהורים נשמות
אבי אדמו"ר ואמי מורתי זכרונם לברכה מגזע גאונים
וצדיקים בצרור החיים עם אבותיהם ואבות אבותיהם
עד יום ביאת הגואל צדק בקרוב במהרה בימינו

כל התוארים והשבחים שנכתבו על המצבה הם אלה
דברי גאוני הדור שכבדו את רב האי הגאון האמיתי
אאמו"ר יעקב בן הרב הגאון אברהם ישכר דוב זצ"ל
ממשפחת אביגדור

ערב ראש השנה "שנת תבוא סוף הגלות לפ"ק



מפורסם בכל תבל צנא מלא ספרא

רבן של ישראל נכבד ונהדר וחביב

נודע ביהודה בספריו עד בלי די

יצר פלפולים בחריפתו גג על גג

על ישראל ורבנן יזרח שמשו לעד

קרן פניו וזיוו הודו לא יסוף מאתנו

בתוך עמו נאסף ובין החיים יצרור

הרב האי גאון האמיתי

מוה"ר יעקב בן הרב אברהם ישכר בער

המכונה ד"ר אביגדור

זכר צדיק לברכה

שירת חייו באמצע נפסקה י"ח אדר ב' תשכ"ז

ת נ צ ב " ה

An Apology

At the very outset of planning to write this book in my father's memory, I decided that I would write it all in English. I wanted to avoid creating, "A Babel like" mix of languages, complicated texts and unnecessary translations. In my mind, and in my fathers' mind, there was one language deeply imbedded within our hearts and souls, and that was mamelashon, (mother language) Yiddish, the language that she spoke to us when we were being nursed.

In a few rare instances, I had to use original texts clipped from newspapers, since no other language could bring about a meaningful translation of the true particulars between the reader and the subject.

Most of the time, Yiddish is used to assure the veracity of the story or facts that I needed to be recorded properly for the future.

From the Author









Metamorphosis Of The Same Man

מתוך גיא צלמות

RABBI DR. YAAKOV AVIGDOR Z"TL

Chief Rabbi of Drohobycz-Borislaw, Poland,
Rabbi of Congregation Chovevei Torah in Brooklyn, Dean of Yeshiva Rabbi Solomon Kluger,
Chief Rabbi of Buenos Aires, and for almost two decades, Chief Rabbi of Mexico City.
Passed away on 18 Adar II, 5727-1967.

Top: Rabbi Avigdor in traditional Rabbinic garb of sable fur (worn all year round) 1939
Right: Upon liberation from Buchenwald, weighing 80 lbs.
Left: As Chief Chaplain of the Polish Army
Cover: At the Bar Mitzvah of his grandson David, 1966