ESCAPE TO SHANGHAI



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BY

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(Originally Appeared in Hebrew
titled **"Nes Hatzalah")**

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Published by Bais Veyelepole
4302 17th Ave. Brooklyn, N.Y. 11204

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2024

Distributed by:
JUDAICA BOOK AGENCY
5122 18th Ave.
Box 385, Blythebourne Station
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11219

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For information write to:
Bais Veyelepole Inc.
4302 17th Avenue
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11204

Printed in the United States of America.

Translator's Preface

History is nothing more and nothing less than the interpretation of the past for the benefit of the future. Since first-hand narratives of history's dramas are usually written in the language of the participants it is the responsibility of the translator to convey their contents to a broader audience.

This is a difficult challenge, not only because of the inherent complexities of capturing the idiom of a native tongue in the style of another culture, but also because of the impossibility of totally identifying with the spirit of the recorded events. The translator is at best only a sympathetic observer of the history which was a page in the life of the original author.

It is perhaps this gap between experience and observation which has compelled me to undertake the translation of Rabbi Hertzman's book. As one who had intimate contact with the survivors of the Holocaust, both those who played major roles and those whose chief success was in defying the enemy's genocidal designs, I have always sensed a need for a greater awareness of this era. My intensive research in this field has provided me with a perspective which finds expression in Rabbi Hertzman's work. My conviction that others who did not experience these events must become familiar with them has been my inspiration in bringing this fascinating narrative to the attention of the English-speaking public. This is particularly important service to the generation which has grown up after the events recorded in such

works. It is the hope both of the author and the translator that the post-Holocaust generation will gain the opportunity of appreciating the heroism of the European Jews who kept alive their faith in divine destiny throughout their dark experiences under the heel of the Nazi oppressor.

It is my hope and prayer that the Torah perspective of Jewish suffering conveyed by this book will guide all of our people towards a rededication to G-d which will render such grim recollections a matter of the past, never to be repeated again.

Chaim Uri Lipshitz

We all owe great thanks to the following students of our sacred yeshiva who worked day and night, literally risking their lives to obtain visas and to make travel arrangements:

Rav Aryeh Mallin זצ"ל
Rav Eliezer Portnoy זצ"ל
Rav Mordechai Karpensprung זצ"ל

Rav Moshe Zupnik שליט"א
Rav Yaakov Ederman שליט"א

To the others who should be named, I offer my sincere apologies for losing the list of names just before going to press. That omission was accidental and I apologize sincerely.

Elchonon Yosef Hertzman

INTRODUCTION

I was born in a small shtetel in Eastern Europe named Husynne near Luviene. I had the privilege of receiving moral training not only from my parents, but also from my sainted teachers and Mentors, Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, Rabbi Baruch Ber and other great Scholars in the pre-war Yeshiva of Mir. And with that yeshiva I was destined to wander to Shanghai on an almost er less journey that finally ended in the United States.

The great source of spiritual riches is now covered forever with the blood and ashes of six million martyrs, including my beloved parents, sisters and brothers who were ordered to dig a pit in which they were thrown in alive.

I feel like a small particle of ash surviving the great fire and still retaining a little spark from the fire, a spark which gives no rest, which burns and burns and sometimes sheds some light.

Over this little spark I try to prepare some food for spirit. It is as though I were speaking to myself and raising my voice a bit higher so that anyone who cares can also listen.

"Moses commanded us a Torah as a heritage to the congregation of Jacob." Each Jew is meant to refine himself in the fire of Torah just as an iron is refined by the smith. First it is heated in the flame, then it is beaten by the hammer until he has shaped a beautiful vessel fit for a king's table.

We are people with a heritage. We in turn must produce something to be passed to coming generations. If we let our inherited identity work on and live in us, our children will see that we really mean what we preach.

Since we stood on Sinai we have carried the scroll of the Torah on our shoulders in spite of all kinds of harsh decrees, slaughters, hanging, fiery furnaces and gas chambers. When the very ground was aflame under our feet, we rose above the earth, soaring higher and higher on eagle's wings. Our spirit became molten at those heights and became a spiritual sun to shed light for our descendants to all time.

All this is hard to communicate in words — one must have experienced such a manner of living to fully understand its significance.

We are not afraid of suffering for it strengthens our spiritual muscle and prepares them for man's eternal struggle of good versus evil. This is our heritage from our patriarch Abraham whose spiritual essence was shaped in the fiery furnaces of Ur of Chaldes. We are not afraid of death for we are a people of life, a channel through which life is passed on to the whole world.

Can any nation in the world compare with the Jewish people? In the midst of our sufferings, in the very fires of the inquisition, we created tens of thousands of books written with the fiery pen of the stiff-necked people, dipped in the bloody ink of the holy martyrs who died to sanctify the Divine Name. (And sometimes I wonder how humanity could stand by while the blood of six million was added to all the other holocausts of the ages. Is this the reason why a world endowed with all kinds of comforts and luxuries lives under tremendous tension and fear, wondering when and by whom an atom bomb will be triggered next? It is because much of civilization was based

on wickedness, betrayal and cruelty to the Jewish people that it cannot enjoy permanency and security?).

The Jewish mind is the diagnostic microscope of all humanity. Our eyes, like an x-ray, penetrate deep into the secret places of the soul. Involuntarily, we cry out with a loud voice in a diagnosis of the bankruptcy of the world. This is the reason why a world of falsehood and flattery hates us. Just as one cannot pull the sun, moon and stars down from the heavens so no one can tear this spirit from our hearts. This is the mystery of the Jewish people, no one can understand it, but it is nevertheless present in the feelings of the Jew. Faith and trust are the wings on which we have flown through a world of suffering. On them, we have flown through the years of the exile, on them we will reach our goal with the coming of the Righteous Redeemer. In this book, I tried to encompass all phases of human life, from beginning to end, with short, diagnostic observations. To some extent, the diagnosis is in itself the cure. All this I studied in the laboratory on the greatest project in the world — shaping and preparing their own natures.

It is sad to think how little of that laboratory and those workers has survived. We can only see or gather some sparks rescued from the ashes, in the hope that they will stir up our spirits to some understanding of the treasure of the past.

My teachers; great and saintly men, were not only great in intellect, but were able to make their intellects the absolute rulers over their bodies, which obeyed their dictates with military discipline. They controlled their physical needs, their eating and their sleeping, rigidly, so that they would not make too great demands on the time needed for spiritual purposes.

Every word, step, thought, was measured out as if by a computer. Eighteen hours a day belonged to the soul, the

rest to the absolute necessities of the body. If they subtracted anything from these eighteen hours, they treated it as a note from a bank which had to be met in due time.

Time creates the content of each human being. It is the greatest gift in the word. Wasted time disturbs the spiritual balance and throws it out of control just as if one had uprooted a tree from its place. The wasted moments prick us as if they were pins and demand an accounting. Perhaps this is the source of much of our nervousness. Idleness is like drinking salt water, the more you drink the thirstier you become. Dead men can be resurrected, but not dead time.

Before my eyes, I see my teacher, Rabbi Elchonon reading a book of Mussar moral instructions, holding a handkerchief to his eyes. I see the big hall of the Mirrer Yeshiva with its five hundred students studying to the cherished melodies. A great offensive was in progress, an offensive against ones — own imperfections. As a watchmaker takes apart a watch, repairs it and puts it together again. It was different, a higher, a holier life. One longs for those days. For the heavenly atmosphere which transfigures earthly men living in the most trying or material circumstances. One asks oneself, "What about me?"

The human soul in essence is pure, it cannot be influenced properly unless it receives its nourishment from pure sources, that is from the Torah, transmitted by a person of great piety and righteousness. Torah itself passed on by a person who is not sincerely pious will give no spiritual benefit to the soul, although the teacher may be a person of great learning. Even a wonder drug is worthless if it is injected into the body by a rusty needle. It is therefore extremely important to choose a truly pious

teacher. For me, it is a great privilege to have known such great men and to have learned something from them. Although the great Yeshivos of the world were reduced to ashes, but their spirit survives embeded in our minds and souls. It is our duty to transmit it to our students and children and upon them depends the hope for the eternity of the people of Israel. (On all of us rests the duty to rebuild all this, never to be stopped by any difficulties — their difficulties were vastly greater.)



Pictured in the late 1930's: l. to r. Kaminetzer Rav, Horav Reuven Burstein; the author Rabbi Hertzman; Horav Baruch Be'er Levovitz; Horav Avrohom Chaim Pincus, Principal of Yeshivas Torah Voda'ath.

The Mitzvah of Remembering The Goodness of Hashem

It is a mitzvah to remember the goodness of HaShem and to reflect upon it.

Rabbenu Yona writes in his Shaare T'shuva: "You should realize that supreme values were incorporated in the positive deeds as much as the degree of free will. As it is written, 'and you have chosen life', and the virtue of remembering His goodness and delving into them, as recorded in the Torah (Deut. 8:2), 'and thou shalt remember all the ways which the L-rd, thy G-d, has led thee these 40 years in the wilderness' and he fed thee with manna'. 'Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee neither did thy foot swell, these 40 years'. 'And thou shalt consider in thy heart, that as a man chasteneth his son, so the L-rd, thy G-d chasteneth thee.' King David calls out, 'who is wise, let him observe these things, and let them consider the mercies of the L-rd' Psalm 107:43). 'For Thy mercy is before mine eyes'. (Psalms 26:3.) See full text in 1A.

The Sefer Charedim (chapter 1:33), after it quotes the above works of Rabbenu Yona, comments, "from that we may draw a conclusion, a menori (ad mojus). If we were commanded to recall for generations the grace that was done to our ancestors, how much more are we duty bound to review the favors that are being done for us continually, for us and for all Israel, when we are saved from the teeth of the lions (the wicked who stand ready to destroy us). For this, we recite every day the Psalm (134) 'If G-d were not for us: Every Jew is obligated to restate the righteousness rendered to him every day from the time he was conceived. Then he will prostrate himself before Him and repent with a complete penitence. I also heard this from my teacher the

righteous Reb Yosef Sagish, z'tl that it is included in the total of the 613 mitzvos, according to Rabbenu Yona."

In this mitzvah, two emphasis are accentuated (1) to recall the virtuousness and wonders of G-d (2) to search into them. It is not sufficient just to remember G-d's goodness and His wonderwork, but it is also important to search into them — that is, to learn from faith and Providence, and to subordinate to G-d for His full measure of benignness to us. Then must one hurriedly repent as quoted by the Sefer Charedim, that is the fruits of recalling the miracles had to involve himself fully.

The responsibility to recall the bountifulness of G-d also includes, not only those wonders which are conspicuous, but also the ordinary ones. All of them are subjected to be called to mind and to express gratitude to G-d for them, as inscribed in Sefer Charedim. One is also duty bound to think upon the love and good that the A-Mighty endowed him since birth. He will then become subordinate to Him and return completely to Him.

We can say that to reminisce over an individual miracle that occurred to one's friend can also be included in this mitzvah to recall and reflect on the munificence of the Omni-Benevolent one and His Providence in the world. Understandably, this also includes a miracle performed for one's friend. What the Sefer Charedim refers to — that every Jew must look back on all the beneficence done to everyone and to him personally — is that these miracles are close to him and that there is no need to investigate after them, because they are interwoven in his own life. If he is aware of a wonder that his friend met with, he is also obliged to review it and bear it in mind.

If the miracle was for his friend who is a ben-Torah, it is included in the benigness of G-d to all Israel.

There is no achievement in general that can be compared to the preservation of the Torah, especially when

the miracles happened to many bnai Torah. Besides the miracle that we will describe in our book, which was the saving of the entire Torah with G-d's kindness, practically all the Roshei Yeshivos and their thousands of disciples were rescued. A great portion of them were liberated through the "Miracle of Vilna" via Japan. As is related in the future pages, those who were saved became the cornerstone of the future building of Torah in the world after the war. Is there any more significant goodness than that? It is as if the Torah is again being born.

We have been commanded by the Torah to extol and acclaim G-d for all the goodness and benevolence He provided us. In addition to the duty of remembering the miracles, we must concentrate on them thoroughly. Another mitzvah, we have is to thank G-d for all the generosity that He bestowed upon us, as is written in "Evet Hamelech" (in Deut. 10:21): "He is thy glory, and He is thy G-d, who hath done for thee these great and tremendous things which thine eyes have seen," to which the Evet Hamelech points out the significance of that edict is to remember G-d's wonders and His goodness to us.

In Psalms we notice a number of ordinances on lauding G-d (see "Evet Hamelech" on Psalms (100:14). "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Give thanks unto Him, and bless His name. For the L-rd is good, His mercy endureth forever, and His faithfulness is unto all generations." (103:22) "Bless the L-rd, all ye His works." (105:45) "And He remembered for them His covenant, and repented according to the multitude." (106:1) "Hallelujah. O, give thanks unto the L-rd, for He is good and His mercy endureth forever."

In Psalms (34:2), we read, "I bless the L-rd at all times; His praises shall continually be in my mouth" and in Psalms 78:8; "Tell the generations to come to the praises of

the L-rd". 71:15; "My mouth shall tell of Thy righteousness and Thy salvation all the day". In Psalms 145:11, we see, "Every day I will bless Thee and I will praise Thy name forever and ever, My mouth shall speak the praises of the L-rd and let all flesh bless His holy name for ever and ever."

The Midrash Psalms (18) informs us what Rabbi Simon says: "not everyone who declares that he utters praises, really says praises, But if one who lived through a miracle and voices his adulation to G-d, it is known that all of his sins are forgiven and he is considered a newly-born person."

We can see in the Sefer, "Olas Tamid" (chapter 17) "Concentrate very much every day when you say the 'Song of the Sea.' Say it loudly, with great joy, as if you are witnessing the crossing of the Red Sea, and for that, all of your sins will be forgiven."



Pictured l. to r.: Rav Baruch Be'er Levovitz; Rav Zaidel Sematitzky of Tiktiner; Rabbi Hertzman; Rav Hanoch Aigus, the Vilna Dayan ("Marcheshes"); Rav Moshe Shatzkes; the grandson of Rav Baruch Be'er.

The mitzvah for the Attestor of the Miracle to record it for generations.

The Ramban writes, (in Parsha Massa) in the name of the Rambam: "The significance and purpose for our Torah is to note the wandering that we witnessed in the desert. The wonders and miracles that occurred then were the most authentic that was seen by all. In the future, those words will only be hearsay and the individual may negate them, as compared to the wonders of the Torah and her heroic epitome of marvel. Israel's sojourn in the wilderness for 40 years and the availability of manna every day — all of this they had when they were far from civilization and it was unnatural to human being's. It was a place where they could not grow figs, grapes, dates and pomegranates and yet, G-d explains in the Torah: "bread you did not eat, wine and beer you did not drink." All these miracles, contrary to the nature of things, they witnessed themselves. The A-Mighty was aware what would transpire then and that the people might in the future consider that the wilderness was near civilization. (as we find that today, deserts are near cities inhabited by people, where they can grow grass, fruits and food.) There, they also may have wells with sufficient water. For this reason, in order to obliterate this concept from the minds of man, G-d ennumerates in the Torah all the places that they wandered in the desert, so that you will recognize the wonders that the Jews witnessed in the desert for 40 years."

From this we learn that one to whom a miracle occurred, should not be satisfied in transmitting this incident by word of mouth because, in due time, someone might doubt the authenticity of the occurrence, but the one who was

fortunate to live through such an event is to record it, for posterity, so that no one would doubt the genuine episode.

The Ramban writes (Deut. 25-17) about the mitzvah to remember what Amalek did to us. Let us tell our offsprings and our generations just what this vicious enemy has done to us. For this reason, we have been commanded to erase his name. We are also obligated to trasmit to our children what happened to Miriam, so that they may hand it down to their generations so that they will be exceptionally careful about maligning anyone or speaking ill about anyone.

The Ramban also comments on the passage, "Only watch yourself and your soul, that you do not forget these words that your eyes saw (Deut. 4-9)." Before G-d's commandments are to be remembered, we have been warned concerning the "do-not-forget"-mitzvah that we should not fail to remember the historic moment at Sinai, and not to let it slip from our hearts. Our do-not-forget-mitzvahs are; that we inform our seeds in every generation everything that we saw and heard there ... The purpose of this mitzvah is very significant. If the words of our Torah come to us only from the mouth of Moses, even though the prophecy was substantiated with signs and wonders, there might arise among us a prophet or dreamer who might order us to reverse our Torah, and he might even show us wonders and miracles leading a doubt to enter the hearts of men. But as the Torah came to us at Sinai from the mouth of the A-Mighty, into our own ears and eyes and there was no intermediary in order that we would be able to deny every adversary and all who seek to misrepresent us. Their miracles will have no influence on us and their omens will not protect us from death because we can now realize their falsehoods. This is what is said there: "And in You, we will remain loyal forever. When we wrote it down for our children, they knew that the words were true without

doubt, as if every generation saw it itself. For they know that we would not testify falsely to our offsprings and we would not deceive them with empty and useless words. They will not have the least doubt in the testimony that we presented, but will truthfuly believe that we saw with our own eyes all that we told you."

Here we see how much the Torah appreciated that the tradition that is being transmitted to our children should be strengthened in every aspect and no force in the world should be able to doubt it.

In Samuel (1:17:33) we read, "David said to Saul that he was his father's shepherd, and once a lion and a bear came and carried away a sheep from his herd." The Vilna Gaon makes the following comment: "The written word is 'he carried this from his herd' and the spoken word is, 'He carried sheep from his herd.' The differences between the written and spoken word can be explained by the Midrash. The Midrash tells us that when David saw a miracle in this sheep, he slaughtered it, removed its hide and made himself a coat from it. He wore it continuously, so that he would always remember the miracle. Therefore, the spoken word is 'sheep,' because he said to Saul, 'a sheep has been truthfully taken from my flock.' The written word is 'this', because he displayed it to Saul."

We also find it in the miracle of the splitting of the Jordan River even though the miracle was famous throughout the world, and the participants saw it with their own eyes, yet our sages ask in the Talmud (Sota 34): "what was the height of the water? (twelve mil by 12 mil in accordance with the dimensions of the camp of Israel). Such is the statement of R. Judah and R. Eliezer b. Simon who said it teaches that the waters were heaped up like stacks to a height of more than 300 mil, until all the kings of the east and west saw them, as it is said, 'and it came to pass when all the kings of the Amorites, who were beyond

Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites, who were by the sea, heard how the L-rd had dried up the waters of the Jordan from before the children of Israel until they passed over, their hearts melted. Neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel."

Even though the Jews and the whole world saw these miracles, yet, Joshua was commanded by G-d to make a memorial for future generations by erecting 12 stones as it is written in Joshua (4-6;9), "that this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask in time to come, saying, 'What mean ye by these stones?' then ye shall say unto them: 'Because the waters of the Jordan were set off before the ark of the covenant of the L-rd. Joshua also set up 12 stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where it passed over the Jordan, the Jordan was cut off'.

"These stones shall be a memorial unto the children of Israel forever. And the children of Israel did so, as Joshua commanded, and took up 12 stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood, and they are there unto this day."



L. to r.: Kaminitzer Rav, Reb Reuven Burstein; Rav Baruch Be'er; Rav Aharon Kotler; the grandson of Reb Baruch Be'er.

Man should not give up.

Our sages (Talmud Berochos 10a) teach us an essential axiom, that "even if a sharp sword rests on a man's neck, he should not desist from praying," as it says: "though He slay me, yet, Will I trust Him" (Job 13:15). Rav Chanon said, "even if the master of dreams says to a man that on the morrow he will die, he should not desist from prayer."

The "Ein Yakov" comments on this that Rav Chanon added to the words of R. Yochanon and R. Elazar, that even if the master of dreams said to him that he would die by the sword, and then placed a sharp sword on his throat, yet he should not desist from prayer. The "Etz Yosef" explains that the master of dreams is an angel who is greater than a prophet. This proves that the visible authenticity of Heaven passes over any doubt.

Even in such circumstances, when all incidents were blended together, when all the conditions of the dreams are validated, even when the dream will be more specific, that on that day and in such a time, hour and place the head will be severed, and it is even coincidental that he arrives on that day and hour to this specific place, even then, when a sword is placed at his throat, he should not become a victim of despondency.

He may reason, "if I was only faced with the danger of being killed by the sword, I would not lose faith and I would pray and hope to G-d for a miracle to happen at the last minute. But now, that it was foretold to me in detail from Heaven (through the angel) — and even the placing of the sword at my throat is substantiated — I am sure that the death will also materialize, so what hope is there in store for me to pray to G-d, when the decree has been so defined and precise?" This is what Rav Chanon meant. Even in such a drastic case, when all items are clear, yet

man should not desist, even then, from praying to G-d. Rely on G-d and pray with full heart, because with His mercifulness from Heaven, He could yet save you from all the harsh and severe cases, even if the decree has been issued against you.

Even when a prophet will come to you as a messenger of G-d, and with the prophecy on his lips about your death, and you are sick and weak, yet, even then, you should not desist from praying, as it is recorded in the Talmud (Berachos 10a): "and Isaiah, the prophet, son of Amos, came to him, and said unto him, 'thus said the L-rd, 'set thy house in order, for thou shalt die and not live' (Isaiah 38:1).' What is the meaning of 'thou shalt die and not live'? Thou shalt die in this world and not live in the world to come. He said to him: Why so bad? He replied: Because you did not try to have children. He said: The reason was because I saw by the holy spirit that the children-issuing from me would not be virtuous. He said to him: What have you to do with the secrets of the All-Merciful? You should have done what you were commanded, and let the Holy One, blessed be He, do that which pleases Him. He said to him: Then give me now your daughter; perhaps through your merit and mine combined virtuous children will issue from me. He replied: The doom has already been decreed. Said Hezekiah: Son of Amoz, finish your prophecy and go. This tradition I have from the house of my ancestor: (King David). "Even if a sharp sword rests upon a man's neck he should not desist from prayer."

Thereupon Hezekiah straightaway turned his face to the 'kir' (wall) and prayed unto the L-rd. What's the meaning of Kir? R. Shimon b. Lakish said (he prayed), 'from the innermost chambers of his heart'." To which the "Etz Yoseph" comments: "which is with his full heart. He had to beg for mercy against the death decree."

Hezekiah's prayers were accepted and the vicious decree was abolished, and years were added to him, as it is written; "then came the word of the L-rd to Isaiah, saying, 'go and say unto Hezekiah,' thus said the L-rd, the G-d of David, thy father. I have heard thy prayer. I have seen the tears, Behold, I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city'."

The Brisker Rav, Rabbenu Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, z'tl, clarifies the subject, "even if a sharp sword lies at your throat, man should not desist from praying," in the following elucidating way.

"Let us take a chapter from real life, when one is brought to trial for murder. He will utilize every means available to secure the best legal advice, and will engage the most proficient lawyer, even if it means an exhorbitant amount. At the trial the verdict of guilty is pronounced. Yet, he will not despair, but will appeal the decision to the highest court. The attorneys try every maneuver to get a reversal of the decision. Even if the appeal is negative, the last avenue will be attempted to beseech the king. A full presentation will be made, using the critical condition of the family, the future of the weak children, his ill wife, the suffering parents, and other emotional factors in order to get the sympathy of his majesty, the king. At the same time, pressure will be exerted on the government and other last minute influential means will be used. When all of these channels proved unsuccessful, the high court refused to hear the case, the king was deaf to the pleas, the family is left with no other alternative way and they find themselves in despair.

"The guillotine is prepared, the prisoner is brought to it and blindfolded and placed in the hold. The prisoner has yet a spark of hope that the sword will break, but he sees its sharpness, as it is prepared to strike him. Even at that last

moment, this is what our Sages meant, when they said that one should not desist in prayer and hope that at the last second, G-d would save him."

The Yavitz (great Torah authority) relates a story that occurred to his grandfather. It was during the infamous "tach v'tat pogroms, that befell eastern Europe (1648-1649). They rounded up numerous Jews for senseless executions.The murderers'pulled them out one after another and slaughtered them. When it was his grandfather's turn to meet death, G-d struck a note of mercy in the heart of his executioner, who called to him, "you're young aren't you? "And he turned his sword and struck him with his hand, with a few curses, throwing him into the mass of dead bodies, and he continued his sanguinary acts against other Jews. The Jews who hid around this valley of death saw Reb Yaakov (the grandfather) fall in with the decapitated Jews and he was taken for dead. When night came, Reb Yaakov slipped out and made his way to his house.

The story of how Reb Yaakov was saved is in the category of what our sages say about a sharp sword at a man's throat. There were other young people there, but his feeling of mercy to this specific youngster proves what it means, even when a sharp sword is at your throat.

May G-d redeem us and send us Elijah, and may the Temple be rebuilt in our time.



A group of Mirrer Yeshiva students before World War II.



Rav Meyer Ashkenazi, the Rabbi of Shanghai, was a noble individual who greatly assisted the refugees in Shanghai in normalizing living conditions during their stay.

CHAPTER 1

On the 8th of Elul, 5699, (1939) nine days before the war broke out, G-d caused the signing of the Ribbintrop-Molotov Agreement. The known part of the accord was an assurance between Russia and Germany that for the next 10 years, they would not attack each other. This agreement named after the two foreign ministers who signed it had a secret undisclosed part which included a plan for the dissection and division of Eastern Europe between these two nations.

All that time, the whole world was shocked, and assailed the revealed part. All the inhabitants and their leaders looked perplexed, unable to understand what was occurring.

The Concordant was unwatched in all aspects. The fact that two nations with such diametrically diverse opinions and ideals and such an embedded animosity could then sign this accord was a blow to humanity. In less than two years, the Germans opened a fierce war against the Russians, coming close to defeating them.

The Russians were negotiating and leading to a defense agreement between France and Britain when, to the complete surprise of the world, the agreement betwen Germany and Russia was signed.

Due to the absurd and unnatural agreement, it was unaccepted by the world community. Even in Germany and in Russia there were adverse reactions, as persons in both countries could not accede to this infamous act.

After the war, a secret document was found that was attached to the known agreement of a ten year non-intervention pact. According to this document, which we will quote in full in a future chapter, the Russians and the Germans divided between themselves the influence and dominations of the Western European governments.

Causing great surprise, there was also a clause regarding the city of Vilna, in which both sides recognized that Lithuania is the authority on this city.

This clause is a wonder within a wonder; for here we speak of the most barbarous and satanic murderers in human history. Yet in their pillage of countries, and during their dividing their spaces, they yet recognized the jurisdiction of Lithuania in her rights, while they stole Vilna from her. This was Providence's order, so that the Roshei Yeshivos and their pupils should be saved.



CHAPTER 2

A number of students who left the yeshiva in order to join their families were not successful in their attempt to escape from the Russian hold. The rest of the students numbering more than 300, remained in the yeshiva during the war. Among them were also those who would come every year during the month of Elul. Because of the division of Poland they could not return to their homes, which were in the German sector, and therefore they were saved together with the entire yeshiva.

The Talmud (Gitin 88a) cites a passage from Daniel (9:14) to explain that even though the Jews were driven into the Babylonian exile, the A-mighty worried that because of their drastic situation, they might forget the Torah. Therefore, preceded Zidkyahu's exile when there were still men of learning in Babylonia, from Yochanays' time, in order that they will prepare themselves in Torah before Zidkyahu's death.

The Midrash (Tanchuma Noah 3) also concurs and concludes that in Babylonia they would dwell in Torah from then until today, with neither Edom nor Greece able to rule over them.

The annexation and dissection of Poland strangely enough turned out to be the door through which the Yeshiva was saved. The "Vilna miracle" which will be explained in a further chapter is credited to this accord. This may be compared, in some degree to the pleas of "give me Yavneh and her wise men." (The "beasts of mankind" were not aware of this turn of events, as will be explained in future chapters).

During the destruction of the second temple by the Roman empire, Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai left the

beleaguered city of Jerusalem. It was a desperate but daringly successful attempt to save Torah from destruction, and guarantee its continuing study and in a sense the spiritual survival of the Jewish nation as they entered the Diaspora. Rabbi Yochanan appeared before the Roman General Asposcjonas soon to be the Roman King and pleaded his case. He was granted three wishes. One was give me Yavneh and its wise men (Gittin 55b). It was from that Torah center that the Torah developed and continued despite the catastrophic destruction that befell the Jewish nation, and the land of Israel nearly two thousand years ago.

It can also be said regarding the European annihilation, during 1940-45, that by the Grace of the Al-mighty and His mercy, thousands of students and Roshei Yeshivos remained alive, thereby allowing the Torah to develop throughout the world.

The Al-mighty assured us with an oath that Torah will never be forgotten from Israel.(Isaiah 59:21)



Horav Shimon Shkopf with the author.

CHAPTER 3

At the signing of the non-aggression pact between the Third Reich and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the representatives of both parties, who were authorized to sign, agreed to very secretive talks concerning the boundries and periphery of influence of the two sections of Eastern Europe. The results of these talks were:

1) According to new agreements, territorial and dominion, in the sections belonging to the Baltic countries (Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), the northern frontier should serve as the boundary of Lithuania, in the periphery of influence of Germany and Russia. Both parties recognized the interest of the city of Vilna.

2) In accordance with new arrangements, territorial and dominion, of the parts belonging to the Polish nation, the periphery of influence of Germany and Russia were set on on the line of Narv, Visla, Vison, in their immediate surroundings. On the 15th day of Tishre; 5700, (Sept. 1939) both sides signed a new agreement concerning partition of Poland, with many border improvements.

The question arises, if, in the interest of both parties, they agreed that Poland should remain self governing, why, then, did they require new lines of demarcation? There were no solutions to the inquiry, other than that they wanted the expansion of additional countries.

3) In regard to southern Europe, the Russians had taken a special personal interest in Bessarabia. Germany fully agreed with this arrangement.

4) Both parties consented to keep fully secretive the conditions of this protocol.

The Jews reaped a great deal of help from this agreement. No one ever dreamed that these provisions would develop as they did. Let us mention a few advantages.

A) The annexation of eastern Poland by the Russians prevented any deaths, by the Nazis as stated before.

B) The eight to nine months that the city of Vilna was being transferred to the Lithuanian Government (in 5700), a great number of Roshei Yeshivos and thousands of their students were spared, as stated before.

C) The dividing of Poland caused a stream of refugees from western Poland, that was under German control, to eastern Poland, ruled by the Russians. Those refugees, numbering about a half a million, were deported to Siberia, with about a half of them remaining alive.

D) The interlocking borders that were created between the Germans and the Russians made possible the escape of tens of thousands of Jews to Rumania, thereby saved them from German hands.

It is a known fact that if the agreement had not been signed, the Germans would have single-handedly controlled all of Poland, because strategically there was no forbearance to her on this issue. Providence caused the Germans to overpower Poland, while handing over to the Russians the eastern district on a silver-platter thus saving some bnai Torah and their remnants.

CHAPTER 4

The days of Slichos and the High Holy Days of 5700 (1939) came during the changeover of authority and brought us into World War II. (The Russian Army reached the city of Mir a day after Rosh Hashanah on the Fast of Gedaliah in 5700 (1939). The schedule of learning Torah, mussar and prayers in the Yeshiva continued uninterrupted, as usual. The lectures of the Roshei Yeshiva and the talks by the Mashgiach progressed without a break.

More than that was the special determination in Torah and (tefilah.) The spiritual atmosphere, in particular, of the yeshiva was strengthened. We know that our only salvation lies in our Torah: Special continual courage and faith and trust in the Al-Mighty, with repentance, prayer and learning of Torah. Twenty four hours a day, the constant spiritual vigilance continued, with groups changing guards. It was said that the atmosphere during those High Holidays was charged with so much emotion and purpose in that critical hour, especially in prayers, that it was way above even what it used to be before. This gave us the resoluteness to continue living.

The last Simchas Torah in Mir was celebrated with the fullest measure of joy, more than the years before. The melody "take consul together and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand, for G-d is with us" ("Utzu Etza Vesoofore," etc.), was sung for hours uninterruptedly with an excitement that has no comparison in the history of the yeshiva. It was even very difficult to wind it up. (It was said that this sentence from our prayers was uttered as if it pierced the Heavens.)

It was worth noting that this strong feeling in those critical times was quite characteristic of the Mirrer yeshiva.

As soon as the Russians conquered parts of Poland, they immediately began a rampage of looting, from one end of the border to the next. They cleaned out all of the food outlets and sent everything into Russia. All factories, storages and businesses were thoroughly gone over. Everything they were able to remove, they did. This caused a famine and scarcity of all items. Even the yeshiva was left without bread, which became very difficult to obtain. During Succos and Simchas Torah, there was an abundance of food available, but bread and potatoes were rationed.

One of the students had an "in" with the Russian Army General of Mir. He met with the General and depicted the hunger situation of the yeshiva, but the General showed no interest in his request. The young man continued to plead his case before the General, but to no avail. The General said to him, "maybe we will wait until tomorrow night." This acrimonious reply hurt us more because we were shown how insensitive one can be. When it was explained to him that there was not even a crumb of bread available, his reply was, "let's wait until tomorrow night."

We had to swallow this and starve, because to complain in Russia is forbidden. If one dares to complain, he is destined for a harsh treatment.

But, this was not all. The Russians were preparing to exile us to Siberia, because now we were under Stalin's law. For the "sin" of conducting a yeshiva, and particularly for the grave sin of learning, one is subject to life imprisonment and hard labor in Siberia.

The army's commander was afraid that we might disperse and leave, so he advised that for "our good", we remain. The Russian government was occupied in rampaging Poland. Even the trains were not used, and the

preparations for our being driven to Siberia were to come in a short while.

But what could we do? How could we escape? We strengthened ourselves with our ammunition — to pray to HaShem.

CHAPTER 5

Three days after Simchas Torah (the 26th of Tishre; 5700) we felt lost, not knowing what to do. We learned that in two weeks the Russians were prepared to transfer the city of Vilna to its own Lithuanian rule. Vilna was the last vestage under Polish rule, and with the Russian conquest, it was annexed to them. No man knew and no one understood this hurried strange resolution. Lithuania was a subservient government. It did not request control over Vilna. Their friendly relations were frozen and she knew by that what was in store for her. Now without any pressure, Russia appeared as a "friend", to Lithuania's great surprise; and it seemed as if with their own free will, the Russians handed over Vilna to the Lithuanians.

Numerous reasons were then circulated to explain certain tactics, but no one was concerned, especially when such chaotic conditions prevailed throughout the world.

A day after the secret move of the Russian-German division of Europe, we saw that the "giving away" of Vilna was tied into this agreement. It was according to the

agreement of both parties, and the interest of Lithuania and the city of Vilna.

The realization of the Vilna agreement in such an expeditious time was very strange, as was the entire panorama in general. The Russians then established a military compulsion basis in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, and this decree baffled everyone. With their brute force they ruled over these three countries and annexed them to Russia during the summer. Latvia and Estonia did not receive any benefits of this duress. Russia's excuse was she was protecting them from outside attacks. Only with Lithuania did the Russians carry on negotiations on the merits of exchange of Vilna. The Lithuanians were well aware what was in store for them when the Russians would accept their "fundamentals." The negotiations with Lithuania involved coercion and extortion. Actually. the Russians could have obtained the "fundamentals" in Lithuania without handing over Vilna as they did with Latvia and Estonia, without any barterings. It is clear however, that Providence ordered it so as to enable the bnei Torah to have a breathing spell.

Regardless of the reasons the actual thought that was considered by the Russians, to agree then and there to hand over Vilna (an act that proved later to be the source of saving the remnants of bnei Torah), is, in itself, a knowledgeable proof of Heaven's purpose, as written in the Torah. "The hearts of rulers and Kings are in the Hands of G-d (HaShem.)" (Psalms). Everyone saw the Omni-present's aim and that there was no one besides Him. This episode was marked as "Vilna's miracle," because from this "Miracle" developed the preservation of Torah. The majority of Roshei Yeshivos and thousands of students and learned men were rescued through Vilna. From them, the Torah expanded throughout the world after the holocaust.

The news of the re-annexation of Vilna to Lithuania electrified all the Mirrer yeshiva students and other *bnei yeshiva* who were caught in the Russian Government's net, and they soon began to travel to Vilna.

There were those who were skeptical about making the trip to the capital. They thought that eventually, Lithuania would fall prey in the hands of the Russians. Then those who did escape to Vilna would suffer more than those who did not. It was believed that this might be a trick to ensnare these people, in order to find out who were those who were not satisfied with the new rulers and to eventually deport them to Siberia. (This method was not an unusual phenomenon in Russia's plan of action.)

All of these doubts had no basis, and were not even being considered. The only actual thought that prevailed on everyone was: "Here is a possibility of being saved. Let us run in its path immediately, as if Heaven got a hold of us and saved us from this troublesome situation." A feeling of fleeing encircled us all. Our luggage was packed in haste, bidding goodbye to relatives and making last minute arrangements, as if escaping a desperate enemy who was expected any minute. All preparations were made clandestinely, not to cause the Russian authorities to notice anything.

On the 2nd of Cheshvan, 5700, the majority of the students of the Mirrer Yeshiva left the city in the middle of the night on their way to Vilna commencing a most difficult journey. After that came the remaining Roshei Yeshiva (the Rosh Yeshiva, Reb Eliezer Finkel, with his family, his son-in-law, Reb Chaim Shmulewitz, and his family and the Mashgiach, Yecheskel Lewenstein, with his family.)

Only one of the Roshei Yeshiva, Reb Avraham Zvee Kamai, remained in the city of Mir. He also served as the

Rav of the city and would not leave his community in such a most difficult time, remaining in the city to lead and encourage his fellow Jews.

On our way to Vilna, we met a remnant of the well-beaten Polish army that displayed its hatred towards Jews. Even in their disastrous downfall, the Poles did not forget for one moment their acrimonious feelings toward the Jews.

When the yeshiva finally left the city of Mir, it made a very great impact on the remaining inhabitants. There was never such a black day for them as when the yeshiva left the city. It semed as if the city was orphaned, and everyone felt it.

The commissar, (of the Russian government), learning of their escape began to howl like an animal: "They ran away, but we will capture them yet."

To enter Vilna one did not require a special permit, because the city was still under Russian rule as was all of eastern Poland. It was only after the Lithuanians took control of the city that a new border around the city was established — Lithuania — Russia. Whoever did not reach Vilna then, could not enter it anymore except by smuggling himself across the border.

The Russian soldiers who occupied the streets noticed the large numbr of yeshiva students entering, but did not interfere. Everyone was waiting impatiently for the Lithuanian Government.

As the yeshiva students reached Vilna, most of them settled in the building of the Rameillas yeshiva. It was too small to hold all of them, and a portion had to use the facilities of the synagogues. There was no place to rest, so they used to sleep on their baggage. Yet even under such circumstances we continued to learn.

Other yeshivos in the district began to flee in the thousands to Vilna. Most of the Roshei Yeshivos and their students luckily reached the city in time, and thereby were saved.

A famine occurred in Vilna as in other districts conquered by the Russians. We had to stand in line sometimes for hours, to receive a loaf of bread. Thank G-d, preparations were made for the students of the yeshivos to receive bread. When Vilna was re-annexed to Lithuania, within two weeks the Jewish community of Lithuania supplied students with sufficient amounts of food.

On the pre-arranged day, when the Lithuanian Army was to take control, not one Lithuanian soldier was seen on the streets. Even several days later, there was no sign of the Lithuanian Army entering. (It could be because of the basic bargaining that the Russians were making with Lithuania.)

Some were skeptical: Maybe the entire situation was a trick by the Russians to trap and seek out the dissenters, and nothing more.

When this thought was expressed to the Rav of Vilna, HaGaon Reb Chaim Grodsinsky, he replied: "Do not worry, the only reason for the delay is because not all the students of the yeshivos have arrived and others are still on their way to safety." And so it was. Every day additional groups of students arrived into the city. It was only after the flow of students entering the city ended that the Lithuanian army entered after a delay of two weeks and took control of the city.

With the help of *HaShem*, and during the whirlpool of the war, Chassidic Rebbes, rabbis and yeshiva students from the German territories reached Vilna. An organized group of students from the Yeshiva of Lubavitch, in the city of Otwask, (near Warsaw) arrived. Individual students also arrived from other yeshivos of western Poland. HoRav

Grodsinsky organized all the students into one yeshiva, which was called "Yeshiva Chachmei Lublin". Rav Menachem Zvee Eisenstadt was chosen Rosh Yeshiva, coordinating these students and helping them physically as well as spiritually.

With the entrance of the Lithuanian authorities to Vilna, we were saved from the Russian government and we immediately began to plan how we could leave Lithuania (which was still a self-governing land) to somewhere out of the sphere of the war zone. Since this was not possible for a day or two, we therefore searched for a proper place in the city where we could adjust ourselves until we could leave. The yeshiva received permission to use the large Bais Medrash known as "Novogrod". The few hundred seating capacity available there was sufficient for everyone, and the learning schedule began as always. Even the intense lectures and the mussar were in full force. Dormitory facilities were obtained in the immediate surroundings and good meals were prepared.

Everyone who was familiar with the yeshiva when it was in Mir, and now that it came to "Novogrod", seemed to think that he was attending exactly the same yeshiva as it had been in the city of Mir. Here he found the same warmth, the same devotion and concentration and, with the same zeal, the learning of mussar and the conducting of the proper prayers without any change. This phenomenon amazed everyone. After all, they were in the midst of a war, far from their homes, knowing not what tomorrow would bring, yet the same zealousness was found as if nothing had occurred.

Let me just record the impression of an outsider, who described how the learning progressed. This man who today is a great *talmud chacham* and was then a student at the Brisker Yeshiva also arrived as a refugee in Vilna. He

decided to enroll in the framework of the Mirrer Yeshiva. On his way to the Yeshiva in Novogrod, as he approached the street where the yeshiva was located, he heard a tremendous noise of learning Torah from hundreds of students. This noise was so sweet and dear to his heart that it caused him to run to the yeshiva, as if a magnet were pulling him there.

The *talmud chacham* continues to comment that the learning of mussar before the Maariv services was with so much warmth that it seemed as if the walls were shaking. The Maariv services that came after the mussar were conducted in such deep thought and feeling that it can never be explained. These were the findings of this *talmid chacham.* This spirit of diligence spread to the other yeshivos that were situated in Vilna.

Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik, the Brisker Rav, ztl used to discuss the miracles that G-d had shown to the yeshiva students: How the Al-mighty vacated for them a place in Vilna between the hammer and sickle. From one side, the Germans, and the Russians from the other. This situation should prompt us to more intensified learning, and that is what actually happened. The Brisker Rav delivered wonderful lectures, full of depth and zealousness, before a group of about 50 to 60 selected students.

The lectures, called "The Blatt", were always delivered specifically by the Rav. This was a period when the concentration of Torah learning reached its peak in the yeshiva world, and it is enembered forever by all those who were lucky enough to participate.

For a full year, the lectures continued, until Kislev, 5701 (Dec. 1940) (actually until the Russians left). Even after the dispersion of the yeshivos from Vilna to the surrounding cities, the lectures continued on schedule. Many individuals remained in Vilna and complete yeshivos remained there. They were all able to obtain permission for

temporary visitors from the nearby communities to come to Vilna. That is how many who had left Vilna to its surrounding vicinity were able to attend the lectures.

The elderly sage, Admur Reb Shaul Yididya Taub, the Modshitzer Rebbe, also reached Vilna in a unique providential way in order to strengthen the hearts of the desolated ones and to help save them. The Modshitzer Rebbe also fled from Warsaw when it was in the hands of the Germans, and through great agony reached Brisk. From there, he was exceedingly fortunate to come to Vilna with his family.

In Vilna, he continued his Chassidic tradition, and his synagogue was packed completely with refugees. His talented and heartwarming songs brought joy to the broken hearts, and gave them much happiness.

Even after the Lithuanian officials ordered that the yeshivos should spread out outside of Vilna, the Modshitzer Rebbe continued to remain in Vilna, until the Russians left in Av (August) of that year, and he uplifted the downtrodden hearts with his beautiful melodies and songs of joy.

Only a few days after the Russians left did the Rebbe, with exceptional merit from Heaven, receive permission to leave Russia for the United States (his relatives and friends in the United States helped him obtain this American permission.) In 5700 (1940) he left Russia, officially for the United States through Japan. The bon-voyage affair was held Saturday night in Veschonon. His remaining family reached the United States later, together with all the refugees by way of Japan.

From the United States, he went to Eretz Yisrael after the war and established his synagogue in Tel-Aviv. In 5708 (1948), he ascended to Heaven and was buried on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. He was the last to be buried there during the Israeli War of Independence.

CHAPTER 6

The Lithuanian government set up a "Refugee Department" to serve the thousands who were there. They gave each refugee a "Refugee Identification" card. Their main purpose was that the refugees should not become citizens. It is interesting that at the end, it was the refugees who succeeded — through the Lithuanians — to prepare the ground for the exodus from Russia (as will be explained in future chapters).

After months of waiting in Vilna, the Lithuanian Government issued an order that all refugees (especially the Bnai Yeshivos) were to leave Vilna and disperse to the surrounding communities.

In reality, this edict was a good omen for them. Due to the conditions prevailing then in Vilna, the students of the yeshiva took part in discussion pro and con on political issues and this robbed them of hours of learning.

The order did not affect the individual learned men or the yeshivos with a small registration. There were also yeshivos with a large number of students that succeeded in remaining in Vilna. It was also possible to obtain temporary entrance permits, which was used especially by those who wished to hear Rabbi Soloveitchik's lectures.

The Rosh Yeshiva, HaGaon HoRav Finkel, did not agree to move to another city because there were no facilities there to accommodate 300 students which contained sufficient space for the lectures. He preferred to go to Keidon, a quiet and peaceful city in the depths of Lithuania.

The Lithuanian Government refused to permit them to move to Keidon, but only to disperse in small communities around Vilna.

The Rosh Hayeshiva used all his influence and connections that he had to obtain a permit to move to Keidon. He knew that the future of the yeshiva and the lectures depended on it.

One avenue utilized for this purpose was to direct large sums of money to the proper authorities, who finally granted him permission to establish his Yeshiva in Keidon.

It was a great miracle that he was able to amass such enormous funds in such a crisis and accomplish his goal.

In the beginning of the month of Teves, two months after we arrived in Vilna, we moved to Keidon.

Peace and tranquility was evident in the city and by its inhabitants. Keidon did not have any knowledge as to what transpired in Vilna. The air was so pleasant that you could forget completely that the world was involved in a war (it was in this period that the war between the Russians and The Finns was in progress).

The city had a very large synagogue that could seat several hundred students. It is told that the Gaon of Vilna would learn there in his youth, when he served his Rebbe, Rabbenu Moshe Margolis, author of "Penea Moshe" (on the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmud).

The dormitory and the provisions for food were prepared most satisfactorily.

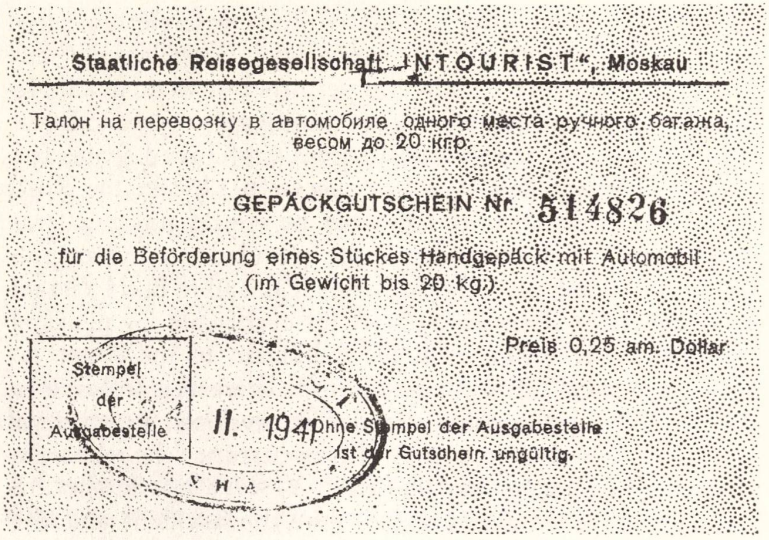
The yeshiva began its schedule with a most enthusiastic beginning that could not be duplicated. The learning and the prayers reached a higher level than when in Vilna. The students recall with pride the elevation that they attained during their stay in Keidon.

During the ensuing period without interruption, the Rosh Yeshiva continued in every way possible with his strenuous efforts to obtain exit permits but to no avail. He especially endeavored to procure certificates to exit to Eretz Yisrael. He even used pressure from the United States for that the purpose but was not successful. When the Rosh Yeshiva realized that in Lithuania he would not gain any certificates for his students, he decided to utilize the certificate he had on hand for himself to sail to Eretz Yisrael and from there attempt to secure the certificate for all of his students. He travelled with his Rebbetzin to the airport at Riqa (capital of Lithuania) and from there was to leave to Eretz Yisrael. As the plane ascended, it developed a mechanical defect and it had to return. In this occurrance the rebbetzin met with an accident and the Rosh Yeshiva had to alter his plans of travel. Everyone felt that the accident and the postponement of the trip was a sign from Providence and, as the mashgiach remarked, "It was to the good."

Before the matter was completely unveiled, it was discovered that if the Rosh Yeshiva would have left for Eretz Yisrael, then the students would have remained there in this "valley of death." Later they found out that he would not have been able to secure certificates. The students remaining in Lithuania would not have used the connections there, but with his efforts, they applied to the N.K.L.O. (the secret service of Russia) and they received exit permits.

CHAPTER 7
Shevat — Adar 5700

During this period, numerous attempts were made in all directions for the possibility of leaving, but with no success. We were without any citizenship, because Poland revoked all citizenships, and that made a strong impact on us. For how can a stateless person get a passport during the



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Intourist identification ticket for traveling.

war? Nevertheless we needed something in our hand. At that time one of the workers learned that the British Consulate in Kovno maintained a Polish department for the Polish citizens in exile. After the annexation of Poland, the Polish Consulate moved to Kovno and within the confines of the British Consulate (Britain was a member of the Allies, and therefore Britain gave recognition to Poland's government-in-exile.) In this office, the Polish representative agreed to extend to us a certification in lieu of a passport.

The worthlessness of this certificate was not only because the government did not exist, but also because its own authenticity was in doubt. On the top of the certificate, the following was printed: "An Exchange For A Passport-Representative of Poland in Kovno." The broken lines that appeared was to prevent erasures.

The outside appearance of this certificate was a total disgrace. It was not a booklet like the usual passports, but a piece of paper that seemed more like a personal note. In any event, we were fortunate to receive any kind of passport. The Rosh Yeshiva urged us to consent to this kind of creditation. The young men who were involved in emmigration matters obtained about 300 such passport papers. It is very interesting that this "paper" was the only document we had and with that "paper" we left Russia.

After it was known that the yeshiva was a recipient of such "passports", thousands of others obtained such authorizations (It was the yeshiva students who were the first to reveal this emmigration scheme.)

At this point we would like to elaborate on the passport miracle. The beginning of this wonder began unexpectedly two years before, with a very clear demonstration of providence! Hashgacha:!

Because of Poland's conquering and annexing Vilna during World War I, there was a deep feeling of animosity between the two countries. Lithuania would not agree to a reconciliation under any circumstances until Vilna was returned to her. Therefore, there was no relationship between these two contries, no visitors business, nor even mail, (Mail had to be sent to a neutral country and from there to its destination, although there they were both only a boundary apart). It is also understood that they had no diplomatic accord between them.

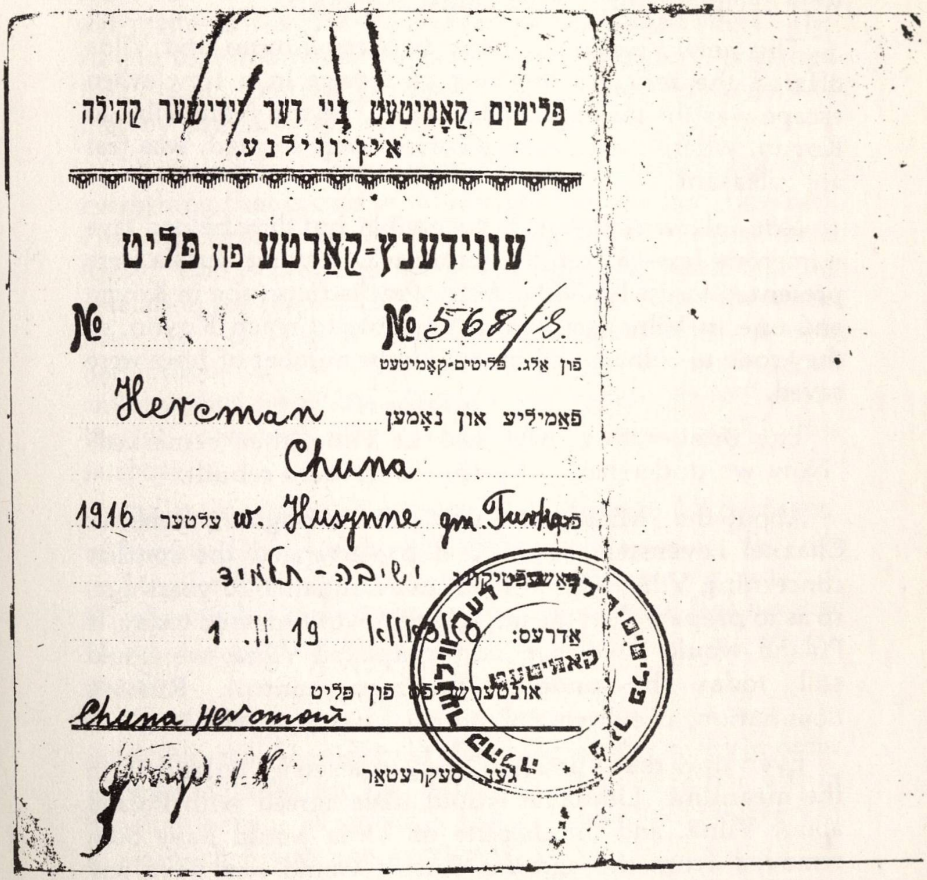
Because of the strained relationsip with Lithuania, Poland was very insecure, although she was much stronger than Lithuania. The situation did not allow Poland to continue her affairs (in this way) and ultimately caused an open conflict.

In the middle of 1938, Poland issued a strong ultimatum to Lithuania to review her relationship unconditionally. It was a peace or war offer.

The ultimatum made a serious and earnest impact. Poland mobilized its army at the border and a feeling of war was in the air. Lithuania, whose armed forces were no match for Poland capitulated completely and announced her good intentions complying with Poland's demands for friendly relations — the inter-change of diplomatic consulates, resuming business and the distribution of mail.

Lithuania also agreed to Poland's demand to build a new rail line between them and improve the highways. The agreement was as follows:

Lithuania was to build from the city line to Kovno (the present capital) a rail line and highway as far as her borders. About a half a year before the outbreak of the war, the rail and highway traffic, the mail and commerce, as well as exchange of diplomatic representation were functioning well.


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גענע סעקרעטאַר

An I.D. card issued by the "Refugee Committee of the Jewish Kehilla of Willna".

Poland's excuse to open war against Lithuania because of her enmity to her was an unheard of phenomenon in world politics. But this was the strange story that brought the Polish consulate to Kovno. Thanks to this turn of events, we were able to secure (and thousands of others were recipients of) the so-called passports.

The newly-paved highway between Kovno and Vilna offered the refugees the best of service in a time when escape was the major consideration. The trip from Vilna to Kovno, where the consulate offices were located, was fast and pleasant.

Not only were the roads accessible, but they helped save numerous Jews. When the request for leaving Russia were presented to the NKVD offices, the districts (one in Kovno and one in Vilna) seemed unpassable to reach Kovno, so they rode to Vilna and thereby a large number of Jews were saved.

The Brisker Rov, who was in Vilna, then remarked; "Now we understand why the roads were rebuilt."

About the "Miracle of Vilna", the Mashgiach, Rabbenu Chazkel Levenstein, said "G-d pre-arranged the conflict concerning Vilna with Poland and Lithuania 20 years ago, so as to prepare then the miracle that we witnessed today. If Poland would have then not conquered Vilna, we would still today be under Lithuanian control. Russia's domination in eastern Poland in the city of Mir."

Even now that Vilna had been annexed by Poland, if, in the meantime, Lithuania would have agreed with Poland about Vilna, and the dispute of Vilna would have been removed from the agenda, Russia would not have any reason to transfer Vilna to Lithuania and we would be under Russian rule in eastern Poland.

Therefore, the Al-Mighty so caused it, that Vilna should be conquered by Poland 20 years ago and from then until today, He implanted a deep hatred between the two countries, only to prepare the ground for Russia's annexation. The temporary return of Vilna to Lithuania was made so that the *Bney Yeshivos* should be saved. The Kovno to Vilna roads were completed because G-d caused that Poland coerced Lithuania for friendly relations and thereby prepared the roads before the war.

These incidents strengthen the words of our Sages that everything that occurs in the world is for the sake of Israel. From the first six days when the world was created, until today, every event is with the ultimate goal for the revelation for the respect of Heaven. Throughout the world there is no episode that is not interwoven in this harmonious action — if we do not recognize it in its entirety (but when the Messiah will appear we will attain the full meaning). The whole chain of events lead to this purpose.

On this subject, the Mashgiach, Yechezkel Levenstein, zt"l pointed to what the Vilna Gaon explained in his notes on Megilas Esther, to prove that Ahashuverush's choice of Shushan as his capital was not only his choice, but because of what would transpire there on behalf of the Jewish people.

The Mashgiach went on at length about this event to show that the Al-mighty is the cause of all causes in order to make miracles for the Jews. Because Mordechai was in Shushan before, as stated in Esther, caused Ahashuverush to establish his throne in Shushan.

We are therefore obligated to read every word of Esther because every sentence relates to the sequence of events of the great miracle. The Omnipresent "with a strong hand and outstretched arm", G-d completed his mission. This was the opinion of the Gaon of Vilna.

The miracle continued with Ahashuverushes party and Vashti's refusal to attend. Her execution opened the way for Esther to become queen. Next a seemingly unrelated event occured. Begsan and Serash plotted to kill the king. This plot was exposed by Mordecai. Subsequently it was verified and recorded in the day book of the king. This incident led to Mordecai's rise and Haman's downfall.

CHAPTER 8

Nisan, 5700 **April — 1940**

In the month of Nisan 5700 (April-1940), the Germans were victorious against Denmark and Norway. Therefore the Baltic Sea — the only water route to Lithuania — was made impassable.

In the beginning of the year, the Germans over-ran Holland, causing the only air-strip from Lithuania to be closed. On the 11th of Iyar, France capitulated to Germany.

Russia did not allow the Lithuanians to travel through her country; not to the Odessa part, from where they could sail to Eretz Yisroel nor to their Vloda-Vostok part, from where they could sail to the United States through Japan.

During this period, Lithuania was completely closed and no one could leave or enter. This situation continued until the 6th of Av of that year, when the Russians relinquished it to the Lithuanians.

Prior to the German invasion, when it was possible to leave, during the winter months, hundreds of Jews sailed to Eretz Yisroel. Among them was the Gaon of Ponovez, Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, ztl. Those who were detained until after Passover could not leave, even if they had authentic certificates to go to Eretz Yisroel. This is what is meant by, 'no one came and no one left.'

Even in that period of serious world crisis, the Mirrer Yeshiva in Keidon, continued uninterrupted. The students' devotion and concentration to Torah and tefillah was indescribable.

Sivan, 5700

With the expansion of Germany's gain in eastern Europe, the Russians began to intensify their hold on the Baltic section. After Shevuos of 5700 (June 1940), the Lithuanian-Russians set up, under pressure from the Russian army stationed in Lithuania, a Communist government. This government was established because the Russian army left its strongholds and took positions in central cities.

The duty of this government was to prepare the public for the annexation of Lithuania to Russia within two months. A poll was taken and the results were that Lithuania urge that she be considered a part of Russia. This "request" was transmitted to the Russian Government, which authorized it. On the 6th day of Av — Sabbath Chazon — 5700, the day after the passing of the great Gaon, Rabbenu Chaim Ozer of Vilna, ztl, Russia annexed

all of Lithuania. Both historic Lithuania and her capital, Vilna, became Russian territory. From that time on we were returned to the Stalin government. The Russians demolished all the boundaries between Russia and Lithuania and dispersed the consulates of Kovno, because Lithuania was now part of greater Russia and there were already consulates in Moscow, so there was no need for duplication.

After Lithuania fell, Latvia and Estonia followed suit in the same manner.

During the ensuing Communist rule the consulates in Kovno continued as usual. Lithuania was officially still a self-governing country. Emigration activities were streamlined, and every method of leaving the area was utilized. The visas secured from the Dutch and Japanese Consulates were amongst the new avenues of escape.

The few months delay in the interim period was a G-d-send, and preparations for departing were in full swing before the Russians were to arrive. If the Russians had annexed Lithuania immediately without hesitation, as they did to other countries, there would have been no possibility to prepare the visas the way we did for numerous reasons,and surely not by such grandiose method.

Direct procedure was not manageable for the Russians because of the Ribbintrop Molotov agreement specifying that Lithuania was to remain under both countries' influence (see chapter 3). It may also have been because of the public relations angle. Only nine months earlier Vilna reverted to Lithuania in order to correct the inequity committed against her by Poland. Now the Russians mselves, wished to swallow the entire Vilna. This ponement was another chapter in the miracle of Vilna.

CHAPTER 9

During this lapse of a short while, before the communist government was established in Lithuania, a Japanese consul, Sigi Haara, arrived very unexpectedly and opened his office in Kovno.

This was a great surprise because there had never been a Japanese consulate in Kovno, even before, in peaceful times. Just now, when the entire district was on the verge of liquidation and the air was charged, this Japanese consulate appeared.

Lithuania and other Baltic countries had diplomatic relations with Japan because of mutual interest in tourism, commerce education, etc. But Japan only delegated one consul to each of the districts of the Baltic countries. The consul's headquarters was in Riga, capital of Latvia. Even this one consul did not have many activities. The consul who arrived in Kovno, was sent by the Latvian consul of Riga, with full credentials as a consul to issue visas.

At the start, Kovno's Japanese consul had little to do, but when the Jewish refugees came flooding to the office for transit visas, he was snowed under with work. This consul remained in Kovno until the month of Elul, when he finished issuing the visas. He did not leave until he utilized every means available, storybook fashion, to satisfy everyone. He then left Lithuania. Every one saw the hand of G-d in this great work in that the Consul was dispatched to Kovno only to save the yeshiva students.

As already stated, with the establishment of the Communist regime in Sivan 5700, (June 1940) we did not have any visas in our possession. This concern caused us to turn to the consul of Japan whom in our wildest dreams we would never before have thought of approaching. The results were that the consul was ready to offer us transit visas through Japan. A transit visa is given to one only to pass through a country on the way to his destination — another country.

Where were we to secure a destination visa? Wherever we turned, we met with defeat. How could we now, under Communistic rule, get anywhere? But G-d, in His kindness, sent us our salvation through a miraculous event, (in a way that has no explanation). We became the recipients of authorizations and with them, we made our successful journey.

Denmark's consul, Philip Reiley, was an honorary consul. Denmark was not able to maintain a consul in Lithuania (aside the general consul in Latvia) because of lack of activity in judicial matters. His major involvement was in private business of Electrical Appliances of the Philips factories, but he had permission to deal in matters of visas. When the Communist regime was established, the consul rushed to leave Lithuania, but the Communists prevented him from doing so for no reason. Providence prepared for us Denmark's consul who served as another link in our visa miracle.

For years, the Holland Government had conducted a campaign to urge people to settle on the Isle of Curacao, under her jurisdiction (Curacao is one of the islands of the Netherland Antillies in the Carribean.) She issued permission to anyone who wished to go to Curacao even without a visa.

The Jews of Vilna were aware that anyone could enter Curacao without a visa, and they now decided to approach Denmark's consulate on this issue.

The thought of emigrating became imbedded within us and we approached the Dutch Consul for visas to Curacao. We never intended to reach Curacao, as our only purpose was to have any destination visa in our possession and thereby become eligible for a Japanese transit-visa. Our aim was to reach Eretz Yisroel or the United States.

The Dutch Consul informed us that there was no possibility of obtaining a visa to Curacao, because the Dutch government allowed everyone to enter without a visa. He further pointed out that, actually the newly arrived residents of Curacao, who had formed a local government, did not permit anyone to enter, for numerous reasons. Therefore, there was no need for a visa, in any case, no one could set foot on the island.

It was then that we suggested to the consul that he put in writing that there was no need for a visa, so that we would be able to present it to the Japanese Consulate. The Dutch Consul agreed and gave everyone a certification in which he wrote:

"The bearer is permitted to enter Curacao without a visa, according to Dutch regulations." We paid the consul for the certification, as if we had received the authentic visas.

With these so-called "visas to Curacao," we turned to the Japanese Consul for transit-visas, which he agreed to give us. He was well aware that we had no intentions of making Curacao our ultimate destination and only wanted to secure his transit-visa. But he routinely complied with the rules and extended to the applicants the visas they requested. He even endangered his position by issuing

these visas after Lithuania was annexed. The sum requested was about one fourth of what we paid to the Dutch Consulate for his so called Curacao visas.

When the representatives of the Yeshiva first came to the Japanese Consul to request several hundred transit-visas, the consul replied in the negative and with utter disregard for our plight. He demanded proof of the possibility of our entering the United States and the probability of securing a boat to sail there. It seems he feared that such a large organized group might end up settling in Japan — a matter of concern to the Japanese Government. There were some preferred individuals and small groups, who had no intentions of remaining in Japan to whom they handed out visas without limit.

Eventually, the visas were offered to the Yeshiva in good spirit, just several days before the Yeshiva closed in Keidon. The Yeshiva emmissary was able to get more than 1,000 transit-visas, which also included additional individuals who had difficulty in applying for personal reasons. The consul even authorized a member of the Yeshiva Aid in signing and stamping the visas (the stamp was in English and in Japanese which read: "Good for transit through Japan to the Island of Curacao and other Dutch Islands"). Because of the large number of applicants the yeshiva representative had to complete them in several days. Once, the consul remained in his office, hours after closing, in order to sign all the visas.

The Japanese consul later agreed to give a transit-visa even to those who did not have a Curacao visa, and because of that, they are now alive with us. There are **Gedolei HaTorah** who are now alive who were saved with this transit visa to Japan, without even possessing the Curacao visa. This visa was stamped on the Polish passport on the empty pages.

As soon as Russia annexed Lithuania, an order was issued to close all consulates in Kovno. Even after this edict was proclaimed, the Japanese Consul continued to issue transit visas for an additional three weeks, as long as he was able to stay in Kovno. Even though his office was very small and he was able to pack all his belongings in a day or two, he prolonged it for a full three weeks. During this time, he continued issuing visas to all who applied, which continually reached a large number. Anyone who had delayed or procrastinated before the Russians entered, hurried to complete it now.

The last day of the consul's stay in Kovno was of special significance. On this day, when numerous people came to get a visa, a rumor circulated that the Russian N.K.V.D. was filming everyone present. The consul himself, approached the crowd outside and assured everyone that he was continuing to offer visas.

This sacrificial gesture by the consul convinced everyone, and they remained, waiting for their turn.

His entire paraphernalia and belongings were packed, ready to leave, except his seal for the visas, which he held in his hand and continued to use all day to sign the documents.

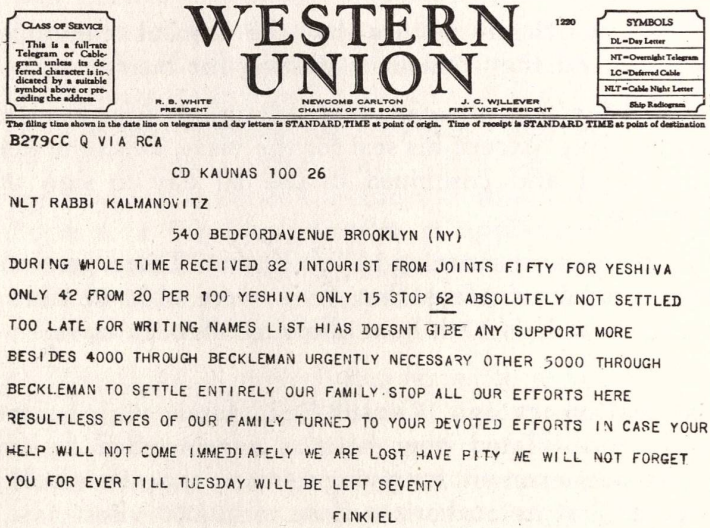
Early the next morning he left Kovno. There were still more miraculous ways that Jews were able to obtain documents at this 12th hour allowing them to leave.

Several years ago, Consul Seji Harah visited Eretz Yisroel and related how he was reprimanded by the Japanese Government for giving so many transit-visas. It is estimated that he authorized close to 10,000 visas.

It is difficult to comprehend the reason for his most self-sacrificing attitude. We must admit that Providence's intervention was boldly demonstrated. How G-d prepared this Japanese Consul, strong in character and with a heart of gold, and instilled in him a willingness to save the yeshiva students.

The wonder is augmented when we stop to think that the Japanese government and its representatives were known as pro-German, and even several years before (1937), she joined Germany for a combined army and political bond, primarily aimed at Russia, known as Anti-Commutarian.

After 1937, Japan joined with Fascist Italy in a bond. To us, the Japanese Consul showed a most devoted heart, without realizing why and for what. This is to demonstrate how hidden and wonderful are the ways of Providence.



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FINKIEL

CHAPTER 10

Av, 5700 — August 1940

About several days befor the arrival of the Russians, the Lithuanian Communist regime ordered the yeshiva in Keidan to close and disperse its students.

The Yeshiva administration agreed to shut the yeshiva and disband its student body. Arrangements were made in four surrounding small communities to accept the boys. Clandestinely, they continued their learning unhampered.

In the beginning of the month of Av, 5700, the yeshiva left Keidan.

Before their departure, the entire student body and the **Roshei Yeshivos** assembled together and recited chapters of Psalms. With deep emotions and tears streaming down their cheeks, everyone beseeched the Al-Mighty to save them. The residents of Keidan joined in the prayers. The city was clothed in mourning upon their departure.

The communist rulers were exhilirated as they officially and publicly announced, "We Have Destroyed The Bastion of Torah, The Mirrer Yeshiva."

But, on the contrary, the yeshiva was not shattered. It became strengthened and more and more determined.

They continued to communicate with the Jews of Keidan, and when the students left Kovno for Moscow on their way to Japan, they all came to bid them farewell. The Jews were so overwhelmed that they prepared sufficient food for everyone to take along.

The yeshiva separated into four groups. One went to the city of Karkinova, headed by the **Rosh Yeshiva** Rabbenu Chaim Shmulevitz. The second to Shat with the **Mashgiach,** Rabbenu Yechezkel Lewenstein, leading them. Ramegula, and Kruk were the next two stations. (The group destined to Shat, attempted at first, to go to Vilna, but because of the difficulties there, had to return to Shat. Then the **Mashgiach,** who had first gone to Karkanova, joined them.)

Rabbenu Eliezer Yehuda Finkel the **Rosh Yeshiva,** who was involved in securing exit permits, took the city of Krinkishuk a suburb, so that it would not appear in any way to be an organized, religious group.

From his house in the country he dispatched telegrams and letters to help save the yeshiva. His emmigration agents would come to his house in the middle of the night and leave before dawn, so that no suspiciousness was noticeable.

In these villages, we learned in the synagogues and we dormed in the homes of these dear and poor Jews. They accepted us with open arms, love and warmth. Many times, they shared their portion of bread with us. They considered it a good omen that they were fortunate enough to help those who were able to sit and learn Torah. In these hamlets, we had to conceal our movements as much as possible, but we were certain that we could not continue for long undercover.

Rabbenu Chaim Shmulevitz delivered his lecture and the **Mashgiach** continued his talks to reinforce us in our spiritual ways. The **Mashgiach** would visit every one at the quarters and his presence proved to be an injection of life. This is how the yeshiva existed harmoniously, in seclusion, under Stalin's Communist rule.

The **Rosh Yeshivo's** only disturbing thought was how to secure permission to go to Eretz Yisroel which up to now had been impossible. The close cooperation of these small communities was short-lived. The threat of being driven to Siberia began to fill the air (since Russia took control, word continually reached us about coerced expulsions to Siberia.)

What remained on the agenda, then, was to request permission to leave for Japan. With our transit-visas in our hands, it seemed that this was the only avenue left for us, for we had nothing to lose.

HaGaon HoRav Leib Malin, and HaGaon HoRav Eliezer Portnow and others headed this venture.

In the month of Elul 5700, (Sept. 1940) two emmigration offices were opened at the NKVD bureau in Lithuania. One was in Kovno and the second one in Vilna. The actual opening of such offices was a great surprise, because Russia did not allow any emmigration, but suddenly she made offices accessible for those who wished to emigrate. Everyone was skeptical that this was only a hidden play to ensnare those who wanted to leave and exile them to Siberia. The impression was that all to suddenly Russia was prepared to aid those who wished to leave. But there was another side to the coin, and this probably was the crux of the "Miracle of Vilna."

It is true that Stalin's government looked at one who desired to leave as a traitor who should be evicted to Siberia. Because of that, the Russians made these offices available so that they would be rid of The Jewish refugees of Lithuania. These refugees were mostly comprised of Rabbis, **Roshei Yeshivos,** their students and other religious Jews. It was difficult to believe and to understand this, but this was the existing fact.

More than that, the Russians, in general, then had a disdain and disrespect toward refugees, and especially to the "refugee traitors," as we were known. It was only about once a year since we had escaped from the territory conquered by Russia from Poland, to Vilna, when Lithuania was being over-run. Surely, according to Russian thinking, we were subject to revenge from them. Our amazement was compounded when we learned that their greatest antagonism was directed only to those who abandoned Vilna, when the local citizenry had no means of escaping. Only because of us were these offices established, so that we could leave Russia.

The **Mashgiach,** Rabbenu Yechezkel Lewenstein, has already written about this, the greatest wonder. We will never understand why the Russians gave us permission to travel as we pleased. This was diametrically opposed to their nature and regulations. Even more than that, they elevated us and considered us tourists. They altered their laws and directions. Instead of committing us to Siberia for lawlessness, they treated us well, even they themselves did not understand why, or what happened to them.



Horav Yechezkel Lewinstein.

CHAPTER 11

During the time before we asked for visas, when we reviewed our decision whether or not to request them, we were in a desperate situation, not knowing what to do. It is worth noting that all of these considerations were not at the expense of learning. We then learned Talmud Yevomos with more intensity, and the entire time was devoted to courageous elevation in learning, praying and in the study of **mussar.** The **Mashgiach** used to run his feet in mud, going from one city to the next, even though he was in ill-health, when the Yeshiva was engrossed in spiritual elevation, to express his fiery words and thoughts to them. He would demand total involvement in faith and hope in HaShem. His words struck a responsive note and a unified spirit was visible.

No one noticed any change in the **Mashgiach.** No sign of depression could be observed within him. He carefully followed the schedule without any changes. What need was there to be alarmed, when we were all in the hands of G-d? His stature and words of encouragement were one of the great comforts of our long journey.

Around the beginning of the month of Teves, the emigration permits were approved. The approvals were not handed down at one time, they took about two weeks. No notifications were sent to the homes of the students, but their names appeared on a bulletin board at the offices of the NKVD. There was always a delay after the announcement. There were no specific office hours, and one had to wait all day and all night until the man from the NKVD would show up. While waiting, quorums

(**minyanim**) for prayers were conducted outside. Even food was served and Grace with a group was recited scrupulously. We wanted to demonstrate the eternity of Israel and the victoriousness of the Torah against the hand of the wicked.

During that time,, thousands of permits were issued, especially from Japan. Even those who had a certificate to Eretz Yisroel or a visa to any other country received the necessary authorization. Generally, all requests were honored, except for a few individuals, and their personal delay was not harmful to them.

The Emmigration Department existed only for several months, until the end of the winter, 5701. After that it was closed, and anyone who was unable to present his requests until then could not leave and had to remain in Russia.

A large number were recipients of exit visas to Eretz Yisroel (through different ways.) Among them the following great Rabbis, **Roshei Yeshivos.** Reb Eliezer Menachem Man Shach, **Rosh Yeshiva** of Klutzk, and today Rosh Yeshiva of Ponevaz. Rabbi David Pusorsky, today a **Rosh Yeshiva** in Ponevez, Reb Zalmen Sorotzkin, **Rosh Bais Din** of Lutzer. Reb Yaakov Moshe Levovitz (son of Rabbenu Baruch Bear), **Rosh Yeshiva** in Kaminetz, Reb Chaim Yechezkiyahu Mishkowsky, **Rosh Bais Din** of Krinik (son-in-law of Rabbenu Yitzchak Blazer). Reb Yitzchak Moshe Soloveitchik, **Rosh Bais Din** of Brisk, Reb Moshe Bernstein (son-in-law of Rabbenu Boruch Bear) **Rosh Yeshiva** of Kaminetz, Reb Menachem Zvi Eisenstadt, one of the prominent rabbis (later an eminent Torah leader) Reb Shabse Yogel, **Rosh Yeshiva** of Slonim.

As we said before, this list is only an example of the widespread rescue work of the giants of Torah and their students. Many more were saved by traveling through Japan to the United States. Among them; Rabbenu Aaron Kotler, Reb Avraham Yaffen, Reb Menachem Zacks, etc.

Those who remained in Russia after our departure were sent to Siberia with the large Russian emigration in the beginning of Sivan, 5701, only seven days before the outbreak of the German-Russian war. The Russians expelled to Siberia practically all the Jewish refugees who were in the territories of Lithuania and eastern Poland who escaped from the German occupation. Their number reached more than a half a million. About half of them remained alive when the war ended, and they returned from Siberia and were permitted to travel to their destinations. The Siberian exile, even though it was a catastrophic one, nevertheless saved hundreds of thousands of Jews who would have otherwise been annihilated by the Germans. As we wrote before, seven days after they were driven to Siberia, the Germans opened war on Russia in all those territories in which those Jews had resided and from which they left for Siberia.

The return of the Jews from Siberia after the war was, in itself, a public recognition of Providence, what inspired the Russians to allow them to leave Siberia, when they could have remained there to continue their tasks. Several hundred students and individual Jews escaped deep into Russia at the approach of the German army, and remained there until the end of the war. This is one of the ways by which yeshiva students were saved.

In the year 5700 a ten year calendar was published in Vilna, covering 5700-5710 (1940-1950). the feeling of the war situation and the catastrophic times brought about the publication. The ten year calendar accompanied the ones exiled to Siberia, the Jewish partisan fighters, those who escaped deep in Russia, and the residents of the ghettos. It was a minute treasure that they kept. Being completely cut-off from everything at least the calendar enabled them to know when holidays occured.

CHAPTER 12

The first group that received permission to leave bought tickets to Japan, through the port of Vladivostok, at the Kovno train depot. The price of each ticket was 700 rubles, equivalent to about $20.00 For this amount, (at that time) one could buy two pairs of boots or used clothing. With these tickets, the first contingent arrived in Japan. The route was by train from Kovno to Moscow, at which point they took the trans-Siberian train to Vladivostok (more than 10,000 kilometers) where they remained until the ship to Japan would sail. The entire trip was included in the 700-ruble fare.

Later on, the Russians discontinued selling tickets to Vladivostock (and Japan) at the Kovno train depot. It was only available at the "Intourist" office in Kovno, which was the official Russian department of tourism. We approached the "Intourist" office and, to our surprise, they demanded the same amount Americans paid; 170 American dollars for each passenger, which amounted to over $50,000 for the 300 yeshiva students. When we asked them where could we possibly obtain American dollars, when the mere possession of United States money was forbidden by Russian law, their reply was, "we do not care." They even suggested that we turn to the black market.

We were then faced with a very serious dilemma. We had to produce an exhorbitant amount in a relatively short time, since the exit-permits were good for only six weeks

from date of issue. Fifty thousand dollars in 1941 before the inflation of World War II, was equivalent to over a half a million dollars in todays value. The students were requested to obtain dollars in any way which was possible. A number of parents were able to sell all of their belongings and come up with the required amount. But most of the students were only able to secure a small percentage. The yeshiva then wired to the then director of the yeshiva in New York, Rabbi Abraham Kalmanowitz, to attempt to save us immediately. Rabbi Kalmanowitz appealed in synagogues, summoned relatives and students in New York to an urgent meeting. At that meeting he depicted the danger that we were facing if immediate help would not be forthcoming. Forty thousand dollars was raised then and there and an additional $10,000 Rabbi Kalmanowitz secured through instant loans.

Now the problem was the transmission of the money from the United States to Russia. Through clandestine ways, and with the aid of devoted people, Rabbi Kalmanowitz succeeded in receiving permission to immediately dispatch the money. The money was cabled to "Intourist" of Kovno, payable to the students of the yeshiva. From the time of cableing our original request, until the money reached us was only a period of about two weeks.

I wish to quote a few sentimental words that Rabbi Kalmanowitz expressed when the money was being sent, as is recorded in "Hapardes," Tammuz, 5701: "I must credit the dear Tenenbaum brothers, who were able to secure the authorization for the transmission of the money Treasury department, and from the Federal Reserve Bank in one hour. I saw that it was only through the greatness and goodness of HaShem, and their devotion to our Holy Torah, that made it possible at such a crucial time. Our

efforts were not wasted and we succeeded in saving 305 students, directors and young men of the kollel of the yeshiva." The list of those saved appeared in "Hapardes" of Elul, 5701 (Sept. 1941).

Rav Avrohom Kalmanowitz, who was a very capable, inventive and rare organizer, always incorporated love and devotion, in his deeds especially to the Bnei Torah, and whose dedication was boundless, escaped from Lithuania to the United States in a unique providential way. He arrived before the war and immediately involved himself in the affairs of the yeshiva in New York. He succeeded in being the patron of the yeshiva in its most critical hour during all the years of wandering that the yeshiva underwent. His special natural ability was very obvious, and his capability of influencing people was one of the attributes that he mastered.

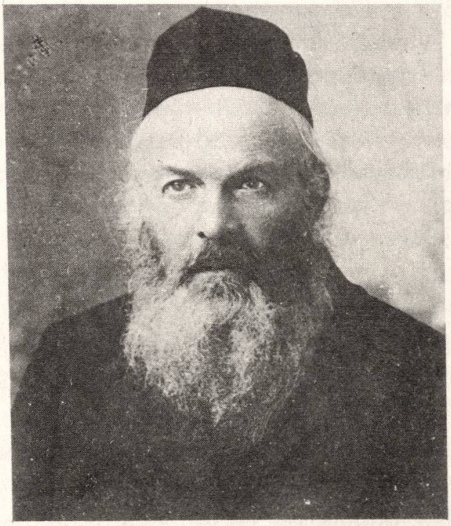
When the currency dealers got wind of the illegal request of the "Intourist" for United States dollars, they immediately approached the "Intourist" offices and began to deal openly with dollars there. One was able to trade dollars for rubles, immediately, and at the same time they became available in other places. If one conducted such business, before that, or even at that time, he was immediately arrested, except within the walls of the "Intourist" office, and immediate area, it appeared to be legal.

Those who were not fortunate enough to acquire dollars before the expiration date of the exit visa, applied for additional time from the NKVD, and they received it. Twice they entered the "Jaws of the enemy" and were saved.

Some remaining students, who could not procure dollars, were fortunate enough to leave Russia, with G-d's help, without dollars. They bought train tickets from

Kovno to Moscow, and in Moscow they purchased tickets to Vladivostok with rubles (it seems that the Russians discontinued selling tickets to Vladivostok in Kovno, and seemingly also in Vilna, because they wanted them purchased at the "Intourist" office in dollars, but they never thought of this circumvention). When a great number arrived in Vladivostok under such circumstances, the Russians realized what had happened and ordered the stoppage of ticket sale from Moscow to Vladivostik. But the *Bnei Yeshiva* found a new avenue. They secured their tickets to a mid point station, and from there, bought tickets to Vladivostok. Thus not one Jew remained in Russia because of finances.

Those who obtained "Intourist" tickets traveled the same route as the first contingent, but with some additional benefits — a tour of Moscow and better conditions at the hotel, which we did not request, and in which we had no interest.



Horav Elchonon Wasserman.

CHAPTER 13

The trip from Kovno to Moscow took a full day. When we reached Moscow, we travelled in a tourbus to an expensive hotel. The "Nova-Moscova" (the new Moscow). We stayed there for several days, until the departure of our train to Vladivostok. Our rooms were very nice with private baths (everything arranged beautifully) for each room. Every room had a phone in it, as if we could telephone to Lithuania and Poland. The rooms were continually heated and the entire hotel was filled to maximum capacity. The food was not subject to a menu, and everyone could eat what he wanted, but the price was very high. We were able to secure kosher food. We ordered oranges (in the month of Shvat (Feb.) in Russia during a war) and other excellent fruits, as well as kosher sardines that were brought from Poland. A special kettle for tea was available and bread without doubt of kashrus as it is today. Even though we had at our disposal such conveniences and good foods, we ate our own hard bread that we brought along. Before our departure on our trip, we prepared dried bread in an oven, sufficient for several weeks. We also brought along other edibles which could be kept for long without spoiling. The Jews of Keidan helped us a great deal in our preparation.

During our stay in the hotel, we were offered sightseeing tours in Moscow at the museum, the zoological gardens, the Kremlin, etc. all included in our ticket without paying any additional fees.

With all the honors that we received, we thanked G-d that we left the hotel in peace. In the walls of each room were built in machines recording every word uttered. One unfriendly word said about the government could place us behind iron bars. (This concurs with what the Talmud says (Baba Basra 4) about Reb Bava, son of Reb Bub. Although King Hordus blinded him, yet he did not curse him because koheles says, "the birds of heaven will carry the voice.")

In addition to us, there were also Russian officers military staff and diplomats in the hotel. Regular tourists or ordinary citizens were not seen within the walls of the hotel. It was at that time that long lines of people stood waiting to receive a loaf of bread in Russia.

How wonderful it seemed to us that we slept in a hotel, after paying a substantial sum for our tickets, for we were the same yeshiva students that were hunted by the communists for extermination, and now we were being helped by them and being treated as kings in their capitol!

This incident brings to thought the Midrash (Shemos 31) how Moses was raised in the palace when the order was that every boy should be thrown into the river. And G-d's Finger caused that no one else but Pharoh's daughter saved him and raised him. this is to show us that, "man has many thoughts but the plan of G-d is what remains." (Psalms)

We can learn a very good lesson from the occurrances at the Moscow hotel for our daily life here. Man has available all the goodness of this world. He can speak, do and think how he pleases, but he has to remember that every word is recorded every act filmed and even every thought recorded. In the World to Come, on man's Judgement day, the Heavenly Host will produce all the evidence black and white, whatever one did during his life — both the good and evil that man has done.

After spending several days in Moscow, the train to Vladivostok, known as the Trans-Siberia Railroad, arrived. The trains route, a distance of 10,000 kilometers, passed through the length of Russia, the wilderness of Siberia till it reached the port of Valdivostok which is on the western side of the coast of Japan in the Far East. The trip ordinarily takes 10 full days. Day and night the train proceeded, stopping only occasionally to obtain fuel, as there were very few stations on the way, It was a good trip and there were facilities for sleeping. The railway officers supplied us with bread, herring and warm water with crystal sugar. The *Bnei Yeshiva* also brought along additional foods. The coaches were heated during the entire trip due to the extreme cold weather outside. We passed through Siberia, although the temperature reached 50°-60° below zero, we were warm inside the train.

We had a steady *minyan,* and we learned. The students took along numerous seforim from the yeshiva library, in addition to their personal copies. One member of the group even took along a Sefer Torah.



Horav Yeruchom Levovitz.

Chapter 14

On the entire trip we were accompanied by the men of the NKVD. They did not leave us for a minute, until we passed the Russian border. The Trans-Siberia Railway was built in the 1800s with sweat and blood, tens of years by the Czarist regime, and a loan from the Rothschilds banking family. The communists opened new routes and old tracks and roadbeds were repaired. It is difficult to estimate the exhorbitant price it cost.

It is interesting to note the words of Rabbi Yosef Zvie Soloveitchik, *ztl* in his sefer; "We see that everything that occurs in the world from far and near is because of the Torah and those who study it. Some day they will derive pleasure from it. The rail line between Petersburg and Berlin was innaugurated in order that the yeshiva students would be able to ride without difficulty to Voloshin. And when the rails between Vladivostok and the Far East were outlined, I am sure that the purpose was, that the *Bnei Torah* who rode this route to Shanghai should have a comfortable ride. Only for them has it been made and we should have understood its purpose. If we do not comprehend how that could be so, we must remember that G-d prepares His ways from far off. In time, we realize this when the occurrence is brought to its conclusion. We then see that everything is for the Torah and its students and that there is nothing in this world without a purpose."

When we arrived in Vladivostok, the "Intourist" arranged hotel accomodations for us, so that we could wait until the arrival of the steamship to take us to Japan. Due to the lack of boats on the Russia-Japanese route, we never knew when to expect the steamer. We were anxious to see ourselves out of the boundaries of Russia, for we could never know what could occur at the last minute.

A small and old Japanese freight steamer named "Amisco" was our lot. She took us and a number of other groups to the port of Tsurgo in north Japan. The entire trip took several days. With each departure, an "honor guard" escorted us until we reached the international waters. The guard was composed of a Russian officer and other police officers. We never outwardly showed our delight and joy because we were afraid they would take revenge and return us to Siberia for that. We were glad that we were leaving Russia and not being transported to another place. It was only after the "honor guard" left the boat, and we continued on our trip that we spontaneously brust out in song and dance and praise to G-d for extracting us from Russia.

The Japanese Sea in the winter is generally very rough and we needed G-d's special care to pass over it in peace in such a small and dilapidated boat.

During one of the departures in the end of the month of Shevat, 60 yeshiva students were subjected to bitter storms, thrashing waves were as high as a two story building. The captain lost complete control as the steamer was thrown between the waves, like a straw before the wind. (The situation was as it is written in Psalms, "ascending to Heaven and descending in the abyss.") S.O.S. signals were dispatched a number of times but help never arrived. No one could reach us in such a stormy sea.

It was a miracle that our steamer reached the shores of Japan in one piece. The sailors told us that in 14 years, never was such a stormy sea ever witnessed.

Shortly after the steamer Amisco docked in Japan with its final "cargo" of yeshiva students the boat sank at sea. Everyone saw the hand of G-d that kept the boat together in one piece, although it was dilapidated it held up until it completed its mission of saving the yeshiva students from Russia.

When we arrived in Japan, we stood breathless and speechless over how we succeeded in leaving the "iron curtain" of Russia, as it is written in Mechilta (see Rashi in Shemos 8:9) about Yisro's gladness over all the good that G-d had done to Israel. We also expressed our joy, since up to then, there was hardly even a slave who was able to run out of Russia and now, thousands of Jewish Torah students left with great pomp.

No doubt that the entire miracle of the *Bnei Torah* leaving Russia was solely in the grace of the Torah and with the force of Torah, as is recorded by our sages in the Talmud (Sota 35): The ark carried those who were to carry the ark and lead them through the Jordan as if they were carrying it in the air. For the students of the yeshivos, the same miracle occurred: The ark of Torah was the one that carried these students and brought them out of Russia to Japan.

In the publication, "Torah Or," issued in Sivan 5706, in Shanghai, the Mashgiach, Rabbi Yecheskiel Lewenstein, describes the occurrences as in accordance with our Torah.

It is known that in each generation, as well as in each individual, there is the spirit of the exodus from Egypt. We may also ascribe this to the emigration from Russia, which in reality was a duplication of the Egyptian exodus, in our own generation. The exodus to Shanghai and the diligency

in learning can be compared somewhat to the giving of the Torah. The miracles of supplying us with our own needs and saving us from all dire sickness and other plagues was in a sense the same miracles as that experienced by our Forefathers who went out of Egypt and lived through the wilderness.

CHAPTER 15

When we reached the shores of Japan, we were very warmly greeted by the representatives of the Jewish Community of Kobe. They brought us to homes that were arranged for us in the city. Most of the lodging places were hotels that the community obtained for us.

The Jewish Community of Kobe numbered 25 families. They had come to Japan from Russia about 20 years earlier, prior to the revolution. Their business was import-export, and thank G-d, they were well to do.

When the first refugees arrived from Russia, the entire Jewish community became involved in aiding them, at their own expense and without any outside help from any source. The community made available several hotels, and also dealt with all the physical needs of the newly arrived refugees. During this endeavor they even neglected their own private enterprises. Everyone worked together to his maximum capacity to accommodate the refugees with everything they needed. They accomplished this happily and whole-heartedly. For the entire six months that the refugees were there, the community was their right hand, physically and monetarily. Even after they received help from world welfare organizations the aid was funneled through the Jewish Committee that they established. They stood at the helm of this committee as long as we were in Japan.

May they be remembered by G-d for the good that they did.

The community of Kobe received from us, in return for its warm hospitality, a spiritual uplifting. These 25 families among 80 million Japanese were spiritually deserted. After the war, the community was dissolved and the entire community moved to other religious environments in the Western World.

The entire establishment and existence of the Kobe community was still another one of the wonders of HaShem. Everyone fully realized why G-d had aranged their stay in Japan, in order to aid the refugees who were to come later. He sent these good hearted families and enabled them to enrich themselves, so that they would be able to serve the *Bnei Yeshivos* when the time would come. When their task had been completed they too left Japan.

The city of Kobe is a metropolis maintaining a population of about two million inhabitants, and was blessed with an abundance of everything. The scenery is one of the most beautiful in the world, a combination of mountains and seas with pure fresh air. The climate, both summer and winter is a pleasant one.

We were happy when we arrived in the middle of the winter from a bitter Russian frost to pleasurable spring weather of warm sun and blossoming trees. For this, we extended our thanks to the Al-Mighty. It can be compared to Scriptures (Shemos 14:4), when G-d said, "today you are going out in the month of spring", to which Rashi interprets, in the name of the Mechilta, "didn't we know what month we were leaving? But it was only to show! See the goodness that I have made for you and have taken you out in a month that is just right to leave — not hot nor cold and with no rain."

When the first transport of students arrived in Kobe, they were assigned to learn in the community synagogue. As the number of students continued to increase and emigrating from Japan could not be accomplished in a matter of days, the yeshiva was compelled to rent a rooming house in Kobe. It was then remodeled by removing the inner walls into a large study hall. In this building, several hundred yeshiva students found room to learn. In due time, groups of Lithuanian yeshiva students from Klutzk, Kaminetz, Radin etc., joined the Mirrer yeshiva. The schedules of prayer, learning and mussar lectures were all kept on time. Rabbenu Chaim Shmulewitz delivered his regular lectures, as well as the Mashgiach, Reb Yecheskel Lewenstein's mussar talks.

In the next few weeks, the yeshiva received several hundred copies of Mesechta Keddushin, sent by Horav Avrohom Kalmanowitz.

The learning and praying pace went on uninterrupted with even more devotion, and the voices of Torah and prayers reverberated across the mountains of Japan, day and night.

Rabbenu Chaim Shmulewitz wrote the following letter from Japan to the United States at the end of the summer of 5701, depicting the situation of the yeshiva (the letter was printed in Hapardes in 5701).

"The sanctuary of Torah — the Mirrer Yeshiva is also flourishing here with all of its pomp and sanctity. About 300 Bnei Torah, together with the administration and other young men who learn with us, are continuing to delve into the Torah of G-d day and night. There are those who rise upon the House of Israel, determined to destroy and close its House of Worship and Learning and to annihilate the voice of Torah in numerous places, but here, the voice of Torah is in full force and continues to ascend

to higher levels. We hope it will bring our great and aged Hall of Torah to the banks of a true redemption and from there spread out the light of G-d over all Israel."

Horav Avraham Kalmanowitz printed the following in Hapardes, Tammuz, 5701 portraying the religious situation of the yeshiva, as heard from witnesses who arrived in the United States from Japan.

"When the yeshiva arrived in Japan, it secured and rented a large house in Kobe on the mountain top, and arranged there the yeshiva in all of its spiritual dignity. They turned nights into days by learning with much devotion. The Roshei Yeshivos have continued their lectures, and the Mashgiach his mussar talks as usual. I have been told by the Rabbis who arrived here from Japan that the prayers in the yeshiva were with such sanctification as those usually conducted on Yom Kippur."



Horav Avrohom Kalmanovitz.

CHAPTER 16

As the holiday of Passover was approaching, we were informed that the welfare organizations would supply us with matzohs and wine for Passover.

The Gaon, Horav Yechiel Michael Feinstein (now the *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshiva Beis Yehuda in Tel-Aviv, was one of those who worked diligently to save the yeshiva and its existence especially in Japan) realized that if we did not take drastic steps immediately, we would never receive the matzohs and wine on time. It was only a trip of two weeks from the shores of Japan to the western shores of the United States through the quiet Pacific Ocean. Rabbi Feinstein immediately dispatched a letter to Rabbi Kalmanowitz about the situation. Rabbi Kalmanowitz fully grasped the urgency of the matter and immediately organized a transport of matzohs and wine that was successfully completed. This is but another example of the immediate response and devotion of Horav Kalmanowitz.

Horav Kalmanowitz immediately contacted the suppliers of matzohs in Los Angeles, rather than in New York, in order to save time for the orders to be filled. With the help of the Rabbis of Los Angeles and Seattle, the transport was dispatched immediately ("HaPardez", Tammuz, 5701, carries the names of those who were involved.)

The private boat of a millionaire, the "Theodore Roosevelt", had just docked at the port. The owners of the luxurious liner agreed to make the trip at once, and the shipment arrived several days before Passover. The transport had a sufficient amount of wine and matzohs for all. It is interesting to note that a similar shipment from the welfare and aid organizations arrived after the holiday of Shevuous — seven weeks after Passover. The two and one half ton shipment consisted of shmura matzoh and thousands of bottles of wine.

Horav Michael Feinstein, to whom the shipment was sent, went to the Custom House, accompanied by a representative of the Kobe Jewish Community and with Japanese Professor Kotsuji, in order to expedite the handling of the shipment. Due to their intervention, the authorities agreed to a seventy-five percent deduction in the tax with the remaining fourth, which amounted to several hundred dollars being paid by the community.

Although the shipment was sent to the students of the Mirrer Yeshiva, thousands of other refugees were also recipients, because their shipment never arrived.



L. to r.: Rav Baruch Be'er; Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski; Rav Shimon Shkopf.

CHAPTER 17

Dr. Kotsuji was a professor of Semitic languages at Tokyo University. He was also of the Japanese royal family, and in his high positon, he was very influential in government circles.

When he learned of the arrival of the yeshiva students in Japan, he made the trip from Tokyo to Kobe to see the yeshiva and learn first hand about them. He observed them closely and asked questions about Torah and the faith. In a short while, a warm and close relationship developed between him and the community of yeshiva students, who admired him very much. The yeshiva students made an indelible mark on him, which caused a complete revolution in his life. His contact with the yeshiva students was one of the causes of his conversion to Judaism eighteen years later (in 5719).

Professor Kotsuji was a right hand man for the refugees in their problems with the authorities, and he did a great deal for them. He was especially successful in prolonging their visitors' visas. The transit visa that they had received from the Japanese Consul in Kovno was to be in effect only 10 days. From time to time, they had to extend their stay in Japan. Every time the Japanese deferred the date, they would emphasize that it was only up to them, but we should proceed with arrangements for emigration. This is how we lasted in Japan for nine months with transit visas for 10 days.

At first only the yeshiva administration dealt with the interim, but as time went on, it became more difficult to prolong the date, so others took a hand. The Amshinover Rebbe, Reb Shimon Kalish and HaGaon Horav Moshe Shatzkes became involved in the procedure. Later, they had to enlist the help of Professor Katzsu, who always was successful.

Summer 5701

At the beginning of the summer, there was agitation formenting around the Jewish refugees in Japan. It reached such proportions that the Emperor of Japan, Macodo, ordered a thorough investigation of the status of these Jews. Word reached the Germans that several thousand Jews escaped to Japan. Japan was a member of the axis. Germany took immediate steps to fulfill her ambition of annihilating the Jews wherever she could. The message to Japan was to be careful of the thousands of Jews that reached her shores.

Professor Katzsu, upon learning of this abortive step, immediately contacted those of the authorities who were designated to supply the government with the report, convincing them that the Jews were a good element and were not conspirators. His involvement even endangered his own life. But thanks to his efforts, the report to the King was favorable.

Eighteen Years Later. . .

...In 5719, Katzsu arrived in Israel and was converted there, being named Avrohom, son of Avrohom Katzsu.

In the beginning of 5720, the Mirrer Yeshiva celebrated the event with a get-together in the home of the Gaon Rabbenu Chaim Shmulewitz, together with the Gaon Rabbenu Eliezer Yehuda Finkel and a number of students who were with the professor in Shanghai.



The true Japanese convert Prof. Avrohom Kotsuji and his grave in Jerusalem.

The affair was an outstanding and emotional one. After a lapse of 18 years, they were again together with Professor Kotsuji, but not in better circumstances. Kotsuji, the true convert, and the yeshiva students joined hands in a sanctifying get-together in the new and beautifully built Mirrer Yeshiva in Jerusalem.

Dr. Kotsuji expressed his feelings, "when you were in Japan I visited you in order to be of help to you. When I witnessed your learning Torah and praying, I then decided to convert to Judaism. Now when I heard that you had arrived in the holy city of Jerusalem, I yearned to be in your midst."

Rabbi Chaim Shmulewitz spoke very warmly about the honored guest and blessed him to grow in Torah and fear G-d. Other speakers related their experiences during their stay in Japan and depicted how the professor on numerous occasions endangered his life in order to help the Bnei Yeshivos. This devoted attitude gained him the merit to enter the covent of our faith.

Avrohom, son of Avrohom Kotsuji, died several years ago, when he was in the United States. His body was brought to Jerusalem, for burial in accordance with his last wish in his will.



Amshenover Rebbe.

CHAPTER 18

Entry permits to the United States came about unexpectedly, but with difficulties.

Impending obstacles occurred, yet several hundred students were able to receive the permits, among them several dozen from the Mirrer Yeshiva.

As a rule, most of the permits were given to Rabbis and *Roshe Yeshivos,* who were called upon to serve yeshivos and communities in the U.S.

Among the hundreds who were recipients of the visas were the great *Roshei Hayeshivos* and their families, who established great centers of Torah in the United States.

The list is too long to enumerate everyone. It is sufficient to record that some became deans of the existing yeshivos, while others established their own yeshivos, which flourished in the United States. As the Mirrer *Rosh Yeshiva,* Rabbenu Eliezer Yehuda Finkel, once wrote; we were fortunate that our students became the cornerstone of the propogation of Torah in Israel and in the diaspora."

When we found out that the chances for the entire yeshiva to receive authorization to emigrate to the United States were not encouraging, the activities of individuals, as well as small groups, to seek permission ceased, in order not to dislodge the composition of the yeshiva. That is why the Gaon HoRav Chaim Shmulewitz, the Rosh Yeshiva, hesitated to use his visa until all would be able to emigrate.

This became the method used: they would emigrate only as a group and not individually.

Rabbi Kalmanowitz describes this episode in "*Hapardes*" (Tammuz, 5701). In it, he depicts the sacrifices that they made for the yeshiva and its student body. He writes: "Rav Shmulewitz and his family received their visas to the United States. I have cabled him to come here and help us in our efforts of *hatzalah*. He replied that he could not leave the yeshiva now, even for a moment. Then the American Consul visited them and urged to leave Japan immediately, or they would forfeit their visas. Rabbi Shmulewitz then replied to the consul. I am prepared for any eventuality and I will remain here in my position and will not depart from the yeshiva. Only with the entire yeshiva will I leave!"

With G-d's help, we were fortunate to hear from him outstanding lectures in Japan, as well as in Shanghai as long as we were there, a period of five years. This act was one of the major aspects which helped us make great strides in learning during our years of wandering.

The *Mashgiach*, Reb Yechezkiel Lewenstein, received his certificate in the summer of 5700 to emigrate to Eretz Israel, when he was yet in Keidan. He refused the certificate without regret, in order not to leave the yeshiva (see letter of Or Yechezkiel 31).

This act proved to be one of graciousness by G-d to us, because we were then able to continue to be the recipients of his magnanimous influence during our stay in exile. He was the messenger of G-d, to serve as the heart and soul of the yeshiva, permeating it with the living spirit in faith, learning and prayers, and with the love for Torah and fear of G-d. His presence was especially important to us when we were subjected to most difficult times and

arduous tasks, which cannot even be described, during our years in exile — and especially the five years in Shanghai.

Another plus for us was the *Mashgiach's* presence, because before the war he was in Eretz Yisroel, where he then served as the spiritual leader of the Lomze Yeshiva at Petach Tikvah. Just before the outbreak of the war, Providence caused him to come to Mir in Lithuania in order to spiritually lift up and guide our souls during the war.

When the Russian-German war was in full swing, all countries refused to allow refugees to set foot on their land, especially those who came from Communist-Russian territories. It seemed impossible to secure visas to any country in the world.

As we described before, the Americans became hard-hearted and refused to grant visas to all refugees. All the influence mustered to Washington to alter its stand was fruitless. With the new announcement of the State Department that no visa would be granted to one who has relatives in the European conquered nations, the chances of emigrating to the United States were diminished. It reached a stage when the American Consulate in Tokyo issued notification to the offices of Kobe's community that no one was to apply for visas to the United States.

With the help of Rabbi Kalmanowitz, and the co-operation of Jewish organizations (see *"Hapardes"* 5701), 41 visas to Canada were sent to the Mirrer Yeshiva in Kobe but the students refused them, because they wanted to emigrate all together. This was also the reason that similar visas from Paraguay were refused. Those who refused the visas and remained there were not sorry for doing so, for the spiritual advantage that they incurred during their stay in Shanghai was so rewarding that it cannot be duplicated. We now realize the advantage that

we had because of the hard-heartedness of the American government.

When the Japanese learned that our avenues of emigrating were closed to us, they issued an order for us to leave immediately to Shanghai, the international city on Chinese territory. Even the Jewish community and Professor Katzsu's involvement to halt the deportation was fruitless, and by the end of Av, 5701 (August 1941) about 2,000 refugees who remained in Japan were ordered to go to Shanghai. The exodus took several days.

Our stay in Japan also proved to be an asset. The abnormal and difficult conditions prevailing in Shanghai would have been impossible for us to cope with, were it not for the intensified spiritual uplifting we received in Japan, which enabled us to weather the bad tides.

The timing was particularly good, because we were able to complete, without interruption, our schedules during the summer, as the move did not occur during our regular learning time, but only several days before Elul and the High Holiday season. We were also able to make our necessary arrangements before the Japanese American War that broke out in Kislev 5702 (December 1941), which we would never have been able to do had we stayed in Japan another two or three months.

After this exodus, the Germans and the pro-Nazi forces in Japan strengthened their positions of attacking the Jews and their friends. Professor Kotsuji's life was threatened by the Japanese extremists, and even his close relationship with royalty was no barrier. Kotsuji fled to Charbin in Manchuria to protect himself until it would blow over. Some say that if we had remained in Japan, we too would not have been safe from them. The deportation, therefore, was Heaven-sent to spare us until now.

Shanghai was an international city. It was to there that all unwanted citizens of the world were driven. If Japan had not deported us, who knows what they would have done to us? This was a good omen and also the benevolence of the Japanese Consul in Kovno, extending visas to everyone with the probability that they would not receive American visas, so they would then be sent to Shanghai.

CHAPTER 19

The episode of Shanghai began to develop more than 100 years ago, when the city received commercial rights and concessions in the western countries. The western countries established, in the last quarter of a century, new housing projects with all European accommodations, which served us well.

Shanghai was then an international city with a population of about five million inhabitants, mostly Chinese, and a minority of Europeans and others. The city was divided into five zones. Each country conducted its autonomous rule over its own zone. The international zone, was under the rule of England, Holland, the United States, Japan, France and China had their own zones. One had to obtain a permit from one of the ruling governments in order to enter the city. Once one entered, one could have moved around throughout all other zones without any additional requirements.

In 5697 (1937) Japan conquered Shanghai as part of her conquest of China, but she did not interfere with the municipal city affairs until the American-Japanese war.

We were expelled from Japan to the Japanese zone in Shanghai, known as Honko. When we arrived, we were at first allowed to remain in the international zone.

The Jewish community of Japan consisted of Sephardic Jews who arrived there in the last quarter of the previous century. The first Jews to arrive in Shanghai several hundred years before, when the Shanghai port became accessible for free commerce, were from the east. These Jews were very small in number, and it was not until recently that the development of the Jewish community began.

About 20 years before World War II, after the Russian revolution, Ashkenazic Jews emigrated to Shanghai in large numbers. Their financial standing improved greatly and some became very wealthy.

About 20,000 Jewish refugees from Austria and Germany were deported to Shanghai by the Nazis in 1938. The seemingly disastrous act proved to have saved their lives.

In turn the refugees who now had arrived from Japan were assisted by the Jewish community of Shanghai. The German refugees helped them by finding appropriate living quarters for them. There were a number of weddings between the yeshiva students and the religious girls from Russia and Germany.

The entire establishment and existence of the Jewish community in Shanghai was one of the wonders of G-d, like the community of Kobe in Japan. Even here, one could see vividly how the AlMighty prepared "Shanghai" in the Far East for our dear Jews, not much before the arrival of the *Bnei Yeshivos*, so that they would have someone who would accept them. When the *Bnei Yeshivos* left Shanghai after the war, the entire Jewish community followed them and the community disintegrated.

A year or two later, when the last Jews left Shanghai, the city was conquered by Red China, who still controls it.

When we arrived in Shanghai, our first stop was the large and beautiful synagogue, known as "Bais Aaron," that was turned over to us for our use by the Chief Rabbi of the Sephardic community, Rav Meyer Ashkenazi. The synagogue was used for all the students to learn. it also had spacious rooms, halls and a kitchen where we were able to arrange temporary lodging.

On *Rosh Chodesh Elul*, 5701, the first general lecture was delivered by Rabbenu Chaim Shmulewitz, and thus commenced the yeshiva in Shanghai, which continued for five consecutive years.

CHAPTER 20

The Bais Aaron Synagogue was a beautiful two-story building. On the upper floor was the gigantic sanctuary that had hundreds of seats, with a very spacious women's section. The furniture, the seats, tables, etc., were all works of art and craftmanship.

The lower floor had two huge dining halls that could accommodate hundreds of people. Next to the hall was a most spacious kitchen equipped with the best utensils. Vast pots and a good supply of dinnerware and cutlery were available. Appropriate storage rooms were ready to serve. Cooking was done by gas (gas to cook with was not available then, even in rich homes.)

In the courtyard, a large mikvah was built in an adjacent building. At the entrance gate, there was a house for the guard.

On the spacious grounds, temporary sleeping facilities were prepared until permanent quarters in the city were obtained.

The synagogue was situated in the international zone on Museum Street No. 50, near Nanking Street, the business center of Shanghai. Nanking Street was several kilometers long and packed with stores. The surrounding areas were orderly and clean. As Museum Street was a side street, the atmosphere of traffic was not felt. It all combined into a quiet, clean center.

The value of the land upon which the synagogue was built was tremendous and even the amount invested in its construction was enormous.

Many years before our arrival in Shanghai, there lived a childless Jewish millionaire. When he became very ill and neared death, word spread that he was dispersing all of his wealth. One of the leaders of the Sephardic community, Chacham Reb Ibrahim, came to him. The night before Ibrahim's visit, this millionaire had a dream that prepared him for the Chacham's coming. When Ibrahim suggested to the millionaire that he now had a chance to do something great for Jerusalem, he responded, whatever is lacking, I will supply it." Reb Ibrahim then replied, "we need a nice size synagogue in the middle of town and he mentioned an astronomical figure for the land and construction. The financier agreed and immediately drew a check for the full amount.

Reb Ibrahim then relates that in reality, there was no need for a synagogue there in the midtown area because no Jews resided there. The Jews lived far from mid town and they

had a very spacious and beautiful synagogue in their own neighborhood, and they also maintained all other religious and educational institutions, such as a mikvah. "My only thought was," continued Reb Ibrahim, "to prepare a place for the future." Shanghai is thought of as an international city of commerce and Jews from all parts of the globe will no doubt come to it. In order to attract Jews of all origins I have built a synagogue with the most adequate conveniences. I also, therefore, included in it a Torah library that will have a Vilna Shaas (such a Shaas was a rarity then). On the first floor, I built halls and a kitchen for gatherings and happy occasions.

"For this outstanding goal, the community was not able to afford such an exhorbitant price, and we could never dream of such a luxury. When I heard that this millionaire was dispersing large sums, I decided to ask him for this cause and, with the help of G-d, I succeeded in a startling manner."

The synagogue was built 15 years before our arrival, and since its construction, it stood desolate. A Rumanian Jew, who lived next to the synagogue, used to hire a *minyan* of old Jews who lived in the Jewish quarter in the suburbs to come to pray there. The halls and kitchen were never used. Thus stood this magnificent building and waited for us, so that several hundred students would fill its halls.

Our *Mashgiach*, Rabbenu Yechezkel Lewenstein, ztl, used to refer to the phenomenon of the Bais Aaron Synagogue as a reminder of the faith and surveillance of G-d in *all* particulars of the world, as well as every individual. He used to cite the Ramban (Parshas Bo), who expounded on the ways of G-d and how he rules the world and every aspect of it. We accepted his words of wisdom, especially when we personally were witnesses to it.

CHAPTER 21

Summers were very difficult in Shanghai. The blazing heat caused choking and difficult breathing, aside from the fact that perspiration would continue profusely. When we wrote on a piece of paper, we had to cover it, especially a line just written, because the moisture from our hands would damage the paper. We also had to be particularly careful not to spoil the books from which we were learning. Our clothing was always damp and stuck to our bodies as if we had immersed ourselves in water. When a blackout was proclaimed we had to close all windows and we nearly choked to death. The winter was also quite rough, the climate was very cold and damp and we were without any ovens to warm up.

In our first year, we had problems of nutrition which caused the splitting of the tongue. Dr. Seligson, a religious physician who was a Russian refugee, was summoned to a consultation with an expert physician named Dr. Sinai, and they concluded that it was due to the lack of Vitamin B.

These signs were an indication of the coming of the disease known as pelagra, a malady that is prevalent in the Far-East, where the climate is very detrimental. The victims received large doses of Vitamin B, which cured them completely.

The good-hearted women, refugees from Russia, volunteered for yeshiva kitchen duty and helped with balanced menus. This cured out ailments entirely and disease never returned.

In a very short time, proper lodging for the students was arranged. Rooms were rented from the German and Austrian refugees, who were centered around the Japanese quarter of Honko. Later, two resident halls were obtained on Mahlman and on Bibling Street in the international zone, where the yeshiva students were conspicuous among the inhabitants.

During our stay in Shanghai we were subject to all kinds of dangers, such as diptheria and other diseases, problems in the ghetto, the American bombs, etc. But G-d through His merciful ways, saved us from all of those destructive elements. What must be emphasized especially is that even though we were faced with all these distractions our schedule of learning and our devotion to Torah and prayer was on the highest pedestal. This was one of the great wonders of Shanghai.

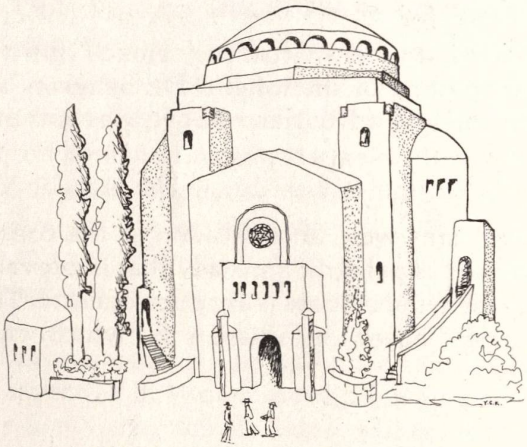


Illustration of the Beis Avrohom Shul in Shanghai.

CHAPTER 22

Elul and the Days of Awe passed with a sense of determination and elevation, although we were in exilic turmoil and going through uncomfortable and difficult weather. The voices of learning and praying, day and night, penetrated the Heavens and permeated every Jewish heart of Shanghai. Every passerby was touched by it and stood in awe.

The Simchas Torah celebration carried the same spirit and ecstacy as in the Yeshiva in Mir, Poland, in years gone by.

We had a sufficient supply of the willow and myrtle leaves required for the holiday of Succos. The citrus fruit (*esrog*) was scarce because of the climate, which is not suitable for such fruit trees. Providence, which supplies everything for everybody, was also good to us, and every Jew in Shanghai had an *esrog*.

Rabbi Ibrahim, the president of the Sephardic community, experimented and planted a single *esrog* tree in his garden. Dr. Sinai, who was with him year-round, took care of it and, due to his personal care, the tree sprouted a small number of *esrogim*. Willow and myrtle trees were also planted and they became the main source for Shanghai Jewry. In this far-fetched land of Shanghai, we had all four species required for Succos.

CHAPTER 23

As soon as we arrived in Shanghai, especially right after the holidays, we began to look for ways to emigrate, but not at the expense of our learning, which continued uninterrupted. We were in constant touch with Rabbi Kalmanowitz in the United States about our migration. Through his efforts and from other sources we received substantial sums.

On the 17th Day of Kislev 5702, December 7, 1941, the harsh war with untold fatalities began, and it continued until the A-bomb exploded at the end of the month of Av 5705, August 1945.

The Japanese, who already ruled Shanghai, established a military government, and kept a very close eye on everything that went on there. The mail was under strict censorship. The American and British citizens were interned and their belongings confiscated. Among them were many tycoons with immense wealth.

We were completely cut-off from the world, lonely and isolated. We were sure that our stay there would be for a very long time without any knowledge of when it would end. Our contact with Rabbi Kalmanowitz was severed with the beginning of war, and aid from overseas was stopped for the time being.

The most difficult time for us was the first months of the war, when we lost all our contacts, even for the supplying of food. The disease of the "splitting of the tongue", which struck us at this time was also a cause of discontent to us.

Before the war broke out, we had hope of receiving exit visas to the United States and Canada. A group of several dozen students had already received permission, and they only needed to have them signed by the American Consul in Shanghai.

It was on a Thursday when the permits were received. On Friday the consulate offices were closed because of a holiday, and on Saturday, we were unable to go there. Even though it involved a matter of hazard to life, the students did not want to take advantage of this loophole. They accepted the grave consequences and did not go to the consulate on Saturday. They missed the boat to the United States, deciding to wait for the next transport. In the meantime, the American-Japanese war broke out and they had to remain in Shanghai.

It seemed then, that our hopes were completely lost, and that we would never be able to emigrate from there. Later, after the war, we learned that the trip was a most dangerous one, because the Japanese controlled the Pacific seas and all lines of communications with the United States were severed. Those steamships that had sailed before were stopped in mid-sea, with all their passengers transferred to an Asian intern camp. They stayed there until the end of the war under very great hardships. If our students had left then, G-d knows what lot would have been in store for them.

In these critical moments, our *Mashgiach* succeeded in sparking our spiritual attitudes. Fiery words that penetrated every heart were heard from him, strengthening our faith in his *mussar* lectures. He was close to every student and kept up a close contact with each and every one. He succeeded in elevating their standards to a very high level. They were prepared to give full devotion to Torah with any consequence that might arise. The future,

if they could live, and what would be in store for them, never entered their minds.

We were permeated with a complete devotion to learning Torah and pouring our hearts in prayer with sincerity, possibly exemplifying the holiness of Heaven, rather than of this world.

In this manner, we continued for five years until the end of the war with the surveillance and influence of our *Mashgiach.* Our prayers were privileged by Heaven and the gates of prosperity and abundance in all aspects opened up to us. Providential succor was evident in every one and one could seriously touch it with one's hands. That is how close and vivid it was to us.

BRITISH EMBASSY
WASHINGTON, D. C.
December 14th, 1943.

Dear Rabbi Kalmanowitz,

Thank you for your letter of the 1st of December about the position of the Rabbinical group in Shanghai.

I note your statement that your request for special consideration for the group was based in the main not on their Polish nationality but on the exceptional religious status of the group. Unfortunately, it is necessary for practical purposes of evacuation to sub-divide the persons to be evacuated by nationalities; since every internee has a claim for evacuation, there is really no other basis possible. It is as Polish citizens that the Rabbinical group in Shanghai would come under consideration for evacuation in a British and Allied exchange, and should such an exchange take place in the future the claims of the members of the group will no doubt be considered sympathetically on this basis.

If the Union of Orthodox Rabbis, however, wish the group to be considered on a special and non-national basis, I think that it would be appropriate for the Union, having its centre in New York, to approach the United States Government in the first place.

As you will have seen by my letter of November 26th, my own Government are fully aware of the situation of the group in Shanghai, and I am also sending copies of this correspondence to London so that they may be kept fully up to date.

Yours very sincerely,

Halifax

Rabbi Abraham Kalmanowitz,
The Union of Orthodox Rabbis
of the United States and Canada,
Suite 1221, 132 Nassau Street,
New York (7), N. Y.

(Letter of Halifax)

CHAPTER 24

With G-d's help, the Yeshiva succeeded in a short time to make contact with Rabbi Kalmanowitz. These contacts, in code, were sent to neutral countries probably primarily Sweden and Switzerland, through Argentina and Uruguay, with the assistance of the local Rabbis. The contact in Sweden was made through Rabbi Shlomo Valpo, a student of our Yeshiva, who served as spiritual head of Yeshiva Be'er Yaakov.

Rabbi Valpo came to Sweden in a providential and unique way. Before the war broke out between Poland and Germany, Poland exiled all of her German citizens. Rabbi Valpo was one of those expelled. There were others in the Yeshiva who were German citizens, but they were successful in deterring the order and escaping with the entire Yeshiva by way of Shanghai. Rabbi Valpo came to Sweden by way of Latvia. It is known that Sweden and Switzerland, were not involved in the war. Rabbi Valpo was the line of communication between the Yeshiva and the outside world.

Rabbi Valpo, during the war, sent an article on a Torah subject, which was printed in the journal, "Meor HaTorah," published in 5704 in Shanghai. The article was entitled, "Just Received From Sweden."

The postal and telegraphic lines of communications improved, and full communications between the Yeshiva in Shanghai and Rabbi Kalmanowitz in New York was established, even in such times of turmoil. It was as clear as

if they were sitting together at a meeting and speaking face to face. That is how they were able to arrange financial transactions, and to deal with the problems facing them.

All these connections were conducted through the mail at the General Post Office in Shanghai, under the noses of the Japanese, for five consecutive years.

It is worth mentioning that the threat of death always hung over everyone, as that was the punishment if one was caught communicating with the "enemy", but thank Heaven we were spared.

The transferring of funds to Shanghai from the United States and from other sources was one of the greatest miracles.

One avenue utilized was that of elderly Jewish residents of Shanghai, who would make payments to Rabbi Kalmanowitz in New York, whose counterpart in Shanghai would repay the yeshiva that amount.

As we wrote before, the Japanese confiscated all the assets of their British and American citizens. Among them were Jews who were alien citizens who, for the time being, were not affected, so they hunted for means to transfer their wealth. The Yeshiva was a solution to this dilemma. All transactions were conducted clandestinely and with coded messages through neutral countries. The results were that the transactions continued unhampered as if there was no war.

Another way that every yeshiva student personally received regular support was that the local Jews, those whom the Japanese did not affect, were a great source of income.

The greatest miracle was that when the entire world was embroiled in a major international conflict, the gravity of the situation increased daily, and the residents of

Shanghai witnessed the severest financial squeeze. Yet our situation progressed from day to day, especially when the war was ending.

When the most viable coin then was a penny, the situation of the Yeshiva improved and we were able to obtain summer and winter clothing at the lowest prices. Even *seforim* were available for the asking.

CHAPTER 25

Our lengthy travels across half the earth, until we reached Shanghai as well as the scarcity of *seforim*, created serious problems for us in learning. There was a large deficiency in *seforim* on *Shaas* and *Rishonim*, as well as *Achronim*, *mussar seforim*, etc. even in normal times, there was a shortage of *seforim* for such a large group of more than 300 young men, who required tens of thousands of seforim to meet their requirements. Certainly now, in the midst of the war, in a far flung religiously-desolate city, where were we to obtain at least our minimum requirements?

But G-d, in His Omnipotency, even supplied us with our obligations and we had a sufficient amount of *seforim*, so as not to hamper or impede one moment of our learning, we easily secured all the seforim we needed unexpectedly.

The men in charge of publishing contacted offset publishing houses, and by supplying them with original copies they were able to produce the seforim that were essential for our study.

Hundreds, and in some cases thousands of copies of every sefer available to us were published to supply the demand of each and every student in Shanghai. The students paid the full amount required, and the publishing transactions continued during our entire stay in Shanghai from 5702 to the end of 5706.

The sum total of all seforim published in all subjects were in the tens of thousands. These included *Shaas, Rishonim, Achronim,* complete works of *Chidushei Torah* from the *Bnei Yeshivos* as well as Torah journals. This demonstrates the dynamic religious momentum that prevailed in Shanghai.

Appreciation must be acknowledged to the Jewish community of Shanghai, who contributed toward the expense of the first publishing undertaken of Mesechta Gittin. One of the oldest residents of Shanghai is credited with donating his private copy of the *Vilna Shaas* to this project. It must be noted that the undeveloped method of publishing caused the original copy to be destroyed.

Shanghai had old book dealers. The complex of Jews from all parts of the globe in one city made available such rare books and seforim, and they were also involved in the buying and selling of our *seforim.*

In the month of Elul 5704, the first volume of the Torah journal entitled, "Maor Torah", was issued. Thirty one students of the yeshiva wrote a thesis on a Torah subject. The Torah journal begins with the dissertation by the Gaon Reb Chaim of Brisk, *ztl.* On the title page an apologetic note appeared: "Due to technical reasons, we were unable to include in this journal all the essays that we assembled. They will please G-d, be published in forthcoming issues."

This literary collection which was of high quality, as well as quantity, was published in the only Jewish printing

house in Shanghai, at 716 Juper Street, in the French zone. It was a small printing plant and the setting of the type was done by hand. Here we printed other collections and books of new authors.

Permit me to present a copy of the text used on the title page that will offer a natural picture of that era.

"This present journal dedicated to *chidushei* Torah and matters of *halacha*, is for the purpose of reviewing and continuing what has appeared in such famous journals and Torah manuals in their original in Poland as "Oholei Torah", by Branowitz, "Knesseth Israel", by Vilna, etc.

Even then, when Torah was in abundance, the Gedolei HaTorah, found it essential to produce publications and collections of Torah. How much more is the need today — especially now, when we are dispersed and under such strained conditions that has no precedent in the history of our nation. Woe unto us that we have to witness such a situation! The appearance of "Meor Torah" will validate this enormous scene: the preservation of the defenders of Torah from the raging storm that embroiles the world. The remnants of the Yeshiva of Poland and the Mirrer Yeshiva and all of her students are the leaders of our Torah. And now, in the midst of bustling Shanghai, involved in varying situations, they continue the study of Torah as before, as the voice of Torah is accelerated and strengthened.

Who would believe that in such far flung places we would be able to establish a yeshiva with full glory and ritual. Here our present sages are continuing their lifelong entreaty that is the prayer, "cleanse our eyes to the light of *your* Torah." Let that be inscribed for all generations so our learned people of miracles will see and praise G-d.

When we present this journal to the public, we hope that all those who toil in Torah, their loyal friends and those who weary in it, will find in this their expected wish, which is also our aim to glorify and exalt the Torah."

Another publication, "Torah Or", in memory of Horav Avraham Yitzchok Yisroel was then also published. It included all the *chidushei Torah* of the deceased and also from his colleagues.



Members of the Mir Yeshiva in "Lane 599 Tongshan" road in Hongkew.

CHAPTER 26

After the death of Rabbenu Yeruchem Levovitz, ztl, the *Mashgiach* of the Yeshiva, on the 18th day of Sivan 5697 (1936), his disciples began to publish his lectures. HaGaon Rav Leib Malin, one of his distinguished disciples issued a booklet on his talks called "Mamorim," Three pamphlets were published in 5699 (1939) and, in Keidan, in 5700, with great anguish and difficulty, the fourth was published.

We continued in this project, even during our sojourn in Shanghai. We published five pamphlets every year without interruption (from 5702 to 5706 included). In 5703 we reprinted pamphlets 1, 2 and 3.

We chose the lectures of the *mashgiach*, due to the seriousness of the hour, which was *be*clouded, and his words served as a dew to strengthen ourselves in Torah and *mussar*. These words, that were uttered 25 years ago in Mir, are as true now as they were when they were delivered. They even depicted the situation in Shanghai, as "His words remain steadfastly alive and loved forever."

HaGaon HoRav Leib Malin, who was one of the pillars of Torah and mussar, prepared these talks as if one would now stand there and hear it from this sage. The words were overwhelming to the reader. These talks were reprinted in 5729 in the second volume of "Daas Chachma V'Mussar", which was entirely the efforts of Rav Malin.

CHAPTER 27

The *Bnei Yeshivos* were instrumental in strengthening the faith among the refugees, who numbered about 25,000. They inspired them in education, Sabbath, Kashrus, family purity, Torah courses, etc. Among the refugees there were those who were expert in preparing twine for the talaisim and the repair of tefillin.

The first step was the establishment of a Talmud Torah and Yeshiva Ketanah, as a preparatory school for the Mirrer Yeshiva from the Yeshiva Ketanah. In other words a chain of Torah institutions from kindergarden to Yeshiva Gedolah and a Kollel all under the auspicies of the Yeshiva.

At the same time, the Yeshiva established religious educational institutions for girls including an elementary school and a seminary for teachers. These institutions were built in Honko because there was a large concentration of refugees in that district.

In the kashrus field, the following was accomplished: Kosher kitchens were established with the most modern equipment. Even the baking of matzohs was under strict supervision.

Taharas Hamishpacha (Family Purity) included new modern mikvahs, in addition to the ones in "Honko" district, courses and a program of supplying information on this essential subject.

A large number of refugees began to return to Yiddishkeit, while the observant ones accelerated in

observance, performing the mitzvos with more zeal and devotion setting aside a time every day to learn, etc.

As steel is forged together, so the firmness of the students cleaved and their joy and contentment in learning was as if the world was directed to the reposed seas. This attitude gave the students a strong uplifting in Yiddishkeit — not to despair, nor not to flicker, and only to fortify themselves and pray for the goodness of Heaven. The traditional image of the bnei yeshivos, with their spiritual power and their exemplary personalities, influenced very much the entire Jewish community of Shanghai.

It cannot be described what an influence they had in particular and in general on the Jewish community. There were many of the populace who became closer to Yiddishkeit and began to educate their children in a Torah way of life. Some joined the yeshiva as students, and took an active part in every religious undertaking. This proved to be one of our colossal achievements in Shanghai.

The crown of our accomplishments was the establishment of educational institutions for boys and girls that fulfilled our aim and purpose. Among the refugees that arrived in Shanghai from Japan were many with large families, and it was our concern to organize such institutions of learning. With G-d's help, in a very short time these organizations were successfully built and hundreds of Jewish youngsters were imbued with Torah and reverence. Both the Talmud Torah and the Yeshiva were conducted by excellent pedagogues, who made an indelible influence on the children.

The girls' school (the elementary as well as the seminary) were administered by religious, experienced teachers.

There are, today, a number of qualified teachers throughout the world who were students in our seminary. They, in turn, were successful in setting up similar schools in their respective countries. Many graduates from the seminary married the students of the Yeshiva.

The wide range of religious activities continued as long as we were in Shanghai, from the day we arrived, and especially during our confinement in the ghetto, until we finally left Shanghai a year after the Japanese-American war ended.

It is G-d's wonders that in the farthest corner of the Far-East, existed a vibrant Jewish community with all the religious and other essential institutions necessary for its existence and growth, taking into account that nearly the entire community was comprised of refugees. All this while, we were completely isolated and shut-off from the whole world in an *impenetrable* ghetto under the mighty Japanese rule. The German blood hounds did not rest, but contrived ways to exterminate us. Yet above all, hundreds of sacred Yeshivos, have gained valor in Torah and sacrifices in a way that can not be duplicated in the history of Yeshivos.

An article that appeared in the journal, "Or Torah", volume 2, of the month of Av, in 5706, describes the religious activities in Shanghai. This article was written when we began our exodus from the city. It is a comprehensive, original report:

"With the publishing of this last issue of our journal, a special era in the life of religious Jewry comes to an end. A large portion left for Canada and the United States, and the remaining ones are preparing to leave the city. The path of life for the *Bnei Yeshivos*, the Mirrer Yeshiva and its numerous students, the Polish Rabbis and the Jewish

religious community of Shanghai, included the following: An awakening and devotion to learning Torah; the developments of religious institutions of learning for boys and girls; establishing kashrus and Sabbath observance; inaugurating kosher kitchens and institutions for family purity; and above all, the returning of the hearts of our Jewish brethren to the strict observance of the mitzvos of G-d.

On the other side, we see the hardships, trials and tribulations that they underwent, which will depict the goodness of G-d and His wonders, which we saw at all times.

When we left the city, we lifted our hands to G-d in gratitude for saving us from total destruction and being able to devote our lives to Torah, even under such chaotic conditions. We stand in prayer for our future, that our cries for help should remove from us the vicious flood of evil never to return. May G-d bless our path to help rebuild and re-establish our nation, which is broken to pieces in spirit, and may we live to see the return of G-d's people in the very near future." Amen!



Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski.

CHAPTER 28

One of Providence's wonders was the safeguarding against the Biblical transgression of "shatnes," the prohibition of wearing a garment made of linen and wool.

This is how it happened. In the midst of the services, during the week of Yom Kippur, one of the students left the hall, and when he returned in a short while, he was dressed in his wedding attire. It was an astonishing episode and no one entered into any discussion with him until Yom Kippur at night. When we approached him with the inquiry, he replied that he was not praying fervently and it dawned upon him to check his garments. He recalled from learning that when one is clothed in a garment that has *shatnes*, his prayers do not penetrate Above. He thought that possibly the garment he had just purchased might have the unlawful combination of those fibers, and that is why he had a peculiar feeling. As soon as he returned to his room and he changed into the clothing that he brought along with him from Europe, a deep feeling of awe surrounded him. He then realized how sacred were the words of our sages.

Right after Yom Kippur, the garment was brought to a shatnes expert and he did find the prohibited mixture in it.

This incident caused a special alert regarding the purchase of suits. From then on, everyone was more careful of the kind of suit they bought.

CHAPTER 29

Those German — Amalekites who proclaimed, "They say come, let us destroy them as a nation, the name of 'Israel' shall be remembered no more" (Psalm 83:5), set their eyes on the 25,000 refugees in Shanghai. Japan, as a partner in the Axis, reached an accord with Germany for our extermination, in accordance to the German "Final Solution." The Japanese agree to combine efforts and implement the extermination plan of the Germans.

Among Heaven's other goodness that we were to witness, we know of at least two schemes of annihilation that miraculously failed at the last minute. There was also the fact that the plan met disaster even before the Japanese had a chance to begin to implement it. Not one Jew was affected, even though two tremendous schemes were in the making.

This and other continuous problems did not cause a change in our pattern of living in either a spiritual or a physical way. The secretive method that the Japanese used and its vagueness prevented us from knowing what was going on, and therefore produced no fear in us during their planning stage. Furthermore, as said before, they never succeeded in their implementation.

The first plan of extermination came during the winter of 5703, before the establishment of the ghetto. The Japanese army and navy officers, together with the Japanese Ambassador in Shanghai, prepared the scheme under the army secret design.

The plan called for the following implementation: The Jews of Shanghai should be informed that, due to the designation of their zone as a miltary installation, all the Jews would be transferred in boats to one of the islands. There, their situation would improve and become a great deal more secure. During the short trip, all of the passengers would perish at sea and the news media would express a deep sorrow and regret for such a catastrophic accident which happened due to the numerous mines in the Shanghai seas. It was through these or other seemingly innocent pronouncements that they expected to cover up their plot.

An elderly officer of the Japanese Embassy, by the name of Bakuto, who had a close relationship with the Jewish leaders of Shanghai, revealed this to them, with the warning that in no way could this plan be altered or halted. His purpose was only to save our soul, he did not wish to have it on his conscience that he knew of such a plot and did not divulge it to anyone, even though he was urged in the strongest terms not to mention it to anyone.

Bakuto also disclosed that the entire fleet had been prepared to transfer the Jews, as well as the actual place where they would be drowned. Everything was on the alert for the act to be carried out in about two weeks. Even the Emperor of Japan (Mikado) had no power to alter this plan, because every detailed aspect had been pin-pointed and was just awaiting the signal, the matter was therefore considered sealed.

But as Psalms prophesizes, "There are many thoughts in the hearts of man, but G-d's decision is the one to remain." The atrocious plan was exposed just in the nick of time, which prevented the Japanese from implementing their scheme. Words cannot describe the fit of rage that the Japanese officers exhibited when they learned that their

shameful plans were exposed. They acted like wild animals.

The leaders of the Jewish community of Shanghai were in a state of shock and despair that such a herd of murderers were amongst them. They could not believe that it could be true. The leaders were saved from death miraculously, even though they were subjected to torture and beating. The Japanese would often jail and persecute anyone they chose.

As we said before, the Japanese attempted to cover-up their disasterous debasement and even made efforts to confuse the public on this issue and to quiet it down. They did not disassociate themselves from their partners in crime — the Germans — and new plans were drawn up for the implementation of the extermination of Jewry.



HoAdmor Reb Shaul Yedidyeh Eliezer Taub, the Modzhistzer Rebbe.

CHAPTER 30

On the 10th of Shevat 5703, the Japanese provisional administration gave notice of the establishment of a ghetto for refugees who were stateless and who arrived in Shanghai after 5696 (1936). This proclamation was aimed only at the Jews. Everyone had to register at a special office for this purpose until the 13th of Nisan 5703 (April 1943) over a period of three months.

After Passover, the edict was implemented. This created an uneasiness among the refugees and strained relations betwen the refugees and the Japanese authorities, even to the extent of instituting curfews.

Even with the establishing of a ghetto, the Japanese tried to hide their plan of extermination and they announced that their purpose was for the benefit of the refugees, in order to protect them from any accident that might arise due to the war. They even warned that no one was to associate this with an act of ghettoization.

When the establishment of the ghetto was announced, the Bnei Yeshivos had a choice between going to the ghetto or accepting the protection of their former citizenship and not to enter the ghetto (citizens of the government of Poland in-exile were under the jurisdiction of the British Government.) There were pros and cons about entering the ghetto. The *Mashgiach* tilted the pendulum in favor of the ghetto.

As was explained before, the ghetto proved to be our greatest miracle in "The Miracle of Shanghai". Yes, this ghetto that was prepared by the German-Japanese murderers in order to annihilate us was instead the source of salvation for us from G-d. If not the ghetto, we would have been subjected to one of two things: either being locked up by the Germans as citizens who escaped from their conquered lands, or being interned in camps with English or United States citizens whose situation was the worst (not to mention that we never would have had a chance to learn in these internment camps).

The Shanghai ghetto, did not obstruct our actions, as was done in the German ghettos of Europe. The Japanese' only aim was to gather all the Jews into one place, so that they would be able to put their hands on us when the time came. Actually, in the ghetto, we did not suffer. Our way of life was practically unhindered. The schedule of learning and praying in the Yeshiva was conducted in full ritual and beauty. The students did not feel the yoke of exile in the ghetto, because we were always able to arrange whatever we needed. It is amazing that it was during this period in the ghetto we were most successful in elevating our standards of Torah and Yiddishkeit, both for ourselves and for the refugees. Our major religious attainment was made in the ghetto. The first volume of "Or Torah", a Torah journal, was published in the ghetto and our greatest advancement in learning came during that time.

During our stay in the ghetto, a number of weddings were celebrated by the *Bnei Yeshivos* — weddings that were saturated with joy and happinesss.

The ghetto was located in the Japanese quarters of Honko and was marked on the map, but not in the enclosure. Actually, the confinement to the district was not

especially difficult, because the ghetto limitation was large enough and was not felt as a curb, particularly to the yeshiva students, who were in any case restricted to their yeshivos. To leave the ghetto, a special permit was necessary and it was obtained without difficulty.

Residents of the ghetto had to wear a ghetto emblem on their clothing, which was a round blue metal insignia. Usually, the emblem was not worn within the confines of the ghetto, but only when one left the grounds.

At first it was decreed that everyone must leave his present abode in Shanghai and move to the ghetto, but we could wander about in Shanghai all day without the need of a permit. At night, one had to return to the ghetto. Those students who dormed in the international section around the Yeshiva had to move to the ghetto, although the "Bais Aaron Synagogue" continued to function in the international zone unhampered.

On the 9th of Av (August 1942), about three months later, the second part of the decree was promulgated: the complete closing of the ghetto. From then on there was no leaving nor entering the ghetto without a permit, day or night. This edict was only enforced for about three weeks, because by that time, the Yeshiva obtained permits for every student to leave the ghetto and enter the Yeshiva. This continued in effect for more than a year.

It was Tisha B'Av night, when we had just concluded the Ma'ariv Service and read the "Kinos" in the Bais Aaron Synagogue. It was about 11:00 p.m. when we left the Yeshiva on our way to the ghetto, to reach it before the deadline of 12:00 a.m. On August 10, 1943, the Japanese had ordered the ghetto closed at midnight, and it was then that I sensed the feeling of exile. On this 9th day of Av, the remnants of Torah forced to leave the sanctuary.

After the 9th of Av, we sat and learned in the large congregation, Ohel Moshe, which belonged to the Austrian and German Jews, located on the ghetto grounds. Meals were also supplied there.

We were successful in obtaining permission from the Japanese authorities for each and every student of the Yeshiva to leave the ghetto every day from 7:30 a.m. until 11:00 p.m. The enforcement of the midnight curfew had no effect on the Yeshiva until the expiration of the permit, which occurred in the beginning of 5705 (1949).

From Elul 5703, until the 16th of Shvat, 5704, the exit and entrance permits were in effect for groups, not individuals. Therefore, every morning, including Saturday and holidays, hundreds of Yeshiva students would march from the ghetto in Honku to the Yeshiva and Bais Aaron Synagogue in the international zone, a 45-minute walk. There, we assembled to pray the morning service and spend the entire day learning Torah, and there we heard the lectures of *mussar* by the *Roshei Yeshiva* and the *Mashgiach*, as usual. Three meals a day were served there both during the week and on Saturdays, as if nothing had occurred.

At 10:00 o'clock in the evening, we began our return walk to the ghetto, which usually took about an hour.

The Yeshiva in the Synagogue Bais Aaron never closed. Twenty four hours a day, it was in full swing. There were those who would arrive very early in the morning and others who would stay late at night. The diligency of learning was never interrupted. Upon returning from the synagogue the learning continued in the ghetto into the early morning hours.

A building was purchased in the ghetto at 635 Tunkashon Road for a *Bais Medrash*. There, we maintained

the courses practically all night, and into the early morning hours. We also used the Ohel Moshe Synagogue as well as the Lubavitcher Yeshiva and the Yeshiva Chachma Lublin, which were in the beginning of the ghetto zone. The voice of Torah never ceased day or night, even with our confinement to the ghetto.

It is worth mentioning that during this period, Shanghai was in complete darkness due to the blackout, and we had to learn with the windows shut tight in the midst of a kind of choking heat for which Shanghai is known. Electricity was scarce and we had to use wax candles or carbide flames that gave off extreme heat and caused unbearable choking. Under these conditions several hundred students of the Yeshiva sat and labored in learning with all their faculties, day and night, and this was their only worry and concern in the world. There were numerous other matters at hand, but they completely disregaded them.

16th of Shevat, 5704

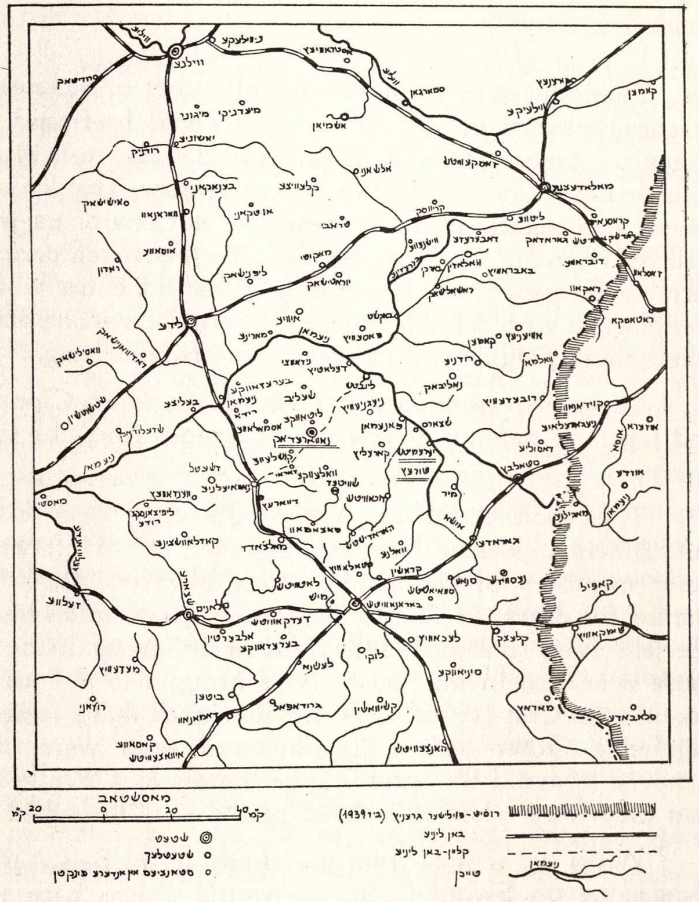
On the 16th of Shevat, 5704, another privilege was afforded to our students. Every individual student had received a permit, allowing him to leave at 7:00 a.m. and return by 11:00 p.m. Now, however, it was decreed that we no longer had to come and go in groups, leading to our developing a more favorable attitude toward the government.

The offering of the permits was accomplished in an honorable and inspiring way.

A young Japanese official came to the yeshiva and handed every student his permit. The students were not required to go to the government offices, rather the official came to them.

A Dr. Cohen accompanied the official, and was to a great degree responsible for this accomplishment.

Dr. Cohen, a Jew from Russia, came to Shanghai as a child and reached a high level of recognition in the Japanese government. He was a special messenger of G-d sent to be at our side in a time of crises, to aid the Yeshiva.



Map of Vilna-Baranowitz-Mir Area.

CHAPTER 31

Shanghai was plagued with all types of sickness'. Practically every virus in the world could be found in Shanghai. Among the usual contagious diseases were black boils, leprosy, cholera, typhus and dysentery. Thank G-d, we were protected from all these ills, not one of us was inflicted from any of these diseases which were rampant in each and every corner. It was a time that the entire world was plagued with this dilemma, yet Shanghai was one place where these plagues did not reach an epidemic stage.

There were some zones, however, in which Chinese and Japanese persons afflicted with leprosy filled the side streets.

Their bodies, burning with high fever, were taken out of their houses to the streets in order, not to infect the other members of the family. In the streets, they lay waiting for death. In Honku, the Japanese authorities had a special service to assemble the dead in the streets (many of those who died in the houses were brought to the street, because the Chinese did not have the funds that a funeral required.) Other sick and moribund ones were also removed to avoid the spreading of the diseases. We heard that they were taken to isolated places until they died.

When we walked from the ghetto to the Bais Aaron Syngagoue on Sword Road, we would notice, here and there, curbs lined with corpses.

In our zone, we did not see these afflicted ones, but we knew that the area around us was saturated with pestilence. Even in our midst, there were several cases, but, thank G-d, not one of us was troubled with these infections during the time that we were in Shanghai.

The Chinese sector was the most contagious, and we feared to enter its district. It was also the most dangerous for robbery and murder. Not one of us ever entered there.

Several of our students were afflicted with dysentery but, in general, to a mild degree. We were also affected with stomach disorders that caused us discomfort. There were isolated cases of typhus and one case of cholera, but they recuperated completely.

One student was stricken with a severe case of typhus. The physicians endeavored to save him, but did not succeed, and signs of dying were visible. They gave up hope for him and waited for his last minutes. This tragic news was brought to the *Mashgiach* while he was conducting his lecture in the Yeshiva. The *Mashgiach* immediately approached the Holy Ark, swung it open, and began to read the Talmud in Shabbos 22, which states: "If one becomes sick and is near death, even if 999 condemn him and one finds a merit, he will be saved. If there be a messenger with him and an interpreter, one among a thousand to show unto man his uprightness, then He is gracious unto him and saith, "deliver him from going down to the pit: I found a ransom" (Reb Yossi Haglilli), "He then let out a heart-rending cry that pierced every heart and called out, "G-d doesn't this student (name and mother's name), who left the home of his parents in Germany and wandered to the Mirrer Yeshiva in Lithuania deserve one merit of a thousand?" He then read Psalms aloud accompanied by the entire Yeshiva. There was an outbreak of emotion and prayer, with each and everyone crying uninterruptedly.

This continued for some time. The *Mashgiach* then ordered each young man to return to his studies, for the merit of learning might serve as an asset for the deathly-ill student in Heaven.

After the prayers, we looked at the watch and, as we found out later, just then the patient began to feel better. His condition continued to improve until he was completely well and without any after effect. Today this student is a leading Torah educator and has a very fine and respectable Orthodox family.

The Europeans who resided in Shanghai were interested in establishing a functioning hospital. In the French zone, there was a hospital of note and the world's best doctors were enlisted at exhorbitant salaries. Otherwise, it would have been dangerous to live in Shanghai due to the proliferation of sickness there. The physicians served in a five-year rotation, which was sufficient under such conditions. Also, there were Jewish doctors among the German-Austrian refugees.

Our students received the best medical attention. There were cases when previous ailments were cured here. To our great wonder in Shanghai, which was saturated with diseases, we found good physicians and hospitals more plentiful than we had in Poland or Lithuania. Types of diseases and operations that were difficult to treat in Eastern Europe were treated here successfully.

CHAPTER 32

The year 5705 (1945) was full of dramatic occurrences affecting the world in general and specifically our Yeshiva. That year the war ended, in the month of Iyar (April). Germany capitulated and Japan followed in the month of Elul (August). With regard to the Yeshiva, this era was the most dangerous. During the last six months, from Nisan to Elul, the Yeshiva was saved in numerous ways from annihilation, such as gas attacks, American bombs, the civil disorders in the city of Tensin, on the brink of war, and destruction of the Yeshiva building on Blecker Street. Every time that danger lured, Providence kept a close watch on us. And at every occurrence we saw the great wonders that protected us at all times.

During the High Holidays of 5705, including Simchas Torah, we remained in the Bais Aaron Synagogue. Thereafter, the Japanese informed us that, for military reasons, we would not be permitted to learn there and that we must concentrate ourselves only in the ghetto. This order was strictly enforced, with no leniency. It seems that they were preparing for the gas attack on Shanghai.

In the meantime, the Yeshiva moved to the large Ohel Moshe Synagogue in Honku. It is understood that it was very difficult and time consuming, yet we endeavored to our utmost not to disrupt our schedule of learning and prayers.

Around the middle of the winter, after spending several months learning in Ohel Moshe Synagogue, the synagogue again moved to its own private building on Beikel Street in Honku. It was an old two-story structure that previously was a factory. There, we had better accomodations for learning. There, we were especially able to concentrate all of our students under one roof. We were in this building only six months until (Elul, 5705), when we moved to larger and better quarters on John Street, near the dormitories in Honku.

The reason for moving to this building was because the winter was approaching and the edifice on Beikel Street was not prepared for cold days — especially when it was noticed that it had begun to tilt and was in danger of collapsing. A month after we left, it did collapse completely.

During the summer of 5705, (1945) when the war scale dipped to the detriment of the Japanese and the fall of Shanghai seemed imminent, real estate declined a great deal.

On John Street, near the Yeshiva's dormitory, there was a nicely structured two-story Japanese hotel. The owner agreed to sell it to us at a very low price. Payment was to be made partially in dollars and partially in gold bars. The Yeshiva students obtained the gold bars from outside sources and the deal was consummated.

Renovations were instituted immediately to accommodate the Yeshiva. The inner walls were removed to make space for a large study hall.

There was a kitchen, a dining room, study halls and dormitory rooms. On Rosh Chodesh Elul, we moved in and began our schedule of learning under satisfactory

conditions. This building met our needs for space for the administration, for learning and for dining purposes.

The Yeshiva students lent a hand to the revamping in order to hasten it before Rosh Chodesh Elul. Special mention must be made of the extreme spiritual devotion that it caused which will be illustrated in a later chapter.

We sat and learned in this building until we left Shanghai in the month of Teves, 5707. After Japan's capitulation, and the surrender of Shanghai at the end of the year (after several weeks), we returned to the Bais Aaron Synagogue. We remained there until the last student left in the month of Teves, 5707.



A group of Yeshiva students during the war in Shanghai. They are in shirt sleeves because of the heat and humidity. In the middle is Horav Shmuel Walkin.

CHAPTER 33

When the defeat of Germany was assured and became only a matter of time, the Germans dispatched to Japan two of their experts in gas chambers. These two had experience in the extermination of men, women and children, possibly millions in the gas chambers in Europe. One of them prided himself as being responsible for the extermination of all of Warsaw's Jews.

These two murderers had a very difficult passage to Shanghai, ultimately arriving there in the winter of 5705.

In the industrial section of Shanghai they camouflaged their real intentions of constructing the kind of gas chambers used in Auschwitz. They even imported cyclone gas, which was discovered in Auschwitz to be the most efficient in asphyxiating their victims.

Other gases were also imported from Europe. The Japanese were commissioned to bring the Jews of Shanghai to these gas chambers without their becoming aware of what was in store for them. It was all prepared according to the way it was done in Nazi Germany. After the war, the details were uncovered at the German Embassy in Shanghai.

During that time, we did not know any particulars of this extermination plan, but we suspected that some preparations were being devised. We presumed that something was brewing and it worried us very much. During this period, before the end of the war, the Japanese

again made a thorough count of each resident of the ghetto, with maximum personal data. They also checked on all of our belongings. They informed us that in a few weeks we would be going to "work". We understood that this was a smoke screen for their real plans, but we could not fathom exactly what they had in mind.

When we were informed that within two weeks we would leave for "work", the Japanese suffered such great losses on the battlefield that they did not know what happened to them, and then they spared us for a short time. When they recovered, they again informed us that in about two weeks "we will be going to work." Again they met great catastrophic defeats on the front, until they were compelled to forget us entirely. This round of affairs continued, and every time that they prepared to implement their hideous plan, they met with disastrous results on all fronts, and this went on until the war ended. Only after the war, did we learn of the Nazi-Japanese schemes.

How can we fully thank G-d for all the wonders that He has done to us and for us; even if it were only for saving us from the gas chambers — and yet so many favors were done unto us in Poland and Lithuania, until today! Furthermore, the gas chamber miracle was not the last one in Shanghai. During that half year, other wondrous miracles were performed for us, such as our being saved from American bombings during the surrender of Shanghai. These dangers were not minimized as was the plan of annihilation by the Japanese and Germans.

The great miracle of gas chambers was intensified in that we were not aware of what was in store for us until much later.

We at least had peace of mind and were able to learn during that entire time. We utilized that period to develop

the facilities of the Yeshiva, by securing the building on Beikel Road and, immediately after that the purchasing of the well-constructed building, working without a let down in our endeavors until the opening of the Yeshiva in its new quarters.

Nachmonides, in one of his letters writes, "take to heart always, that if HaShem does not build, your toil will be in vain, and if G-d will build, their attempts to destroy it will be ineffectual."

Concerning the miracles that we witnessed up to that point, and which continued even later, they are like the words written in the book "Duties of the Heart."

The greatest of the benefits that the Creator has bestowed upon man and the strongest proof of His existence is the Law that was delivered to Moses. His prophet (peace be upon him), and the manifestation of signs by him changes in the normal natural phenomena, and exhibition of awe inspiring wonders to induce faith in the Creator, blessed be He, and in His prophet; as it is said (Ex. 14:31), "And Israel saw the great work which the L-rd, and they believed in the L-rd and in Moses, His servant" (Deut. 4:35-36). "Unto thee it was shown, that though mightest know that the L-rd, He is, G-d; there is none else besides Him. Out of Heaven He made thee to hear His voice, that He might instruct thee; and upon earth He made thee to see His great fire; and thou didst hear His words out of the midst of the fire."

If anyone seeks a parallel situation during the present time period similar to the above mentioned, let him look with candid eyes at our position among the nations since the exile began, and at our orderly condition in their midst, notwithstanding that we did not agree with their beliefs or practices — of which they were aware. Even this is as our Creator promised us (Levit. 26:44), "And yet for all that,

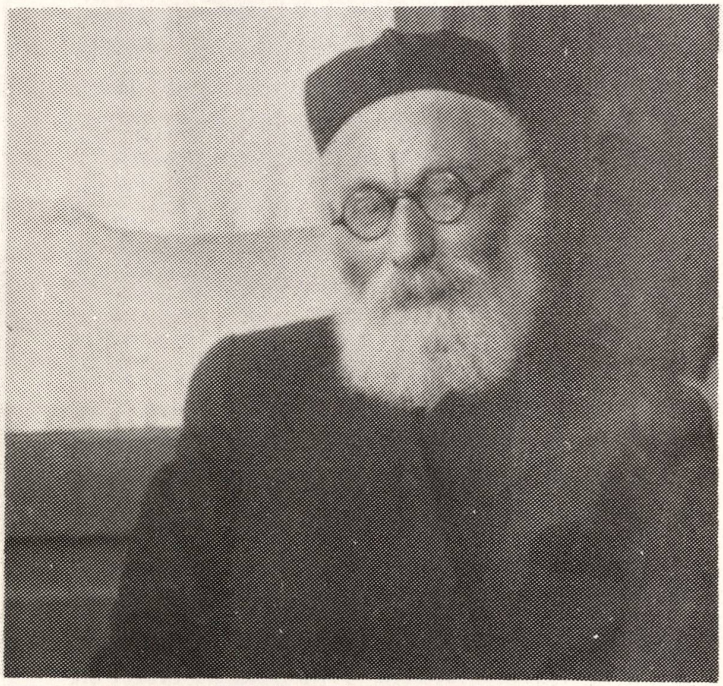
when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them, utterly to destroy them and to break my covenant with them, for I am the L-rd thy G-d (Ezra 9:9): "For we are bondmen yet our G-d hath not forsaken us in our bondage" (Ps. 124:1, et. seq.), "If it has not been the L-rd who was for us, when men rose up against us, they they would have swallowed us up alive, when their wrath was kindled against us."

Rabbi Yaakov Emdin writes that Israel's existence among the great nations is also one of the wonders of the exodus from Egypt. He writes; "Who is so blind that he does not see the connection between the world below and the world above, which supports it and maintains it. The eyes of Providence are always on it, and how can a heretic not be ashamed of this surveillance and stand unembarrassed? Whoever will delve into our position and place in the world — we, the wandering nation, as a sheep dispersed, after all that transpired with us concerning the trials and tribulations over all these thousands of years — we'll find that no nation in the world has been as persecuted as us.

"Since we became a nation, in our youth, our enemies planned how they would annihilate us and uproot us from our roots, because of the envy that they have toward us. They were not able to destroy and wipe us off the map of the world, as they did to all other strong nations before us. Their memory has been forgotten, their thoughts divided and their face obliterated, but we who are attached to G-d are all alive today. We did not lose one iota of our Torah, even though we have been subjected to thousands of years of wandering. All the words of our Sages are as strong today as the day they were uttered. Time had no effect on them. What will the clever philosopher reply — that it was

coincidental? I swear, by my life, for when I delve into the great wonders, I see the great and world-shocking miracles that G-d has done for us in Egypt, in the desert and in Eretz Yisroel. The longer the exile continues, the more we attest to the authenticity of these wonders, the more we recognize His greatness and His strength.

"All the previous prophets saw it in depth and they protested as to the length of the exile, before it even occurred. Nothing will be missing. None can deny, all that happened! Let us look into it and we will see clearly that G-d is the cause of all this and we will return to Him with complete heart and beseech Him."



Horav Eliezer Yehuda Finkel.

CHAPTER 34

In the summer of 5705, the Americans intensified their bombing of Shanghai.

The Honku zone was hit many times with the bombs completely destroying the buildings. Several bombs fell around the Yeshiva, but no damage was done to it. Air raid shelters were ineffective, due to the size and weight of the bombs. There were no shelters in or around the Yeshiva.

Near the Ohel Moshe Synagogue was a single air raid shelter that was in a police station and which also served as a hospital. Thus it was able to display a white flag. In this shelter, hundreds of Jews hid during an air raid. An American spy revealed that this building was not a hospital, but an army stronghold, where quantities of ammunition were stored. American bombs pinpointed this building but, with the greatest of wonders we were never hit.

The bombers accelerated their attacks and became known as the "flying fortress of the Shanghai skies". To complete their missions they rained fire and brimstone on the city. Sometimes there appeared several hundred at one time. The danger of being buried under debris was imminent every day. We were then in the Yeshiva building on Beikel Road, and the Yeshiva was in bad shape, apparently ready to collapse. These were the circumstances which we had to endure.

It was then suggested that we leave Shanghai and move to the Chinese city of "Tensin", far from the bombing zone. There was a Jewish community there and, naturally the idea was accepted.

The *Mashgiach* rejected this plan. He did not consider leaving Shanghai, standing strong and determined on this point. His reasoning was that a move to Tensin would cause disruption of learning for several days and in such a time, when bombs kept flying, it would be a danger to halt learning. Besides, he explained, the danger was not less in Tensin.

As the bombings over Honku became stronger and stronger, the pressure continued to leave Shanghai. The *Mashgiach* then said, "The Talmud Pesachim (8b) asks: "should those who live in the valley fear the evil spirits?" They replied: 'Let the punishment be meted out, but it cannot hurt me because the mitzvah is protecting me."

The *Mashgiach* then stood up straight, with a gleaming face of holiness and special serenity, and remarked: "If I was the Rav, I would also say, let it be on my shoulders."

After such strong words, the idea of moving from Shanghai was dropped from consideration. At another time the *Mashgiach* said that every Yeshiva student who was in Shanghai would be saved from any harm or from bombs. We were spared, but only with fears. Later, the *Mashgiach* revealed that he knew Heaven was with us.

At the end of the war, a fearful tug of war broke out in Tensin between the communists and the nationalists. One group slaughtered the other mercilessly and entire districts were destroyed. The foreign citizens who were there became first victims. Only G-d knows if there would have been any trace of us left had we moved there as planned. We then appreciated the determined decision of the

Mashgiach not to move to Tensin although, at the moment, it had seemed very strange, the end result was obvious.

On the 7th of Av, 5705 we were subjected to the fiercest bombings in and around our Yeshiva. The walls shook, but the building remained standing. Hundreds of students were then in the building. Our apprehensiveness was over the number of students who were ill and bed-ridden when their section was completely demolished. All the students began searching among the ruins and by the Grace of G-d, an outstanding wonder of wonders occurred. Every one of the students buried in the wreckage was found safe and sound and not one was hurt. Every one told of their miracles.

I will just mention several incidents that were related.

One student was saved when he left the building to go the the bathhouse. The moment he left the house, the bomb struck it all those who were in the yard were saved.

A second student was saved when he noticed a clear spot. He stood there while everything around him was destroyed and only the pillars which held the roof up remained. He still does not understand how he came to be standing under the pillars. He showed us with his hand where he stood and did not receive a scratch.

A third student related that he glided with his bed from the top floor, down to the bottom, and continued to sleep in it without sustaining any injuries.

Said another: "I was saved this way: I did not feel well and went to lie down in my room during the bombing. I was debating with myself if I should visit a doctor or not, and decided there was no need to do so, and that I would recover without a physician. But my feet drew me to a doctor, I do not know why. It must be that Heaven decreed

that I visit a doctor in order to be saved from the catastrophe. While I was at the doctor, the building was destroyed (this building was near the Shanghai-Japanese radio station). "This is some of the numerous ways, the students were saved."

The bombings did not cease that day and they continued until Japan surrendered. During this time, the American Navy began to attack Shanghai. We were all saved from everything and no mouth can explain or describe the greatness of G-d that we witnessed during every moment.

Even the poorest peasants, who were menial laborers also admitted how the *Bnei Yeshiva* were saved. Whenever they heard cries, they looked to the *Bnei Yeshiva.*



Horav Avrohom Tzvi Kamai.

CHAPTER 35

At the end of summer 5705, the American Navy came closer to the beaches of Shanghai and the threat of an invasion was imminent. The Chinese Nationals, under Chang Kai Chaik, advanced toward Shanghai and were preparing to take part in the battle of the city.

The Japanese army in Shanghai was digging in and fortifying its positions. It dug in the length of the streets, one close to the other. Not far from the Yeshiva, on Johns Street, existed these fortified stations. The Japanese declared that they would defend Shanghai to the last man and would not retreat as long as they could do that. Everyone knew what was in store for Shanghai if they would battle in the streets against such strong odds.

But G-d, in His merciful way, saved us even from this danger at virtually the last moment. On the 25th of Av, (August 9, 1945) the first atom bomb was dropped on Japan, and three days later (the 28th of Av,) the second bomb exploded. Only then did Japan surrender (the signing of the surrender took place on the 24th day of Elul, 5705). This is how Shanghai was conquered without a battle at the very last moment.

Several days later, after the surrender, the American Navy was visible on the waters of Shanghai, still posed to attack. The strong navy included air craft carriers,

submarines, mine sweepers and numerous vessels that filled the entire horizon. One did not have to be an army expert to visualize what would have happened if the invasion on Shanghai was effected.

At the surrender, the Chinese Nationalists entered the city and occupied it without one shot being fired.

When the battle of Shanghai reached its peak at the end of the summer of 5705, when the fear of bombings and all other incidents were a daily occurrence, there was still no inattentiveness on our part to our religious demands. Our first concern was to find a suitable building because this would help us expand the future of our Yeshiva. It was then that the deal over the hotel of Johns Street was consummated.

At the end of Av, there was a fear that we would not be able to complete the renovations before the forthcoming month of Elul. A group of students took their place near the Chinese construction workers and helped them in plastering, etc., in order to complete it in time for Rosh Hashanah. On Rosh Chodesh Elul, the new building of the Yeshiva was dedicated.

The days before Rosh Chodesh Elul were the most critical of the war, not only because of an invasion on Shanghai, but also because of the numerous suicide squads of Japanese sent against the United States, and especially because of the threat of atomic bombings by the United States on Japan and its dropping of the bombs on Japanese cities. During this dreadful whirlpool, that had no comparison in history, the students of the Yeshiva were concerned with their own problem — in building a center for Torah.

How much love for Torah, how much sacrifice and self-denial from all desires is found in their story.

Elul, 5705

After the dropping of the atomic bomb, the surrender of the Japanese and the conquest of Shanghai by the Nationalist Chinese Army, we had to consider what would be our options at the end of the war.

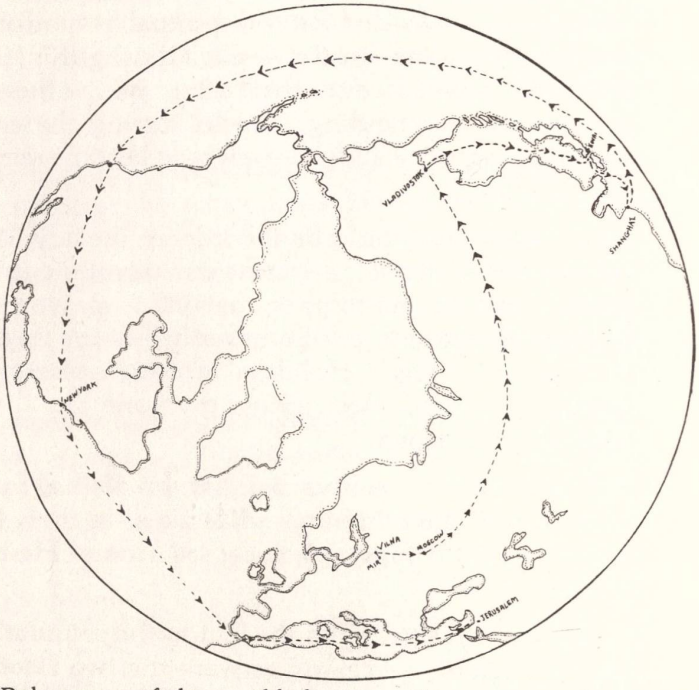
Naturally, we were apprehensive of our condition. The *Mashgiach* noticed that we were perplexed and that it might effect our usual concentration at the Yeshiva during the month of Elul. He came forth with a fiery lecture to inspire us to disregard everything around us and to devote our full comprehension to our sacred spiritual responsibilites, as was always the case in the yeshiva during this time of the year. He pointed out that after we witnessed such innumerable outstanding miracles during the entire war, we should not now allow ourselves to become remiss in our responsibility.

The opposite should be the order of the day. We should become stimulated to augment our devotion to a greater degree. And it came to pass, that although we were living through an anxious period nevertheless the days of Elul, 5705 and the High Holidays of 5706 were filled with intense devotion, electrifying everyone in a way that cannot be described.

The previous Yeshiva building on Beikel Street, that withstood all the bombings while we were there (although it was weak and sagging), collapsed around Heshvan time in 5706.

The eastern side, from the roof to the foundation, and a large portion of the ceiling between the two floors crashed to the earth, shattering it to pieces, while the remaining part stood hanging as if in the air. All of this occurred when no one occupied the building, so there were no fatalities. Only

several weeks before, in the midst of the heavy bombing, the building contained several hundred Yeshiva students. It is frightening to think what would have happened if we were still occupants of that building. Realizing the additional weight of several hundred young men during such a moment, we can appreciate what impact that would have made on the crash. This incident can be compared to the sinking of the vessel Ameikuso (which brought us to Japan from Russia). Providence's guardianship was visible in that a building, that could not stand without occupants, remained intact when hundreds of students dwelt within it.



Polar map of the world showing the journey of the Mir Yeshiva students which took them clear across the world while escaping from the Nazi tyranny and their final re-establishment in new Torah centers of New York and Israel.

CHAPTER 36

Even though 5706 arrived after the conclusion of the war with Japan, and the people were attempting to return to a normal life, yet the obligation of diligency in learning was not over, on the contrary, it was, to some degree, more difficult. Now began the total attempt to emigrate as well as the serious search for relatives and members of the family through all possible avenues. The dynamic free enterprise in Shanghai, the severing from the different critical situations of the war, and other similar factors came together at one time at the end of the war. But the *Mashgiach* was wise to remain on the watch during these troubling times so that we did not slacken in our studies, even under these conditions. The devotion to learning was therefore augmented to a degree not possible up to that point.

The *Mashgiach,* in his letter of the 8th of Teves, 5706, writes: "We are all, thank G-d, well and contented. The spirit and determination in the Yeshiva was always at a very high degree and has not been minimized one iota during these days of peace. Even now, although the problem of emigrating is uppermost on our agenda and requires a swift solution — because we cannot continue to remain here any longer due to the climate, as all kinds of sicknesses and hardships have engulfed us — yet it has no effect whatsoever on the routine of the Yeshiva, and everything continues as before. (Or Yechezkiel 33)."

Obtaining the necessary exit permits was not as quick or easy as we had hoped. There were all kinds of hindrances and it took close to a year for us to secure them. The reasons included a lack of private steamship lines on the Shanghai route and the removal of the numerous mines on the seas, but it was especially due to the unwillingness of those countries to which we strove to come to, to allow us to enter.

Our major drive was aimed at procuring entry permits to Eretz Yisroel, which proved unsuccessful.

Our hopes for American visas were also not imminent. It was only in the month of Av, 5706, that we received our first entry permits to the United States, after a year of intensive involvement by Rabbi Kalmanowitz. The remaining permits that reached us later did not come all at once, but dispersed in batches until the month of Teves, 5707. We left Shanghai in groups, the majority of us going to the United States. From there, most of us left to Israel, especially the *Mashgiach,* who strove with all his being to go to the Holy Land.

The strengthening of Judaism in all aspects continued during 5706, as in the years before with continuing education, kashrus, and the spreading of Torah, etc. In 5706 we published numerous seforim on all subjects. The thought that in a short while we would be leaving did not weaken us in our religious endeavors, and we were intensified until the last moment with full vigor, comparable to our devotion to learning in the Yeshiva.

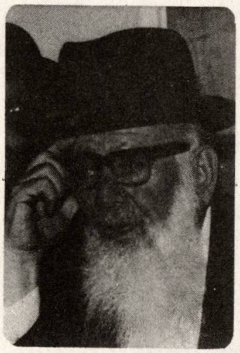
When the first group left Shanghai, the remaining students bid them farewell at the pier. Near the port, the students broke out in enthusiastic song and dance to the words: "Bring us to Zion, your city in joy, and to Jerusalem, the home of your Holiness, with everlasting

happiness." The emotions and joy reached a very high note in our hearts and souls and tears came streaming down everyone's cheeks. After all, after so many years of wandering under such drastic conditions — it was now coming to an end — we, the students of the Yeshiva in Shanghai, are finally leaving the Far East in a state of good health and full of spirit, taking along a large and heavy bag of experiences for generations to come.

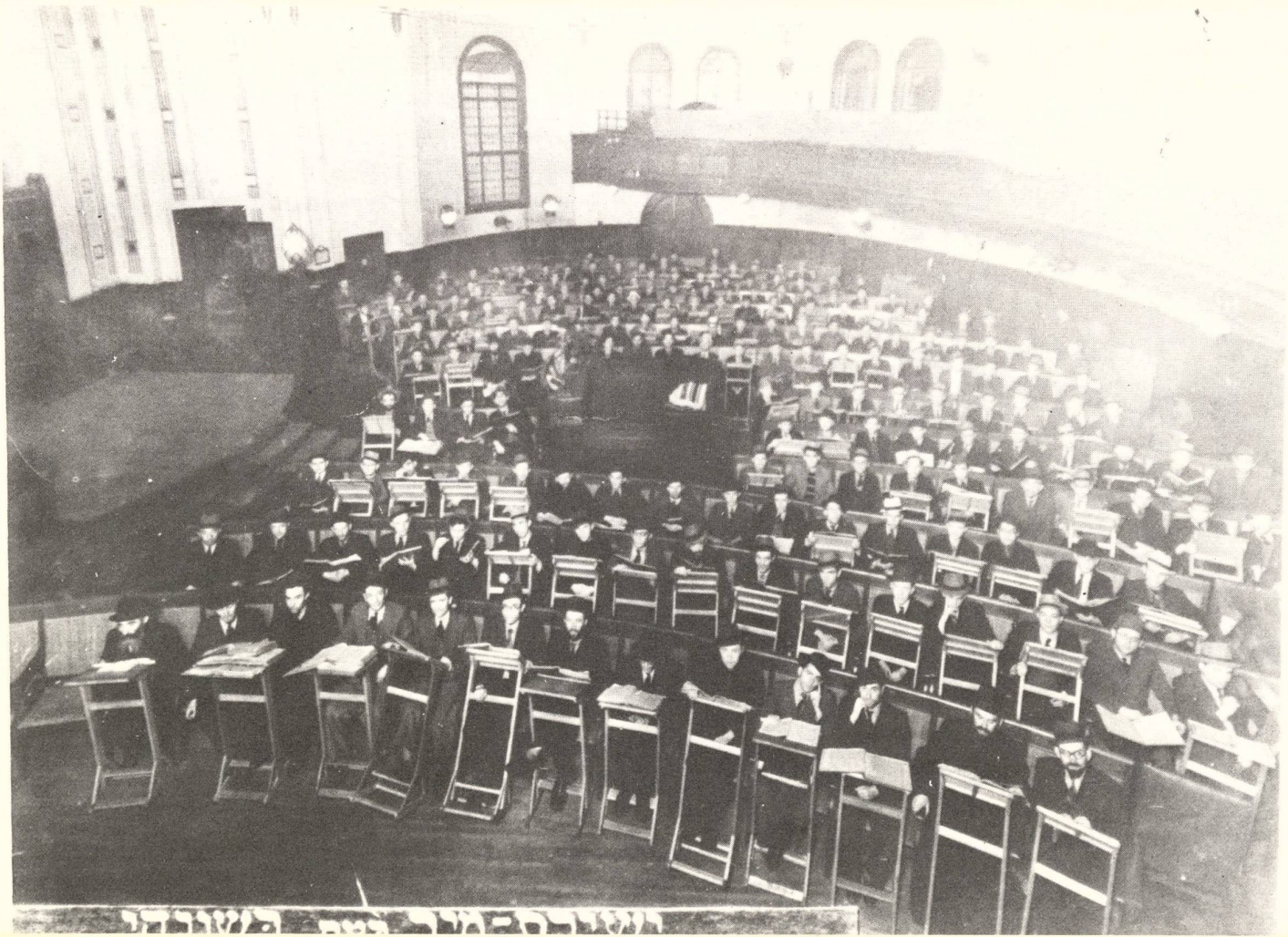
The Yeshiva left Shanghai in several groups. The last group left the soil of Shanghai in the month of Teves 5707. The remaining Jews in Shanghai followed immediately behind and about a year after that the city was annexed to the Chinese Communists.

Upon arrival of the Yeshiva in America Horav Kalmanowitz re-established the Mirrer Yeshiva in Brooklyn, N.Y. where many of the *Bnei Yeshiva* settled joining Kolels, becoming Roshei Yeshiva and Rabbonim in various different Torah institutions.

Reb Chaim and the *Mashgiach* together with the greater part of the Yeshiva left the United States in order to fulfill their original goal of going to Eretz Yisroel, where they joined the Mirrer Yeshiva of Jerusalem under the leadership of Horav Eliezer Yehuda Finkel who arrived during the war.



The Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva Reb Chaim Leib Shmulevitz ZT'L.



MIR, A HISTORICAL NOTE

The Yeshiva was founded in the city of Mir in 1815 by a merchant of considerable means, Rabbi Shmuel ben Chaim Tiktinski. Together with his son Avrohom, they dedicated themselves to the great task of providing world Jewry with Rabbis and Talmudic Scholars.

The study of the Talmud was carried out under the guidance and tutelage of the Rosh Yeshiva; the dean and lecturer, who together with his students toiled with great diligence in studying the depths of the Torah in order to totally comprehend every facet of Talmudic knowledge.

Equally as important for the spiritual needs of Yeshiva life, was the Mashgiach; the spiritual guide and advisor. His ethical and spiritual discourse commonly known as a "Shmusen" or talks, formed the image of the Yeshiva and left a powerful and lasting imprint on its disciples.

During its first 125 years, under the leadership of many famous Roshei Yeshiva and Rabbonim, the Yeshiva constantly thrived. Despite two major fires in the 19th century and exile to the city of Poltava during the first world war the Yeshiva continued to prosper.

In 1921 under the leadership of Horav Eliezer Yehuda Finkel the Yeshiva returned to Mir. Together with Horav Avrohom Zvi Kamai, the Mirrer Rov and the Mashgiach Reb Yeruchem Levovitz, the Yeshiva's fame spread throughout the world, attracting new students even from the Untied States.

This glorious picture was about to come to an end. The ominous clouds that hung over Europe in 1939 were about to bring "A time of trouble to the House of Jacob" and a dreadful end to European Jewry. Those who realized the gravity of the situation knew that escape was imperative.

Those who could not or did not escape were annihilated. When the Nazis captured the city on June 27, 1941 they immediately executed scores of Jews. On Nov. 9, 7,500 men women and children were shot on the outskirts of town. The surviving 850 Jews of the city of Mir were liquidated on Aug. 13, 1942 (with the exclusion of some youths who escaped in the last moments and joined the underground resistance movements). May Hashem avenge their innocent blood.

KORBAN TODAH

Thanks to these two events, I remained alive

I was studying in Baranowitz, with R' Elchonon Bunim Wasserman, HY"D, and I once heard a *Mussar Shmuess* from Hagoan Horav R' Yisroel Yaakov Lubzansky ZT'L, the Mashgiach of the Yeshiva, in which he told us of an event in the first world war. At that time, one of the men in town came to the Yeshiva and asked to be enrolled as a student in the Yeshiva, because whenever there was danger Bnei Torah were more secure. About 10 years later, a few days before war broke out, I received a postcard from my father in which he asked me to come home immeditately. He felt that with war imminent, the family should be together. I was very impressed with his letter, and immediately ran to buy a ticket at the train station. I had the money in my hand, when I suddenly saw before me the picture of the Mashgiach, who had said that in a time of war Bnei Torah were more secure, I decided to stay. It was thanks to that decision that I remained alive. My poor brother, Avigdor Meir, returned home from the Kamenitz Yeshiva and was killed with my parents. It is tragic how they were ordered to dig their own graves and to lie down in them. And thus the sun set with the blood of my parents, two brothers and three sisters (4?). May the earth not cover their blood.

In Shanghai I lived in an apartment, and in the courtyard there was a radio station which the Americans always used to bomb. One morning I felt very weak, with some fever, and decided to go to the doctor who was outside the ghetto for which one needed special permission. I did not want to go to the Japanese, for when one applied he was often beaten and abused, and was even sometimes imprisoned in a prison full of various types of criminals. It was from heaven that I was given an idea, and I ran to the doctor in the French Concession. After I left, the Americans bombed the radio station, and though a number of the families who lived in my building were killed, I survived. This should be a lesson for all who read this of the *Hashgocho P'rotis* of my *Korban Todah*, and may this be a memorial to my parents.

May their *Kiddush Hashem* shield me and all of Israel, and may the redemption come soon.

Sunday, Parshas Shemos, 5741, Brooklyn, U.S.A., Elchonon Yosef B. Shmuel Herzman



During the infamous Holocaust when millions of our fellow Jews were subjected to most unbelievable tortures, deaths and deprivations; When everything seemed to be black and without hope, a small ray of light pierced through this armor of despair and instilled hope for a better future.

Escape to Shanghai *takes you along with hundreds of young Talmudic students from Mir, Poland through 'sub zero' Siberia in their incredible journey from city, town and hamlet until they reached a temporary home in Shanghai.*