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# HUMANITY IN DOUBT

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REFLECTIONS AND ESSAYS

*Philip Weiss*

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# HUMANITY IN DOUBT

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*To the vibrant Jewish community of Drohobycz, Poland,  
that was, but is no more*

*To my loved parents Solomon David and Cilia Weiss*

*To my beloved wife Gertrude Weiss*

*To my precious daughters Francie Winograd,  
Shelley Weiss and Beverly Schwartz*

*To my dearest brother, Leo Weiss, and sister,  
Erna Kimmel, my soulmates and witnesses to the world gone mad*

*To my most cherished grandchildren, Abby, Jill, and  
Richard Winograd; Evan and Erin Laroque, Michael and Lainie Schwartz,  
With Hope for a Peaceful and Tolerant Future*

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*WE DON'T RECEIVE WISDOM:  
WE MUST DISCOVER IT FOR OURSELVES  
AFTER A JOURNEY  
THAT NO ONE CAN TAKE FOR US OR SPARE US.*

MARCEL PROUST

## INTRODUCTION

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**B**orn in Drohobycz, Poland, Philip, along with his parents, his brother, and his sister, was first placed in a ghetto, and then separated from his family; during the war, he was imprisoned in a succession of three labour camps and two concentration camps, and finally liberated by the Americans from Matthausen in 1945. Philip Weiss has made it his life's work to testify to history by bearing personal witness to the devastation of the Holocaust.

In all of this work, he has promoted the values of tolerance and respect for all other groups. In recognition of his outstanding contribution in the field of Holocaust education in Manitoba, Philip Weiss was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Laws, by the University of Winnipeg, in 2003, and many other accolades over in years including, in 1991, the Prix Manitoba by the provincial government for distinguished service in cross-cultural awareness, and the 2006 Canada Peace prize medal from the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Association of Winnipeg (Manitoba) in 2006.

The Holocaust profoundly shaped every facet of Philip's being and left him not only physically devastated, but in many ways emotionally scarred. It took many years, and much soul searching, to rebuild his own humanity, from the ground up. In his words, returning to normality was a laborious journey that he took along with other survivors and family members. As part of this journey, Philip has chosen to try to put meaning and context to his experiences, by devoting considerable time to researching the political, social, and cultural underpinnings of the Holocaust. His research evolved into a series of lectures that were delivered across schools, cultural and religious institutions in Manitoba.

In essence, this book is both a personal odyssey and a collection of Philip Weiss's essays he has delivered on thematically organized topics, relating to the

Holocaust. What is unique about this book is that the reader is first introduced to the man, in his own words, so that he or she can better connect with and understand the perspective he brings to his intellectual considerations of the hard questions on the Holocaust.

In his essays, Philip Weiss is not afraid of controversy; he seeks to explore his "truth" and provokes the reader to consider the issues that are intimately tied to the Holocaust head-on. This book begins with his personal story, followed by an interview that seeks to elicit information that is absent in his accounting of his history - and in so doing allows a more personal and vulnerable man to be uncovered.

It is Philip's greatest wish that the book will open the eyes of those who have little or no knowledge of the Holocaust. The personal odyssey and essays provide a baseline of knowledge on this most dark period of human history, a period where man's humanity was truly in doubt. The book sends a warning to the young of this generation to be on guard against the symptoms of evil and the extreme danger to society of allowing the same conditions to take hold as these conditions allowed a society to become dehumanized.

Editor

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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**H**olocaust, the most tragic event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the colossal degradation, and destruction of my family, friends and European Jewry, shaped me and the world around me. It left me with the desire to speak, to tell, to repair the unspeakable, to reconstruct the events which I have witnessed, and which I researched.

The following individuals are responsible for my writing *Humanity in Doubt* as they profoundly influenced my thinking on freedom, liberty and democracy. Without them, my book would not have come into existence.

The first individual I wish to acknowledge is Renata Reinke, author of the book *Antworte Mensch*, which translated means “Answer Humanity!” I met Renata in 1967 in Bremen, Germany, at the trial proceedings against high-ranking SS Officer, from the Ghetto of Drohobycz, Heinrich Hildebrandt.

Elie Wiesel, as my spiritual mentor, in his brilliant portrayal of the Holocaust, crystallized the importance of that event in my own life. Even though I differ with him on certain issues, he brings everything to one denomination – he questions God. He has the courage to confront God’s ways and actions during the Holocaust. This struggle is all the more powerful in the face of the orthodox religious image of the just God. And because of that, I consider him, to a certain degree, a soul mate.

Simon Wiesenthal, the unceasing hunter of war criminals, was responsible for my decision that those crimes can not be forgotten and that those who survived must remember and imprint their memories on the next generation.

I would like to acknowledge the Asper Foundation, and its founder Dr. Isadore Asper, for his love and dedication to the Jewish people and his outstanding work in Holocaust education.

Bryan P. Schwartz, encouraged me, most persuasively, to put my thoughts and essays into a book, and Darla L. Rettie, worked tirelessly to capture my ideas in a coherent, organized and evocative manner, hopefully to the readers' benefit.

Finally, I would like to thank Michael Schwartz and all my family members, for their support with this project, which has taken many hands and many hours to complete.

# I. PERSONAL ODYSSEY

## I. PERSONAL ODYSSEY



MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY:  
PERSONAL REFLECTIONS FROM 1939 TO 2005

*I see the world gradually being  
turned into a wilderness. I hear the  
ever approaching thunder, which will  
destroy us too. I can feel the suffering  
of millions and yet if I look up into  
the heavens, I think that it will all  
come right, that this cruelty too will  
end, and that peace and tranquility  
will return again.*

– Anne Frank, July 15, 1944

**T**he town of Drohobycz (Poland then, Ukraine now) where I was born, a jewel hidden at the rim of the Carpathian mountains was inhabited by approximately 10,000 Poles, 10,000 Ukrainians and 15,000 Jews.

Drohobycz did pride itself on its mix of Eastern and Western culture. Truskawiec, a world class mineral water retreat, was just 20 km away and frequented by tourists from all over Europe seeking benefit to their health and hopefully everlasting youth from the mineral waters.

Drohobycz represented a mosaic of nationalities and cultures and it counted among its inhabitants members of the old Austria-Hungarian aristocracy, anti-Semitic and philo-Semitic Polish patriots, members of Polish Officer's Corps., Ukrainian nationalists and communists, Zionists, oil magnates, illiterate farmers, Jewish communists and capitalists, doctors, lawyers, yeshiva students, members of the rabbinical court, assimilated Jews, merchants, tradesmen – all living in pseudo-harmony. In reality this mosaic was a big package of dynamite, laying dormant, waiting for a spark to ignite the pyre. That was the town I was

born in; the town where my grandparents were born; the town where my ancestors came and settled in the late 1700s.

My youth in Drohobycz was interesting but not extraordinary. I was born into a middle class family in the territory of Easter Galicia, a small but vibrant community that had a definite Eastern European character. My father Solomon, a highly respected high fashion designer and tailor, was definitely not the prototype of an Eastern European Jew. Tall and immaculately dressed, he made his presence felt by his easy-going manner. I would not call him an agnostic but the religion that he expressed was delegated to Saturdays and Jewish holidays. He was more a secular man interested in the affairs of the world around him than with theological issues. My mother was a tiny woman with unstoppable energy. She was well read, and worked as a legal secretary to a Jewish barrister. She was in complete charge of the household when we were young; later on, she became a business woman running her own chocolate shop, specializing in high quality imported treats.

I was the middle child of my family – with an older sister and a younger brother. Each of us were treated equally; there was no trace of favoritism in our family. My parents were extremely lenient, and I had no idea what it meant to be punished physically. Back then, children rebelled by sneaking a cigarette here or there, but I don't remember ever even having a puff on a cigarette as a child. The worst I can say is that I helped myself to a glass of wine when I was about thirteen and got tipsy.

Leo, who was two years younger than I was, became my defender against bullies who picked on me. I was a gentle soul, without a natural inclination to fight, so I became a perfect target for the thugs that roamed the streets of Drohobycz. There were boys in our town, like most towns, that liked to cause a good dust up. Some of these boys were Jews; some were Gentiles. Leo would take them on in a fist fight, if he found them punching or teasing me. He was a well formed boy: good in size for his age, athletic by nature, and physically sure of himself on his feet.

My sister, Erna, was the epitome of style back then. She was a petite girl, always immaculately groomed and extremely well dressed in fashions my father had designed or purchased. She was well rounded: good at school, very sociable and outgoing. She traveled with a pack of friends who seemed to orbit around her. I'm sure they were drawn to her bubbly personality. I remember her keeping our family entertained with stories of her school excursion trips to the theaters, museums, and the opera houses of Krakow, Warsaw, and Lwow.

At the age of seven, my father made me a full tuxedo, including a crisp white shirt and bow tie, for a special ball that was held in conjunction with the Purim Carnival. Purim is a Jewish holiday held every spring and although it has some religious significance the emphasis is traditionally on lighthearted fun. The rabbis would serve beer in the synagogues during Purim. There were private celebrations, with gifts being exchanged between friends, and public dances which were held at halls, with the best of foods prepared for the most part by the community. My mother would make a special pastry called *hamantaschen* for the event. These dough wrapped triangles were filled with plums or poppy seeds. Hungarian and Jewish women were traditionally the best bakers in Europe.

My early years as a young child in public school left me without any special memories. I was a quiet, shy boy, minding my own business, making only a few friends. My early recollection of school was that it was "boring." I was not a child with a particularly inquisitive mind; I was a dreamer not interested in math, grammar, and sports beyond soccer. I was living in a world of my own making. History was my favorite subject and biographies my favored books. Napoleon was my hero. Excursions to Truskawiec and Boryslaw, both an easy distance from my hometown, were the most memorable family outings. Living at the rim of the Carpathian Mountains was exhilarating and I spent my time hiking the hills and exploring the forests. I loved them and waited for those excursions with excitement and predication.

I was completely lost when it came to understanding girls. They were a completely different entity; hovering around us but not really with us boys. At school dances, I was too shy to ask the girls to dance. A lady teacher took compassion on me, when I was about thirteen, and invited me to the dances, and asked me to dance, to try to coax me out of my shell. She wanted me to understand there was nothing terrifying about girls.

What was terrifying was the anti-Semitism, expressed by students and the teaching staff alike, that was ever-present in the public schools I attended. It was seldom physical yet extremely hurtful and degrading. Otherwise though, I was happy and worry-free. Time revolved around family social activities and I hoped for a promising future.

All that changed in 1933 when Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany. Uneasiness permeated the Jewish community. Jews had a 1,000 year history in Poland. They understood their political place in the anti-Semitic Poland of 1933. Poland was a deeply religious Christian country squeezed between two major European superpowers: to the West, Germany, her worst enemy and on her Eastern borders the Soviet Union, the imperialistic Godless power, for centuries her mortal foe.

By this time I was attending a public high school, Jagiello, and then, at 13, my parents transferred me to a private Jewish high school named after Leon Sternbach, whose principal was Dr. Blatt, well-known pedagogue. My sister Erna and my brother Leo attended this school as well. By the time I came out of my shell, I was surrounded by well meaning, well mannered, and highly educated teachers from different backgrounds and different nationalities. Their knowledge and technique of teaching spurred my interest in Latin, German, literature and history. I became a more outgoing youngster. I joined a group of my friends under the leadership of Walter Schwartz, with the goal of a self-education in cultural and political issues.

We were living at this time on Szaszkiewicza Street in a tenement building; I remember the Stiefel family, with their two daughters Dziunka and Lotka, both ardent Zionists at their young age, living in the same building. The daily news in the years 1937 and 1938 was not very encouraging; economically and politically things were getting worse for Jews living in Poland. The local papers contained increasing levels of anti-Semitic rhetoric. For example, Mr. J. Holewinsky wrote, in *Maly Dziennik* of December 12, 1938, “It is our duty and demand, before the complete disposal of Jews from Poland will take place, to separate Jews from the medical profession, with our proposal that Jewish doctors should look only after their Jewish patients.” On January 14, 1938, Dr. Jan Witkovski was quoted on the front page of the *Maly Dziennik* stating, “the Jew Frankfurter nominated a Judge to the Supreme Court of the United States of America.”

In this anti-Semitic atmosphere, more and more Jewish students were sent by their families to foreign universities in Prague, Paris, Rome, Budapest and other European cities. Even the poorest Jewish families in Poland did everything possible to educate one of their children at the university level. Unfortunately, upon their return home they faced unemployment, discrimination, and anguish. I watched men, who were 25 and well educated, walking the streets of Drohobycz with absolutely nothing to do – no outlet for their newly acquired expertise.

It all started innocently. The summer of 1939 was one of unforgettable beauty. The great body of Europeans sought solace from the heat and tension of everyday life at the seaside and mountain resorts. Our family was no exception; we rented a small cottage in mountains.

In a small country, particularly when you are in the minority, you made it your business to know about the comings and goings of world politics; we were well informed about escalating tensions on the world scene. My sense was that most European minds were definitely not occupied with issues of war, for sure not in London, Warsaw, and Paris. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s

appeasement policies toward Hitler brought him gratitude and jubilation in England. The Polish government in Warsaw, in its hatred toward the Soviet Union, lost all common sense, and strongly trusted the 1934 non-aggression pact with Germany. And Paris acted like Paris. Newspapers supplied stories of young people, loving couples were strolling the streets of the city, lost in romance, music, and superb food, oblivious to the reality of political life. Berlin grew stronger and more confident. After the diplomatic mastery over the West, Hitler's brutal power was not to be stopped by decadent democracies.

I shall never forget the speech that Hitler delivered in the Reichstag on January 30, 1939. As students at a Jewish private school, we listened mesmerized and fearful when the leader of the German government openly declared his intention to eliminate the Jewish race "Vernichtung der Judischen Rase in Europe."

Very few people in Europe wished to think about the war, except Polish Jews. They knew that war was coming and they knew that they were powerless to stop it. August 23, 1939, the date of the signing of the non-aggression pact in Moscow between Germany and the Soviet Union, sealed their fate and the fate of the European Jewry. Germany invaded Poland on Sept. 1, 1939, and France and England declared war on Sept. 3, 1939, finally realizing that appeasement had been suicidal. Poland was smashed in ten days by the German army and divided into two occupied zones: German and Soviet Union, and I became a citizen of the Soviet Union until June 22, 1941, when Germany attacked the Soviet Union.

Life as a Soviet citizen differed completely from my experiences as a Polish citizen. The standard of life definitely went down. The quality and availability of merchandise were unpredictable. Items of luxury disappeared. Some people were considered enemies of the Soviet Union: wealthy individuals, Zionists, clergy, prostitutes, and beggars. I attended a school where the teaching staff was fully indoctrinated in Marxist ideology, and students were strongly encouraged to join the Komsomol youth organization. Teachers were prompt to

introduce particular students as examples of the working class, citing their poor parents or grandparents as examples of perfect Soviet Union citizenry. Nearly everyone in the class wished to be poor, and students of middle class and rich parents felt ostracized.

The key to survival for the young and older was to stay apolitical. Any anti-government agitation was brutally suppressed. Curiously, cultural life flourished as the Soviet Union wished to garner support from previously Polish populations, so top artists were brought in from the Soviet Union to perform in local theaters and opera houses. We students were immersed in unending performances by artists from the Bolshoi Ballet, Kirov Ballet, the best singers the Bolshoi Opera, the latest of Soviet propaganda cinematography. The majority of performances were free and if we had to pay for the tickets they were extremely inexpensive. In school, we were immersed in Russian literature – both classic and new ideological writings.

Truthfully, we former Polish Jews were lucky to find ourselves in this “Soviet Paradise,” as those who lived in the western part of conquered Poland were under German control, which was much worse. So in the long run, those two years as a citizen of the Soviet Union were extremely beneficial to me, as it permitted me as a very young man, to compare systems of government, the Polish-semi-democracy, and the Soviet Union’s communism. It fully gave me the taste of dictatorship, which later assisted me in surviving five years of incarceration in the dictatorial, fascist, Nazi Germany.

On June 22, 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union and penetrated deep into her territory. Drohobycz was occupied by German forces in a few days, as the Soviet Union was caught by a complete surprise and Soviet forces were decimated. So I began a new chapter in my life as a slave in Nazi Germany.

Before July 1, 1941, when the German army marched into Drohobycz, a bestial pogrom by the Ukrainian population took place in Drohobycz and Boryslaw and also in other cities, towns, and villages against the Jewish

population. Men and women with knives, pitchforks, hammers and sickles killed hundreds of children, women, and men in a hard to describe the paroxysm of violence and hate. The German authority gave them 48 hours to exercise their wish. My family survived this pogrom, along with other Jews, by hiding in the basement of the tenement house we lived in. A Christian janitor, and his wife, who looked after the building, stood at the front gate and confronted the mob who wanted to force their way in, telling them the Jews had left the building shortly before.

Once the Germans had taken control, we were herded quickly into a partitioned area inside Drohobycz. The Ghetto of Drohobycz resembled all the other ghettos in Poland and possibly in all Europe. Its purposes: the complete separation of Jews from the native population, confiscation of their possessions, the subjugation and starvation its residents (or to work them to death). We were crowded into old, dilapidated houses with two or three families living in one, cold room with a constant shortage of food and medical supplies. Life became unbearable in a short time. Under penalty of death, our family, and all others, had to give up all the items of value we possessed: gold, silver, jewelry, furs, leather boots, silver cutlery, down filled pillows, paintings, ski shoes, fine clothing, radios, telephones, bicycles, and any other items of any value to the German authorities.

In a very short period of time the Ghetto was beyond recognition. By late November early December 1941 the first bodies of dead children, sick and old people were laying on the streets and hospitals were not able to accept patients because of the shortage of rooms. The carnage we were seeing was unbelievable. We were shocked and traumatized, but we had no choice but to accept what we saw. It may seem strange, that you can accept seeing death around you, but you develop coping skills very quickly just to stay alive. Our family talked about the death around us all the time. We also talked about surviving – we knew we had to

hide, and not go onto the street because we could be snatched. We were only told once, as these rules were life and death.

The hunger was overbearing. At that time, you could only get food in the Ghetto with ration cards that were given to every family in the Ghetto. We had a bit of bread, flour, potatoes, a bit of fat, and that was it.

The cold was destructive and the brutality of the SS and their helpers beyond description. Sick children, living skeletons of men and women were swarming the kitchen of the ghetto hoping for a slice of bread, a hot potato or a bowl of watery soup. The bodies of the dead ones remained on the streets for a few days before they were removed by the ghetto burial society. And things were getting worse day by day. Men and women taken from the streets to work outside the ghetto did not return. Explanation given by the German police and SS men was, "taken to places to work in other neighborhoods or towns" and never heard from again. SS detachments started openly to penetrate the ghetto walls, either by day or by night, and shot sick people in the hospital. Those able to walk were loaded into trucks and taken away.

Shortly the truth was on the lips of every grownup in the ghetto, the clothing warehouse, where some ghetto workers were employed received bundles of clothing for sorting and cleaning and they were soiled and soaked in blood. The secret was out and so the painful truth stared in the faces of the ghetto. Nobody was safe and you had to use every trick possible to escape the bloodthirsty enemy.

Young people, my age were forced to perform physical work, boys and girls worked on building highways, repairing bridges, painting military barracks, cleansing them and cleansing the latrines of military and police stations and residences. In 1942, for the first time, a concerted SS and Ukrainian action took place in the Ghetto, where hundreds of children, sick people, older men, but also younger men and women were loaded into trucks and taken to a forest on the outskirts of Drohobycz by the name Bronica, where some trenches were dug before, they had to strip themselves of all their clothing, place it in neat bundles

on top of the trenches, were clubbed into submission to get into the trenches and were cold-heartedly killed. Their clothing was returned again to the warehouse some soaked in the blood of the victims who resisted the stripping of their garments.

Right before the October 1942 action, something extra-ordinary happened. My father, being a designer and tailor of uniforms for high-ranking Nazi officers, was a highly respected artist in his trade. The most skilled and prominent tradesmen and their families were taken by Ukrainian militia and placed under protective custody in Stürmführer Beer's house for the duration of a three day action against the Jews of Drohobycz. I can not describe the psychological pain we suffered, knowing well that we were escaping with our lives while our Jewish friends and neighbours of Drohobycz were being murdered without any mercy just outside this house. Father was the only reason my family was saved. This would not be the only time my father's tailoring skills allowed our family to survive.

In the meantime the Jewish ghetto authorities opened a few working camps with the permission of the SS and the military government. Their goal was to employ as many Jews in industries, which could be essential to the German war effort. Approximately 2,500 Jews worked in Ceramic Workshops (Keramische Werkstätten), Vegetable Gardens (Gärtnerei). Wood Mills (Sagewerk), Gestapo-camp (Gestapo lager) and the Karpathen Oil refinery (Karpathen—Erdöl-Gesellschaft).

Once Drohobycz Ghetto was destroyed, my father mother and my sister were taken to the Gestapo camp on Jana Street. My sister worked growing tomatoes, radishes, and fruits like strawberries, gooseberries, pears and apples. The Nazis started these gardens as they wanted the best quality fruits and vegetables for their own use.

My father continued his work as a tailor for the Gestapo officers. He knew the men he was tailoring for, as he had to measure them all personally. He

had a workshop in the camp, along with a few other tailors where the officers came with their demands; they always had to be given the best service and quality of workmanship. The army supplied the materials. He was not allowed to use even the scraps of material or buttons. Father sometimes would get a little extra from certain officers for doing good work. In personal dealings, even the cruelest Nazi officers could show gratitude, if not compassion, with an extra loaf of bread or a bit of sugar once in a while. Although it may seem contradictory to say that Nazis could offer some expressions of gratitude, it is not so unusual, as it is human nature to want to acknowledge receiving something of extraordinary quality, regardless of who has provided it.

My mother worked with others in the Jana Street Camp kitchen where they prepared food for all the mothers. My mother never took anything away from the kitchen. She was an impeccably moral woman who would never even consider an illegal action, whether or not the penalty for such action was death. My parents traded a few pieces of clothing with Poles for more food, from time to time. It was enough to assist in our survival in the labour camps.

The first labour camp I was taken to was Stadtische Werkstade, which was located on the outskirts of Drohobycz. I had been to this area as a child, it was actually at the old Jewish high school that I had attended, so I knew the building quite well. The camp was isolated to the grounds of the old high school. It had been converted into workshops where we manufactured: toys, horse brushes, and woven ammunition baskets to be used by the German military. The brushes were used by the military as well, and the toys were sent to Germany. I worked in all three areas. The toys we made were made out of plywood, cut in the shape of animals and dolls, painted in bright colours, they were made for children of 6 or 7 years old. There were days filled with fear and a desire to survive, as we were observed by Germans most of the time, we had to produce fast and good quality. There was not time to brood on the fact that I had taken classes in the same rooms and laboratories I now slaved in. There was no time to be sentimental about the

past, even though I was working with young girls and boys that I had shared the same space with during our school years. I didn't form any specific friendships during those times as I was still in contact with my brother who was in the same camp and the rest of my family, from time to time.

The Germans decided to demolish *Stadtische Werkstadte*, I presume because of it not being important enough to the German war effort. I remember feeling very fearful about what the future would hold. Where would we be taken? Would we live? No one knew where they were they were marching to as we left the camp. Some went by big trucks, to the forests of Bronica where they were shot, I was taken to Beskiden camp. We marched every morning and evening from the camp, which was in the city of Drohobycz to the Beskiden-Oil Refinery, on the outskirts of the city. I did manual work at the refinery: putting paraffin into large drums and hauling the drums onto wagons, cleaning the grounds, carrying wood – whatever was needed.

There were some very important individuals within the Beskiden organization who were helpful to the Jewish inmates of the camp. They helped during the actions. Some hid Jews in secret compartments and gave them food during the action period. It was extremely important to the Jewish community to know that among the bestial conditions there were rays of light who risked their own lives for individual Jews. Some were chemical engineers. Some were building supervisors; although none were members of the Gestapo, they were part of the civilian administration. This camp was almost grey to me, as we were paying more attention to how close the front was. Was freedom around the corner? In some cases, we could see Soviet planes flying above, and I remember some inmates who thought they could hear artillery fire in the distance. Our thoughts lingered on the freedom we could almost taste.

My brother and I had visits from father from time to time. A low ranked SS man guarded father, on the way from the Gestapo camp to Beskiden, when my father was sent out, from time to time, to pick up fabrics and buttons that he

needed. During these “outing” he would briefly stop into our camp to bring us news from our family. His visits kept our hopes alive, as he would always leave me with a few words from my mother and words of encouragement that would sustain us.

My brother and I were given a warning by a messenger sent by my father to “disappear” from our camp, and make our way to the camp he was in. Father knew somehow that we would be shipped out, or that the SS were going to destroy the camp inhabitants. The only way out was to jump the fence, but my brother and I decided not to jump at the same time, as that might create some attention. My brother jumped first; I saw him go over. I waited for another 10-15 minutes but when I went on the top of the fence to jump I saw the camp was surrounded by SS and Ukrainian Militia, so I jumped down from the fence. What my thinking was at that time, I cannot tell you, other than I hoped my brother had made it to safety. Next morning we marched to the train station, where we were loaded into the wagons, and shipped westwards to an unknown destination, which on our arrival, proved to be Plaszow.

We were not sure where we were going, so in some ways finding out that I was going to Plaszow was “heaven” as I knew that Auschwitz meant certain death. I had no idea what had happened to my family, but I hoped for the best.

In March 1942, the first transport of one thousand Jews was sent to the Belzec gas chambers; in August 1942, in a three-day action, 6,000 Jews were transported to Belzec’s crematorium, and then between October and November an action occurred that lasted a total of one month. By August 1943, all the camps – except Beskiden and the Gestapo Jana Street camp – were dismantled and camp inmates were killed in the forest of Bronica. That was shortly after Bruno Schulz was killed (1942), one the most promising Jewish painters and writers, and my teacher. In late May of 1944, the last shipment of 1,000 Jews from the Beskiden camp to Plaszow took place. I was part of this transport. Plaszów camp, located on the outskirts of Krakow, was well portrayed in the movie *Schindler’s List*, by

Stephen Spielberg. My stay in Plaszów and Wieliczka (salt mines) continued until 6 September 1944, when I was transported to the Mathausen concentration camp in Austria.

May 1944 opened another chapter in the torturous life of the small number of saved Jews from Drohobycz and Boryslaw, now prisoners at the concentration camp Plaszów.

The journey to Plaszów was completed without incident. Upon our arrival, we were surrounded by heavily armed SS men spaced every ten feet. When the train stopped, we heard the command, “raus.” This was the order given to the SS men to assemble us in columns; this was completed with great speed, fist punches, and hitting with their guns. In charge of this assembly was Untersturmführer John, a deformed sadist and the right-hand man to the commandant of the camp, Goeth. John was running from one wagon to another checking to make sure no one was hiding in the wagons. Goeth was standing not far away, with folded arms, and a satisfied smile on his face. John reported to Goeth that everything is under control and ready for our own march toward the camp. A short distance from the camp, the order, “Mutzen up” (take off the caps) was given. It was also a good pretext for another round of punches. Hilowicz, chief capo – who was himself an inmate – gave the order to place all our belongings in designated order and demanded that gold, watches and all valuables were to be given to him separately.

All this was observed by Goeth and a group of SS officers. Women and children, who were separated in a special column, were looked after by Mrs. Hilowicz, the wife of the chief capo. She was a mad, vicious woman who was hitting women on their faces demanding the immediate dispossession of all their valuables. Showers and disinfection then took place in the shower facilities. The women’s lodging barracks were surrounded by wire to separate them from the men’s quarters. The camp of Plaszów, after its changeover from labour camp to concentration camp, was divided into two parts: Jewish and Polish. The camps

also retained the mass graves of 5,000 Jews liquidated from Krakow Ghetto. The executions took place, when Krakow was exterminated, at Chujowa Gorka, a hillside used for military exercises during WWI. Many Polish patriots from Krakow and surrounding towns were also executed there. On the morning of May 7<sup>th</sup> 1944, we had to assemble for health inspection. We were waiting near our barracks, and then on the order of Goeth, each one of us stripped off our clothing and stood naked before the camp doctor, Hauptsturmfuhrer Dr. Blancke. It was a cold morning and we were shivering. Each one of us had to turn a few times for Dr. Blanke to have time for a thorough examination. Another SS man made notes under the direction of Blancke. Hauptsturmfuhrer Blancke, with the movement of a stick, directed the candidates towards the specific areas and Goeth, with his nod, approved the selection.

Three days after the health inspection we received our striped uniforms and we were directed to work. I worked as a groundskeeper but many times also as a helper in the uniform shop, which produced military clothing for the SS and the German Wehrmacht. On Sunday, May 14<sup>th</sup> 1944, a general assembly of thousands of inmates was called. The inmates were tightly encircled by a throng of SS men and SS women, in the center of the Appelplatz (assembly grounds). Goeth signaled to one of the SS men to give one pistol shot in the air, which activated music throughout the camp's sound system.

This time, about 1,400 selected inmates, including children and older patients taken from the hospital, were taken by wagons out of the camp to be exterminated. The sound of music "Mutti Kauf mir ein Pferdchen" (Dear mother buy me a pony) and other children's songs overpowered the cries and shrieking of women running after the wagons taking away the children. Among them were also some of the children from Drohobycz and Borislav who were hidden by their parents until this time. The camp sunk into deadly silence and grief. Two hundred and ninety innocent children went into their death on the orders of the sadist Goeth and his henchmen.

This camp “cleansing” of elderly people, women and children had its purpose – as we observed very shortly. The camp received a new shipment of younger and stronger Hungarian Jews, and without room for everyone the decision to exterminate the weak seemed “practical” to the Nazis. Plaszów was one big *anus mundi* of filth, perversion and murder directed by Goeth and helped by Hilowicz and his despicable helpers. The “aristocracy” of the camp consisted of tailors, shoemakers, and cooks who were the main suppliers of goods for the thriving black market. The SS and the capos kept their eyes closed as they benefited greatly from it. During my stay in Plaszów, I witnessed a few executions at Chujowa Górka of mostly young Polish women, facing their deaths with courage and stoicism, singing the Polish anthem to the last breathes of their young lives.

Rigor of the daily activities was unchanging. Every morning we assembled at 6:00 a.m. The head count took hours until it was verified as correct based on office documents. The dead were placed on the ground in the lineup; even the sick were brought on stretchers into lineups for the head count.

We were all given the same rations: black coffee, 1/8 of a loaf of bread, and sometimes marmalade. We were required to work until noon, then the SS performed another headcount before we received our soup and 1/8 a loaf of bread. Many inmates tried to get at the end of the line, hoping to get thicker soup from the bottom of the kettle. This provoked some fist fights and feuds. After half an hour of rest, work continued until six and then assembly began again before evening rations of coffee and bread. Basically, this was the general way of feeding the inmates in all concentration camps, with very few exceptions. In times of German military victories on the field there were extra rations of bread, marmalade and cigarettes, but because already in 1943 there were few victories we did not benefit.

New shipments of Poles – including once a complete wedding party with the bride and bridesmaids in white, a priest in black, and the band – were taken

after a merciless beating to the place of execution. This was Goeth's revenge for the defeats that the German army was suffering on all the fronts at this time (in the summer of 1944).

At this time, I was transported to a neighborhood salt mine in Wieliczka where I worked until my transport to Mathausen on Sept 6, 1944. Life in the salt mine did not differ substantially from Plaszów except work underground was much more demanding. Wet, low ceilings, cold tunnels played havoc with our bodies, clad only in pants, jackets, and wooden clogs. No underwear and no socks – and no hope. We received small help from Polish miners, who worked in the same facility, sometimes passed to the inmates slices of bread and pieces of meat. It was a spark of humanity never experienced in Plaszów.

From the time of landing in Plaszów, Wieliczka, and later on in Mathausen I did not possess a belt, underwear, socks, shoes, toothbrush, toothpaste, and any toilet paper, I also did not have any soap, or a comb, although I did not need one because my hair was shaved off. In Wieliczka, I did not have any close friends and this was a tremendous disadvantage in any camp. To have someone close to you, to be able to exchange some ideas about the past, to think together about the future, was a very important part in strengthening “the will to survive.”

To keep yourself fairly clean, even though we were covered with thousands of lice, was one of the most important prerequisite of staying alive. Otherwise, you turned in a very short time into a “muzulman” a skeleton walking and still alive but basically a person without any will and determination to resist and fight to stay alive. During the day, the lice didn't bother us that much; it was during the night that we would tear at our bodies from the bites.

The second measure, and maybe as important as keeping oneself clean, was the will to fight hunger and to control our habit of eating. We had to have an iron will to divide our meager portion of bread into small pieces, and keep them in our pockets so that we could nibble on them until the next feeding. If you ate the

portion at once the pangs of hunger forced you to indulge in grass, tree bark, and pieces of paper. This in fact contributed to diarrhea, which in those circumstances, because of the lack of simple medicines and medical help, was deadly.

At the beginning of September, Wieliczka camp was buzzing with the news of evacuation. Because of the success of the Soviet Union army marching westward, we thought we were going to be evacuated either to Auschwitz or deeper into German or Austrian territory and the camp Mathausen was mentioned. This speculation came to fruition when we were transported back to Plaszów and told to expect further transport west.

The journey to Mathausen from Plaszow on Sept. 6, 1944, was not a regular transport procedure because Amon Goeth was the commandment of the camp, which guaranteed the trip would include the “requisite” amount of brutality and sadism.

Goeth ordered the complete assembly of all inmates on the *Apell Platz*. Hundreds of SS heavily armed guards surrounded us; Goeth, Miller, and Hilowicz organized us for the transport. Groups of inmates were marched in the direction of the train lines where cattle cars were waiting for us all. The windows of the cars were covered by sheets of plywood and spiked wire. Each car was filled with 100-120 people. After a short time, people began yelling and knocking at the doors as there was not enough air circulation in the wagons. Sealed like sardines in a container, we left Plaszów around midnight.

This voyage from one hell to another shall stay in my memory forever. Scenes worthy of Dante’s pen took place in the wagons after only a few hours of travel. Because of the great heat, high humidity, and lack of air, people started to dispose of their clothing and sweat profusely. The stench of human bodies and excrement (one pail per wagon for use of 100-120 people) putrefied the air and made the stronger among us fought their way to occupy space around the windows, where thin streams of fresh air flowed through openings in the plywood. Great bedlam, cursing and physical fights erupted in the wagon. Some

went out of their minds: shouting, yelling and beating their own relatives and friends. After a while, everything quieted down as the exhausted did not have the strength to yell anymore.

At first stop, the SS men went to each cattle car asking if there were dead people among us; these souls were taken out by the inmates and buried in the surrounding fields. The beautiful September weather with high temperatures created havoc during the day, as the insides of the wagons became deadly furnaces, while the nights were unbearably cold. There were other stopovers and each time new people were buried in the fields. After two nights and three days, we arrived at the station of Mathausen. We made our way on foot the four kilometers to the camp, under the escort of hundreds of SS men.

For many of us, this march toward the camp was painful and exhausting. The sharp incline of the ground, the uneven stone lined surface, made it very difficult if not impossible to make. Our undernourished bodies, sick and weakened by years of brutality, were no match for this exercise. The brutal beatings did not help as well. The column made its way at a very slow pace.

We arrived in Mathausen in the afternoon, approximately 3,500-4,000 of us, and sampled the “beauty” of an Austrian concentration camp. The surroundings were breathtaking: fresh air, close proximity to the mountains, forests, flowers, and birds singing in the warm September weather helped us to feel alive. Mathausen was the central concentration camp in Upper Austria with a web of satellite camps under its umbrella. All of them, Ebensee, Gussen, and others exercised the same kind of brutality and torture for which Mathausen became famous.

Not far away from the massive doors of the camp, we were organized into military columns and instructed to march in military fashion. At the gates the order *Mützen up* (hats off) rang out, and we were “greeted” by the SS officers. Not far away, a group of German kapos were waiting to take possession of any remaining valuables inmates might have brought. The order *alles ablegen* was

given, our possessions were placed on the ground, and we were taken to the bathhouse, as the first step in our quarantine. Our bodies were shaved; we were given long shirts and led to designated barracks. Close to midnight, we were led to our sleeping quarters, where we were instructed to sleep on the ground on our sides, in order to accommodate the greatest number of inmates (about 500) within the smallest amount of space. We were completely isolated from the rest of the camp and felt bewildered as to our future. During the first days, we were allowed to stay outdoors, close to the barracks, but the intense heat often forced us back inside.

Before we were allowed to lie down, we were required to wash our feet. This was a camp ritual, the purpose of which escapes me. Later on we were introduced to another ritual that defied explanation: if we were lucky enough to receive a blanket, we had to fold the blanket in an exacting fashion, as bed-making was subject to strict inspection. Our first meal consisted of 1/8 of a loaf of bread, some margarine, and so called soup, which was warm liquid with indescribable pieces floating in it.

On September 12, 1944, our quarantine ended and we were inaugurated into the infamous quarries of Mathausen. The 174 steps leading from the camp to the quarry were guarded on both sides by SS men and Kapos. We were ordered to carry heavy blocks of stone on our shoulders from the quarry into the camp, and back again. This process has no practical purpose – only the mental and physical punishment of our bodies. This was definite open season for bloodthirsty SS men and the criminal Kapos. Blood was flowing freely from the faces of inmates, punched for no reason at all. There were also some cases of inmates being forced to push the defenseless sick, older men into the ravine below, a forced execution of one inmate by another. The brutality of the German Kapos superseded many times the brutality of SS men, but the most feared were the gypsy Kapos – legendary for their innovative torture.

On Sept. 20, 1944, we were assembled again. After barbers shaved a corridor about 3 inches wide through our already shaved heads, we were given our striped uniforms and wooden clogs (unmatched pairs). As of this moment, we became full fledged Mathausen inmates. Now every day consisted of the same routine: assembly in the early morning, bread, coffee, margarine, work until noon, a meal break consisting of soup (dark water), bread, sometime marmalade, then work until six, again a ration of bread, coffee, sometimes a piece of cheese. In total were given no more than 800 calories daily and sometimes 2 cigarettes.

On the black market, buoyant in every camp, the ration of bread was available for 7-8 cigarettes, soup demanded 12 cigarettes, 1 cube of sugar 2 cigarettes. Those addicted to cigarettes paid with their lives in a very short time. Even those who consumed their full daily rations, after a short time, showed symptoms of undernourishment, weakness, and dizziness. Yet no matter how weak we became we did everything possible to stay away from the hospital, which was the fastest way to the crematorium.

In mid November, there was a registration for qualified machinists and I did not think twice about applying as I knew that my days in Mathausen as a living being were near the end. A week after I was transferred to the Hermann Goering Werke factory, in Kleinmetünchen, a few kilometers from Mathausen. It was a huge complex of buildings where steel plates for tanks were manufactured. This industrial complex was bombed many times by the American and British planes and yet produced steel to the last minutes of the war. It also gave me a chance to survive the war.

Because 1944 and the beginning of 1945 were disastrous years for the German military, by the beginning of winter in 1944 all young able bodied men and women were called to perform their duties at the front to the bitter end. Because of this, we were surrounded by old men and women, not the customary SS men and SS women. This resulted in fewer beatings, more food, less strict discipline, and the opportunity to warm our tired, sick and cold bodies at bonfires

lit in big barrels inside the compound. We were able to “smell” imminent German defeat already at the end of March and beginning of April 1945. Now was the time to embrace an iron will to live and to become a free man again. I mustered this will, as did others, by our determination to live through the darkest years of the bestial Nazi regime and the complete disintegration of human behavior. I was liberated on May 5/1945 by the American Army. The majority of us did not survive this unbelievable degradation of humanity.

How do I, a human being who during the five years of incarceration was dehumanized, describe my liberation and return to so called “normality” of life? It was an unbelievable day of many fantastic events: exultation at the sight of an American soldier entering the camp – the first black man I had ever seen in person, seeing the mighty tanks, and the once invincible SS men now begging for their lives – carrying white flags of surrender.

The camp was alive again, no more a place of death but of rebirth. The camp was filled with sounds of yelling, crying, and praying, for a long, long while. And then, a deafening silence of uncertainty and fear. Fear of life and fear of the unknown. Memories of the past, which were practically buried in our weak bodies and confused minds, came alive again. The memory of before, the memory of our families mingled with the fear of facing the reality of life. Who was I and who shall I become? Do I belong to anyone, to any family, to any country? Does any one want me? I know where I am today, what kind of tomorrow is awaiting me? No uncorked champagne, no toasts, no dancing in the camp, only a dark night with all the mysteries to be solved in nightmarish, restless dreams. And yet, we also had the full knowledge and assurance that the Americans were with us. The morning after liberation became the morning of decision making, of planning our future, as were not slaves anymore. And so those who could still walk on their own and those who could not, started in an unending column of smelly, sick, abused and tortured humanity toward the city of Linz – the city which represented wealth, power and our future. Some on our own, some in wheelbarrows, some on

their knees, some on bicycles taken from the Germans, some in stroller cars: a band of dirty, unshaved and rag-clad savages in search of bread, butter, milk, clothing, shelter, and freedom. Although we were confused, the great majority of us were harmless; we were not seeking revenge and blood but our rightful place within the community that until now had been denied us. After a few hours we reached the city, which seemed abandoned, empty, and scared.

With three of my friends, from the Mathausen camp, I settled in a basement of a house in Linz occupied by a tailor with his family. He was an older man of Czechoslovakian ancestry, who seemed harmless, but you never knew. The war taught us Jews not to trust anybody. We were living a separate life; he was not in our way. I am fully confident that he feared us, as much as we feared him. Two of our members (in fairly good health) were given the responsibility to seek food and other necessities and they performed beautifully.

For a month or two, I anticipate that every city in Germany and Austria experienced the same, as hundreds of thousands of former inmates moved into the homes of their citizens, at our will. The homeowners were not able to say no to the intrusion. We didn't break the doors down, we merely opened the doors. They appraised us right way. We were in striped uniforms, dirty, unshaven, and they were afraid of retribution, which never materialized, as we were at our lowest physical and mental condition. We only wanted to be left in peace at this point; we sought the return of normality in our lives – not retribution. The whole social strata turned on its head over night. Former inmates rode the street cars and buses without paying anything; Austria was a fully defeated and demoralized country. There were no German authorities to stop us; the sick, filthy, emaciated former camp inmates took refuge where and when we needed it without anyone's permission.

There were criminal and political prisoners in the camps at Mathausen who dispersed into the civil population, along with the Jewish inmates. Stores were looted of food, clothing, and the criminal and political element also helped

themselves to weapons and currency. Survivors of every type appropriated the items needed for their daily life. The two of us who remained in the house were responsible for maintenance of the premises.

In a while, the democratic arm of the Austrian citizenship emerged. My German language was good and I conversed freely with Linz's citizens. I never found one Nazi in Austria during my three-and-a-half year residence there, after my liberation. Or, at least who would admit to being a Nazi. They all purported to be democrats, who knew little about the concentration camps in their country. In a matter of weeks, Linz was pulsating again, thanks to the Americans who came to "liberate" the "poor, oppressed Austrians." We survivors registered with the American and Austrian authorities and also with the Organization of Survivors for Linz.

After my stay in the basement, I was hospitalized for three months as my legs were swollen enormously because of long periods of hunger. The excellent care and rich food worked miracles. Although my family kept a kosher home, at this time I ate whatever was necessary to survive and regain my vitality, although some remained strictly adherent to Jewish food laws. In many cases, these individuals shortened their lives by doing so.

I had the great privilege of being in contact with Simon Wiesenthal, and observing him in the formative years (1945-1947) when he was planning the Jewish Documentation Centre (First in Linz, then in Vienna) which became his brainchild for dispersing justice in blood soaked and devastated Europe.

I was discharged and was given a position as supervisor and warehouse keeper in a Displaced Persons camp, in Kleinmunchen, on the outskirts of Linz. Because of my knowledge of Slavic languages and German, which I took in school, and used in the camps during my internment, I was in a position to communicate with people of different nationalities. American officers I was in contact with also made use of my knowledge of German in the interrogation of SS men, some of whom were still on the loose in 1945 and 1946 and were hiding in

the nearby forests. Late in 1946, I was contacted by a representative of the Red Cross in Linz who gave me exciting news about my family's survival and their whereabouts in Silesia, Poland.

My parents had recognized my name from the lists of Polish survivor's names, beamed by the BBC in different languages to Europe, and had made immediate steps to contact me. I had already registered for repatriation to Poland, when I received the news from them. We were taken by trucks as far as Czechoslovakia, where we were put in a Soviet Union military camp, with the purpose of making us soldiers of the Soviet Union. All three of us graciously declined this great honour and disappeared at night. We went through Vienna, on our way back to Linz, avoiding the Soviet Union military police as Vienna was under Soviet Union occupation. To settle back in Linz was not difficult for a concentration camp survivor (at this time, 1946-1947 but not later). I spent 1947 in a new position with the American Red Cross as the warehouse supervisor, under the direction of Captain Peter Jorey and Ms. Steel, both from the US army. They were in charge of distributing American Red Cross packages in Upper Austria, and only they could make decisions regarding the amounts given to each recipient. The packages were given to the US military and concentration camp survivors but also some food rations and clothing were given to the Austrian civilian population. I had a young Hungarian man, by the name of George Szedlaki, working with me and we became good friends. My family arrived in late 1947 and it was a time of joy, happiness, and reminiscence.

We were all registered for emigration to the New World and the opportunity presented itself as Canada was looking for skilled tradesmen after the war. The Canadian Government, the Jewish Congress, and the Amalgamated Garment Union joined forces in a mission to register for emigration specialists in many trades who had resided in camps in Germany and Austria. The Winnipeg delegation visited Linz and registered our family – my father, mother, brother, my

sister and her fiancé, and myself. We met the members of the delegation again, in Winnipeg, on many occasions.

We were given our visas and embarked from Bremerhafen, in Germany, to Halifax at the end of January. Our ship, the Second World War military transport ship, Gen. Sturgis, delivered us all in one piece, after a trip of consistent stormy weather and stormy seas, to Halifax on February 11, my birthday. We had on the ship many nationalities, many friends, and also many enemies who weren't shy to display their anti-Semitic feelings. We were taking our meals in standing position as this ship was not equipped with dining room facilities. My brother and I slept near the engines in the engine room and the heat and noise was unbearable. The crew had fun with the bunch of un-experienced travelers, most of whom had little knowledge of the English language. The cost of one orange was five dollars; one lemon was three dollars on the "black market", conducted openly by the ship's crew. And yet the stormy sea, the poor service or no service at all, the vomiting, and seasickness, did not dampen our spirit as we were going to a new, free, democratic country – A country we had been dreaming of for years. We landed without money, without language, without any family connections, but with the will to build a life for ourselves.

The second part of this memorable journey was the train ride from Halifax to Winnipeg. For a European man, the distances did not seem real. The service, for people who had spent the last few years in DP camps, was superb. Black waiters in white uniforms and gloves, silver cutlery and crystal, snow-white table cloths and napkins made up fully for the meager food and service on the ship. The food served was new to us, and completely different in its preparation, as compared to the European cuisine. I did not touch the chicken a la king because of the white, heavy cream topping it. But cherry pie a la mode and banana splits were sensational.

We arrived in Winnipeg at the CN station and were greeted by government officials, representatives of the Jewish Congress, and the

Amalgamated Garment Union. There was an atmosphere of friendship, helpfulness, and caring. The reception was well organized and expedient. For the next few weeks my brother, my future brother-in-law, and I lived on Boyd Ave., while my parents and sister found an apartment on Manitoba Ave. In 1948, there was a shortage of living space due to the influx of new immigrants. Canada, for the first time since the 1930's, opened the door wide for immigrants from Eastern Europe as well as some Jews. For me this again became a new chapter in my life, as I became a garment worker contracted by the Government of Canada for one year of employment, in Winnipeg. On one level, as survivors, we were still in shock – it took years to dispose of the daily memories and nightmares of the Holocaust. But we had to go to try to become normal citizens of the new country, and that took great effort.

I started at Stall's and then moved over to Sterling Cloak where I became a cutter – in time a very good cutter – earning 18 dollars per week. My pay included a deduction of five dollars, which repaid the Government of Canada for the cost of my voyage to the new country (I paid a total of \$400).

Life was demanding and challenging. Yet being free compensated for all the inconveniences. Evenings were spent learning English at St. John's High School. And this took priority over everything. There was much to learn and absorb: books to read, movies to see, to theater to attend, new friends, adjusting to completely new surroundings.

The Second World War opened new portals to literature. Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, both received the Nobel Prize for literature, Norman Mailer's "The Naked and the Dead" was published in 1948, James Jones's "From Here to Eternity" electrified the readers, in France Albert Camus was on top of the horizon and in Germany (Günter Grass) was raising his voice of condemnation of society's ills; In the Soviet Union, Ilya Ehrenberg, and in Italy, Ignazio Silone, became voices for justice and humanity. Bicycle Thief by Vittorio de Sica and "Open City" and "La Dolce Vita" by Federico Fellini became the classics of the

post war movie industry. The forties started with unspeakable miseries, great suffering and finished with great hope for a better world and its speedy recovery.

In 1948, I met Gertrude Goot at night courses for English language and she was my hope for a better world. In 1950 we married and went on our honeymoon to Clear Lake – a new country, a new language, a new life. We spent the 1950s working, saving, and enjoying the Saturday evenings with our friends, either at Moore’s Restaurant, Child’s Restaurant, or the Royal Alec Hotel, known for “Glen Miller’s” big band tunes, strong Turkish coffee, and their crusty buns. We danced until midnight and then took a streetcar home. Lucille Ball’s “I Love Lucy” kept us in stitches of laughter.

Fifties were also very important in our private lives as together with my brother-in-law, Harry Goot, I started a small upholstery shop under the name “High Grade Upholstery” on Sargent Avenue. It was with pride that we were introducing ourselves as the owners of a furniture manufacturing workshop. We transferred all our energies toward the enterprise. These were hard years, challenging and demanding but greatly self-satisfying. We suffered a big loss, our dearest father passed away at a very young age of 54 and Gertrude’s brother, Harry, at the tender age of 23. Tremendous sadness enveloped both families. It forced me also to think about my future and the possibility of continuing running the business without having any fabricating skills.

After consultation with family members, I made the decision to continue and Professor Grant Marshall, who was teaching interior design at the University of Manitoba, decided to recommend my company to the School of Architecture, which was in need of some work on older pieces and also needed additional new pieces of furniture. It became a big job and the stepping-stone for my business’s future expansion. In 1962, we moved to Main Street South with more space for the workshop and showroom. I also employed more people.

In 1967 the German government invited me to testify in the court proceedings in Bremen against a high officer of the SS, Frederick Hildebrandt. I

jumped at the opportunity to be a part of this historical event and hopefully bring to justice this scourge of Jewish people. All his civil liberties and his financial assets were confiscated, and he ultimately received a life sentence for ordering murders in the territory of Galicia in the years 1943, 1944, 1945, and being responsible for other crimes against humanity. This was my first time setting foot on German soil since my emigration, I was full of mixed feelings, sadness, and resentment seeing the tremendous new vigor in the country in such a short period of time, after their total defeat. At the same time, I was thankful that I was on ground of a free democratic German Republic and not a visitor to Nazi Germany. We were strictly absorbed with the court procedures, but I had the opportunity to reunite with my uncle and my cousin, who had made their way from Israel to testify as well. My life was profoundly changed when I met the humanitarian Renata Reinke, who later went on to write a book about Drohobycz and Hildebrandt's trial titled *Antworte, Mensch!*

Renata sat through the complete trial, every day, over the course of several months. After giving my testimony, Renata introduced herself, and invited me to visit her and her husband in Bremen. She had been a member of Hitler's Jugend. She was the daughter of a high SS officer who had committed atrocities in the Ukraine, was jailed, then released, only to commit suicide. For her, it was extremely difficult to reconcile what her father had done with the loving man she remembered. She really never knew the man who had the murder of thousands weighing heavily on his conscience. Renata Reinke, in her tolerant approach to world affairs and her distinctive democratic philosophy, made a tremendous impression on me and was instrumental in my future involvement with Holocaust education.

In contrast to the brutal German women employed in the concentration camps, my contact with the middle-aged German writer, Renata Reinke widened my level of tolerance and my desire to work for greater Christian/Jewish cooperation. The court procedures left me with respect for the German judiciary

and German government as the trials were conducted with total emphasis on unearthing the truths of history, without any sanitization of the past. The daily visits by students and teachers to the court made me think that upon my return to Winnipeg I should be involved in the process of educating young minds in the spirit of truth and tolerance.

The seventies and eighties became very productive times at my furniture manufacturing plant. Under the new name “Philip Weiss Ltd.,” we moved to a new location and started producing a new line of top quality upholstered hotel furniture. Our company received three awards for excellence in furniture design from the Manitoba Design Institute, which we were very proud of. I was able to offer some of my time to different organizations: Rosh Pina, synagogue in the North End, which had close to one thousand members. I served as an officer of the executive, then vice president, and finally as president. I became a member of the board of the Winnipeg Jewish Community Council and the Chairman of the Holocaust Committee. I was a member of the board of the Y.M.H.A. (Young Men’s Hebrew Association), a board member of the Friends of Hebrew University and Ben-Gurion University. It was during this period that I became involved in ecumenical meetings and discussions at churches, synagogues, schools, and universities on my Holocaust experiences.

This was the fulfillment of the promise that I made myself in the camps to speak on issues of the Holocaust and hate after the war. More exactly, I felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility to move past my pain and testify on my Holocaust experiences. But before I was entitled to speak, I had an obligation to educate myself by reading and researching on issues intrinsically tied to the Holocaust – how and why such evil had evolved and been allowed to flourish within our societies.

All of us who went through the brutality of the camps, and survived the physical and mental anguish, had our souls scorched forever. There is no way of getting away from it no matter how hard you try, the memories pursue you. One

can make a sincere and solid effort to live a normal life but in the long run the guilt of being alive and living a “normal” life forces you into contemplation of past events.

I was a witness to some monumental events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: some of them left me in awe while others have reawakened feelings of trepidation. I have witnessed the collapse of the moral centre of humankind, watched it begin to rebuild itself. Yet, over the last decade, I have seen the course of events change direction, with an increasing glorification of the cult of death, and the corresponding debasement of life itself, which has unfolded in many corners of the world. I am grateful to have lived in the times of Roosevelt, Churchill, De Gaulle, Ben Gurion, and Chaim Weitzmann, and pained to be a contemporary of Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin.

I have observed unspeakable violence, cruelty, racism, and religious intolerance, starvation and desperation, the violation of human rights on a monumental scale, the murder of innocent children, women and men. I have also witnessed how the human spirit can elevate the will to live in order to cope with the unspeakable perversions we experience. I am also the repository of knowledge of unfathomable spiritual faith, courage, resiliency, sacrifice, and inspiring acts of love, which I witnessed during the darkest years in human history.

Since my liberation from Mathausen, on May 5, 1945, I have been torn between the urge to describe those events and the sense of futility in doing so. Would not a shattering and numbing silence be the best response to the unspeakable horror of the Holocaust? And even if justice demands that truth be exposed, the question we survivors need to answer is: can we find adequate words to describe the unspeakable? Has post-Holocaust mankind become better because of this knowledge? Has the telling ennobled and strengthened us as survivors? Has it redeemed our souls?

For me personally, my journey ends with *Humanity in Doubt*, penned with greatest of hope that you, the reader, shall offer some of your valuable time to contemplate our fragile humanity of Then, Now, and of our Future.

### Epilogue: Family Remembered

Although my immediate family survived the Holocaust almost intact, by some miracle, my mother's family was almost completely extinguished. My father Solomon, mother Cecylia, sister Erna, my brother Leo, were liberated in Drohobycz in the summer of 1944 by the Soviet Union Army. I was liberated in Mathausen (Austria) on May 5, 1945. My grandfather on my father's side Samuel Weiss, my grandmother Genia Weiss, their four married sons Solomon (my father), Leo, Herman, Bumek, and their families, and their single son (Józek), all lived in Drohobycz. My grandfather on my mother's side, Chaim Wegner, my grandmother Rachel with 3 married daughters Cecylia (my mother), Rozia with her husband Herman Warschauer, Adela with her husband Munio Spiegel and son Kulós, Salka with her husband David Siegal, and a bachelor son Izak Wegner also were living in Drohobycz for many generations. My grandfather Szmuel Weiss and my father Solomon David, two of his brothers Leo, Herman fought in Italy during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War for Austria and Germany. They were a part of the 100,000 Jews who fought and offered their lives for Austria and Germany. In total, 20,000 Jews were decorated for bravery. Twenty five years later the Nazi Government of Germany on orders of Hitler thanked them for their sacrifice by gassing and burning patriots in the crematories of Auschwitz and Sobibor or killing them in the ghettos of Lublin and Vilna. My grandmother Genia Weiss, her son Bumek with his wife Cylia, their daughters Hancia and Nusia were killed in 1942, my cousin Salek, son of Herman and Chana Weiss was killed in 1944 (all

on my father's side). My mother's sister Rózia, her husband Herman Warshauer, her sister Adela, her husband Munio Spiegel and their son Kubus, her sister Salka, her husband David, and Salka's brother Izak were murdered in 1942, 1943, respectively. In 1985, my mother Cylia Weiss passed away, and this was a heavy loss to me and the family. She was the last of the Mohicans, the last reminder of the European glorious past, the last member of the old generation of European Jewry in our family. In the early nineties, Gertrude's mother passed away leaving Gertrude as the only survivor of the Goot family.



## INTERVIEW WITH PHILIP WEISS

*Interview conducted by Bryan Schwartz and Darla Rettie, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on June 28, 2004.*

We met with Philip Weiss at his home to discuss the issue of survivors' recollections. We were specifically interested in Philip's thoughts on the role that survivors' memories have played in documenting and educating the world about the atrocities suffered before, during and after the Holocaust. What is remembered; Are current reflections historically accurate; Were people willing to listen; How has Judaism been changed by survivor's recollections? Philip spoke eloquently on these pointed questions and offered a nuanced reflection on his personal need to speak on one of the darkest periods in mankind's history.

### **Memories**

*Interviewers: The Germans did not keep a complete record of the Holocaust so a lot of history is left to the recollection of people who experienced it. It's a half a century later, how much do you actually remember of the event?*

**Mr. Weiss:** First I want to underline the Nazi language pertaining to the Holocaust was specifically designed to mislead inmates, the German public and the world at large, and so even existing records that were kept are suspect unless one clearly knows the duplicitous meanings of those words.

It seems to me that every Holocaust survivor has vivid memories of what happened, because extraordinary events were happening. These were abnormal occurrences, and abnormal things you remember. I clearly recall what happened to me, to my family, and to others. Possibly the names of certain people have escaped me, but basically the kaleidoscope of events is set in my memory very well.

*During the Holocaust, were people trying to document what was happening around them?*

We had scribes in the Warsaw Ghetto, but I wouldn't say every individual felt that they had to record history or to leave some personal memories. First of all, the times were extremely hard. You were basically fighting for survival and food was the number one concern. Food, heat, medical help – that's what people were focused on, but there were some people dedicated to documenting history, like Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum, who painstakingly recorded the conditions and daily occurrences which took place in the Warsaw Ghetto, until his death at the hands of the Gestapo. So there were people of tremendous strength of will and vision that knew that they had to leave for posterity knowledge of the events they were experiencing. Some of these documents were hidden in metal milk canisters and buried in the ground. But even those, like Itzhak Katzenelson, who had the urge to write frequently didn't have the concentration and freedom to write extensively.

*Stephen Spielberg tapped into the memories of many survivors in preparing the movie Shindler's List. As somebody who actually lived through it, how close to the truth does his story get?*

*Shindler's List* came as close as possible to being an accurate portrayal of the life of a concentration camp inmate in every camp in Poland in 1944. I was in the camp that the movie portrayed so I have the ability to confirm the truthfulness of the facts. I think though no matter how accurate the language is, no matter how beautifully a movie is structured, art can not truly reflect the Holocaust.

*Shindler's List* is not a documentary movie; it's a movie which attempts to express the "essence" of what the Holocaust was about. I accept that movie as a mechanism by which Steven Spielberg brought to the world the message of hate and love and initiated the discussion of the outrages of Holocaust, throughout the world. This movie has become a critical tool by which knowledge of the failure of humanity, during the years 1941-1945, can be disseminated to future generations.

*We were looking at some black and white pictures of the Holocaust, are your memories of this period in black and white?*

My memories are not in colour. I associate the image of death with blackness. The use of colour would desecrate the memory of the Holocaust destruction. Colour is something buoyant, rich, pleasant to the eye, and it just wouldn't work to try to recollect those dark memories in something other than black. *Shindler's List* was filmed without colour except for one image of a young girl in a red coat. She was walking towards her death; I expect that Spielberg wanted to spotlight this one little girl's fate. I prefer not to present my camp experiences in the morning when it's bright and sunny, because it doesn't create the right mood for documenting the dark events of those times. It's not what the Holocaust was about. There were no "sunny" days, they were pitch-black.

*In the camps, what did you think when you saw elements of normalcy, like a tree or blue sky? Did your mind try to hold onto these images?*

At times, when I saw something like the sky or trees, when I was being transported between camps, for a moment it brought me back to feelings I had as a boy, and just for a moment I felt a sense of myself rushing back, a sense of normalcy in a world that was otherwise completely insane and unrecognizable to me. I don't remember any trees in the camps I was in. There were barracks and the naked ground. The camps were almost colourless, and you as a person had to be colourless. The best description of a camp is its greyness. We inmates became physically and emotionally grey, like the ashes surrounding us. We dare not be visually noticeable: we could not be 6 feet tall, or 4 feet tall, or have distinctive blue or brown eyes, or walk too briskly or too slowly. We just had to be a nobody because that's what they wanted us to be – nobody with a small "n". If I had worn a red scarf, I would have been killed on the spot.

*Is it possible just go through a day where you just have the same normal aggravations as everyone else, or does being a survivor colour everything in your daily existence?*

My background and history definitely impact the way I deal with issues in my daily life. History has a certain impact on you, it never leaves you, but you can't let it become the dominant force in your life or it will smash you. All survivors have to balance our memories with what life demands of us.

### **Is Anyone Listening?**

*Why do you think there was a deafening silence about the Holocaust in the immediate years after liberation?*

Well, first I would say, there was a period of time when survivors did not speak about the Holocaust because no one was listening. That changed from 1970 on

when survivors started to speak openly, and in depth, about their experiences. It shows that the silence of the survivors was not only of their own making, but was dictated by circumstances. Right after the war ended, people were not interested in listening to what survivors had to say. Eli Wiesel was one example of a man who did speak and write about his experiences from the beginning on. On the other hand, Primo Levi complained that his friends/associates were not interested in listening to his war stories. But in late 1940s, I think most survivors who had immigrated to a new country were basically stopped from speaking on the Holocaust – people didn't want to listen. Even Jewish community members were not eager to listen to the statements, which were too gruesome, too extraordinary, and to their way of thinking, bordering on fantasy. Canadians and Americans did not want the newcomers' unpleasant baggage to be dumped on their grounds.

*Were North American Jews embarrassed by their response to the Holocaust? Do you think they felt they should have done something more, and didn't want to be reminded of their inaction?*

Yes, there was embarrassment; and there was guilt as well. Did we do enough to save the European Jewry or were we slack in doing things to help? And then there's another aspect as well. There are many survivors who by their nature are not communicative. These individuals, especially women, didn't want to discuss Holocaust issues because it was an extremely difficult and painful topic for them to discuss. I am sure there are men and women who were tortured and went through a number of medical “experiments” and will never discuss those events.

*Did Holocaust survivors shy away from the topic because of they feared a backlash of anti-Semitism, in their new adopted counties?*

Although many of us were not afraid to speak out, at the same time, the political philosophy was for Jews not to make any waves. American Jewry was extremely conscious of the anti-Semitism within United States; in the same way Canadian Jewry was alive to the anti-Semitism within Canadian society.

Survivors also had to contend with the insidious Jewish stereotypes that arose after the war. Jews were portrayed as weak and not actively involved in fighting the German occupation. A prominent derogatory slogan was coined to describe the lack of Jewish resistance: going like sheep to their deaths. That was an embarrassing and completely false statement because we should not forget that Poland, a country of 25 million people with an army of about two million people, was defeated by Germans in 14 days. Polish defence collapsed like a house of cards in a short period of time, against the mightiest military force in Europe, and yet some people felt that Jews could withstand that tremendous might. It took a combined effort of many nationalities, England and France and United States and the Soviet Union to defeat that mighty war machine.

*By the late 1940s and early 1950s, the West wanted Germany as an ally against the Communists. Did this impact the ability of survivors to be heard?*

Yes, this change in global politics was definitely not beneficial to the Jewish question. I don't think the victim's ashes were cold yet when United States changed its policy towards Germany and the Soviet Union. Germany and the U.S. partnered as "friends" against the common enemy: the Soviet Union. United States brought many German war criminals, who maltreated their forced labour used for building rockets and other war materials, into the United States. The prosecution of Nazi war criminals became non-existent at that time, for selfish political interests.

*When was the taboo about talking about the Holocaust broken in North America?  
Was the Eichmann trial a key turning point?*

There were two components: the first was the unfolding situation in Israel in the late 1960s. The Six Day War of 1967, and the Yom Kippur War, where the community of Israel was actually faced with complete destruction, had a ground shaking impact on the consciousness of Jews around the world. American and Canadian Jews became more aware, linking that possible destruction of Israel with the Holocaust. That was the beginning of bringing the memory of the Holocaust into the foreground, without being ashamed of it. The second component was definitely Eichmann's trial – bringing one of the most offensive Jew-hating war criminals into a public court brought anti-Semitism squarely into the open. That's what the man stood for; that's what he represented; that's what the Nazis represented. The Canadian Jewish community and American Jewish community definitely responded positively to his trial. The negative stereotype of the passivity of European Jews was broken down by these two events. There was possibly a third component, which was the growing self-assurance of Holocaust survivors, who had already embedded themselves within their new communities. They no longer waited for people to give them permission to speak. They took it upon themselves to speak.

### **Personal Disclosures**

*Philip, do you remember the first Holocaust memory you shared, and whom you shared it with?*

The first time I spoke publicly about my Holocaust experiences was when I was invited by a Gentile lady to give a one hour talk to a group of ladies at a private home. There were no men present – it was a women's reading circle – and I did

not know what they were seeking. I remember being very nervous because it was something new for me. I remember wanting to make them aware that the Holocaust is tied up tremendously with religious issues – not only historical and political issues. I made use of a shopping analogy by saying, “Some of you like to go to Safeway to buy certain products; others buy products at smaller grocery stores. It’s the same thing with religion. Some of you are Roman Catholics and you go to a Roman Catholic Church; if you are Greek Catholic, possibly you go to a different church. We Jews are asking for one thing: to be able to practice our religion the way we want.” And I said, “If your store supplies a product which is dangerous, it will be taken off the shelf. If our religion is dangerous because it creates certain uproar in the community you have the right to curb it. But if our religion is not a danger to society why has anti-Semitism been tolerated for centuries?” I wasn't composed; I was very emotional because it was the first time. Let's call it an inexperienced defending of Judaism along with my Holocaust remembrances. But that's the way I fumbled through my first public “lecture” somewhere in the Charleswood area. The experience opened my eyes to see there were people within the Christian community who are willing to listen. And, by the way, I don't know how deeply I moved them, but I know that they were extremely friendly. I don't think they gave me a standing ovation, but they did give me certain self-satisfaction and assurance at the same time that I didn't have to be scared of the Christian community.

*When did you start speaking about your Holocaust experiences at schools and public events?*

As a member of the Holocaust Remembrance Committee, which was a part of the Winnipeg Jewish Community Council, I was asked to speak quite often at Yom HaShoah commemorative events. And then when I became a chairman of that committee, I was delegated to speak to certain schools in various districts. The

majority of survivors, at that time, were unwilling to speak because they were shy, the way I was shy when I spoke the first time to the ladies reading circle. I did dispose of that shyness, because I came to the conclusion, seeing the acceptance of that small group of women, that there is a message to be given, especially to young children. What do people say about us old people? That they are hard to break in; that they are already moulded a certain way. But young children, they have an open mind. My talks at schools gave children a different perspective they were generally exposed to in school or at home. Holocaust education, at that time, was more advanced in the United States, with time, the audience for my lectures became wider and wider, and from schools I advanced to universities. Churches also began to participate in educating their parishioners on the Holocaust, particularly if they were led by liberal-minded clergy.

I remember speaking at St. Paul's High School, a Jesuit school, which proved to me that tremendous changes that had taken place within the Vatican, and other churches in their tolerant approach to other religions. They are not as formal and dogmatic, as they were before the Second World War. I think the Lutheran churches were the first to modify their thinking, and they were not afraid to disassociate themselves from Luther's diatribes against Jews. So that was an extremely powerful experience for me, to be invited to a Jesuit school. Even though they knew that I was highly critical of the actions of certain Popes (which I openly expressed), they encouraged me to speak my mind.

*Have you ever wanted to share a Holocaust memory but didn't because you were afraid of backlash against you or your family?*

No, first of all, most Holocaust survivors' have a special sensibility to foresee danger. We were always facing dangerous situations – on a daily, hourly basis – and this forced us to develop a keen sense of potential harm. I personally developed that ability after a short stay in the camps. I can sense people, whether

they are good or not. I can sense if they are my friends or they are not. Also, with age and practice you become more skilled in handling people and understanding them.

*Are there some memories that you just don't allow yourself to recall or don't want to talk about?*

Yes, there are some moments and degrees of pain that I experienced during that period of time which I will never discuss, as they are too gruesome.

In the concentration camps I was in not every day was structured the same way. There were certain things that were everyday issues, like relieving ourselves in the open (on planks with holes cut out), or eating our slice of bread which was given to us three times a day. They were the daily issues which occupied the mind of a Holocaust survivor definitely to a great degree, like the severe cold and hunger – always hunger, always the craving for more food. But there were certain extraordinary events which are embedded deeper in my memory, which seemed even more cruel than the death, which surrounded me daily. So I'll give you two pictures, which are engraved in my mind forever.

One was the transport of young Hungarian girls in Plaszow, in late 1943 or the beginning of 1944, in wintertime. I saw young girls dressed only in flimsy nightgowns, their hair shaved, without any shoes, emaciated, walking like marionettes in a trance. This picture of the vivid degradation of young human beings was an example of the total debasement of my people, which pained me then and now.

Another painful memory took place in the stone quarry in Mathausen in 1945. Inmates arrived daily at the camp where they were subjected to the ritualistic

initiation, before being sent onto the stone quarry, which included being stripped and shaved with every part of our bodies being checked by German Kapos. They were looking for diamonds and other pieces of jewellery hidden inside our bodies. Then we went through disinfection, which was completely useless because we were covered by lice again in a short period of time. Then we were given the striped uniforms and we were initiated into the stone quarry of Mathausen. I saw young men, very few older men, carrying heavy boulders down the 167 steps, which were carved into a mountain. And then another crew of men was taking those stones back up the same 167 steps. There was no practical purpose to moving these stones other than as a punishment and the sadistic degradation of human spirit and body. I am giving you two examples, one of young girls; the other of young boys, and those two pictures possibly were instrumental in my decision to speak on issues of Holocaust to students whose age was very similar to the ages of those young girls and boys which I describe. I never speak to children about the morbid ways of killing which I was a witness to because I wouldn't like to burden the minds of young people with those hellish cruelties.

### **The Intellectual Response**

*Your approach, at least lately, has been to revisit the Holocaust in a very intellectual way. You have taken on a lot of difficult intellectual topics like theology and the Holocaust, the role of Jewish councils in the Holocaust. Why did you develop an interest in untangling the mystery of the Holocaust in an intellectual rather than personal fashion?*

First of all, I'm honoured if you consider my writing in the category of intellectual thinking. The mystery of the Holocaust compelled me to dig beyond my own personal experiences and research the subject as seen from many different perspectives, and analyze those perspectives expressed by different individuals.

Those were extraordinary events, and the analytical dissection of every happening in the camp does not necessarily bring you a rational answer. Even after lengthy research over many years, you still come to the conclusion that the Holocaust was the greatest mystery ever to befall human, and beyond a clear answer. So even today after 60 years of research I am practically at the same point I started after my liberation. I hope that future researchers will be more successful in finding an answer which eludes me until now.

To answer your question, I would have to say that I began my research to answer very personal questions that I struggled with while in the ghettos and camps. And as everything is interconnected, I began to explore other issues over time. First of all, I looked at the Holocaust from a theological point of view – was God in the concentration camps? It's a legitimate but difficult question. A simple but a deep, searching question. What answer could I give to that question? Where was the loving God in all those years in which I and thousands and thousands of others spent in the camps. Did God see all the pains and tortures perpetrated on innocent children, women, and men? Did I become a more religious Jew in the camps? Yes. Is it a mystery? Yes. What is the answer? I have no clue. Did other people become less religious? Yes. There were those coming from the most religious families in Poland who shed their religion in the camps. What made me become a more religious Jew? I think when I start by analyzing first the degradation of my people, and the total destruction of my people, I could not keep God separated from all these happenings. He had to be involved and a part of those extra-ordinary events in a positive or negative way. I personally, as a young boy, did not have the maturity and the strength to place Him in the negative image without great fear. Issues of Judaism and Christianity played an important role in my life then and they do now. I also could not solve the issue of Christian “brotherly love” as taught by Jesus versus the cruelty and bestiality shown by adherents of the Christian religion during my stay in the camps. And yet in the

same camps, I met some Christians who expressed their love for other human beings without any preconditions – unfortunately, too few.

*Do you find there is a limit to how much even the best scholars, such as Lucy Davidowitz or Martin Gilbert or Yehuda Bauer, can understand because they didn't experience the Holocaust personally?*

There are certain differences in the way scholars and survivors approach the Holocaust. I would not want to suggest that those who have not experienced the Holocaust should not try to tackle it, as they can make a very important contribution. And being a witness to the Holocaust does not necessarily put the person into the category of being knowledgeable as to why it happened. And this is basically the mystery that we are trying to solve. Scholars, like Eli Wiesel, being a survivor himself, is an exception to the rule, as his deep mysticism and the use of most literary language help him in his search for God and the answer to the mystery of the Holocaust. He has the knowledge of the Holocaust both as an inmate and a scholar and has written on it in the most passionate, eloquent and intimate way. Those who are scholars only, who never entered the “Gates of the Holocaust”, can only write about it with a clear mind and dedication to the issues, but not with the same passion of a man who experienced the horrors within the deep pits of cruelty in the camps.

*Some intellectuals who have written on the Holocaust, like Hanna Arendt, seemed to have no clue about the actual camp experiences. Her position, often quoted as “the banality of evil”, is that rational bureaucrats could engage in the kind of enthusiastic destruction that people like Eichmann did. What is your response to Hanna Arendt’s theories?*

Hanna Arendt was a German Jewess who did not go through the Holocaust. She left Germany before the Holocaust. She is considered a brilliant thinker; I don't know enough about her to even dispute her thinking, but I can say that her theory about the involvement of the Jewish community in its self-destruction, which is one of her main points, was not correct. Her statement that the Jewish community councils, by supplying information about ghetto populations, helped the German authorities to destroy the people of the ghettos is only partially true. It's correct they made it easier for German authorities to assemble the transportation facilities; yet we should never forget that the German destruction of European Jews was structured completely independently of the war effort. They would have destroyed the community with help or without the help. It would have taken a little longer, maybe. Everybody helped to destroy the Jewish communities in their midst: Italy, Romania, Hungary and others. It was an indescribable situation of helplessness, where we could not seek any help from any European country and definitely not from the native Polish population. We actually found the native population quite eager to help the enemy. So her portrayal of the Eastern European Jewry's destruction is not entirely correct. There were parts of the Jewish community who fought physically with their arms and their bare hands for liberation, and fought the German war machinery, but they could do very little. From my point of view, there is no such thing as "banality of evil"; evil should never be interpreted as benign in any way. One can project an air of dispassionate, calm exterior, as Eichmann did at his trial, that may look on the surface as merely ordinary without exposing a hidden terror that is gruesome. If her perspective of Eichmann is drawn from seeing the man's composure at his trial it is certainly not a full understanding of the complexity of the man who had the ability to be savagely cruel, along with an ability to be distant and removed from the atrocities that he orchestrated. The man in his SS uniform, that decided on life and death, who reigned with fear and instilled panic in those around him, was a vastly different man in street clothes

who presented himself as an “ordinary administrator” who deserved mercy from the court.

## **Judaism and the Holocaust**

*To what extent do you think Judaism has or should have incorporated the Holocaust into the actual practice of Judaism? Some synagogues have a Yom HaShoah, some don't. Some have special prayers, some don't.*

I know that the Holocaust plays a tremendous role in the educational process today, not just for Jews but for all Canadians. May 5<sup>th</sup>, Holocaust Remembrance Day, is a national day of commemoration. Religiously, you have one day, Yom HaShoah, designated for spiritual remembrance. I am confident that the Holocaust will be further incorporated in the theological aspect of orthodox, conservative and reform Judaism. From my point of view, Holocaust should play an important role but not the only role in Jewish philosophical thinking and in the educational system and should never be left as the only component of Jewish spiritual life.

*Yes. Just focusing on the destruction doesn't make you focus on what was destroyed. What was destroyed, apart from the human tragedy, was this tremendous intellectual, cultural, literary, musical, historical legacy.*

There are enough Jewish writers today in the world, in Israel, United States, France and England who are bringing to the surface the beauty of pre-war Jewish literature, which practically disappeared after the Holocaust. And yet, there is a tremendous loss of the rich Eastern European Jewish culture, the tremendous input in music, Talmudic studies, and Jewish contemporary studies which took place in

cities like Warsaw, Krakow, Vilna, Lublin, Prague, and Budapest, which will never be replaced to the same degree. I hope there will be a renaissance of Jewish culture within open multicultural societies, as before in arts, movies, music, and writings, as is happening today in Israel.

*Did the people in the camps connect what was happening to earlier pogroms and earlier measures of anti-Semitism, or did they see this as some totally new development that they couldn't quite fit into their collective memory?*

Some of us were completely unprepared for the camps, because we were thinking of ourselves as equal to others within our society. Those who lived in societies which were more liberal-minded, in which they were completely assimilated, could not grasp the tremendous brutality as shown by the guards by and the Kapos at that time. For them, that was a revelation, because they were educated, emancipated, well integrated into their western culture communities. Many of these individuals were highly educated, they had never worked physically; they didn't know what a shovel was, or what a hammer was. I remember German farm boys, who became fanatical SS guards, seeing these educated Jews, who were unable to work with a shovel, expressing immediately their hate in extreme brutality towards these men. The others coming from so called "ghettoized" societies of Eastern Europe (who had always lived under racist oppression) were more spiritually prepared for that behaviour. Eastern Europe was basically different, with some exceptions, you knew your history of the past you knew the anti-Semitic excesses which took place in the biblical and post-biblical times.

*Did the Holocaust change Judaism?*

There are many, including some historians, who would like the Holocaust to become just an historical event like any other. And again, in our own experiences

as Holocaust survivors, based on the interpretation of our Jewish history, we try to make the world understand that the hate, the murder, the plunder; and the near destruction of European Jewry was a historical event completely different from any other historical happening.. Some within our society agree with this statement, some don't. My thinking led me to conclude that the Holocaust and Auschwitz changed Judaism, as well as Christianity. Judaism and Christianity both became more tolerant and less dogmatic in their theology. I only hope that those changes will also occur in the near future within the Islamic faith, and tolerance for other religions, which is missing today, will resurface again.

*Do you think that after 50 years of historical perspective we have at least some understanding of the Holocaust, or is it just as elusive now as it was 50 years ago?*

This is very difficult to answer. For example, you can write a hundred books on Hitler and every one will see Hitler with different eyes – through their own eyes – the way they would like Hitler to be. And he still is an enigma, even after all the books. The same can be said about the Holocaust and the destruction of the Jewish community in Europe. Do we have a better understanding today? It's very hard for me to say. We all build our own image of the Holocaust based on our beliefs, so there is no one right perspective today, any more than there was one truth 50 years ago. Holocaust remains to me until today a painful puzzle of sadistic human behaviour and as a survivor I hope humanity will undergo a drastic change to become more sensitive, tolerant and passionate about freedom.



II. EVIL TAKES ROOT

II. EVIL TAKES ROOT



THE VANISHED WORLD:  
THE GLORY AND DESTRUCTION OF POLISH JEWRY

*Text from speech delivered, on May 26, 2003, as part of an educational series of lectures at Shaarey Zedek Synagogue. Lecture series sponsored by the friends of Hebrew University of Winnipeg, Shaarey Zedek congregation and Gertrude and Philip Weiss Endowment for Holocaust Education. Lecture is dedicated to Shelly, the most beautiful human being, my daughter.*

**T**he planned “thousand year” Third Reich lasted only 12 years, but twelve years too many. It devastated Europe, cost 40 million lives and maimed and dispossessed 80 million individuals. Of the six million murdered Jews in the Holocaust, half were Polish Jews.<sup>1</sup>

There are very few Jews in Poland now. Those remaining few are but a sad reminder of what was once a vibrant community of millions, before the war. The community was eradicated and will never return. All that remains is dimming memory of the Jewish people who once lived there.

Maria Czapska in *Kultura*, wrote of this history:

The most terrible genocide in human history, the massacre of several million Jews in Poland, which was chosen by Hitler as the place of execution, the blood and ashes of those victims which have permeated Polish soil, constitute an essential bond, which has fused Poland and the Jewish people, and from which it is not in our power to free ourselves.

Her words are full of truth. But is it only the blood and ashes of the victims which will become the true bond joining Poland and the Jewish people? With the passing of time there is evidence of other bonds that are as important.

Jews were a significant physical and spiritual component of the Polish landscape. After the tragic decimation of Polish Jewry, the landscape had to change at once, spiritually perhaps even more than physically.

Pre-Holocaust Poland wanted to be rid of Jews, even though they were invited by Polish kings, and for close to a thousand years helped to enrich Poland's economy and culture. Germany solved the Jewish issue for Poland, but Poland will never be able to forget them.

The Jewish chapter in Polish history is closed. But how did that chapter come to be closed? What did it contain? What was the true role of Jews in Poland and Polish life? Only now when there are no longer Jews in Poland can these questions be given an objective and honest answer. And my task this evening is to address these questions, as a Polish born Jew and a Holocaust survivor.

Working on this paper I came to the conclusion that the spoken part would be greatly enhanced by a visual presentation.<sup>2</sup>

Jews first settled on Polish lands even before the establishment of the Polish State. They came from Mediterranean and from the short lived Khazar state. Excavations in Krakow revealed a sizable hoard of iron money indicating a large market area and testifying to Krakow's role as a trading centre in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. Thanks to scribe Sofer Ha Dinim's letter, which can be dated to 1028, we learn about a dispute between two Jewish German merchants, which took place in Krakow.

The Spanish edict of Alhambra<sup>3</sup>, in 1492, scattered the proudest and most prosperous Jewish community in Europe to the four winds. As the door of Christian Europe closed on the Jews, new doors opened in Turkey and Poland to receive them. Eastern Europe became the centre of Jewish life. Just as Turkey

served as a refuge for Spanish and Portuguese Jews, Poland became the Promised Land for oppressed German Jews.

They were driven to the Vistula, the Dnieper and the shores of the Black Sea from the beginning of the Christian era. In the eighth century, a whole Tartar kingdom, the Khazars, in South Russia had been converted to Judaism and maintained an independent and successful existence for more than two centuries, until it fell in 969 to Swiatislav, the Duke of Kiev. It was not until the crusades destroyed the stability of German Jewish life that Poland became an important Jewish centre.

The Polish kings heartily welcomed the refugees, anxious to utilize their capital for the development of the country and their revenues to render themselves independent of the powerful nobles (*szlachta*.) All through the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Jews prospered as merchants, traders and tax farmers. Many of them were in charge of mints and slowly became the only commercial class in a country of landowners and peasants. Boleslaw the Pious in 1264 issued a favourable charter which promised Jews complete freedom and excellent opportunities for an honourable livelihood in Great Poland.

Nearly all of his successors renewed these promises, especially Casimir the Great (1333-1370). He welcomed Jews as an essential factor in his reconstruction policy, and extended Boleslaw's Charter to all the Polish dominions. His generosity to Jews and peasants gave him the title "King of the serfs and Jews". In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Poland's rulers were not so uniformly favourable. The most formidable was the opposition of the clergy, who had opposed Boleslaw's Charter on the ground that it would endanger Christianity. Some of the weak kings gave in to the clergy; the old charters were revoked and Jewish existence in Poland was endangered. In 1407 there were some disturbances in Krakow, during which a number of Jewish lives were sacrificed and nearly a whole community was forcibly converted (baptized).

During the liberal regime of Sigismund I (1506-1548) every minority group was cordially treated. Jews were chosen for public service and a number of them served the king at the court. In 1551 the famous Charter of Sigismund Augustus, which was termed “The Magna Charta of Jewish Self Government”, was issued. By its provision the Jews were given virtual autonomy, their own courts, their own schools and their own self-governing agencies. It is clear that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Poland was no mere refuge for oppressed and broken exiles. It had become the new centre of vigorous Jewish life and cultural activity.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century Poland had ceased to be a haven of refuge. The clergy conquered the very heart of political life and the Jesuits won complete control of education. Jews continued to serve the nobles as tax collectors, tax farmers, financiers and particularly as stewards and overseers of their estates. But those positions, while adding to their power, increased popular animosity and resentment. The peasants, who were living in squalor and were exploited by the nobles, hated the tools of tyranny more than the tyranny itself. Those were the years of Khmelnitsky’s revolt and pogroms against the Jews.

At the threshold of modern history, in the middle of the eighteenth century, Jews were scattered in every corner of the globe. By most estimates, they did not total more than 3 million. Of the 3 million the vast majority dwelt in Eastern Europe; Poland sheltered more than a million and a half until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Polish partition made Maria Teresa of Austria the empress of one of the largest Jewish centres in Europe.

In 1733 the Polish Church Synod declared that Jews should be tolerated so “that they might remind us of the torture of the Saviour” and by their miserable condition might serve as an example of chastisement of God inflicted upon the infidels.

Poland emerged from the peace conference after the First World War (1918) the fifth largest state in Europe. The new Poland was constituted as a democratic state in which power was concentrated in the lower house, or *Sejm*.

Nineteen million Poles were given control of eleven million non-Polish minorities, including more than 3 million Jews. Although there were a few Jewish representatives elected to the *Sejm*, they were virtually voiceless and powerless.<sup>4</sup>

Freedom came to Poland after centuries of oppression. The minority groups were to be protected by a series of treaty provisions which guaranteed their civil and political equality as well as their cultural autonomy. Unfortunately, as soon as Poland's own national life was secured, the promises made at the peace conference to respect the rights of minorities were scrapped.

Year after year restrictions were introduced to cut away the economic opportunities of the Jews until nearly half of them were reduced to virtual beggary. With all the paper guarantees of Versailles, the Jews of Poland were no better off than before. Thus, the Jews of Poland responded to the growing hostility of the population among whom they lived, and to the barriers imposed on them, by proudly accepting, indeed cultivating, their differences. They were highly visible in their distinctive dress and language, and easy targets of hostility and derision.

The Jews dealt with their minority situation in Poland by forming a close society of their own, highly organized to meet their needs. Theirs was a largely stable society, deeply rooted in tradition and slow to change. The traditional base was of such strength that even extreme blows from the outside could not shatter it. Tens of thousands of Jews were killed in the massacres of 1648-1649 in the uprising of the Cossacks led by Bogdan Khmelnytsky in the Ukraine which was part of Poland. Whole communities were destroyed and left without means of livelihood. It was the greatest tragedy that Jews had suffered since the time of their dispersion. And yet it was interpreted by Jews in the traditional manner – put in the framework of Jewish suffering in exile. Thus, additional prayers were composed and fasts proclaimed.

This was the period of growing interest in the mystic teaching of the Zohar. It culminated in the messianic movement of Shabbetai –Zevi (1626-1676) and Jacob Frank (1726-1791).

It was in the smaller towns, more than in the cities, that a new movement spread in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which curbed despair and held out hope to the poor and oppressed. It arose in the Polish province of Podolia and its founder was Yisrael Baal Shem Tov (1700-1760) a man of great charisma and whose “miraculous” cures in the name of God became legendary deeds. Hasidism proclaimed faith and emotional expression of Jewishness to be above learning and erudition. Joy and ecstasy transformed religious worship into an escape from the dreariness and fears of everyday life.

No wonder that the common people flocked to *tsadikim*, (the righteous) the charismatic leaders who banished their worries, freed them from feelings of inadequacy and inspired them in song and dance to celebrate the fact of being Jewish. The courts of any of the prominent *tsadikim* were not located in cities but in small towns, such as Gora-Kalwaria, Kock, Kozenice and Mezrich (Miedzyrzec).

Despite the strong opposition of the rabbis, and other learned opponents, large portions of the Jewish population were won over to Hasidism by the beginning of the nineteenth century. In Lithuania, the illustrious scholar and moral guide, Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, the Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) successfully opposed it. Elsewhere, the opposition of the rabbis subsided.<sup>5</sup>

Hasidism accepted that chiefly economic contracts should be made with Poles. The Enlightenment aimed at fuller participation in and social integration into non-Jewish society.<sup>6</sup> Traditional Jewish leaders saw Enlightenment as the first step toward conversion and the abandonment of the Jewish people by Jews. A large portion of Polish Jewry underwent urbanization to ever increasing degree. The urbanization led to conflicts among the masses of Jews between the ideals of the past, traditions, and the new reality with all the allurements of the new future.

As always, the conflict was chiefly between the generations. For young Jews in particular, the clash between the old ideas and the new reality was impossible to reconcile. The new reality was chosen, and that in short order led to assimilation. The groundwork had been laid by the Haskalah movement which had developed among Eastern European Jewry, not without influence from Germany. Haskalah sought to break with the traditional forms, to rebuild life through non-traditional education in keeping with the new demands. At the same time the leaders of the Haskalah rejected the concept of radical break with the past. The Jew was to remain a Jew but one adapted to new reality. For all its moderation, Haskalah had an enormous influence both on furthering individual assimilation and with time, in awakening the desire for national emancipation among the Jewish masses.

The Haskalah movement contributed to the emergence of the School of Rabbis, in Warsaw, the first large scale centre dedicated to creating a Polish-Jewish intelligentsia. Under the influence of the Haskalah, young Jews assumed the dress, customs and language of Poles and sometimes at enormous cost and effort, acquired education.

After World War I, the newly established state of Poland had a Jewish community of over 3,000,000, which was the largest in Europe and the second largest in the world. The community was organized as a Kehillah (form of self-government) with the power to own all communal properties such as synagogues, cemeteries, hospitals and the like. It also had the authority to direct communal education, religious, social and cultural institutions. Each town, large and small, was represented on a Council, and Councillors were elected by secret ballot. The various organizations found their interests reflected in the bodies of the Kehillah through proportional representation. The greatest achievement of Polish Jewry was its educational system maintained at its own cost. Here too, the different Jewish ideological and religious groups maintained their respective types of

schools, each with their own language of instruction in Hebrew, Yiddish, Polish or bilingual.

The Jewish community also maintained teacher training schools, rabbinical academies, trade schools and other cultural institutions such as museums, libraries and adult study courses. In higher education, Jewish students were generally handicapped because of discrimination against them by Polish universities. As many as half of Jewish trainees in various professions had to obtain their training in foreign universities. When they returned home to Poland they had often had great difficulties gaining permits to practice their professions.

Jewish culture flourished throughout Poland. A large number of books, magazines, and dailies were produced. In higher institutions of Jewish learning,<sup>7</sup> scholars produced many volumes on Jewish subjects, and trained students who later spread Jewish knowledge throughout the world.<sup>8</sup>

In the Jewish museums in Warsaw, Vilna and Krakow one could find treasures of the past as well as creations of such contemporary artists as Marc Chagall, Henry Glicenstein and Arthur Szyk. A vibrant religious life, centered on thousands of synagogues, courts of Hassidic Rabbis and individual homes, endowed the Jews with the strength and courage to live a traditional Jewish life in a frequently hostile non-Jewish world. On Sabbath and the holidays all rites and customs were observed in an atmosphere that glowed with joy and piety. This picture, as given to you describes the religious part of the Jewish community. A completely different image would apply to the secular Jewish life in pre-war Poland.

Jewish communal life also abounded with variety of political, social, philanthropic mutual aid organizations and institutions, which helped Jews to cope with the complexity of problems suffered. There were organizations aiming at restoring individual human rights and freedom, as well as collective autonomy, and defending those rights politically. Numerous Zionist organizations helped in the rebuilding of Palestine. Some of my older school friends left their comfortable

homes and loving families to live in poverty and danger to clear swamps in the Holy Land. Agencies were established for health benefits as well. In summary, a nest of philanthropic institutions and youth organizations were organized, upholding divergent religious, secular Zionist, yiddishist and socialist ideologies, all of them aiming at a strong, living Jewish People.

Jews also contributed their full measure to the general culture of Poland in science, art, literature and music. Among others Julian Tuwim was considered the foremost contemporary poet in Polish language; Bruno Winawer was prominent in literature, Bronislaw Huberman in music and Szymon Ashkenazi in historiography.

The Jewish community of Poland functioned under tremendous hardship of financial limitations and governmental discrimination, which drove large Jewish masses into poverty and migration. The anti-Semitic attitudes of the government and the population at large produced economic boycotts and outbreaks of violence against Jews. Nevertheless, the Jews fought their battle for survival with all possible means through internal efforts and the aid of the American Jewry; they maintained their communal life on a high level to the very end of the pre-war period, until the German army overran the country in September 1939.

It was in this anti-Semitic environment of economic boycotts, governmental discrimination, and a lack of any political representation in the governing institutions of Poland that the annihilation of Poland's Jewry took hold swiftly in 1939. Within a mere matter of two weeks, after the invasion of September 1, 1939, the rich cultural life, publications and leadership of the Polish state ceased to exist.

In Poland, ghettos were formed soon after the Nazi invasion. They endured until the policy of annihilation was firmly in place and the instruments of destruction – the killing centres – were established. The Jewish ghettos in Poland were set up in haste but with great efficiency. The Piotrkow Trybunalski Ghetto, established in 1940 was the first. Lodz, Warsaw, Lublin, Radom and Lwow soon

followed. By 1942 all the Jews in Poland, and the German controlled territories of the Soviet Union, were confined to ghettos, living in hiding or on the run.

Some ghettos were closed while others were relatively open. The Warsaw ghetto was surrounded by eleven miles of walls, Krakow also was walled and the Lodz Ghetto was sealed, enclosed by wooden fences and barbed wire. Piotrkow Trybunalski, Radom, Chelm, Kielce were open ghettos. From the German point of view, ghettos were holding pens for subjugated populations with no rights. Jewish labour was to be exploited; goods and property to be confiscated. Warsaw Ghetto which occupied only 2.4 percent of city land contained 30% of the city's population. Ghetto life was one of hunger, disease and despair. Starvation was rampant. Dead bodies were often left on the streets until the burial society was notified. Beggars were everywhere. The most unbearable was the uncertainty of life. Ghetto residents never knew what tomorrow would bring. Governance of the ghetto rested with the Judenrat (Jewish Council) and they were Nazi appointed officials charged with controlling its municipal life.

In the summer of 1942 Nazis began liquidating the ghettos of Eastern Europe. Within 18 months, almost all of the ghettos of Poland were emptied and the death camps of Sobibor, Treblinka and Belzec were readied to receive their victims. By the summer of 1944 more than 2,000,000 Jews had been transported to concentration camps and there were no ghettos left in Eastern Europe. The killing centres of Auschwitz, Birkenau, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor, Belzec and Treblinka were located on the main railroad line in Poland. In each of them, killing was done by gas, either carbon monoxide or Zyklon B.

At the entrance of each of the death camp, the reception area, the dead were removed from the train and the living divided according to their ability to walk. Those able to walk were sent on; people unable to walk were taken away. Those who could walk then faced the first selection. A SS officer pointed to the left or the right. Old people, pregnant women, young children and the infirm were immediately condemned to death. Segregated by sex they surrendered their

valuables and removed their clothes before entering the gas chambers. The Nazis tried to deceive arriving prisoners until the end. The gas chambers were labelled “showers”.

Those selected for work were registered, in most cases branded and sheared. Their ordeal as inmates was just beginning. They would face additional selections in the future. In the winter of 1944-1945, the Nazis knew that the war was lost. As the Allied Armies closed in on the Nazi concentration camps, desperate SS officials tried frantically to evacuate the camps. A concerted effort was made to conceal the crimes that had been committed. The concentration camps were destroyed and the corpses burned and buried. But Germany still needed slave labour and more time to complete the Final Solution.

The inmates of the camps were moved westward in the dead of winter, forced to march toward the heartland of Germany. Almost one in four died en route. The first concentration camp to be liberated was Majdanek, on July 23, 1944, by Soviet troops and on January 27 Auschwitz was liberated. The British liberated Bergen-Belzen April 15, 1945, American troops entered Buchenwald April 11, 1945 and I was liberated on May 5, 1945 in Mauthausen, Austria by the Second armoured division of the U.S. Third Army.

## CONCLUSION

I would like to offer some insight to the long debated issue of anti-Semitism in Poland and I mean the inter-war Poland. The attitude of most Jewish scholars has been and continues to be that inter-war Poland was an extremely anti-Semitic country. They claim that Polish Jewry during the 1920s and 1930s was in a state of constant decline and by the 1930s both the Polish regime and Polish society were waging a bitter and increasingly successful war against the Jewish population.<sup>9</sup>

I disagree with those who have characterized Jewish society as being in a state of decline during the inter-war period. My lecture today has attempted to

showcase the richness of both religious and secular activities pre-war Jewish society offered its members.

Inter-war Poland was bad for the Jews in the sense that excluded them from first class membership in the state. By the late 1930s, this reality had led to a widespread feeling among Jews, especially among the youth, that they had no future in Poland, and that they were trapped.

And yet the inter-war Poland was also good for the Jews because among other things, it provided an environment in which forces were unleashed in the Jewish world which many Jews regarded then and today as extremely positive. I think we can say of Jewish history in the inter-war Poland that it was “the best of times and the worst of times.” The best of times in the sense of the extraordinary creativity of Polish Jewry, the worst of times in the sense of the fulfilment of the bleakest prophecies made mostly by Zionists concerning the imminent fate of the eastern European Jewish Diaspora.

I would like to end with a quote from Yitzchak Katzenelson, journalist of Lodz Ghetto, in 1942:

*Oh, all is gone.*

*There was a People, which exists no longer.*

*There was a People, but is no more.*

*Gone, wiped out.*

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> The author has considered the following sources in preparation for this lecture: *Jews in Poland* edited by Abramsky, Jachimczyk, Polonsky; *Jews in Central Europe between the World Wars* by Ezra Mendelson; *Jews in Polish Culture* by Aleksander Hertz *On the Edge of Destruction* by Celia S. Heller; *Jews in Poland*

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by Cyprian Pogonowski *Image before my Eyes* by Lucian Dobroszycki & Barbara Krischenblatt-Gimblett

<sup>2</sup> The author presented a series of film clips to support the visual images drawn during the lecture. “The Jews of Poland: Jewish communities of Bialystock, Lwow, Krakow, Vilna, Warsaw,” shot by Yitzhak and Shruel Goskind in 1938-1939. This film is the last visual documentary account of once vibrant communities.

<sup>3</sup> Royal edit the King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, The Alhambra Decree, 31 March 1492.

<sup>4</sup> Before the Second World War, the Jewish-Polish historian Majer Balaban realized that in view of the scarcity of Hebrew documents one had to turn to the Polish documents to study the past of Jews in Poland. To learn the Christian’s opinion of Jews, Daniel Tollet searched through polemical Polish literature of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in the national library in Warsaw. A great help in this task is the very important research done by K. Bartoszewicz who before World War I established a list of anti-Jewish works under “*Antisemitizm w literaturze polskiej*” – Anti-Semitism in Polish literature XIII – XVII centuries – Krakow 1914. It must be stressed that anti-Jewish feeling, even if it was omnipresent in Poland, showed itself in a less violent way than in several other European countries during the same period. With the exception of the ceremonies and specific attitudes of the Jewish religion, the life of Jewish merchants was not very different from that of the Christians.

<sup>5</sup> Eventually a synthesis occurred between Hasidic expression and rabbinical learning. It was exemplified by the action of the Rebe of Ger, the Hasidic leader who restored Talmudic study. Hasidism was an indigenous movement and it swept Polish Jewry. In contrast, the other major movement of the same century, the Haskala (Enlightenment) which won over the Jews of Western Europe, drew its inspiration from European Enlightenment. The central goal of the Enlightenment, in contrast to Hasidism was to change the nature of the relationship between the Jews and the dominant society.

<sup>6</sup> The Haskala scarcely existed in Congress Poland, was much more prominent in Lithuania-Byelorussia and most influential in Galicia which was under Austrian rule. The founders of the Galician Haskala were mostly from wealthy families – Nachman Krochmal from Zolkiew, Joseph Perl from Tarnopol and Shlomo Yehuda Rapaport from Lvov.

<sup>7</sup> Such as: the famous Yeshivoth of Lublin and Mir, The Yiddish Scientific Institute (Vilna), the Institute for Science of Judaism (Warsaw).

<sup>8</sup> Among the outstanding writers who later lost their lives under Nazis were such men as the historian Meir Balaban, educator Janusz Korczak, the religious Zionist leader Rabbi Isaac Niesenbaum, and the religious philosopher Hillel Zeitlin. My teacher in Dr. Blatts gymnasium was Bruno Szulc (poet, writer and artist). He was killed in 1942.

<sup>9</sup> The most outspoken in this attitude is Celia Heller in her book *On Edge of the Destruction*. And yet so called Jewish-Polish camp expresses a completely different view and I would like to refer to Professor Ezra Mendelson from his *Jews of East Central Europe between the Wars*, Chapter Interwar Poland subtitled "Good for the Jews or bad for the Jews":

I see no reason why Polish historians should not admit that interwar Poland was an anti-Semitic state, in the sense that it acted in many ways against the Jewish interest. Possibly one reason why Polish scholars are reluctant to state that because they are accustomed to regard Poland as a victim, and victims are eventually reluctant to admit that they have victimized others. But such things are possible. As for the Jewish side, we should admit that we owe the Poles a good deal. Above all we owe a debt of gratitude to Polish freedom which allowed Jews in 1920 and 1930 to participate in politics, to have open schools, and write as they pleased. In inter-war Poland the Gerer Hasidim could remain Gerer Hasidim and the pioneer could organize vocational training in anticipation of alaya to Palestine. Polish freedom allied with Polish anti-Semitism and Jewish modernization made possible the emergence and popularization of the new Jewish politics, which among other things helped to build the State of Israel. Modern Polish nationalism led definitely to anti-Semitism but it also inspired Polish youth to raise the banner of Jewish nationalism within the Jewish members of Bund, Hashomer-Hatzair and Betar.

## THE VANISHED WORLD PART II: POLES AND JEWS, THEN AND NOW

*Text from speech delivered on November 4, 2003 as part of an educational series of lectures at Shaarey Zedek Synagogue. Lecture series sponsored by the friends of Hebrew University of Winnipeg, Shaarey Zedek congregation and the Gertrude and Philip Weiss Endowment for Holocaust Education.*

**T**oday's lecture will focus on Polish-Jewish relations during the Holocaust, after the liberation and now. I shall concentrate on: Ghettos, camps, Jews on Aryan papers and Jews in forests. While "The Vanished World Part I" could have been subtitled "Poland for Beginners", this presentation could possibly be subtitled "An Advanced Study of Poland from 1941 to 2003".<sup>1</sup>

I will begin with the story of the Lodz Ghetto, as it is the story of all ghettos. All ended in their destruction. On September 8, 1939 Lodz was occupied and shortly after surrendered to the Nazis. The Jewish population of Lodz numbered at least a quarter of a million before the German invasion. On January 20, 1945 when Lodz was liberated by the Soviets only 800 Jews were found alive.

Except for the death camps, Lodz Ghetto was cut off from the rest of the world. It was the most hermetically sealed concentration of Jews in Europe. Jews were separated, under threat of death, from contact with other Poles. The Germans built three bridges, paid by the Jews, over thoroughfares used by the Poles and Germans. The streets were fenced on both sides to contain and isolate the Jews.

Heavy sins were committed in Lodz Ghetto. The greatest sin was the dehumanization of its inhabitants. People raised in a spirit of civilized decency were changed after just half a year of living under horrific conditions into beasts of prey. Almost overnight some individuals lost whatever sense of ethics and shame they once had. While many were dying of hunger – often searching through waste heaps for edible refuse and eating it right there – there were others who stole and robbed at every opportunity and gorged and devoured what they could.

While men and women harnessed themselves to the excrement and garbage wagons and dragged their loads, which stank for miles, for fourteen hours a day, those who occupied high offices in ghetto administration contemplated what else to steal and how to cover up the thefts.

Along with the cold, having to relieve oneself in open latrines, pulling wagons and carts like animals with powerless arms, sleeping nights on damp grounds, the organism soon has to give up putting its heart into extreme service. The caricature of a soup, a few grains of barley floating in warm water – appeared as the essence of hunger. One drunk, ate, slurped, gurgled the soup and used it to brutally suppress any feeling of hunger. The density of people in the living spaces, the lack of soap and water, the impossibility of keeping oneself clean and of changing one's underwear often and the stubborn indifference of the elderly to caring for the body have given rise to skin diseases, mostly due to parasites. The doctors diagnosed these as different kinds of eczema, boils and swellings that often led to gangrene.

### THE WILL TO SURVIVE

By December 1941, it was decreed that Jews were to receive 800 calories a day – half of those given to the Poles – and this was only to come from bread, potatoes and ersatz (artificial) fat. Under those conditions, smugglers of all ages, including very small children, crawled through sewers and cracks in the walls.

Jews even smuggled in carts when the guards could be bribed. Hunger-crazed children who were able to slip through to the Polish-Aryan section were often given food. More often they were shot by Nazi guards. Children reached the Aryan side by digging holes under walls or by hiding at the ghetto walls near the gates and trying to sneak through when the guards turned the other way. Parents would sit at home all day nervously awaiting the return of their only breadwinners. So desperate was the need for food that not even the death penalty for smuggling could stop it, for strict obedience to the law meant a slow death by starvation.

The stronger and luckier Jews carried on an illicit trade with the Aryan side. In the face of Nazi threats, they established branches of production which served the Polish population. Officially, the ghetto produced goods for the German Army only, but it also managed to produce for Polish consumption, working with the raw material already in the ghetto or smuggled into it. Those in the Ghetto traded with the other side “illegally” through smugglers or Christian workers in the ghetto.<sup>2</sup>

Old clothes were an important source of income for the Christian workers employed in various shops in the ghetto. The Polish workers returned to the Aryan side each night laden with purchases which drew good prices. Jews sold all their personal belongings, linens, china, clothing, jewellery, and personal mementos. The sale of second hand household goods to smugglers gave the ghetto its chief income, staved off starvation and became its most powerful asset. Until the last hour of the ghetto’s existence, thousands of Jews were still selling old clothes. According to the historian Ringelblum, in Warsaw, Polish smugglers sometimes spread false rumours of impending actions (aktion) to depress the old-clothes market, once going so far as to say that the whole ghetto would be liquidated by a certain date. Frequently heard were comments such as, “They’ll turn your skin to leather sooner or later any way. Sell your coat and buy something to eat.”

In many cases, Jews entered into partnership arrangements with Christians giving enterprises over to them, meanwhile remaining silent partners. According to Ringelblume, most of these transactions proved unhappy. Jewish property was simply appropriated, and Jewish owners informed on. In the distorted morality of the time, the Polish smuggler often seemed the most humane Christian of all, and created possibly the strongest kind of Jewish-Christian bond in Poland.

The Polish underground urged all Poles to support smuggling as an economic necessity and the underground press declared that, without it, the Polish city population would perish. The Germans waged a fierce battle against both Jewish and non-Jewish smugglers. But in spite of the patrols and cordons of police and the many executions of smugglers, smuggling never stopped. Economic necessity became an iron master. For the Pole it became a way of life, for the Jew it literally kept him alive.

### **JEWISH RESISTANCE**

The Polish attitudes towards those in the camps, in the forests, and toward those Jews seeking salvation and safety as “Christians” were interconnected. The escape to the woods started in 1942-1943. As the eastern ghettos were being wiped out, small groups of Jews ran to the forests in the desperate bid for survival and vengeance. In all the ghettos, in the wake of the great wave of killings and deportations, the youth of the Jewish political movement began to organize armed resistance to the Germans. Deprived of family, they had gained freedom and autonomy. The possible consequences of rash acts held less terror now that the ghetto was no longer peopled by their families, now that the sense of familial responsibility no longer inhibited them.

The knowledge of the death camps and the sense of death’s inevitability accelerated their resort to armed resistance. The first resistance organization was

set up in Vilna. It was led by Abba Kovner, Hashomer Hatzair activist and poet who proclaimed, “Let’s not allow ourselves to be led like sheep to slaughter.”<sup>3</sup>

When the youth in the ghettos began to form their combat organizations, few gave thoughts to the political and social needs of an effective resistance movement. Successful resistance operations were actively supported by an allied government from the outside and received assistance with (or at the least passive approval of) its activities from the indigenous population within the area of operations. Whenever these conditions were absent, Jewish resistance organizations collapsed. Despite their courage, and readiness for self-sacrifice, the young people by themselves were unable to win the confidence of the Polish underground government, the Soviet partisan organization, and even the Jewish populace in the ghettos.

The Polish population in most cases was antagonistic and hostile. In Warsaw, the Polish capital and centre of all Polish underground organizations, some of the established Jewish parties continued to maintain a Jewish political presence despite the diminution of their ranks. A handful of surviving veteran leaders of the Central Committees of the Bund, General Zionists and both Right and Left Labour Zionists, living on the “Aryan” side under false identities, carried on. They had the responsibility to sustain their parties and to render whatever assistance could be given to the harassed Jews in the territory of conquered Poland.

Even more important was their function of maintaining contact with the outside world – with the Polish underground in the country, with the Polish government-in-exile, and with the Jewish representatives in the Polish National Council in London, with the fraternal parties in Palestine and other Jewish contacts in Switzerland and Turkey. No resistance movement in Europe was self-sufficient. No resistance group could operate independently to any advantage. To be useful militarily or politically, every resistance activity had to be fitted into an overall Allied strategy and synchronized into an overall Allied schedule.

In the first years of the war, Great Britain was the sole supporter for all resistance movements in Europe, establishing for that purpose the Special Operations Executive (SOE). Until late 1942, when Soviet Russia regained the initiative on the Eastern front and reorganized the partisan movement on an expanded scale, London was the headquarters of the European resistance movement, where the governments-in-exile of the occupied countries served as liaisons to the British, pleading on behalf of the underground forces for military aid and financial assistance.

To receive aid, a resistance organization had to have the political backing of its government-in-exile and be able to render useful military service to the Allies. In Poland, the Home Army (*Armja Krajowa*) directed by the Polish government-in-exile and by Delegatura in Warsaw, was authorized to receive SOE assistance through a system of clandestine landings or drops. The Soviet Union, for its part, supported the Peoples Army (*Armia Ludowa*) with funds and material on the calculation that it would establish the communist presence in postwar Poland. The surviving Polish Jews, imprisoned in Ghettos and SS camps did not fit into any conventional framework that would entitle them to aid either from Allied or Soviet channels. *Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa* (ZOB – Jewish Combat Organization) and *Zydowski Komitet Koordynacyjny* (ZKK – Jewish Coordinating Committee) applied for arms to the Home Army, which referred the appeal to the Delegatura, which in turn turned it over to London headquarters. The question of supplying arms was not only military but political. Assistance was hindered by widespread Polish anti-Semitism. In December, 1942 some arms were delivered.

ZKK representatives requested a larger supply of arms than the 10 pieces already received which they said did not suffice to organize an armed resistance or any other action of a collective and non-individual character. They also wanted help to organize purchase of arms on the “Aryan” side and to secure the services of instructors in military training. Most Jews who had been trained in the Polish

army, and could have served as instructors, were now with the Jewish police, and hence untrustworthy.

Henryk Wolinski, in charge of Jewish affairs for Home Army's Chief Command forwarded the memorandum requesting arms and training to London, with a lukewarm recommendation. On the same application, General Stefan Rowecki, commander in chief of the Home Army, sent a distrustful radio message to Polish High Command on January 4, 1943:

Late Jews of various groupings, also communists appeal to us for arms, just as if we had full arsenals. As a trial I gave them a few pistols. I'm not sure that they will use the weapons altogether. More weapons I will not give, because you know we don't have them ourselves. We are awaiting a delivery. Inform us what connections our Jews have in London.

The information relayed from London apparently proved satisfactory, because at the end of January – after ZOB's armed challenge to the Germans in the Warsaw ghetto on January 18-22, 1943 – the Home Army delivered to ZOB 49 revolvers, 50 granades and a quantity of explosives. The rest of their arms the ZOB bought at exorbitant cost and great peril from Poles and smuggled them into the ghetto. Both the ghetto and the "Aryan" side swarmed with police, black mailers, informers, spies and Gestapo agents looking for victims. Every courier was exposed to dangers and risks that tested his or her ingenuity, daring and dedication to the cause.

Jews living in cities as "Christians" were always exposed to blackmail, Polish and Jewish informers, the danger of medical examinations, shortages of food, and the uncertainty of the next day. Informing on Jews was the most common and probably the most lethal crime committed by Poles against Jews.

In most cases, the people in the forests were escapees from ghettos. For young people in particular, rumours about partisans awakened feelings of hope and promise. There were desperate attempts at escaping death, completely individual and unplanned. And in time, it changed to smaller groups of young men

and young girls leaving the ghetto unarmed in most cases seeking better conditions than the ghetto could offer and hopeful to save their lives in the forest.

In the Western Ukraine, Jewish fighters faced two main enemies: the Germans and the Ukraine nationalists. The Ukrainian partisan movement which fought off German rule fought also against the Jews. The masses linked their grievances to the Jews and were easily stirred up to murder them while Nazi-hired auxiliary police and fascist bands also massacred Jews. The exception was Metropolitan Andreas Szeptycki, Archbishop of Lvov and head of the Greek Catholic (Eastern Orthodox) Church in Galicia.

In Central Poland and the province of Galicia the struggle of Jewish partisans was virtually hopeless. The area was thickly populated and strictly policed. The Poles and Ukrainians who lived there were, with few exceptions, savagely hostile making it difficult for Jews to hide. Geography and demography was also not advantageous. The forests were few and small. Jews were likewise unsuccessful in their attempts to link up with Polish forces.<sup>4</sup>

The urge to live was so strong among some Jews that they fled in desperation into the woods. The chances of survival in such cases were about one in a hundred. People were caught in raids or were betrayed and then massacred. Those few who survived alone, or in small isolated groups, in underground bunkers were exceptional. In the hands and hearts of anonymous peasants lay their fate. The compassionate as well as the money grubbing peasant was faced every day with the dilemma whether to yield up his charges to the Germans, who killed people sheltering Jews, or yield to his sense of pity and conscience. He also had to consider his family and neighbours.

Life in those pits was beyond description: fear, cold, nauseating air, food and water rations, lack of hygiene, bed bugs, rats, unpredictable visits from neighbours and police, lack of light created conditions conducive to quarrels and outbursts.

Research conducted in Poland in the late 1960s indicated that a few hundred Poles were executed for helping Jews, while probably many thousands more helped, or tried to help. Some Poles risked their lives for old friends. Others did so out of religious morality or political beliefs. Many did so for money. But most Poles did nothing on behalf of Jews, satisfied to observe how the Germans were now solving their Jewish problem.

In September, 1941 the commander of the Polish underground Home Army reported to the Polish Government in Exile in London “Please accept it as a fact that the overwhelming majority of the country is anti-Semitic...Anti-Semitism is widespread now.”<sup>5</sup>

Shortly after General Tadeusz Komorowski (Bor Komorowski) took over as commander in chief of the Polish Home Army in the summer of 1943, he issued an order to his commanders to “liquidate” the leaders of Soviet bands, and other robber gangs which he claimed were marauding the countryside. The order specifically referred to Jews – in particular Jewish women – who participate in these attacks. No one will ever know precisely how many thousands of Jews were murdered by Polish partisans in Polish forests and marshes.

When the war ended about 70,000 Jewish survivors emerged from their hiding places in Poland. By the end of 1945 some 170,000 Polish Jews were repatriated from the Soviet Union. Jews who returned to reclaim their homes and property were greeted with terror, violence, and murder. The Poles did not want Jews back even if their number amounted to less than one tenth of their prewar numbers. From March, 1945 to April, 1946 more than 800 Jews were murdered in free Poland, the ugliest pogrom occurring in Kielce on July 4, 1946 when nearly 50 Jews were killed by a mob backed up by Polish militiamen. Although the Polish regime tried and executed the murderers, the terror against Jews continued throughout all Poland. By the end of 1946 some 150,000 Jews had departed from Poland leaving behind 90,000, and by 1960 only about 30,000 Jews remained in Poland.

**HISTORY CORRUPTED**

By and large Polish historiography withered away in the years of the Stalin regime. Even the Central Commission to Investigate German Crimes in Poland ceased to publish its bulletin between 1951 and 1956. A consistently Stalinist view of Jews in wartime Poland emerged in the publication of the Jewish Historical Institute with Bernard Mark as its director. Buletin Zydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego (Jewish Historical Institute) followed a crude scenario in which the Communists, Jews and Poles alike, were the heroes and Zionist parties were depicted as willing collaborators of the Nazis. In portraying the Soviet Union as the saviour of the ghetto Jews, a claim that had no support in fact, Mark falsified the incident and his false version has since become a staple of the Stalinist version of the Warsaw ghetto history.

During Gomulka's reign, in 1968, a massive anti-Semitic witch-hunt was launched under the guise of "anti-Zionism." All over Poland a savage anti-Semitism was spewed from the press and the media. The anti-Semitism of 1968 had an immediate and scandalous impact on Polish historiography with regard to the Jews, especially for the war years.

The Poles had been stung by worldwide denunciation of Poland's anti-Semitic course. Counterattacking, they responded that the Jews throughout the world were lying about Poland and its treatment of Jews now as in the past. Even Premier Jozef Cyrankiewicz in a speech in the Sejm on April 10, 1968 delivered a savage attack against the "wave of anti-Polish" slander, which he charged emanated from Israel and chauvinist Zionist circles in other countries, from the United States, and the German Federal Republic.

The Polish authorities gave a warm reception to the writings of Wadyslaw Bartoszewski, who rendered a great help to Jews during the war. Now a professor at Catholic University in Lublin, Bartoszewski was one of the

founders of the *Rada Pomocy Zydom* (RPZ) (Council to Aid Jews). Using his own records of Polish assistance to Jews he compiled a massive collection of anecdotal material describing how Poles helped to hide Jews during the war and the kind of assistance given to them.

Understandably, Bartoszewski's book, despite its clearly apologetic character, has been warmly received by Poles both in Poland and in their exile abroad because this book serves to redeem Polish honour. The data of this book has to be reconciled with the massive documentation of pre-war and wartime anti-Semitism among the Polish population and in the Home Army.

### **CURRENT DEBATES IN POLAND**

Fascinating and difficult debates are going on in Poland now about the 1944 massacre of Jews, and more generally about the role of Poles in the destruction of Polish Jewry.

Jedwabne: that has been the topic of debate in the Polish press since 2000. Or even more precisely, what exactly did Polish Catholics do to Polish Jews in the small north-eastern town of Jedwabne in July 1941?

The story came to light recently in Jan Gross' book *Neighbours* published to great fanfare in 2000 in Poland and a year later in America. Based chiefly on eyewitness accounts of both survivors and perpetrators (and later from trial testimony in 1949 and 1953), Gross tells how the story differs from the usual: it was not the Germans killing the population of Jedwabne, but Poles. Ordinary Poles, he says, regular townsfolk.

The reaction to these revelations conveys a rather mixed picture of contemporary Poland. On the one hand, the ability of the country to have a national debate about a subject that has previously been taboo signals a political maturity and self-confidence not seen for a long time. On the other hand, it

exposes the insecurity of some Poles, who treat Gross' account as a further display of anti-Polish sentiments by Jews.

Gross levels a host of charges against Polish historiography. He blames historians for not previously writing about Jedwabne, for treating the topic of Polish collaboration with Nazis as taboo, for treating the history of Polish Jews as a separate topic from the history of Poland. He then indicts society for the anti-Semitism that made Jedwabne possible. Altogether, Gross' indictment of Polish society and historiography is a sweeping one.

Gross has stated that he wanted to force a wide-ranging Polish discussion, not just among historians, but particularly among "society" on the whole question of Polish-Jewish relations and the lived experiences of the holocaust. Changing public opinion requires engaging the past with sensitivity.

Many Poles today, have personally acknowledged and publicly regretted Polish anti-Semitism. And yet the persistent accusation repeated by the Poles of Jewish collaboration with the Soviets must be addressed. Moreover, the widespread public knowledge that Jews are charged with collaboration with the Soviets contrasts diametrically with the lack of public awareness on the extent of Polish collaboration with the Nazis and the Soviets.

The Catholic Church in Poland continues, as recently as 2001, to feed into the pool of misinformation. Primate Jozef Glemp, the head of Poland's Catholic Church stated, "That Poles also took part in the Stalinist repression does not change the fact that the leading role was played by those of Jewish origin." "Jews," he continues "are guilty for their actions against Poles, especially for collaborating with the Bolsheviks and aiding in the exile of Poles to Siberia, and packing them to prison." (Wprost, May 27, 2001).

In light of these passions it is a good sign that the debate has gone as far as it has and that almost everyone accepts the claim that Poles participated and probably orchestrated a terrible crime against the local Jews. Even the church accepted this position and in May, 2001 conducted a moving service in a Warsaw

cathedral where bishops on their knees begged forgiveness for crimes perpetrated by Poles on their Jewish brethren. It was not quite an apology. The Episcopate expressed pain, contrition for the crimes against Jews, and among whose perpetrators were Poles and Catholics, and asked forgiveness from God not Jews (Gazeta Wyborowa, May 28, 2001). These statements proved too much for some extreme nationalists who said even the Church had been taken over by Jews. As such it is likely that real debate will come in the future when passions subside.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

History is a discipline dedicated to the recovery of the past from the black pit of oblivion. For this, the historian must pursue truth. The historian's task is often to uncover and expose fraud and deceit and bring to light suppressed facts and documents, to lay bare forgeries, to strip away the overlays of myths and legends upon the past.

This lecture has attempted to lay bare the essential elements of Jewish resistance and the Polish reaction to such resistance. It has sought to show that in the face of such a horrific past, a society will go to great lengths to distance itself from committed acts of moral depravity. It is only very recently that some brave historians are ready to expose the truths of the past. It is only in a climate of such honesty that the past can be acknowledged and amends made. As the debate gets other historians to examine collaboration with Nazis against Jews, awareness of this past can become less emotionally charged. This could then lead Western Jewry to question their own gut anti-Polishness and help lead to a genuine peace on this front.

Thank you

<sup>1</sup> The author has considered the following sources, in preparing for this lecture: *Lodz Ghetto* compiled by Allan Adelson & Robert Lapidus; *The Politics of Hate* by John Weiss; *On the Edge of Destruction* by Celia S. Heller; *Fugitives in the Forest* by Allan Levine; *The Holocaust and the Historians* by Lucy S. Davidowicz; *The War against Jews* by Lucy S. Davidowicz; *Drohobycz, Drohobycz* by Henryk Greenberg.

<sup>2</sup> This part of the armed resistance applies to Warsaw, Kowno, Vilna, and others except the Lodz ghetto. No armed resistance movement existed in Lodz. No contact was possible between Jews and Poles outside the ghetto. The total imprisonment which rendered futile smuggling, even of food, turned the idea of smuggling arms into total fantasy. The same situation applied to the concentration camps. They were completely isolated and the discipline, hunger and sickness prevented any armed resistance until late 1944 when the Russian offensive demoralized some of the guards of the concentration camps.

<sup>3</sup> It breathed with the resonance of Bialik in the condemnation of Jewish passivity and appealed to the youth of Vilna to redeem Jewish dignity and avenge the murder of Jews. Within a very short time thereafter, Hashomer Hatzair, Hanoar Hazoni (Zionist Youth Organization) Revisionists, Bundists General Organizatsje and Communists formed the Ferainikte Partizaner Organizatsje (United Partisans Organization).

<sup>4</sup> The sharply split Polish underground required Jews to make contact with both main sectors the AK (Armia Krajowa) the Home Army and the AL (Armia Ludowa) the Peoples Army. The larger group, the AK, was not friendly toward Jews and as one historian observed, in regions where the AK operated, not a single Jewish fugitive from the ghettos remained alive. The AL generally accepted Jews, but was small; the field of its operation was restricted and was controlled by the communists.

<sup>5</sup> Sources, Lucy S. Davidowicz in *The War Against Jews*, Stanislaw Wronski and Maria Zwialkowa, *Polacy i Zydzi 1939-1946*.

## THE TRAVAILS, THE TRIUMPHS, AND THE TRAGEDY OF GERMAN JEWRY

*Paper delivered at Shaarey Zedec Synagogue,  
on May 4, 2005, on the eve of the  
60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his liberation. Lecture sponsored  
by friends of the Hebrew University, Shaarey Zedec  
congregation and the Gertrude and Philip Weiss  
Endowment for Holocaust Education*

The history of German Jewry has always fascinated me, and I've spent considerable time over the years researching this subject. There are no reliable statistics of German Jews. In the eighteenth century there were approximately sixty thousand Jews living in the German states: less than one percent of the total German population.<sup>1</sup> In 1870, when more than thirty independent German states consolidated to establish a united Reich, Jews were still an insignificant minority of slightly more than one percent. One wonders how so small a presence could have triggered such vast enmity and reprehension.

Yet in economic and cultural terms, there has rarely been an ethnic or religious minority so visible. In a relatively brief period, this small German Jewish community produced an unusual array of entrepreneurs, artists, writers, scholars, and political activists; the high visibility of Jewish success elicited intense feelings of envy, resentment, and animosity amongst German citizenry of various socio-economic strata. In the distorted mirrors of citizens' popular imaginations, Jews

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<sup>1</sup> The following sources have been referenced during my presentation: Amos Elon, *The Pity "of it all"*; Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience*; Stephen Ozment, *A Mighty Fortress*; Sidney S. Jones, *Hitler in Vienna*.

loomed as a presumed threat to their economic and national integrity, identity, health, and culture.

Let us examine the history of Germany's Jews to put such perceptions into a larger context so that the imaginary "threat" can be debunked.

### **The Travails: 1669- 1805**

Until 1669, Jews were banned from settling in Berlin, or anywhere in the adjacent regions of Prussia. The Prussian ruler Kurfurst Frederick I agreed that year to accept the fifty richest Viennese Jews after Austrian Emperor Leopold I expelled them from the city of Vienna and from all the Lower Austria. He welcomed them for their money, and their presumed readiness to help finance his wars.

To become his *Schutzjuden* (protected Jews), each had to pay him two thousand thalers (equivalent to \$90,000 today), promise to set up certain industries, and agree not to establish a synagogue. Prussia was in dire need of commercial and industrial development. As a result of the Thirty Year War, much of it lay in ruins. French Huguenots, also a persecuted refugee community, were also allowed to settle in Berlin at this time, but without having to pay an "arrival" tax. They were given citizenship and were not prevented from establishing their own churches or schools. Nor were their personal and professional rights restricted. Jews were expressly forbidden to farm, to own houses, trade in wool, wood, tobacco, leather, and wine or with the exception of medicine, practice a learned profession or craft. They were specially taxed on every possible occasion: when they traveled, married, or gave birth. Upon the death of a Jew, only his eldest son inherited his "protected" status. Other sons had to prove they possessed independent capital of at least ten thousand thalers or else leave the city. Jews were required by law to be recognizable from a distance by their apparel.

In 1710, Frederick William I, the Prussian soldier King, agreed to abolish the Jews' mandatory yellow patch in return for a payment of eight thousand thalers each. The richest were allowed to own houses upon paying a special tax. In

1715, he sold Jews the right to build the synagogue. It had to be of certain size and height. In 1722, the King decreed that before a Jew could marry, in addition to first settling with the military paymaster, he had to purchase a set number of wild boars from the royal preserve. In 1737, the King became alarmed by their proliferation, which he likened to that of “locust bringing ruin to Christians” and ordered that only 120 of the richest and best Jewish families could remain in Berlin, all other 140 families were to be expelled within four weeks.

In the fall of 1743, a fourteen year old boy entered Berlin at the Rosenthaer Tor, the only gate in the city wall through which Jews and cattle were allowed to pass.

The boy, later became famous throughout Europe as the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. At this time, the movements of Jews, many of them wandering peddlers, was tightly regulated and controlled. The gatekeepers’ surviving log for 1743 included entries such as: “Today passed six oxen, seven swine, and a Jew.”

At the time of his arrival, Mendelssohn knew only Hebrew and Judendeutsch, a raw, medieval German dialect mixed with Hebrew. His education was strictly religious. He was unable to speak or read German books. Less than two decades later, almost entirely self-taught, he had become a prominent German philosopher, philologist, stylist, literary critic, and a man of letters: one of the first to bridge the social and cultural barriers between Jews and other Germans. This stuttering ghetto hunchback’s ambition was to end the age-old social and intellectual isolation of Judaism. In some ways he fully succeeded. His impact in his time was considerable.

As a religious thinker, he preached a doctrine of reason that had long been suppressed by German rabbis as heretical. Mendelssohn became the father of modern Reform Judaism, but he himself remained traditionally devout and observant throughout his life. He was as passionate about language as about German literature and social justice. One of the first practicing Jews to be fully assimilated into high German culture, Mendelssohn became the first German Jew

to achieve European prominence, as a philosopher and a man of letters, admired by Kant and Herder, a close friend of the most prominent German playwright Gotthold Ephraim Lessing a leading liberal of his age, and other prominent figures of the German Enlightenment. He was the first of a long line of assimilated German Jews who worshipped German culture and civilization, and whose longing for these “ideals” would later come to such an abrupt and dreadful end. During the final decade of his life, Mendelssohn witnessed the rise of a younger generation of Jews closer in spirit to the general culture than any German Jewish community had been since the Middle Ages. Traditions were crumbling, tolerance was seeping through the cracks. The walls of segregation were first breached in Berlin, where quite a few Jews were permitted to assimilate and live like Mendelssohn in two worlds.

The new tolerance, however limited, was nowhere as manifest as in the sudden blossoming, in the late 1790s, of literary salons on the French model. There had been a “mixed” Monday Club before but for men only, attended by Lessing, Mendelssohn, Nicolai, and other literati in Berlin. The new literary salons included for the first time members of leading aristocratic families and women. As a rule women were not welcome at scholarly gatherings and literary cafes. Jewish women usually suffered even greater restriction. The Berlin salons stood outside the Christian class system, a free arena where eccentric Prussian aristocrats could mingle informally with middle-class poets, writers, actors, and young Jewish women and men they were rarely, if able, to meet at home.

The new Berlin salons briefly linked the cause of Jewish emancipation with that of women. But on the whole, these gatherings, unlike their French counterparts, were apolitical and concerned almost exclusively with promoting arts and the Romantic Era’s cult of friendship.

Literary-minded Jewish ladies found themselves much in demand, not just in Berlin, but also in the capital of German artistic centres, Goethe’s Weimar. Goethe liked to recite his literary creations to them. The most famous salon, and

probably the most influential, was launched in 1791 by Rahel Levin, an unmarried 20 year old. She was not rich; her salon was held in the attic of her late father's home, where she held an open house several times a week. Her guests gathered in the late afternoon, and were served only weak tea and pretzels. The poet, Jean Paul wrote that scholars, Jews, officers, Prussian bureaucrats, noblemen, and all others who elsewhere "were at each others' throats" contrived to be "friendly" at her tea table.

Rahel was widely known to be a feminist, a fully independent woman, who built her life on her own terms. She had many lovers some of whom, like Friedrich von Gentz, the German publicist and statesman, remained enchanted with her into old age. More than just a renowned socialite, Rahel was also the most important German women of letters of the nineteenth century. Entirely self-taught, she was an astonishingly prolific letter writer. Her letters touch on all aspects of literature and art. Politics and the extraordinary historical events of her lifetime – the French revolution and Napoleonic wars – are rarely, if ever, mentioned in her letters.

A thoroughly assimilated Jewess, she was not interested in Jewish reforms, she yearned for complete integration into the German world. She was amused and offended by her observant friends and relatives. For much of her adult life she was what would later be called "self-hating". The idea that as a Jewess she was always required to be exceptional – and go on proving it all the time – was repugnant to her. She was the first German Jewess to articulate what it meant to be enclosed in a spooky circle of favor and misfortune that Heine, Rahel's close friend and admirer, called the thousand year old *Judenschmerz* (the suffering and pain involved with being a Jew). In 1814, after her mother's death, she converted. Her salon in Berlin did not survive the Franco-Prussian war of 1806, nor did those of other Jewish Salonieres. In the national frenzy that seized Germans in the war's aftermath, the Jewish salons simply ceased to exist.

The rise and fall of the Jewish salons coincided with the first wave of Jewish conversions to Christianity. The numbers were high, the highest in Europe since the 15<sup>th</sup> Century when 60 percent of Jews in Spain reportedly converted to Christianity. The historian, Heinrich Graetz, claimed that in Berlin alone, no less than half of the Jewish community converted, including four of Moses Mendelssohn's six children. Nineteenth-century Jewish historians viewed conversion very harshly and morally reprehensible. Zionists later regarded them as traitors since, in hindsight, conversion provided little protection or advancement.

The act was undertaken to conform, escape stigma, gain professional rights, bolster social status, win a governmental or academic post, and/or to marry. Heine famously called the baptismal certificate "the entrance ticket to European culture". It promised equality, which it did not deliver. Only much later did the general realization sink in that baptism, though tempting, could not solve the complex problems generated by centuries of prejudice, legal restrictions, and enforced segregation.

Conversion was mostly a middle and upper middle class phenomenon. The richest, most talented, successful, and culturally engaged men and women were often the first to convert. Few among the rich and prominent resisted.

For rich Prussian Jews, the rewards – often titles of nobility – provided with conversion were compelling. A Prussian military contractor named Jonathan Jacob Moses became Baron Delmar soon after converting in 1806, a certain Moritz Levi became Johann von Oppenfeld; David Mendel was baptized August Neander (new man) and became a leading Protestant theologian; the poet Chaim Heine became the Christian Heinrich Heine; the liberal polemicist Juda Low Baruch became Ludwig Börne; and the prominent Prussian ideologue Friedrich Julius Stahl was born Joel Golson, son of a Bavarian Jewish cattle dealer. While pragmatism was the dominant motive among male converts, women probably converted in order to marry the men they loved. There was no civil marriage

before 1860; to marry a Christian one had to convert as conversion to Judaism was illegal.

The repercussions of this wave of conversions affected Jewish society at large. At the very moment when the new Jewish middle class was beginning to enter German society and German politics, conversions deprived German Jews of their social and intellectual elite. The most influential segment of the middle and upper-middle classes abandoned the poor and petite bourgeoisie to their fate. This failure of solidarity would have tragic consequences later on.

### **Illusion of Freedom: 1806-1849**

In 1806, Napoleon mercilessly reduced Prussia to what it had been prior to Frederick II extensive conquests. What now remained was half of its land, and half of its population. Most Prussian Jews suddenly found themselves part of the newly created Grand Duchy of Poland.

Those, who remained inside the Prussian state expected to be finally granted civil rights. Liberal Prussians led by Karl August von Hardenberg, the new chancellor, convinced the reluctant King to free the serfs, abolish medieval guilds, to annul corporal punishment and pass more tolerant municipal ordinances. The King still balked at ceding full citizenship rights to Prussian Jews. Two years after the great defeat, a new ordinance gave the richest Jews of Berlin equal municipal but not full citizen status. Only a small minority benefited. Elsewhere in the German lands, in the territories annexed by metropolitan France, and in the new vassal states, Jews were finally emancipated and granted full political rights.

Heinrich Heine recalled the dramatic encounter with changes in his native city of Düsseldorf, where Napoleon's brother-in-law, Joachim Murat, introduced the French civil code, which abolished all discrimination and inherited privileges. All professional, commercial, educational, and residential restrictions were lifted. Heine spent weekdays at the lycée where he learned German, French, Latin, and Greek, and spent the Sabbath at home studying Hebrew with a private

tutor. He was one of the first German Jews to grow up as a free man. In Hamburg, several Jews were elected to sit on the city council. Only Frankfurt managed somehow to remain segregated.

In 1812, King Frederick William III relented, and approved an edict of emancipation that annulled most of the existing restrictions and recognized Jews, at least in theory, as full citizens. An immediate result of this decree was a sharp increase in the number of conversions to Christianity, which doubled between 1812 and 1819.

In any event, the edict of 1812 was short lived as it was suspended a mere three years later upon Napoleon's defeat. While their relative freedom lasted, Prussian Jews gave ample proof of their unwavering patriotism. A disproportionately large number of Jewish volunteers in the German war of liberation against Napoleon's France saw active service in the Prussian army.

Support for emancipation – never widespread – seemed in fact to have weakened. With the arrival of Romanticism, instead of trying to build bridges in the name of common humanity, as the main spokesmen of the Enlightenment have done, the Romantics emphasized national uniqueness and unbridgeable differences of race. A new kind of Jew-hatred emerged in Berlin after Prussia's defeat in 1806, mixing religious and racial sentiment with attitudes that were anti-modern, anti-French and anti-capitalistic. Its target was not the traditionalists but the new, recently assimilated, Jewish middle class. These Jews spoke and wrote the common language, sometimes better than their Christian countrymen, and lived not segregated from other Germans but among them.

The erosion of support for emancipation – within the intellectual elite – was reflected in the emergence in Berlin of the new Christian German Eating Club, according to author Amos Elon. Excluded from membership were women, Frenchmen, Philistines, and Jews, including converts down to the third generation. The club members included nearly the entire non-Jewish intellectual elite of Berlin and its new university. For more than a century, the new nationalism would

bedevil Germany and Europe as well. It would condemn German Jews to continue living in the twilight of favour and misfortune, forever straining to be equal and free.

In early August 1819, a sudden wave of riots struck the Bavarian city of Würzburg. Frenzied mobs ran through the streets looting and demolishing Jewish homes, screaming, “Hep, Hep Jude verrecke” (“Hep” in Latin is an acronym for “Hierosolyma est perdita”, which means Jerusalem is conquered). Two people were killed, and some twenty wounded. The army was called in, preventing a massacre. The Jewish population fled the city and spent the next few days in tents in the surrounding countryside. From Würzburg, the riots swept through the Bavarian towns and villages and from there to central and south-west Germany, as far as Bremen, Hamburg, and Lübeck. Nothing similar had been seen since the Dark Ages. Nearly everywhere the authorities were taken by surprise. With the exception of Heidelberg, where two law professors and their students took the law into their own hands and prevented a bloody pogrom, members of the “respectable bourgeoisie”, including students and even university professors, were among the instigators.

Jewish reaction to the riots was remarkably restrained. It was an indication that the rich and converted intellectual Jewish elite had turned their backs on the poor and *petite bourgeoisie*. At the time of the riots, some states had bluntly abrogated the emancipation edicts passed during the Napoleonic era, while others retained them in theory but ignored them in practice. Once again, Jews were excluded from posts in the public administration, and the army, and forbidden to hold teaching positions in schools and universities. The 400,000 gulden the Jewish community paid the city government in 1811 in return for its emancipation was declared forfeited.

In the Rhineland, which had reverted to Prussian control, Jews lost the citizenship rights that they had been granted under the French, and were no longer allowed to practice certain professions. The few who had been appointed to public

office before the war were dismissed. Jews continued to be admitted as students, though not as professors, to Prussian faculties. A good number of law and philosophy students ended up as journalists, and journalism came to be regarded as a largely Jewish occupation.

A few weeks after the “Hep, Hep” riots, three remarkable young men – Edward Gans, Leopold Lunz, and Moses Moser met in Berlin to discuss the Jewish situation. Gans and Lunz were the first German Jews to earn doctorates in jurisprudence and philosophy, respectively. Moses Moser was a young banker, and a secular man of great learning and sensibility. Was there anything they could do to reduce the rampant Judeophobia?

They decided to form a Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews. Its purpose was to bring ordinary Jews into the orbit of German culture, and at the same time reinforce their Jewish identity by bridging the gulf between secular and religious education. They threw themselves into the work of the society in the company of friends, filled with the same enthusiasm. First and foremost the members of the society vowed that they would never convert: they would always remain Jews. However, Lunz was convinced that unless “the Talmud is overthrown there is nothing one can do.” He occasionally led the services at a non-traditional synagogue in Berlin where prayers were led in German instead of Hebrew, and accompanied by organ music. Traditional Rabbis attacked him for his sermons.

In May 1822, Gans appealed to the Chancellor of the Berlin University the refusal to grant him a position at the university. His appeal was futile. The government issued a new royal decree known as “*Lex Gans*”, which explicitly outlawed the employment of Jews in universities and in the public sector.

At about this time, Heinrich Heine made his presence felt in the inner circles of German society. Heine had arrived in Berlin in the summer of 1821 to study law at the university and to attend Hegel’s seminar on aesthetics. Barely 24 years old, he was already a fairly well known literary figure. As a poet, he was

destined to leave an indelible mark on German culture, one that even the Nazis, try as they might, were unable to erase. Heine's imagery was drawn from the stores of both German and Hebrew mythology. No other writer has ever been so German and so Jewish; so ambivalent and so ironic about both.

Jews and Germans might yet make Germany a "citadel of spirituality" but the opposite was just as possible. Heine stated, "Germans bow to none, when there is hatred to be done" and would bring untold ruin upon Europe. He was the first German Jewish writer to proclaim in 1820 – as would many others after him – that his true fatherland was the German language "our most sacred possession" – a fatherland even for him who is denied one by malice and folly. Heine wrote these lines, at the age of twenty three, a few months after witnessing the Hep, Hep, riots. The critics hailed his poetry for its lyricism, but condemned his political prose for "patriotic reasons", alluding to his Jewish origin. Despairing of his future in Germany, he began to travel producing a series of travel pieces about Italy and England. Heine's travel pieces and political satire were very often banned in Austria and the Rhineland. In Frankfurt on his way to Italy in 1827 Heine met the journalist Ludwig Börne. Heine had admired him for years. Both were baptized but remained Jews "psychologically". Both were liberal polemicists and their theme, "liberty" made them "intellectual troublemakers" according to the majority of German's intellectuals.

With Heine and Börne, a new kind of liberal intellect soon decried as typically "Jewish" entered German life. In the words of Heinrich von Treitschke, a leading nineteenth-century German historian, "with Börne and Heine the eruption of the Jews in German literary history began, an ugly and infinite interlude." They soon became the major literary spokesmen of German liberal reform. Borne became one of the best known, and the most feared, liberal journalists of his era, and was among Europe's most challenging and humane social critics.

Borne was among the first of many German Jews who spent their lives in a ceaseless effort to civilize German nationalistic patriotism. Jews had a special role to play in the task of taming the “nationalist monster” as teachers of “cosmopolitanism”. “The whole world is their school, for this reason they are also teachers of liberty”, he maintained. Determined to cure the ills of “his poor, sick fatherland” Börne became the archetype of the liberal Jewish man of letters – fearless, undeterred by censorship, fines, and threats of arrest. In 1818 he founded a magazine *Die Wage* (Scales) as a vehicle for his views. Like “the trumpets that toppled the walls of Jericho, public opinion would bring down despotism and tyranny”, he believed.

In Paris, Heine voiced first foremost acute prophesies about German nationalism and militarism. He warned his German readers that they were their own worst enemies, and he warned his French readers that the Germans were not necessarily the idealistic thinkers, poets, and philosophers described by Madame de Staël in her famous writings, *On Germany*. As early as 1834 he saw the demons lurking under the surface of German life and warned the French, “A drama will be enacted in Germany compared to which the French revolution will seem like a harmless idyll. Christianity restrained the martial ardor of the Germans for a time, but it did not destroy it, once the restraining talisman is shattered, savagery will rise again... the mad fury of the berserk of which Nordic poets sing and speak... The old stony gods will rise from the rubble and rub the thousand year old dust from their eyes. Thor with the giant hammer will come forth and smash the gothic domes.”

In August 1840, war broke out between France and Germany. Napoleon III capitulated at Sedan but the French, and the people of Paris, fought on. The most critical anti-war voice in all of Germany was that of Leopold Sonnemann, the Jewish publisher of *Frankfurter Zeitung*, the leading liberal newspaper in Germany. Sonnemann detested Prussian militarism and predicted that the new unity achieved through the war would come at the expense of freedom.

Sonnemann grasped more clearly than most Germans the changing nature of German nationalism. Before the establishment of the new Reich, it had centered on unification and was the cornerstone of liberal ideology; with the establishment of the Reich, it became conservative, xenophobic, and worshipful of the militarists who had brought it about. In the Reichstag, Sonnemann spoke on issues of conscience and civility and many times was booed for his disregard of sacred national values. The attacks on Sonnemann would continue for almost a decade, Bismarck called him "a paid French agent". By and large, German Jews were glad to go along with the widely accepted cause of war: "French aggression".

On February 25, 1848, word of another French revolution reached university students in the university town of Heidelberg. The Jewish students never believed the revolution would spread onto German lands. To their surprise, the unrest that had started in Paris and Vienna spread to many German cities. The declared aim of the rebels was to put an end to despotism and to inequalities in the law. In the German lands, the rebels were demanding universal suffrage, freedom of the press, and general elections to an all-German democratic parliament.

Unrest spread from Vienna to Berlin where the Prussian King was negotiating with the revolutionaries, and within a week it reached, Mainz, Konstanz, Breslau, Frankfurt, Leipzig, Hamburg, Dresden, and M $\ddot{u}$ nich. In Vienna, the Emperor panicked. He dismissed the hated Chancellor Metternich in hopes of saving his throne.

Jews had only recently begun to emerge into the light after centuries of injustice; nearly everywhere they were among the rebels and in some cities among the leaders. To placate the rebels, German rulers rushed to appoint prominent liberals as ministers in the governments of Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, and W $\ddot{u}$ rtemberg. On April 1<sup>st</sup>, a pre-parliament met in Frankfurt to plan general elections to an all-German National Assembly. The delegates included prominent German Jews and in addition four recently converted Jews.

In the Spring of Nations, 1848, Frederick William IV of Prussia acceded to all demands, including general amnesty for political offences and violations of censorship. No sign of change was more dramatic than the shift in the situation of the Jews. The tiny principality of Hesse-Homburg was the first to grant them full equality; German principalities and free cities quickly followed.

The prospect of equality under the law, separation of church and state, universal suffrage, generated feverish enthusiasm, and support among young men, only a generation or two out of the ghetto. The economic situation of German Jews had changed substantially in the last four decades. The idea of *Buildung* had moved many to absorb German culture long before they gained full access to it socially.

A good half of the Jewish population still practiced the traditional rituals of Judaism; politically they tended to be conservative. The other half had become increasingly urban and secularized in recent years, increasingly, "German." For the first time in German history, the traditional passivity of Jews gave way to active political participation and street action. Roughly 80% of all Jewish journalists, doctors, and other professionals are thought to have supported the revolution in one way or another. The myth quickly spread in any case that Jews and other "riffraff" had started the Revolution.

In June, 230 Berliners were shot by Prussian troops; twenty one were said to be Jews, almost three times their percentage of the city population. The uprising forced the King to permit elections for a new, all-German National Assembly, to be convened in Frankfurt, and for a new Prussian parliament. In September 1848, the revolution was still in full swing in Vienna and the insurgents were in control of the city. The emperor had run for his life, but his troops were gathering to lay siege to the rebellious capital. In November, the emperor's forces marched back into the vanquished city.

Had the revolution not collapsed, the ratification of the proposed constitution would have meant the end of the long battle for Jewish emancipation.

The attempt failed, but the revolutionary years 1848-1849 were a crucial point for German Jewry. Three or four decades after almost the entire Jewish intellectual elite had disappeared, in the first wave of conversions, a new generation of real leaders had emerged. The revolution brought more Jews into the orbit of the new liberal parties. Yet Prussia remained the same – it had promised equality but in reality never implemented it.

### **Growing Assertiveness: 1850- 1900**

In 1850, the King, Frederick William IV, allowed a new constitution. It reinstated the doctrine of a “Christian state”. Jews would continue to be barred from high positions in government, the judiciary, universities, and state schools. With a few exceptions, these restrictions were reinstated elsewhere in Germany too, at least until 1868, when the state of Baden appointed Moritz Elstäter to be Minister of Finance, a position that he would hold for twenty five years. He was the first and only unconverted Jew appointed a cabinet minister until 1918.

It is indicative of the growing role of Jews in German life that the three leading ideologues of the mid 1800s were of Jewish origin: Johann Jacoby for liberals, Karl Marx for socialists, and Friedrich Julius Stahl for the conservatives. Born Joel Golson, in 1802, Stahl was the chief German ideologue of the Christian state in the post-1848 era. At seventeen, Stahl converted to Protestantism, and his new name reflected his character (steel). His public lectures at the university were social events attended by the distinguished audiences, including members of the royal family. Stahl articulated the rules and needs of the authoritarian Christian state. In his opinion, it went against the divine order to allow Jews any influence; they were entitled to full civil but not political rights; these he believed were a nation’s “dearest treasures”. To enjoy them, Jews had to first adopt the state religion.

With the approval in 1871 of a new emancipation law, valid for the entire Reich, German Jews seemed to have achieved, at least in theory, the object of

their long struggle. The new Reichstag abolished all restrictions on civil and political rights derived from "religious" differences. Legally, Jews were finally recognized as equals. With all of its flaws notwithstanding, the new Reich seemed to afford better protection to Jews than France; Austria, and even England.

This wellbeing was buttressed by the community's material advances. At the beginning of the century, most German Jews had been paupers; they were now of secure middle-class status. The majority of Jews were now city-dwellers. By 1867, 14.8 percent of high school students in Berlin were Jews. Thousands of them attended universities and entered professions. Three generations after Moses Mendelssohn, Jews were German in language, dress, and national sentiment. At mid-century, only four of Moses Mendelssohn's fifty-six descendants were still Jews. When the last of the four died, many of the Mendelssohn's attending the funeral witnessed a Jewish rite for the first time in their lives.

In October 1873, a stock market crash changed the state of affairs in one blow. The crash affected the whole continent, starting first in Austria. It provoked a wave of anti-Semitic agitation, unlike anything that Germany or France had seen since the Crusades or the Black Death. The main instigators of the new racism were failed aristocrats, conservative rabble rousers, and demagogic clergymen. The main object of their scorn and envy were the notorious Jewish *parvenu*. The crash ushered in Germany's longest economic recession. Jews were held responsible not only for the crisis but for capitalism itself.

The new anti-Semitism was indirectly facilitated by Bismarck himself. His silence was politically convenient. In 1879 Adolf Stöcker, a prominent Protestant theologian in Berlin and the official chaplain of the imperial court, joined the anti-Semitic pack, endowing it with some legitimacy, as did Heinrich von Treitschke, Prussia's leading historian. The sole prominent Christian who spoke out against the new anti-Semitism was Treitschke's fellow historian at the University of Berlin, Theodor Mommsen.

Then, the wave of rowdy anti-Semitism ebbed; things quieted down. The economic recession ended. The years of anxiety had not broken the Jewish faith in German culture; if anything it had grown stronger. Whatever discrimination that remained was deemed marginal, and in any case, unconstitutional.

### **The Triumph: 1901- 1912**

At the turn of the century, a young philosopher, a graduate of the University of Vienna, equally at home in German letters, and traditional Eastern European folk culture, suggested an alternative response to the “Jewish question”: neither conversion nor traditional separation but rather a conscious embrace of Jewish history as part of one’s German culture. The young man, Martin Buber introduced the Hasidism movement – a counterculture of pietistic eccentric mysticism outside of “official Judaism” practiced in Poland, Hungary, and the Ukraine. To enlightened Jewish and non-Jewish Germans, he popularized this movement as no one in the West had done before. Buber seems to have begun collection Hasidic tales as a teenager in Galicia and, with assistance from his wife, he translated them from Yiddish and Hebrew into German. His *Tales of Rabbi Nachman* (1906) and *Legends of the Baal-Shem (Tov)* (1908) were critical and popular successes. In trying to bridge the old gulf between German and Eastern European Jews, Buber hoped to expand and enrich the possibilities of German Jewish identity. Buber identified himself as a Zionist but in a cultural rather than a political sense, he pressed for cultural nationalism; however he never implied the domination of others. Buber was responsible, in many ways, for the spiritual awakening of German Jewry, and the contributed to the return of pride of ordinary German Jews in their remarkable history.

The increased political influence of Jews – because of their wealth and their roles in the arts, science, and the press – also contributed to growing confidence among them, as did the rise of the Social Democrats, who militated openly for human rights. There was a new willingness on the part of Jewish

organizations to engage in direct political action. In March 1893, German Jews united to establish a national lobby group, the *Centralverein* (Central Union of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith).

Owing mostly to declining birth rates, Jews were now a shrinking minority. They continued to believe in their ultimate integration. What were the alternatives? In most other European countries, prejudice and discrimination seemed equally or more prevalent. In Western Europe, anti-Semitism was generally thought to be most violent in France, this belief was generated by the trial of Captain Alfred Dreyfus, the only Jew on the general staff of the French army. The Dreyfus Affair convulsed France for more than a decade. The violent upheaval reconfirmed German Jews in their patriotic fervor.

At the turn of the century, middle-class German Jews prospered. Grand synagogues rose in the main cities. A few of the synagogues were far too large for the needs of the increasingly secular middle and upper middle-class congregations, whose true house of worship were the opera houses and the concert halls. No other class in Germany, or the rest of Europe, carried the love of arts to as great lengths as the middle and upper-middle class Jews in Germany. Richard Wagner's 1850 anti-Semitic essay, "The Jews in Music", did not deter Jews from flocking to his operas. The more affluent art patrons among the Jewish bourgeoisie collected Flemish and Renaissance masters and the works of Goya, Monet, Picasso, and Degas. Many Jews were now self employed in commerce and related trades. Some were bankers. The most important banks, the Reichsbank, the Deutsche Bank, the Dresdner and the Darmstädter, had been founded or were still run by Jewish directors.

Apart from the banks, several of the new industries – medium and large sized chemical factories, metalworks, electrical, smelting, printing plants, and mills – had been funded by enterprising Jews. They established the first German aircraft factory and shoe department chains, and were among the first to introduce American production methods.

The wealth, prominence, and intellectual keenness of these men brought them into personal contact with the Kaiser. Some came to be known as the *Kaiserjuden* (Kaiser's Jews), a slightly derogatory term supposedly coined by the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann. He despised the *Kaiserjuden* for their assimilation and for being more German than the Germans, superpatriotic, and eagerly following the masters of Germany.

German Jews were shocked but not entirely surprised by the ferocity of the Russian pogroms of 1881. An unstoppable flood of frightened, penniless Jewish refugees streamed across the eastern border in search of safety. German Jews did not welcome them, but contributed generously towards their upkeep and eventual emigration. The revulsion felt by native born Jews at the sight of the Easterners, the *Ostjuden*, reflected the fear of being identified with them. More than a million Jews, some put the figure as high as two, are said to have crossed Germany between 1882 and 1914 on their way to the United States, Latin America, and England.

The combination of material strength with cultural wealth in Germany was unparalleled on the Continent. In scientific research German universities surpassed those of other European countries. The contribution of Jews to this preeminence was enormous. A surprisingly large number of Jewish scientists attracted students from all over the world to their seminars and institutes. Best known among them were Albert Einstein and Paul Erlich, who discovered chemotherapy. More Jews than ever entered journalism. Others became publishers, playwrights, novelists, poets, drama critics, gallery owners, theater directors, actors and actresses, concert pianists, conductors, sculptors, and painters.

Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism, was deeply perturbed by the Jewish love affair with Germany. As a prominent journalist in Vienna, he had come to believe that the resolution of the "Jewish question" lay in founding a Jewish state. He also believed that Germany would facilitate this. In the end,

nothing came of it. As a leading Viennese journalist, Herzl first conceived the idea about the national Jewish state for Jews while in Paris, after witnessing the public degradation of Alfred Dreyfus and hearing the mob outside the iron gates of the Ecole Militaire shouting, “Death to the Jews”.

There was a strong opposition to Herzl’s Zionism, especially in Germany. Yet the younger more radical generation, after 1909, changed the passive nature of German Zionism. Influenced by Buber and his cult of authenticity, the new radicals sought a “fully” Jewish way of living.

The chief spokesman of the new radicalism were Richard Lichtheim and Kurt Blumenfeld, both from wealthy, well integrated families. Assimilation had been in vain and emancipation had essentially failed, they declared. For Blumenfeld, Zionism represented strength of character, and the denial of past passive attitudes imbedded in the German Jewish soul. He sensed the coming of great disaster, he was able to smell rotteness and putrefication, where others only experienced well-being.

According to his close friend Hannah Arendt, Blumenfeld claimed that Zionism “was Germany’s gift to its Jews”. He was primarily embraced by younger Jews who were rebelling against their bourgeoisie parents.

The general German election in 1912 showed that most German voters disapproved of all racist politics. The conservative right, which campaigned against “Jew lovers”, “Jewish money”, and “Jewish owned newspapers” suffered serious setbacks. The Social Democrats, who had vigorously opposed anti-Semitic “Junkers” and priests, Knights and Christian Saints, won an astonishing 35 percent of the popular vote.

### **The Tragedy: 1912 - 1945**

Two years later, the First World War broke out. The liberal euphoria evaporated. The 1912 elections notwithstanding, the military, the ultrapatriotic voices in the press and in the palace had their say. More than ten thousand young

German Jews volunteered for war service. Max Reinhardt, the director who revolutionized German theatre, announced that the war was necessary in defense of German culture. Albert Einstein was one of the few Jews who did not share this view; he loathed German militarism. He was aghast at the headlong plunge towards war and the widespread readiness of leading intellectuals to welcome it. Nobody anticipated that the war would bring about the collapse of civilization in Germany, the rise of Nazis, Fascists, and Communist totalitarianism, and more than one hundred million victims.

Walter Rathenau, the future Foreign Minister in charge the post-war reconstruction, was one of the few who, with remarkable foresight, warned that the war would not be short, but would go on for years, and at terrible human and material cost. In the prevailing atmosphere of widespread enthusiasm for war, Rathenau failed to convert others to his views. Millions volunteered with pure joy. The war seemed like a major holiday, as an opportunity to rise above the dreary routine of daily life.

The Kaiser promised changes in the law, giving Germany's Jews hope for full integration. In a series of memoranda to the German high command, the veteran Zionist leader Max Bodenheimer proclaimed Germany's imperial aims consonant with Jewish interests. Martin Buber, celebrated the war as a liberating quasi-redemptive, communal experience. Stefan Zweig, an avowed pacifist who claimed he would never touch a gun, was thrilled as most other Austrian and German Jewish writers were to be living at this "wonderful" moment. The budding novelist Arnold Zweig, shelved his pacifism and defined himself as a German militarist.

There were few, very few, independent voices protesting the all-out embrace of war. Sigmund Freud's early enthusiasm for war was short lived. Some primal force must be at work, he surmised, a hatred of life or a lack of talent for living. It was difficult, even dangerous to oppose the war.

By 1916, little was left of the war ecstasy, except the rhetoric of conservative politicians and some poems appearing in the daily papers. The Social Democrats' party discipline crumbled. By September 1918, even war enthusiasts felt that Germany's defeat was inevitable.

The result of four years of misery and bloodshed – 5,000,000 Germans dead, two millions orphans, one million invalids – was the revolution of 1918. Before its total demise, the old regime nominated the Social Democratic leader Friedrich Ebert as Chancellor. The Kaiser fled from Berlin to Holland on Nov. 10<sup>th</sup> and there announced his abdication.

Nowhere were Jewish revolutionaries so visible and prominent as in Bavaria. Foremost among them was Kurt Eisner. He was appointed prime minister of a new Republic of Bavaria, and dominated the local scene until his assassination in Feb 1919.

The propaganda assaults on Eisner's Bavarian "Jewish republic" grew steadily. On February 21, 1919, as Eisner walked to the newly elected Bavarian Diet to announce his resignation he was shot and killed. The end came in May. White guards joined forces with federal troops sent by the Berlin government and engaged in a bloodbath. No leader of the revolution was spared. The revolution of 1918 fused old myths with deadly new ones. In addition to "polluting" German culture, Jews were now blamed for the military defeat and considered part of the worldwide Bolshevik conspiracy to undermine Western civilization. Hitler did not have to invent those myths: by the summer of 1919, they were already in place.

The Weimar Republic, named for the city where its constitution was adopted in 1919, began in a flurry of hope. Despite turmoil, and uncertainty it was a showpiece of intense creativity until the very end. Art, sciences, and advanced thoughts flowered as never before, and as nowhere else in modern Europe. In literature, music, film, theater, and design Weimar evoked a marvelous sense of new, the vanguard admired to this day. From the beginning through, the new

regime was mercilessly under attack, despised, and derided by political extremists on both the left and the right.

In the new Germany, Jews were finally equal not only in theory but in practice. German universities, also finally opened up their faculties at all levels. Sigmund Freud won the coveted Goethe prize of the city of Frankfurt. Berlin, despite its political instability, was the epicenter of Weimar culture, a city unlike any other in Europe at the time. Of the five or six leading Expressionist playwrights, three – Franz Werfel, Ernst Toller, and Carl Sternheim were Jews. Hamburger banker, Carl Melchior, was one of the two Jewish diplomats who had negotiated for less crushing economic terms in the Treaty of Versailles. Millions of people were badly disorientated – some became outright beggars – by impoverishment and the demoralizing loss of social status caused by hyperinflation. Political murders multiplied. The assassinations were mostly committed by right-wing fanatics.

In the aftermath of the Soviet Bavarian government, the newly formed German National Socialist Workers' Party elected a thirty year old war veteran named Adolph Hitler as chairman. The NSDAP platform described Jews as vampires that had to be eliminated from Germany, if possible by legal means, but ultimately through violence, deportation, and death.

On June 24, 1922, Rathenau was killed as he was returning home from a meeting with a group of businessmen. His fate was sealed ever since he was appointed foreign minister in February. General Erich von Ludendorff, the head of the extreme right-wing splinter group, insinuated that “the Jewish prince” had sabotaged the war effort. The murder, the 354<sup>th</sup> political assassination committed by the right-wing extremists, shook the republic. On Nov 9<sup>th</sup> Hitler proclaimed the end of the “criminal regime in Berlin” and a formation of a new government headed by him, Ludendorff, and several local notables, and then marched with a few thousand supporters through downtown München.

The (putsch) failed and Hitler was confined to comfortable quarters in Landsberg citadel, where he found the time and peace to write “Mein Kampf” and receive his followers. Hitler was freed in less than a year. The first volume of Hitler’s “Mein Kampf” was published in 1925. Few people read it. The presidential election of 1925 was won by former field marshal Paul von Hindenburg. Republicans voted for him in the hope that his prestige among the conservatives would assure the republic a stability it could not expect from one of the Social Democratic or centrist politicians. The 1929 Great Depression changed the scenery completely. In 1930, five million people were out of work, and in 1931, six million.

There was misery everywhere, even as Germany boasted the world’s largest airships and Europe’s most advanced industries, fastest trains, and luxury ocean liners, most up-to date hospitals, and best symphony orchestras. The slump gave Hitler the opportunity. In the 1930 elections the NSDAP became the second largest party after the Social Democrats. First reactions to this Nazi upsurge were mixed. Many high ranking politicians were confident that the Nazi party would never come to power. The situation worsened, and the year 1930 saw the beginning of the end of parliamentary democracy in Germany. Civil war was looming. Nazi and Communist militias clashed on the streets and Jews were molested by Nazi hoodlums.

The moment was one of paradox: of surging Nazism, yet increasing assimilation and the growing prominence of Jews in every domain of Weimar culture. Max Lieberman was president of the Prussian Academy of Arts, and Max Reinhard showered with honorary doctorates from the universities of Kiel, Frankfurt and Thuringen, directed Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s Christian morality play “Everyman” on the steps of Salzburg’s Cathedral. Jews mistook such prominence as an indicator of their successful integration. But the Nazi share of the vote continued to grow. As more and more intellectuals attended Hitler’s

rallies, true liberals felt increasingly isolated. Wild street violence erupted. Jewish storefronts were smashed.

On September 12, 1931, in what was known as Kurfürstendam pogrom, Nazi thugs fell on Jews leaving synagogue on the eve of the Jewish New Year. On July 31, 1931, the eve of the election, the liberals cautioned the electorate to consider the consequences of a Nazi victory; yet the Nazis more than doubled their votes.

With 230 delegates they emerged as a dominant party in the Reichstag. On January 30, 1933, Hindenburg gave in to his advisors and appointed Hitler chancellor of a new cabinet in which Nazis ministers were in the minority by two seats. Hitler had given his word that the Nazis would remain a minority in any future cabinet. A few hours before Hitler's investiture, a torchlight parade of brownshirts marched for hours through the Brandenburg Gate to the nearby chancellery.

That was the beginning and the rest followed in rapid succession: Jewish-owned shops were boycotted, Jews were expelled from the National Academy and from government positions, schools, research institutes and universities. They were also banned from practicing law and other professions, and were excluded from all national societies, such as the Association of Blind War Veterans. More than fifty professors were expelled from the University of Göttingen, among them the Nobel laureate James Frank, and the future laureate Max Born.

In May 1933, more than fifty thousand books were burned opposite the University of Under den Linden where students in boots and brown SA uniforms threw books into the fires, and stood in honour guard formation. In Berlin, the Nazi propaganda chief, Joseph Goebbels, led the proceedings, proclaiming, "the end of the age of Jewish intellectualism". Fifty thousand Jews left Germany in 1933, thirty thousand in 1934, and twenty thousand in 1935. The rest remained, at least for a while, unwilling or unable to leave. Among those who stayed, suicides were rampant.

After a brief spell in a Gestapo prison, Hannah Arendt decided to leave Germany. According to Amos Elon, she spent her last evening in Berlin reciting Greek poetry with Kurt Blumenfeld, her Zionist mentor. As her train out of Berlin sped south through the rolling countryside, in the opposite direction taken two centuries earlier by the boy Moses Mendelssohn on foot on his way to fame, a circle was closing. German Jewry, even in the cattle wagons on their way to the gas chambers of Poland, still remained German patriots. The rest is well known to all of you, the doom and the destruction of German and European Jewry.

Thank You.

## THE CONDEMNED MASTERS OF THE GHETTOS

*Paper delivered to students at St. Pauls High School, on May 24, 1995, as part of a series of three lectures on the Holocaust. This particular lecture is dedicated to the memory of Gertrude Weiss.*

**M**y research into ghettos and judenrats was supplemented by my own experiences in the Ghetto of Drohobycz, in Eastern Poland in the years 1941-1942.<sup>1</sup> The existence of judenrats – hundreds of Jewish councils in various Eastern European ghettos – is a complex issue, difficult for an American and Canadian born persons to comprehend. I would like to begin my discussion with a caution against over-generalizing just what the judenrats were or represented. The importance of local conditions and the diversity of the personalities of the leaders in the Jewish communities created different internal structures. And yet, the story of all ghettos must be read as one history.

Jewish perception and reactions were remarkably similar across the occupied territories, despite the relative isolation of the communities and their councils from each other. There are always questions asked about the issue of councils' collaborations with the Germans and I hope this presentation will give you some answers.

Jewish ghettos in Poland were established in haste but with great efficiency. Lodz, Warsaw, Lublin, Radom and Lwow were established in 1940-1941. By 1942, all the Jews in Poland were confined to ghettos. The Warsaw Ghetto was surrounded by eleven miles of walls. Krakow was walled; Lodz

Ghetto was sealed, enclosed by wooded fences and barbed wire. Radom, Chelm and Kielce were open ghettos. From the German point of view, so called "Jewish residential quarters" were holding pens for the subjugated population with no rights. Jewish ghetto labour was to be exploited; goods and property were to be confiscated.

Moving large numbers of widely dispersed people into ghettos was a chaotic and unnerving process. In every Polish city, the ghettos were over crowded. The Warsaw Ghetto, which occupied 2.4% of city land, contained 30% of the city's population. The closed ghettos cut the Jews off completely from the population at large. This separation prevented the Jews from coming into contact with non-Jews and left them in a state of isolation. Ghetto life was one of squalor, hunger, disease and despair. The smuggler's motto, "eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" was only too simple. You did not die fast enough. You first went through the process of humiliation and degradation. There were serious public health problems. Epidemic diseases were rampant, typhus the most dreaded.

Dead bodies were left on the streets until the burial society came to take them away. Beggars were everywhere. Most unbearable was the uncertainty of life. Ghetto residents never knew what tomorrow would bring. Governance of the ghetto rested with the judenrat, Nazi-appointed officials, to councils and charged them with controlling the ghetto's municipal life. The duties of the council were: to furnish labourers demanded by the Germans for special assignments outside the ghetto and to take charge of ghetto workshops, for which cheap or unpaid labour was to be conscripted. These workshops produced needed material for the war effort (such as uniforms, ammunition boxes, shoes, brushes, ammunition baskets.) The judenrat supervised the distribution of food, organized and supervised health services (nurseries, orphanages, homes for the aged, clinics, hospitals) and administered other phases of ghetto life (such as records, education and welfare).

The Jewish councils were set up by the Gestapo leaders. Their basic idea was to make them into instruments by which the Nazis could establish full control

of the destiny of the Jews. Originally, the members of the councils were community leaders who had functioned effectively at the head of Jewish organizations in the pre-war period. In the course of time, some of these former community leaders were replaced with more accommodating newcomers, selected or approved by the German authorities.

Dr. Hannah Arendt charges that the cooperation of the Jewish councils aided the Nazis in their “Final Solution” program and that, without Jewish help in administrative and police work, there would have been either chaos or a severe drain on governance manpower. I don’t agree because the German program of the destruction of Jewish life had a priority over the war efforts. Jews themselves were not in a position to influence it. Dr. Jacob Robinson, an outstanding researcher on the Holocaust, states that the basic strategy adopted by the overwhelming majority of Jewish councils during the period of “Final Solution” was based on the assumption that Nazi Germany would ultimately be defeated and not all the inmates of the ghetto would perish.

Two assumptions underlay the council’s universal policy of procrastination: first, that Nazi Germany would be defeated, and second, that since all Jews probably could not be saved, ways and means had to be found to rescue as many Jews as possible.

The strategic and tactical consequences of these assumptions can be grouped under the general three-part statement:

- ◆ the councils took pains to offer no open defiance to the Nazi masters;
- ◆ the councils practically everywhere accepted the philosophy “rescue through work”; and
- ◆ the councils used bribery as an aid to survival by corrupting the corrupter.

Isaiah Trunk, in his path-breaking book *Judenrat*, underscores the fact that the members of the councils were not Nazi sympathizers; that although they

were ambitious and deluded, they were not and could not be regarded as a German institution. They were in short Jews and could not fail to perceive the fate of Jewry as their fate as well.

The councils were totally subordinate to and dependant in their relations with the Germans. And Nazi officials knew it was in their interest that the authority of the Jewish council be upheld and strengthened under all circumstances.

Jewish officials like the Germans in charge, could make use of coercion and take advantage of helplessness. Compliance and acquiescence were assured by Jewish *Ordnungsdienst* (Order Service), which had the power to make arrests and guard prisoners. The Jewish councils could make appeals to the German supervisory authorities in their own locality but could not carry messages directly to regional governors or their staff.

Councils acquired a stake in establishing themselves as the sole representation of the Jewish population, *vis á vis* German authorities. The only island of Jewish freedom was located in the courts, where disputes between Jewish litigants were settled by Jewish judges, without German interference. The Ghettos were consequently political entities with governmental attributes, larger and fuller than the social, cultural and religious functions carried out by the *kehillah* in the pre-war communities

Soon however Jewish councils everywhere came face to face with the basic paradox inherent in their role as preservers of Jewish life: they existed in the framework of German destruction. They could not save Jews indefinitely while at the same time obeying the Germans. The Jewish leadership did not fight the Germans, it seldom fought the orders given, but in its distress made numerous offerings of goods, money, labour, and finally lives. This remained, until the end, the strategy of first resort.

The rescue-through-work strategy, that reflected German dependence on the product of Jewish manufactures, played an important role in the ghettos of

Lodz, Vilna, and Chestochowa. This strategy led to the councils' construction of fairly large-scale industries. The factories bought time for tens of thousands, but the Jews were playing the type of game in which the outcome was always under German control.

Mass deportation forced the Jews to the extreme ends in the spectrum of alternatives. There was no longer any middle ground between open opposition and total complicity. Jewish communities were forced to choose the one or the other. Later on, I'll mention some examples of councils with positive attitudes toward resistance. But, the predominant pattern was the active implementation of German directives. Thus, the councils themselves organized confiscations and forced labour.

In some ghettos, the councils themselves delivered the victims to transport. Germans would frequently ask for only a certain number of deportees. It was such requests that ignited internal Jewish argument. It was rationalized that if 1,000 Jews were given up 10,000 would be saved but if none were sacrificed all would be lost. In delivering a part of the community, the councils could also choose the less worthy. Because of their compliance strategy, the judenrats could be dangerous organizations precisely when they functioned most smoothly. Efficiency and order could intensify deprivation and suffering. Thus many of the virtues of the Jewish ghetto governments became vices. Responsibility was turned into unresponsiveness, and salvage into loss.

If social and economic policies in normal societies can have a large range of effects on large groups of people seeking comforts and security, the internal measures and practices of Ghetto councils were bound to have an immediate and massive impact on a population hovering between survival and death.

We may safely assume that the meager resources at the disposal of the councils were strained. There is no doubt that the ghettos as a whole were no triumph of social equality and economic justice. The ghettos were the scene of all forms of corruption, including favouritism, bribery, and nepotism. Moreover, in

the critical departments of food, labour and taxes, prevailing regulations were particularly harsh for the most destitute families.

Czerniakow's diary shows that the Chairman excused the well to do from forced labour for a fee, to finance compensation to poor families whose men were digging ditches for the Germans. In retrospect, the tiers of privilege should not surprise us that much. Ghetto life rewarded special talents such as smuggling or wheeling and dealing. It accommodated the more unusual skills of doctors and artisans or people who could speak German. It only accommodated them but could not save them.

The ghettos protected their rabbis as well, for Jews did cling to the past and also approached their most extraordinary problems with all the traditional means. Jewish bureaucrats who ran the ghettos during their formation, and who presided at their destruction, were granted temporary reprieve – they were deported last.

### GHETTO LEADERS

I will now discuss the personalities of Ghetto leaders, those known to me through research, including the man I knew as the Chairman of the Judenrat in Drohobycz, Poland.

Adam Czerniakow, (a lawyer by profession) the Elder of the Warsaw Ghetto, was the sort of man who did not want to draw a salary as long as there was not enough money to pay his staff. In the midst of starvation, he shunned elaborate meals – eating soup for lunch in his office. During the construction of the Ghetto boundaries, he refused a German offer that would have allowed him to keep his apartment on a street from which the Jews were being expelled. In July 1942, when he realized that the Jews were going to be deported en masse, he took his own life. Czerniakow, as well as most of the other Jewish leaders, acted on the premise that there was a future. His last words were a tragic confession of failure

“the SS wants me to kill children with my own hands.” It was something he could not do.

Czeraniakow viewed himself as having taken over the impossible task of keeping people alive – only to work from morning to night against increasingly unfavourable odds. He lived through daily nightmares of blocked funds, labour columns, apartment allocations, providing furs for the Germans and soup for the poor. There was hardly anything that could be put off – everything was urgent.

In February 1942, when most of the Warsaw Ghetto had not yet starved to death, he could feel a sense of vindication. He, like hundreds more on Jewish Councils all over Eastern Europe, had fallen into a cadence that did not allow for prolonged reflection about the real meaning of the Ghettos in the Nazi scheme of things. It was a trap into which the Jewish leadership slipped and from which it could not extricate itself.

Even in death, Czeraniakow was a controversial figure. Those close to him saw his suicide as an act of personal courage that expressed his integrity and sense of public responsibility. Those active in the Ghetto’s militant underground were less charitable. Emanuel Ringelblum, the chronicler of the Warsaw Ghetto, wrote, “Suicide of Czeraniakow – too late, a sign of weakness, should have called for resistance – a weak man.”

The Lodz Ghetto, with Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski as Chairman, was forced by Germans to keep order among the starving and desperate population. Lodz was the first Polish ghetto to be sealed. It was also the last to remain in existence, operating until 1944. Rumkowski developed what he believed to be a long-term strategy for survival – salvation through work. In the midst of squalor, disease, starvation, and the stench of raw sewage, Lodz Jews got up early in the morning and went to work, both within the confines of the Ghetto and in work details outside. Yet despite its impressive productivity and the profits made by the Ghetto’s industries, the Nazis were not content to let Lodz remain a working ghetto.

During the first five months of 1942, fifty-five thousand Jews and five thousand gypsies were deported and murdered in gas vans at Chelmno.

Rumkowski was informed of their fate. Two thousand patients were deported to Chelmno from Lodz Hospital, including 400 children and 80 pregnant women. Rumkowski acknowledges his responsibility. He said he received an uncompromising order and carried it out himself to prevent others from doing it.

In early September 1942, the Nazis demanded that all the children and all old people be surrendered. Rumkowski complained, "The decree can not be revoked. It can only be slightly lessened by our carrying it out calmly. Rumkowski was consistent when he said he must cut off the limbs to save the body itself.

For a while it seemed that Rumkowski's strategy had worked. During the period of time between September 1942 and May 1944 when the other ghettos of Poland were being emptied, there were no further deportations to the extermination camps from Lodz. With 90% of its starving residents working, Lodz now took on the atmosphere not of a ghetto but a slave-labour camp.

But even Lodz did not escape the "Final Solution". On June 23, 1944, deportation to Chelm resumed and to Auschwitz-Birkenau. In January 1945 when Soviet troupes liberated Lodz, only 877 Jews emerged from the beginning population of 164,000.

Rumkowski himself was deported to Auschwitz, in August 1944, where he was murdered. Whatever judgment history renders, it is clear that Rumkowski's power was limited. He could not control conditions or initiate policy. The power lay with those for whom the "Final Solution" was the ultimate priority.

The stories of Adam Czeruiakow and Mordechai Chiam Rumkowski exemplify the agonizing situation of German appointed Jewish councils in Nazi occupied Eastern Europe. They presided, whether they knew it or not – and some did know – over doomed communities.

## KOVNO GHETTO

Kovno Ghetto was established and sealed in August 1941. Unlike the Jewish councils of other Eastern European ghettos, which were appointed by the Germans, the Kovno Judenrat was elected and supported by the ghetto population. In turn, the council aided all factions in the ghetto, including the underground.

In Kovno, the Jewish police directly assisted the partisans. The Kovno Judenrat was headed by a prominent physician, Elchanan Elkes, who accepted the office when the community insisted on it. In 1942, word of the fate of Polish Jews reached Kovno through a non-Jew courier for the underground. From then on, the members of the Judenrat understood they would lead the battle for survival even without knowing if their efforts could postpone or prevent the day of destruction. Despite the Judenrat's best efforts, only 2,000 Jews (8 percent of the Ghetto population of 25,000) survived.

In October 1943, just before his deportation, Dr. Elchanan Elkes of Kovno Lithuania, wrote in his last will and testament, "There is a desert inside me. My soul is scorched. I am naked and empty. There are no words in my mouth."

## THERESIENSTAD GHETTO

Theresienstad was a ghetto, a concentration camp, and a way station for Western-Jewry en route to Auschwitz between 1941-1945. Of the 144,000 Jews sent to Theresienstad, 33,000 (almost one in four) died there and 88,000 were deported to Auschwitz or other *Vernichtungs* camps. By the war's end, only 19,000 were alive. German Jews surviving in Theresienstad were unaware of what was in store for them. Some arrived there with top hats and in lace dresses. Some

paid for the privilege of going there, innocently asking for rooms with a southern exposure. Conditions were harsh.

At times, 90,000 Jews lived in a space vacated by 7,000. In 1942, 15,891 people died, more than half of the daily average population of the transient ghetto. Theresienstad was the home – and the death place – of some of the most prominent Czech, Austrian and German artists, writers, jurists, diplomats, musicians and professors. Their presence gave rise to rich cultural life in the Ghetto. On September 28, 1944 the final deportation began. A month later, only a small crew of Jews remained.

Because some of the Danish Jews were sent to Theresienstad, the Danes persisted in their demands for an accounting of their citizen's fate and insisted that the Red Cross visit the Ghetto. To quash rumours about the killing centres, the Nazis permitted the visit. In the week before the visit, deportation from the camp intensified. The Ghetto was beautified. Gardens were planted, houses painted, sidewalks washed, a building was refitted to serve as a social centre, concert hall, and synagogue.

Paul Epstein, the head of the Jewish Council of Elders, greeted the guests in black suit and top hat. A café created for the occasion was filled with customers. When the delegation came to the soccer field, a goal was scored on cue. The hoax succeeded so well that a propaganda film showing how well Jews were living under the protection of the Third Reich was made at Theresienstad. When the filming was over, most of the cast, including nearly all children were deported to Auschwitz.

### **DROHOBYCZ GHETTO**

Maciek Rosenblatt, a lawyer by profession, was a tall very handsome man in his forties in 1941. Full of life and humour, friendly, intelligent and

possibly brilliant, a Zionist, he never did any harm to a Jew before he became the Chairman of the Judenrat, in Drohobycz.

In the beginning, his role was that of an administrator of the Jewish community until the Nazis asked for the supply of children, sick and old people for deportation. At that time the destination was unknown, the reason given by the SS was the overcrowding of the Ghetto and much better conditions for Jews was to be found in the working camps.

After a while, the truth conveyed in a message from a Ukrainian peasant reached the Ghetto population.

Maciek Rosenblatt escaped with his family to Warsaw where he hoped to survive the war as a gentile. Through an extensive search by the Gestapo, SS, and the police he was found, brought back to Drohobycz and tortured to disclose his contact. Then he was killed with his wife and children.

### **“RESCUE THROUGH WORK”**

At the start, the Polish Jews viewed ghettoization as the culmination of German plans. They failed to think in terms of a further more drastic stage in the destruction process. But at the same time was there one human being capable of foreseeing the German plans of gassing and burning the entire Jewish population?

In the remaining ghettos of 1943, the issue of life and death could no longer be avoided. The alternatives were brought forth and discussed: one could plan escape, prepare resistance, or redouble effort to produce goods for the Germans. Even in this drastic situation, there was a tendency to steer away from methodical dispersal or organized battle. While it was not feasible for the entire population to participate in acts of defiance, it was possible for everyone to suffer the consequences.

It was how the doctrine of “rescue through work” became paramount from Krakau to Vilna. It was, in more ways than one, the strategy of least

resistance, and it was founded on the assumption that Germans were rational and would not obliterate a work force that was engaged in so much war production for them. The thought was of course a misconception. Today we know that the Germans expected much more than “general government” from their Jewish deputies. It was German policy to transfer to Jewish middlemen a large part of the physical and psychological burdens of destroying millions of men, women and children.

First, the Jewish councils handed over the money, then they supplied the labour force, and at the end they delivered human beings. We see now that Jewish ghettos provided administrative services and were social and economic entities. They were also a form of organized self-destruction. Once more, it should be emphasized that Jewish councils were not the willful accomplices of Germans. Yet, in building the institutions of orderly ghettos, they could not help serving their enemy. Jewry became, at least passively, a participant in its own undoing.

Jews were also engaged in a more active and virulent mode of self-destruction when their police were employed in the enforcement of German orders.

Much attention has always been directed on the role of Jewish police, the semi-uniformed auxiliaries, who participated in the deportations. The “Order Service” exercised all the expected functions of a regular police department such as traffic control and the pursuit of petty thieves. Furthermore, ---it collected ghetto taxes, was responsible for enforcement of compulsory labour, and was involved in the seizure of families selected for deportation.

Yet the very composition of the Order Services deepens the paradox of Jews acting against Jew. Whereas some of the recruits may well have been drawn from the underworld, a large number were fairly well educated and many were idealistic.

In isolated occasions, police aided in escapes or even engaged in physical resistance, but most of the time they were the most conspicuous Jewish

instruments in the German destructive machine. It was hard for the Jews to take a Jewish policeman seriously and often they were trusted by their fellow Jews. However, this very trust in the Jewish police resulted in one of the greatest moral disappointments of the Holocaust.

#### FINAL REFLECTIONS

I have illuminated the lives of three leaders in this tragic period of time, Rumkowski, Czerniakow and Elkes. They were different men in their backgrounds and ideas, but in the end all three declined to save themselves after they had failed to save their people.

I would like at this point to add some personal remarks. People who did not live in the ghettos cannot understand the realities of life in the ghettos, just as they cannot grasp other things about the Holocaust. Many times I was asked by my friends and relatives whether we really were so blinded so as not to realize what was in store for us? For example, "Why did we still carry our belongings during the deportation that ended in death?" "Why did we endure so much suffering on our last journey?" "Why was there no revolt, and why did we allow ourselves to be led like sheep to the slaughter?"

Such questions could come only from people who did not witness these happenings. They were only told what had happened, or had listened to stories emanating from the ghetto that were usually distorted. He who did not himself watch the happenings in the ghettos, he who was not witness to the theatre of horror, cannot understand or perceive the conditions under which these people lived, nor will he grasp the lies used by the Germans to deceive Jews, even on the eve of their death.

If only those who ask these questions could have spent a few hours in the atmosphere of *aktions* where at every few steps someone was shot to death or people were humiliated, beaten and degraded. If they had seen the behind-the-

scenes crimes, if they had watched the executions. If they had seen how terror was whipped up and fear was instilled by indiscriminately shooting without mercy. Or how, at other times, the captors gave false hope to the deportees – that they would survive. And how the Nazis treated with vengeance the family members of those who had escaped, or performed an act of sabotage, or showed the slightest resistance. Those people would no longer ask, “Why?”

Each inhabitant of the ghettos entertained a spark of hope for survival. “Survival” was a word of great meaning, in those days. What more potent words are there for a slave than “freedom” and “survival”, in times of mass murder? The hidden thought wrought miracles; gave super-human strength and endurance to people. Because of such thoughts, people gritted their teeth and swallowed degradation. Not the fear of death but the will to live was predominant.

This was my impression now about the people and the events I encountered during my years in the Ghetto. Except for a few individuals, I did not see people crying. People calmly looked death in the eye, resigned but also proud. The Germans did not succeed in seeing our people show sorrow or ask for mercy. They lived and died with dignity.

*Son of Man, go into the streets.  
Soak in the unconscious terror of the newborn babies about to be  
slaughtered. Be strong. Keep your heart from breaking so you'll  
be able to describe, carefully and clearly what happened in the  
Ghetto during the first days of September in the year one  
thousand, nine hundred and Forty-two.*

– Josef Zelkowich, Journalist  
Lodz Ghetto, 1942

Thank you

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<sup>1</sup> The author used the following sources in preparation for this lecture: Iseah Trunk, *Judenrat*; Adam Czerniakow, *The Warsaw Diary*; Leonard Tushnet, *The Pavement of Hell*.

# **POETRY OUT OF THE ASHES**

*SMOKE*

*THROUGH CREMATORIUM CHIMNEYS*

*A JEW CURLS TOWARD THE GOD OF HIS FATHERS.*

*AS SOON AS THE SMOKE IS GONE,*

*UPWARD CLUSTER HIS WIFE AND SON.*

*UPWARD, TOWARD THE HEAVENS,*

*SACRED SMOKE WEEPS, YEARNs.*

*GOD – WHERE YOU ARE –*

*WE ALL DISAPPEAR.*

*JACOB GLATSTEIN*

*How?*

*HOW AND WITH WHAT WILL YOU FILL  
YOUR GOBLET ON THE DAY OF LIBERATION?  
IN YOUR JOY, ARE YOU READY TO FEEL  
THE DARK SCREAM OF YOUR PAST  
WHERE SKULLS OF DAYS CONGEAL  
IN A BOTTOMLESS PIT?*

*YOU WILL LOOK FOR A KEY TO FIT  
YOUR JAMMED LOCKS;  
LIKE BREAD YOU WILL BITE THE STREETS  
AND THINK: BETTER THE PAST,  
AND TIME WILL DRILL YOU QUIETLY  
LIKE A CRICKET CAUGHT IN A FIST.*

*AND YOUR MEMORY WILL BE LIKE  
AN OLD BURIED CITY,  
YOUR ETERNAL GAZE WILL CRAWL  
LIKE A MOLE, LIKE A MOLE —————*

*ABRAHAM SUTZKEVER*



III. RECONCILING THE PAST  
WITH THE FUTURE

III. RECONCILING THE PAST  
WITH THE FUTURE

# MYTHOLOGY

## THE MYTH OF JEWISH PASSIVITY

*Text from speech delivered to  
students at St. Pauls High School, on  
June 1, 1995.*

**T**oday, I would like to discuss the issue of Jewish resistance to the Nazi murderers and their henchmen.<sup>1</sup> My discussion will focus on the various manifestations of courage: the fighting spirit of the Jewish underground, the revelations of heroism, and the stubborn struggle of the ghetto fighters. I would like to refute here the claim of “cowardly passivity”. A complex set of relations existed between Jews in deep shock and Nazis who considered murder a national command. Between these two extremes there existed groups of fighters who deserve our esteem and admiration.

The story of resistance brings to light the fact that side by side with the total submission of millions of Jews there was defiance, sacrifice and heroism. This heroism occurred in the ghettos, the concentration camps, through Jewish partisan groups outside the ghetto walls, and through Jewish participation in actual overt military combat.

Jewish reaction to Nazi rule is of tremendous importance to Jews and non-Jews alike. The Jew wants to know the tradition to which he is an heir. How did that tradition stand up to the supreme test of Hitler’s death sentence on the Jewish people? Did Jewish civilization, demoralized under the blows of the brutal enemy, surrounded in the East by largely indifferent and hostile populations, simply collapse?

Those questions are equally significant for non-Jews. Nothing on the scale of the Holocaust had happened before, but there is no guarantee against its recurrence.

We must start by asking ourselves two questions:

- ◆ what do we mean by resistance ; and
- ◆ what do we mean when we apply it to Jews in World War II?

Henry Michel, perhaps the most important historian of anti-Nazi resistance, defines the term resistance as “the maintenance of self-respect”. Professor Roul Hilberg, on the other hand, seems to regard armed resistance as the only legitimate form of real resistance. In his monumental book, *The Destruction of European Jewry*, Hilberg states categorically, and in my opinion mistakenly, that the lack of Jewish armed resistance during the Holocaust was a consequence of the fact that Jews, during their long Diaspora, did not have the occasion to learn the art of self defense. In my opinion, this was only one of the reasons, others being a lack of weapons and a refusal of support by native populations.

The respected Holocaust historian, Yehuda Bauer defines Jewish resistance during the Holocaust as “any group action consciously taken in opposition to known or anticipated laws, actions or intentions directed against the Germans and their supporters.”

The armed resistance during the Holocaust existed under conditions that were not favorable to Jews. You either had arms or you did not. For the most part, Jews did not. However, the Jewish resistance was stronger than many realize.

It is generally accepted that large-scale operations are dependent on two ingredients: the availability of weapons, and the support of a civilian population capable of aiding underground fighters. Neither of these pre-conditions existed for the Jews. Jews did not have access to the arms buried by the collapsing Polish army in 1939. The secret of the buried arms was kept secret by the right wing officers who went into hiding.

No partisan detachments of any importance were established before 1943. Jews were not only unable to join the National Army, the *Armia Krajowa* (AK), but a number of AK detachments were actively engaged in hunting down and murdering Jews. The People's Army, the *Armia Ludowa*, (AL) was weak, had very few arms, and about half of its partisan forces were in fact Jewish detachments in the forests of Lublin. By the time the AL grew stronger in 1943, most of the ghettos were already destroyed. Jews in the ghettos had no way to procure arms. The exception was Vilna and Czestochowa, where the underground secured arms despite the difficulties.

Let us now turn to the three basic scenes of armed resistance: the ghettos (in the East), the forests, and the camps. In the ghettos, the Jewish populace was starved and decimated by disease and forced labor. Moreover, they were surrounded by a gentile population whose reaction to Jewish suffering varied between indifference and open enmity toward the victim.

Resistance, in Poland, would have met with the disapproval, not only of the Polish populace, but also of the Polish underground, the *Armia Krajowa* (AK). Stefan Rowecki, Commander-in-Chief of the AK issued an order (71) as late as 10 November 1942, which bluntly stated that, "the time of our uprising has not come". He mentioned the fact that the occupant [Germany] is exterminating the Jews and warned his people not to be drawn into premature action against the Germans.

All armed rebellions during World War II were predicated on the assumption that there was some chance of success. In the ghettos, no such success could be contemplated. The only result of a ghetto rebellion would be the annihilation of all Jewish residents.

By the first major wave of Nazi murder of 1942, only a small remnant (15-20 percent) of the Jewish population still lived in the ghettos. During the summer of 1942, the Warsaw underground did send Jewish groups into the forests

some distance from the capital but the Poles, the murderous actions of the AK, and the German patrols quickly put an end to these attempts.

The situation was different in the eastern parts of Poland and in Lithuania. In the Minsk Ghetto, containing 8400 Jews, the Judenrat, led by Eliyahu Mushkin, was part of an underground movement that tried to smuggle Jews out into the forest. About 5,000 Jews survived the war in the forest, which shielded only those bent on escape and capable of bearing arms.

I would like now to address another issue: collective responsibility. The Nazis murdered a great many people in retribution for the rebellious acts in the ghettos. Yet the main problem for the Jews was not the collective responsibility imposed on them by Nazi reprisals. It was the more fundamental problem of family responsibility. To belong to a resistance group, one had to abandon one's family to death.

The young Jewish men and women had to make a clear cut decision to leave his or her sisters, brothers and parents knowing they would be transported to their death. Abba Kovner, the great Israeli poet and former head of the *Ferainikte Partisaner Organizacje* (FPO) (Joint Partisan Organization), the resistance movement in Vilna Ghetto, faced this situation. From the moment he made his decision to leave, he didn't know whether he deserved the prestige of a partisan fighting the Nazis or the stigma of a faithless son.

#### THE ARMED RESISTANCE OF JEWS IN THE EAST

There were armed rebellions in the following locations: Warsaw, Czestochowa, Tarnow, Bendzin, Sosnowiec, Krakow, and the Bialystok Ghetto. From Krynki, near Bialystok, and in Kopyl there was armed resistance and people escaped to the forest.

There were rebellions in six concentration camps: Kruszyna, Krychow, Minsk Mazowiecki, Sibibor and Treblinka together with the famous Jewish rebellion in the gas chambers at Auschwitz, in 1944.

One-thousand Jews participated in the Warsaw uprising in 1944. The total number of these fighters was about 5,000, of whom 4,000 were killed. In Lithuania, at least sixty ghettos had armed rebellions, attempted rebellions, or armed underground movements which send people to the forests. There were about 15,000 Jewish partisans in this area towards the end of the war. Some 2,000 partisans in the Tatra Mountains in Slovakia were also a part of this armed resistance. There was also, a large number of Jews fighting in the Russian and Ukrainian detachments who did not disclose their Jewishness.

In Western Europe, the armed resistance movement, of a serious kind, did not become active until well into 1943. By that time, there were not many Jews left to fight.

In France, there were thousands fighting the Nazis rather than hundreds, and there were close to a thousand in Belgium. Moreover, the Jews were usually the first ones to act. For example, the first urban guerillas fighting against Nazis, in Paris during the spring of 1942, were Jewish members of the pro-communist group. The Gutfreund Group in Belgium took up arms as early as September 1941, killing a Jewish Gestapo agent, robbing a German factory and later, burning a card index of Jews at the judenrat offices in Brussels. Finally, thousands of Jews fought in northern Italy in 1943-44, and thousands more fought with Tito's army in Yugoslavia. In Greece, Jews fought side by side with the Greek partisans. They established a separate Jewish brigade numbering one thousand.

## JEWISH RESISTANCE SUMMARIZED

Jewish armed resistance was considerably more widespread than has been assumed. In Eastern Europe, a high proportion of those who survived the first wave of murder participated in armed activities.

Jewish rebellions in Warsaw and elsewhere were the first urban struggles against the Germans anywhere in Europe and Jewish rebellions in the camps were the only ones of their kind. Hillberg's statement that the lack of military training during the long Diaspora period was instrumental in the lack of Jewish armed resistance during the Holocaust is not borne out in reality.

Was the resistance of Jews to their enemies successful? In terms of military victory, most often not. From the standpoint of saving Jewish lives, only partially. The Jews who resisted were motivated by the impulse to live, and to maintain their self-respect. For Jewish people, the supreme sacrifice of life has also been the supreme claim on life.

The courage manifested in physical combat is not the only type of courage, or even perhaps its highest form. The fighter has at least the opportunity and the means to defend himself physically. Not so the man without arms. His means of defense must be more subtle; the weapons and courage of spirit rather than that of body. Such spiritual resistance found its ultimate expression when Jews learned to resist not only in offensive and defensive combat but in sheer grim existence to the brink of death, despite the gallows, the bullets, the ovens and the burning pits. Living only for one more breath of air, one more drop of water, one last beat of the heart.

It is as if Jews stretched time itself to prolong existence to deny Hitler even for another hour, another minute, another second, the fulfillment of his dream to empty the earth of Jews – to make it *Judenrein*. Each Jew survived because he was able to develop spiritual stamina. Existence was his last stand.

It is relevant to compare the behavior of other nationalities in Nazi Europe. Did they obey German law, even those laws forbidding education in Poland and Russia? Yes, they did. Did they resist the shipment of slave labor to Germany? No, they did not. By and large, the Jews on the other hand became highly skilled practitioners of evasion.

Had the Jews passively accepted Nazi laws, where even the smallest infringement was punishable by death, they would have died out in no time at all. Official German food allocations distributed by the Warsaw Judenrat came to 340 calories daily, in 1941. It is unlikely that the Warsaw Jews could have survived longer than a few months on such rations. But smuggling illicit products on a considerable scale, through great inventiveness, produced an average of 1125 calories daily.

Unfortunately, a large population of unemployed Jewish refugees who had been expelled by the Germans from their homes in the provinces into Warsaw slowly died because their food supplies fell below that average. Many others managed to survive on these rations nevertheless. I would consider this stubbornness, this determination to survive in defiance of Nazi authority, to be an act of resistance.

In Kovno, similar smuggling was organized by groups that were controlled by the Judenrat and Jewish police. The police here were the very heart of the armed resistance movement. It was thus an organized act under public supervision and the aim was very definitely to subvert German laws.

Education was forbidden in Jewish ghettos, but it took place clandestinely where small groups of people would meet either in soup kitchens or in the home of the teacher. There were also clandestine high schools in Warsaw. Their students passed matriculation exams in the highest secrecy.

Also, according to Ringelblum, there were in Warsaw alone some 600 illegal (minyamon) groups of Jews praying together throughout the period when

all public religious observance was strictly forbidden. Newspapers were outlawed and yet, we know of more than fifty titles of underground papers in Warsaw alone.<sup>2</sup>

Outlawed cultural institutions achieved colossal importance, at that time. The most famous of these cultural institutions was the Oneg Shabbat groups in Warsaw. Founded and headed by Dr. Emmanuel Ringenblum, an historian and public figure, it assembled reports and diaries and initiated research in order to preserve documentary evidence of the life of the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. Among its studies were the famous medical investigations into the effects of hunger on the human body under the direction of Dr. Milejkorski, which were published after the war in 1946 in Poland.

The story of Kosov exemplifies most vividly the refusal of so many Jewish victims to yield their humanity in the face of impending murder. Kosov is a small town in eastern Galizia and it had a Judenrat, which was not very different from others. On Passover 1942, the Gestapo announced that it would come into the ghetto. The Judenrat believed that this was the signal for the liquidation of the Ghetto and told all of the Jews to hide or flee. Of the twenty-four Judenrat members, four decided to meet the Germans and offer themselves as sacrificial victims to deflect the wrath of the enemy. With the Ghetto empty and silent, the four men sat and waited for their executioners. The men of Kosov prepared to meet the Nazis on Passover 1942. Was their act less heroic than firing a gun?

The war against Hitler's Germany took on two forms. In some areas it was a war for the sovereign independent survival of a given country, in others it was a fight for liberation from Nazi oppression, a struggle for safeguarding the dignity and freedom of free men. Wherever the Jews were permitted to take part in the general struggle they engaged in it actively.

Most historians estimate that there were 150,000 Jews in active service with the Polish Army at the outbreak of the war. According to official Polish statistics, 32,126 fell in battle during the first days of September and 61,000 Jews

were taken prisoners. Five hundred thousand Jews fought in the Red Army. Two hundred thousand Jewish Red Army soldiers fell in battle and over 150,000 were decorated for valor and devotion to duty. More than 100 Jews were named “Hero of the Soviet Union”.

The Lithuanian Regiment, organized in 1941, consisted primarily of Jewish refugees who had fled to the Soviet Union ahead of the advancing German armies. Out of the 15,000 in the regiment, 12,000 were Jews.

Many Jews volunteered into the French army after the outbreak of the war. After the fall of France, a large number of Jewish soldiers and officers joined General de Gaulle’s forces and later returned with them to fight on French soil.

A total of 550,000 Jews, including women, fought in the armed forces of the United States. A total of 62,000 Jews from Great Britain served in the British army in addition to the 25,000 from other parts of the Empire. The Canadian forces Jews numbered 16,883. The Palestine Jewish community gave to the Allied Forces 26,000 soldiers, men and women.

There can be no doubt – Jewish courage has never attained the heights witnessed in our generation, marked by European catastrophe and the slaughter of millions. The manifestation of the indomitable Jewish spirit was not confined to any one country.

Resisters were more universal and they defy the myth of passivity used by our enemies. May the heroes of the Jewish nations who gave their lives so unselfishly in the defense of Jewish honor be recognized by all as the heroes of humanity.

#### **WHERE WERE THE DEMONSTRATIONS?**

I would like to address myself to the young generation of Jews and Gentiles, alike. There was a disturbing lack of mass action by the Jewish communities in the countries not over run by the Nazis, especially in America.

The masses of Jews in the U.S. and other free lands did not make extraordinary efforts to impress on their governments that official inaction doomed their brethren to certain death.

There were no sit-ins, no mass demonstrations; there were no marches on Washington, Ottawa, London, Buenos Aires, and Rio de Janeiro. No public fast days were proclaimed to express solidarity with the victims. Most of the protests that took place were a by-product of the feverish activities of Jewish lay leaders and professional workers.

There are now young Jews and Gentiles who fight for civil rights of minorities, a cause that is cherished by every person of conscience. But in years of the Holocaust, there were no demonstrations by Jewish youth in the cause of their kin trapped in the Nazi web of destruction.

Don't let youth repeat the mistake again. Those who deny the Holocaust deny you the memory of your heroes, who offered their lives to redeem the honor of the Jewish people. If you wish to be able to understand this onslaught on your dignity, as a Jew, educate yourselves, read, and get acquainted with the history of the Holocaust, which is not a Jewish issue at all. It is an issue of morality and decency. Only then, will you be able to face those who not only deny the rich heritage of your people but also would like to deny the historical truth of the Holocaust. The past heroism of our people demands it.

Thank you

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<sup>1</sup> In preparing this lecture, the author has considered the following sources: Henry Michel, *The Shadow War*; Shmuel Krakowski, *Jewish Resistance in Poland*; Aba Kovner, *Holocaust: a Generation After*; Artin Eisenbach, *Hitlerowska Polityka Zagłady Żydów*.

<sup>2</sup> I should mention the importance of the Joint Distribution Committee. It supplied, illegally, the money to kitchens and children's homes, which in turn became

centers of illegal political activities, including party meetings, clandestine presses and illegal schooling.



## MYTHS AS THE CAUSE OF EVIL AND MURDER

*Text from speech delivered as part of an interfaith dialogue titled "Should we Talk to One Another?" at the Shaarey Zedek Synagogue on May 16, 2002. Lecture series sponsored by friends of the Hebrew University of Winnipeg, Shaarey Zedek congregation, and Philip and Gertrude Weiss Endowment for Holocaust Education.*

In the preamble to my presentation I would like to raise your awareness to the fact that today May 16 in the year 2002 of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we Jews of Winnipeg, and our invited guests, assembled in this house of worship to discuss issues of common interest have hired police protection for the doors of this synagogue, for our safety. A similar situation applies to synagogues across the North American continent, in South America, Europe and Asia.

Today the streets of Canadian and European cities reverberate with wild cries "Kill the Jew" reminiscent of the Nazi times in Germany or the ignorant mob seeking Jewish blood in the ghettos of medieval Europe.

The publicity prior to this gathering described me as the representative of the Jewish community, and I'm honored to be considered one, but I'm also representing a much larger community of those who can't be here tonight as they were murdered because of their religion, because they were Jews. Our Winnipeg community is a small but vibrant and active one. I was born in a similar community in Eastern Poland. My community and thousands of others across the world were wiped out from the surface of the earth; they ceased to exist, as the

callous world stood silent in the years 1933-1945. And I fear the world is again drifting into silence, in the face of growing anti-Semitism.

My responsibility to those who were murdered and to you who are alive today is to stop this silence from taking hold. So I am taking part in discussing the rise of anti-Semitism with the hope of preventing its spread. I believe the question, "Should we talk to one another about the problem?" must be answered with a resounding "Yes." The second question, "How should we talk to one another?" has a simple answer. We must discuss the issues with commitment, dignity, respect, and truth.

But I think we would be making a cardinal mistake by stopping there. Talk alone is not enough. After we finish talking we have to act; we have to commit ourselves to action. We must act on behalf of people who have been persecuted for over 2000 years because of ignorance, fanaticism, and hate, but also because of the deafening silence of the world, the deafening silence of bystanders. I expect people of good will not only to listen and talk but to act with commitment and passion in the name of justice and truth.

In most cases we are born into the religion of our parents and grandparents. Most of us live out our lives in the faith of our ancestors. Some opt out because of their personal reasons: be it marriage, search for other spiritual needs, or their hope for advancement in the political or social arena. In the western democracies – and only there because of the separation of church and state – the individual has the full freedom to decide his or her religion.

From the earliest times of prehistory to the present day, men have expressed their deepest convictions about the universe and moral life in worship and symbols. Religion has always been linked to morality. Although moral symbols differ greatly from place to place, all religions carry important moral commandments. The rules of moral behavior in most societies have a strong religious basis, and are supported by the teaching of scriptures – be it the Torah, New Testament, Koran – and also by the actions of their religious leaders.

There are many common themes in religions: human beings, the eternity, God. But, there is also great diversity. There is an infinite variety of doctrine, symbolism, ritual and mythology. I shall zero in on mythology as the basis for my presentation today.

The ancient Greek mythology, in its description of their Gods and beasts and their interaction, is unsurpassed in the imagination and creativity of the human mind of that epoch. Today, these myths are fascinating and harmless. But, there are myths which are dangerous and destructive. They incite to riots and murder, they destroy the fabric of societies, and are difficult if not impossible to divest of their destructive power. They are cancerous.

The myth of Jews killing Jesus, the son of God, the blood libel, the myths of Jews poisoning the water wells and desecrating the Host, the myth of Jews using Christian children's blood to bake their Passover matzo are not only the product of a primitive and sick medieval mind. These myths form part of the well packaged parcels of Nazi and Islamic propaganda. These myths have incited uncalculable expressions of hate and murder in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

These myths caused untold suffering, murder, and plunder of Jewish possessions and the expulsion of Jews from European countries during the years of the crusades, inquisition and eastern European pogroms. It culminated in the Holocaust and the destruction of approximately 6,000,000 human beings, men, women and children in the gas chambers of the concentration camps. I was a witness to this kind of anti-Semitic Christianity in pre-war Poland – a staunch Christian country where the teaching of love as preached by Jesus must have been forgotten by Church, the state and ordinary citizens.

Over the past four decades, the dogma and the attitude of the Catholic Church toward Judaism and Jews has undergone drastic change. In 1965 the Second Vatican Council lifted the collective charge of deicide against Jewish people, reversing the long standing Augustinian view that the Jews would eternally bear the mark of Cain.

Since his election in 1978, Pope John Paul II has repeatedly broken new grounds in relations with the Jewish community: becoming the first bishop of Rome to visit a synagogue, establishing diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the State of Israel, and emphatically denouncing anti-Semitism. Against this impressive personal involvement, there are unfortunately some churches with less than exemplary handling of issues related to the Holocaust. The dispute over the Carmelite Convent in Auschwitz, the canonization of Edith Stein, the role of Pope Pius XII during the Holocaust and the refusal of the Vatican to open its archives to researchers cast a long shadow on the relation between Jews and the Vatican. The intifada does not help it as nor does the Church's ambiguous position in its silence. I only hope that the Holy See realizes the mistakes of the past and will correct them shortly.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001, brought Islam, and the religion's moral issues, into focus. Unfortunately, militant Islam took over where the Nazis left. Josef Goebbels, the infamous propaganda minister of Nazi Germany, had it right: just keep telling people lies often enough and they will believe them. The militant Islam learned the lesson well, starting with Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Haji Amin al Hussein in Berlin in 1941 and continuing today with the most vitriolic Nazi-style propaganda blaring from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. There is an uncanny similarity between today's Palestinian propaganda and the Nazi methods of "dehumanizing" Jews.<sup>1</sup>

The Nuremberg laws denied Jews their civil rights in Germany. The militant Islam denies the existence of the State of Israel. Julius Streicher demonized the Jews in the *Stürmer*.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Arab media propaganda today exceeds the worst of the medieval Christian and 20<sup>th</sup> century Nazi myths and lies. In the Arabic press, one can find statements describing: "Jews as a nest of vipers", "Jews as users of Christian children's blood, for baking their unleavened bread for Passover", "Jews are sons of Satan".

Hitler and Himmler at the end of power in 1945 sacrificed the 12 and 14-year-old boys and girls of the *Hitler Jugend*,<sup>3</sup> sending them to certain death. The culture of death ruled supreme in the whole of Nazi society. The same culture of death permeates the Palestinian society today nurtured by militant Islam. The blood curdling calls from the minarets inciting the killing of Jews and jihad questions the humanistic aspect of Islamic beliefs and the morality of the believer.

This tyrannical system of oppressive governing is bound to collapse soon not unlike the mighty 1000 year German Third Reich, the fascist Italy and the communist Soviet Union. The myths the Palestinian Authority filter into the political life of her citizen will only speed up the process, as these myths are unsustainable when viewed critically.

We Jews of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must rise to challenge these myths, first by asking, "*Qua vadis* Humanity? *Quo vadis* Morality?"

We must become entrenched in our fight for justice and truth. We shall build our societies based on compassion, freedom, morality and tolerance. From our Christian friends, we expect help in this endeavor. We can look to leaders such as Bishop John Shelby, who in his revolutionary book *Why Christianity must Change or Perish*, envisions, with great courage, a Church which demolishes the stifling dogma of traditional Christianity in search for the inner core of Truth. His is a passionate attempt to build a credible theology devoid of prejudice and discrimination.

As to our friends in the Islamic community, I hope that they will achieve the return of the liberal Islam of the Middle Ages which was rich in the freedom of thoughts and expression. It was this Islam that persecuted Jews and even dissident Christians sought as a refuge from Middle Ages Christendom. That kind of Islam, devoid of myths that glorify hatred, will become once again a great religion and mankind's inspiration.

Thank you

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<sup>1</sup> In 1953 Otto Skorzeny, the scar faced SS most notorious terrorist, the liberator of Mussolini and Hitler's darling, spent a considerable period of time in Cairo as a guest of president Nasser and became the spiritual guru to the young engineering student by the name of Yasser Arafat.

<sup>2</sup> Nazi daily newspaper.

<sup>3</sup> Hitler's youth organization.

**RELIGION**



## THE SILENT PEWS: THE CHURCH AND THE HOLOCAUST

*Text from speech to students at St  
Pauls High School delivered on May  
11, 1995.*

I hope that my lecture today will help some people who still hold prejudices against Jews and other minorities to understand the pain, suffering and degradation so prevalent during the Holocaust. In this lecture I shall discuss complex and painful issues. I would like to thank all of those at St. Paul's High School who understood the need for this forum. It is long overdue here in Winnipeg, and as a Jew and a Holocaust survivor, I feel the duty and the responsibility to bring to your attention some facts, which many times are swept under the carpet.

In my presentation, I intend to be open and truthful to history and my own experiences. My intention is not to hurt or offend my friends who offered me an opportunity to speak on this painful chapter of human history, yet my Holocaust experiences demand strong opinions.

I am not a theologian, nor a professional educator. I am a survivor who went from ghettos, through labour camps, to the most advanced form of incarceration, in so called *Vernichtungslager* – destruction camps. Although lectures on the Holocaust by educators, theologians, historians and professional speakers are very important, I have always felt that a survivor's interpretation of this period adds more authenticity and better understanding of issues that are inherently theirs.

Survivors are the only living witnesses. And for how much longer – not very long. Give them the time now when they are still alive and listen to what they say. After they are gone I hope people dedicated to justice and truth will have the opportunity to continue their work in years to come.

I am not detached emotionally from my past, and yet, I would like to assure you of my objective and unbiased stand. Ghettos, labour camps, concentration camps became in my life the institutions of higher learning. History, social studies, political science, spirituality and religious studies were the integral part of this experience.

Intolerance and indifference were the most important courses in this curriculum of bestiality in the years 1939-1945. I feel that those experiences give me the right to speak to you openly and candidly.

Any study on Holocaust would be incomplete if it would omit the history of Jewish persecution and anti-Semitism throughout the ages. In 1937 as a young boy, I could not venture on the Mickiewicza Street in Drohobycz, Poland during a religious procession honouring St. Mary, without taking a chance of being stoned, beaten up, and degraded. In my person the religious fanatics saw the Christ killer. I was a high school student; I wore the same blue uniform as my peers did and I attended para-military training like they did. I was a modern person, not an orthodox dressed youngster, I spoke a literary Polish, and I had gentile school friends. But, in a very real sense, I was *persona non grata* in the country I was born in, the country my great-grand parents helped to build.

In the history of nations, no other minority has suffered such persecution and defamation as the Jewish People. Wherever we have lived we have always contributed to the cultural, economic and scientific developments in society, and yet the slander against Jews persists and anti-Semitism is still rampant. Why is it so? Let me go back in history and find the reason for it.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF ANTI-SEMITISM

Neither the situation of Jews in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe nor the Holocaust and the death camps can be understood apart from the irritable and hostile relationship between Jews and Christians since the birth of Christianity and the animosity of Christianity toward Judaism.

Jesus of Nazareth was a practicing Jew. His followers were Jews, and the last supper was a Passover Seder. Christianity is based on the Jewish teaching of monotheism. Jesus was crucified by Pontius Pilate, who executed him according to Roman practice.

Historians agree that the break between Judaism and Christianity followed the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 C.E. In the aftermath of this devastating defeat, which was interpreted by Jews and Christians alike as a sign of divine punishment, the Gospels were recast to diminish Roman responsibility and to emphasize Jewish culpability in the death of Jesus. Jews were depicted as killers of the son of God.

The New Testament was seen as fulfilling the Old Testament. Christians were the “new Israel” both in flesh and spirit. The God of Love replaced God of Justice. Thus, the early church fathers thought that God had finished with the Jews, whose only purpose in history was to prepare for the arrival of His Son. Accordingly, Jews should have left the scene a long time ago. Their continuing survival seemed to be an act of stubborn defiance.

Exile was seen by Christians as a sign of divine disfavour for the denial that Jesus was the Messiah and for Jew’s role in his crucifixion. Enmity toward Jews was expressed most acutely in the Church’s teaching of contempt. From Augustine, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, to Luther, in the 16<sup>th</sup>, some of the most eloquent and persuasive Christian theologians denounced the Jews as rebels against God and murderers of the Lord. They were described as companions of the Devil and a race of vipers. During the Middle Ages, Jews were accused of the blood libel.

Jews supposedly murdered Christian children as an act of ritual worship or to prepare unleavened bread for the Passover Seder.

Church liturgy, particularly the scriptural readings on the crucifixion, stirred up this hatred. It was no coincidence that acts of violence against Jews often took place in spring, the season of Easter and Passover. Nazi actions against Jews took place most of the time on Jewish Holidays.

As Christianity became the dominant religion of Europe, Jews were forced to the margins of society. Religious attitudes were reflected in the economic, social and political life of medieval Europe. In the late eleventh century, the first crusade unleashed a wave of anti-Semitic violence across the continent. Jews were expelled at various times from England and France as well as from Spain in 1492, and were the objects of massacres and pogroms from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Martin Luther's reliance on the Bible as the sole source of Christian authority only fed his fury toward the Jews for their rejection of Jesus. He wrote, "We are at fault for not slaying them. Rather we allow them to live freely in our midst despite their murder, cursing, blasphemising, lying and defaming." Luther's diatribes in the sixteenth century were foreshadowing the Nazi practices four centuries later. He advised, "First to set fire to their synagogues and schools and to cover and bury with dirt whatever will not burn so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them."

Such views were finally renounced by the Roman Catholic Church decades after the Holocaust, with the Vatican proclaiming *Nostra Aetate* in 1965, which revamped Roman Catholic teaching with regard to Jews and Judaism. The Vatican accepted the legitimacy of Judaism as a continuing religion and exonerated Jews for the murder of Jesus. As a result, Good Friday liturgy was changed to make it less inflammatory with regard to Jews. Similar transformation has also occurred in Protestant teaching.

## JEWISH SEGREGATION IN GERMANY

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, more than nine million Jews lived in the twenty-one European nations later occupied by the Germans in World War II. The six hundred thousand who lived in Germany were less than 1% of the population. Within 12 years two out of every three of the nine million were dead.

Before the advent of Nazi rule, Jews felt comfortable as Germans. They were active and successful in arts and theatre, science and literature, industry and profession. Many Jews converted to Christianity and even more shed their ancestral religious practices.

Intermarriage with non-Jews was common. Their language was German and they identified with the German nation. One hundred thousand of them served in the army during World War I, 80 percent of them in combat roles. Thirty five thousand were decorated for bravery. Of the 38 Nobel Prizes won by Germans between 1915-1936, fourteen were received by Jews.

On September 15, 1935, The Nuremberg Laws for Protection of German Blood and the Reich Citizenship Law began the legal segregation of Jews. The law specified that Jews, including Roman Catholic priests, nuns, and Protestant clergy, who were converts to Christianity or whose parents converted were considered Jews.

On April 26, 1933, shortly after coming to power, Hitler had a talk with Catholic Church dignitaries and reminded them that for 1,500 years the Church had regarded the Jews as parasites and had banished them to ghettos. He was merely going to continue what the church had started, he added.

## THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE

The Church bowed to the Nuremberg Laws of September 15, 1935, although they felt the Laws infringed on their spiritual jurisdiction. The Church

conformed to Nazi laws; some elements welcomed them as indispensable safeguards for the qualitative make up of the German people. The fact is that at no time was the Catholic population released from its moral obligation to obey the National rulers.

As German society became increasingly Nazified at every level, the Christian churches also fell into line. The Roman Catholic Church believed it was protected by the 1933 Concordat between Hitler and the Vatican granting freedom of practice to the Catholic Church in Germany. The Concordat, negotiated by the Papal Secretary of State, Eugenio Pacelli – the former papal nuncio in Berlin, and the future Pope Pius XII, diminished the power of the Catholic Centre Party and Catholic Labour Union in Germany.

The Roman Catholic Church became subservient to the regime. The Concordat undoubtedly gave the Nazi government the prestige it greatly needed at the time, but it was an agreement which Hitler never kept. In 1937, Pope Pius XI issued the famous encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge* (With Burning Sorrow) charging the government with evasion and violations of the Concordat. The encyclical also rejected the myths of race and blood as contrary to Christian truth, but it did not criticize anti-Semitism as such. Among others, the philosopher Dr. Edith Stein, a Jewish convert to Catholicism who was ultimately gassed at Auschwitz, had earlier requested the Pope to issue an encyclical on the Jewish question, but this was never done.

With the exception of a few pastors who resisted Nazi domination, the Protestant Churches were caught in the nationalism sweeping Germany. The Nazi inspired German Christian Faith Movement took over mainstream church offices proclaiming, “In the person of the Führer we behold the one sent from God who places Germany in the presence of Lord of history.”

An opposition group known as the Confessional Church spoke out against Nazi social and anti-Christian teaching. It was led by Reverend Martin Niemöller, the most prominent of pastors and laymen who were arrested

beginning in 1936. In the last sermon preached before his arrest and consignment to Dachau, Niemöller said, “No more are we ready to keep silent at men’s behest when God commands us to speak ... we must obey God rather than man.”

The Roman Catholic Church, which had not taken a stand on the Jewish question, protested the euthanasia program: so called mercy killing. Count von Galen, the Bishop of Münster, openly challenged the regime stating it was a duty of Christians to oppose the taking of human life even if this were to cost them their own lives.

There is no doubt that the rescue-work of Church officials who, in the spirit of true Christianity, offered their cloisters and monasteries to the persecuted Jews was an important factor in the survival of individual Jews.

The courageous denunciations of Nazi barbarities by church dignitaries of Western Europe and especially the statement of Pope Pius XI that in spirit we are “Semites,” had a considerable impact on many clergymen.

There is no doubt that many of the survivors owe their lives to the humanitarian acts of both the clerics and compassionate layman. But these righteous acts were isolated instances; they were the exception to the rule. The fact is that no official representation and protest was ever made by the heads of Christian Churches (neither by the spokesmen of Islam and Buddhism), which would have expressed in the strongest possible terms the protest of all the believers. Mahatma Gandhi, informed about the killings of Jews in Europe, advised the Jewish authorities to commit mass suicide as a way of protest.

While the death factories operated in full blast, the papacy itself was silent. The silence of the Pope has been the subject of debate since the end of the war.

The religious leaders were no doubt concerned but unwilling to antagonize the Nazis lest they take vengeance on Church functionaries and properties. The Catholic Church did not even deem it advisable to use its power to

threaten with excommunication those Catholics who participated in Nazi treatment of Jews and other “undesirables”.

In the midst of the enormity of Nazi atrocities, the Vatican conducted its affairs by the discreet rule, “business as usual.” The clergy in France, Catholic and Protestant alike, played a role second to none in their opposition to the anti-Jewish decrees and in their rescue activities on behalf of the persecuted. The German Catholics supported Hitler’s war not only because such support was required by the Nazi ruler, but also because their religious leaders formally called upon them to do so. At no time were German Catholics led to believe that the regime was an evil unworthy of their support.

### THE ROLE OF INTELLECTUALS

In the century of horrors, Adolf Hitler remains the chief symbol of evil in the twentieth century. As such, it is difficult to understand how the German people could have supported the Nazi party with their votes and accepted the leadership of Hitler. Did doctors support Hitler? Did scientists support Hitler? Did the clergy support Hitler? At first glance it might seem that university professors would be too intelligent to endorse Hitler or that the pastors might be too sensitive to spiritual values to give him their support. But such was not the case.

Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, Emanuel Hirsh were intelligent and respectable German university professors, each was also a Protestant theologian and each supported Hitler. Kittel, was an expert on Judaism at the University of Tübingen who studied the New Testament in light of its Jewish roots. Althaus was also a New Testament specialist at the University of Erlangen and Hirsh was a systematic theologian from Göttingen.

Each of these men was prominent and internationally respected; they each supported Hitler openly, enthusiastically and with little restraint. In the *Judenfrage*, his acclaimed work, Kittel proposes establishing a solid Christian

foundation for opposition to Jews, so that the question can be approached as German and Christian.<sup>1</sup>

In *Judenfrage*, Kittel warns against being sentimental, “God does not recognize that we be sentimental but that we see the facts and give them their due.” The present Jewish problem, according to Kittel, results from the Diaspora: which means that Jews are always foreigners and never feel at home. He writes that both the emancipation and assimilation of Jews, through which Jews inject their foreign blood and foreign spirit into the German Volk, are bad for Germany. In his view, there are only four solutions to this problem: extermination, Zionism, assimilation, and “guest status”.

“Guest status” is the separation of Jews from the peoples with whom they live. Kittel advocates this as the only possible solution. This theoretical framework allows Kittel to support those National Socialist policies, which might otherwise have seemed inhumane and illegal. Under “guest status”:

- ◆ normal civil rights would be denied the Jew and a new sort of rules worked out;
- ◆ Jewish writers and educators should be removed altogether;
- ◆ There would be a ban on mixed marriages, for Jews could not be allowed to continue corrupting the German race.

The implication of the “guest status” was clearly broad and he states:

We must not allow ourselves to be crippled because the whole world screams at us of barbarism and a revision to the past. ... How the German Volk regulates its own cultural affairs does not concern anyone else in the world but us.

Please understand these are not words of Hitler, Rosenberg or Himmler, they are spoken by an intellectual, a leading theologian, a university professor. We can compare the duplicity of language that Hitler used with that of Kittel’s. The elimination of some citizens from full citizenship, and creation of a slave layer of society, is being defended by Kittel as “cultural affairs”.

Althaus signed the *Ansbacher Ratschlag*, a statement written by his Erlangen colleague, Werner Elert. The *Ansbacher Ratschlag* states firmly that God intends for Governments to be obeyed:

As Christians we honour with thanks toward God every order. Therefore also every authority, even if deformed, as a tool of divine preservation. In this knowledge we as believing Christians thank God our father that has given to our Volk in its time of need the Führer as a pious and sovereign and that he wants to prepare us in the National Socialist system of government 'good rule' as a government with discipline and honour. Accordingly we know that we are responsible before God to assist the work of the Führer in our calling and in our station in life.

In the *Wesen des Christentums*, Hirsch confirms his consistency of political views in reference to Volk:

We set our entire power of life and spirit on this to bring our Volk and Reich into a healthy life protecting order and to create for them a durable and honourable existence in the circle of white ruling peoples to which God has entrusted the responsibility of humanity.

In 1941 he answers Goering's call for academics to lecture the Luftwaffe personnel on the Russian front. Hirsch travelled extensively speaking on the evil of Bolshevism and the Jewish peril.

The years proved that their position and the position of other theologians led directly to the chimneys of Birkenau, Auschwitz, Chelm, and Treblinka. To me, however, as a survivor of the Holocaust, the most painful question is the silence of the organized religions: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and other faiths.

## MY PERSONAL COMMENTS

At this point I would like to touch on the role of the Vatican in the rescue of Nazi war criminals. The escape route for them (the Rat Line) went from Austria and Bavaria over the mountains into Italy and from there, by ship, to South America. They were helped along by Odessa, an organization of SS men formed for this purpose.

While war criminals received assistance from individual Roman Catholic priests in places like Genoa and Trieste, Rome became the main sanctuary for fleeing Nazis. This was due to the power of Bishop Alois Hudal, rector of the German church in Rome. This puzzling figure had protested the deportation of Jews and even sheltered a number of them in the Monesterio dell Anima. Yet, it was he who also assisted war criminals including Eichmann, Walter Rouff (the chief of SS in Milan), Otto Wachter (the governor of Galizia – killed 800,000) and Josef Mengele. The most popular hideout provided by the influential Hudel was the Franciscan convent on the Via Sicilia, in Rome.

Some war criminals, Mengele for example, were baptized as Roman Catholics. It appears the Nazis were assisted by sympathetic and possibly nationalistic Roman Catholic priests. Some of the Roman Catholic priests serving in Rome were German nationalists, sympathetic to Nazism. They were fully aware of the wartime records of those seeking to escape.

From the beginning of this century, wherever Jews could live in freedom, they served their countries well in peacetime and in war. And yet, when Nazism came to power, few voices anywhere in the world were heard demanding equal rights for Jews, proper human behavior and decency. There was no Emil Zola to sound the alarm and awaken the people. With few exceptions, the world silently accepted Hitler's doctrine without protest and thus became part of the devilish plot

to exterminate the people who had given the world the Old Testament and on whose religion the other two monotheistic faiths are based.

During the war, the church pews were always full but they remained silent during those years of 1939-1945 and bells were not tolling while the flesh of the innocent children, women and men was being incinerated in the crematories of Europe.

Today, the world over, it seems that religion is playing an important part in people's lives, as demonstrated by the rise of the fundamentalist Christian movement in the United States. And, new Christian church activism appears to be running through Eastern Europe. It took a river of our people's blood for Pope John XXIII to create a new prayer beginning with, "God, forgive us for the lies, hatred and curses that we directed against the Jewish people..." Therefore, would it not be appropriate now, at the end of this century, for more Church leaders to take initiative, together with victims and witnesses to the Holocaust, to establish a common basis so that past persecution may never be repeated?

After 2000 years of enmity and hate is it not the time ripe for leaders of Christianity to develop a new understanding for all human beings? Without the old and outdated belief that only a Christian has the right to a happy and meaningful life on the planet.

Please don't look at us as the future converts to Christianity but as the children of the same God, as your equal, the same human beings with the same aspirations and inspirations hoping to achieve one goal: a just humanity for all.

Thank You.

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<sup>1</sup> He rejects Extermination because it has not worked before and it will not work now. (Hitler, as we know, proved him wrong.) Zionism he rejects because, "Many Jews are socialists and communists so it is not likely they would work hard enough to make a go of it." Assimilation is clearly a chief evil in Kittel's view. It results in racial mixing and leads directly to decadence. This decadence is in every

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respect the actual basic problem of contemporary Jewish question. Assimilation leads to (a) a literature and journalism where nothing is holy, (b) a legal practice which does not serve the interests of the Volk, (c) an irresponsible seeking after money, and (d) a medical practice interested in money only rather than the health of the Volk. Kittel admits that some Germans are like this, and some Jews are not. But he believes that assimilated Jewry is, I quote "the native soil" for this decadence.



## WHERE IS GOD NOW?

*Paper delivered on October 25, 1995  
at Shaarey Zedek Synagogue.  
Sponsored by Sharrey Zedek  
congregation and Gertrude and  
Philip Weiss Endowment for  
Holocaust Education.*

### ***Where is God Now???***

*Where are we going?  
To the end of the world little girl, we are going to the end of the  
world!  
Is that far?  
No, not really!  
You see I am really tired. Is it wrong, tell me is it wrong to be  
tired?  
Everybody is tired little girl!  
Even God?  
I don't know, you will ask him yourself.*

— From *A Jew Today* by Elie Wiesel

**J**ewish history had seen much suffering from the crusades of medieval Europe, the Spanish Inquisition, Cossack pogroms from 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century Russia, but nothing in the past compared with the Holocaust.<sup>1</sup> Six million Jews were murdered; one and a half million of the slain were children. Entire communities perished, including the most precious and the righteous. Eighty percent of the rabbis in the world and ninety percent of the full-time students of the Torah were murdered.

Jewish liturgy speaks of God as the merciful Father. Jewish prayers emphasize that God answered His people in their time of need, but never had the Jews needed God more and never was the God of Israel less available to them than in the years 1939-1945.

For those Jews living with the Holocaust, it became more difficult to speak of God as good, merciful, or all-powerful. The Holocaust has forced Jews, as well as Christians, to re-examine their most fundamental beliefs. Since the Holocaust, theologians have been forced to confront Christian anti-Semitism and the fact that the Holocaust took place within the heart of Christian Europe. The perpetrators were Christians, schooled in the faith of Jesus for many generations. They acted in part out of his teaching, converting it to hate and murder.

“Where was God when 6,000,000 died?” I struggled with this and other questions for years. I have delved deeply into the scholarship of great thinkers in order to gain painful insights. It is my hope that the ideas I canvassed, as part of my inner struggles, may shed light on the issues for others in this audience.

The events of the Holocaust demand a searching religious response from our scholars and religious leaders. It is an extremely painful and sensitive issue, not only for Holocaust survivors, but for every affiliated and non-affiliated Jew in this century. The quest for religious answers to the existence of the Holocaust, and its death camps, has created for many a spiritual crisis. I hope to assist the search for answers to the question, “Where was God?” by examining the writings of seven leading Jewish theologians and thinkers who have tackled the religious dilemmas posed by the death camps. The theologians are: Bernard Maza, Ignac Maybaum, Emil Fackenheim, Eliezer Berkowitz, Richard Rubinstein, Elie Wiesel, and Irving Greenberg. I would also like to touch on my own spiritual experiences in the camps.

**BERNARD MAZA**

Bernard Maza is an English orthodox theologian who provides us with the Torah perspective on the death camps. In his important study, *With Fury Poured Out*, he focuses on the problem posed by the Holocaust: Did God punish the Jewish people for neglecting His laws? At the beginning of his book, Maza recounts a debate that took place on the eve of Yom Kippur, during the Nazi period, in a ghetto:

When the cantor began to chant the blessing “thou has given life”, the silence was broken by wild screams, “Lies, lies, lies” one man shouted. The congregants began to knock on wooden benches with their fists, demanding the man to be quiet. “God, God”, they cried out, “it is desecration and blasphemy”. The person who had interrupted paid no attention to their protest. He was Reb Chaim, a righteous and holy Jew who lost all his family in the last slaughter, and remained alive by a miracle.

One young man dared to challenge his words. He stepped forward. He was a yeshiva student who had strayed from Torah ways. He had become a desecrator of the Sabbath, a person who mocked the customs of the Torah and all who observed them. But, the day the Nazis began their murders, he had repented. All day, he sat in his house and recited Psalms. He addressed the congregation:

Jews, you know me, Leibele Brodsky, you know I was a blasphemer, a mocker of Israel, a lost soul. And I tell you there is a God in Heaven. Here we have seen fulfilled the words of the prophets, and their curses which have fallen upon us.” He opened the book, he held it in his hands and read “And I shall come to pass if you will not harken to the voice of the Lord your God to take care to fulfill all His commandments and His statutes which I command you this day, that all the curses shall come upon you and overtake you!

Leibele raised his voice and said, “Behold, our eyes have plainly seen the hands of God raised to punish His people who betrayed their mission and rejected Him and His Torah.” He finished, his face pained, and slumbered into his seat. The congregants waited now for the responses of Reb Chaim who stood silently by with his eyes closed. “My teachers,” he said God destroys His people from the face of the earth because of their sins. Is it not foolish to believe that?

If this were a punishment from heaven because of our sins why all the rabbis, and holy *tzadikim* (righteous ones) who were full of the Torah and good deeds, why did they die?

This haunting question is at the centre of Maza’s discussion of divine goodness. In previous centuries, Jews were dedicated to Torah. By 1939, this situation had dramatically changed. The *Chalutzim* of Eastern Europe were intoxicated by Eastern European socialism and secular Zionism. American emigrants pursued the materialism of the New World. Yet, it was God’s will, as per Maza, that the Jewish community would not forsake his laws. As Maza explains:

God knew that oppression of the Jewish People had to end or the sun of the Torah would set. The Jewish People had to be redeemed and returned to the land of Israel. This was the moment in the history of the Jewish People that God’s anger was poured out. The beginning of liberation was to be ushered in with the coming of divine fury—the Holocaust. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, God hid his face and did not protect His people from the horror of the Nazis so that redemption should occur. Throughout the destruction of the Holocaust and the martyrdom of the righteous of Israel the Jewish people were freed from the oppression of the exile and Torah learning was able to flourish again.

#### **ELIEZER BERKOWITZ**

Like Maza, the orthodox theologian Eliezer Berkowitz in *Faith after the Holocaust*, argues that religious belief is still possible after the nightmare of the

crematorias. Berkowitz maintains that the problem of faith must be confronted in the agony of one's soul. After the Holocaust, Jews have the religious responsibility to reason with God, and if need be to wrestle with Him. Such a stance is not blasphemous: it is simply impossible to pass by such horror in silence.

Such a questioning of God stands out at the beginning of Jewish history. Abraham wrestled with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. Job struggled with God over his misfortune. Berkowitz concludes that questioning is one way of resolving the crisis of faith brought about by the Jewish concentration camp experience.

The declaration that there is neither justice nor judge is a Jewish version of radical theology. Yet after the Holocaust, God's role in the universe cannot be dismissed so simply. At Auschwitz and Treblinka, man sank to his lowest level, but he also reached the highest peak of dignity. Jews faced death with dignity, as martyrs. They affirmed their belief in God despite his terrible silence. Berkowitz claims that in the death camps God was present with His holy people. The hidden God was manifest in their agony. In the shadow of crematories, they remained firm in their faith in the living God.

Berkowitz believes that Jews today must model their response to the Holocaust on their ancestors' examples. Though the mystery cannot be explained, it can become a positive influence in the formulation of one's beliefs.

A number of the sages of Talmud attempt to resolve the dilemma of Jewish suffering by appealing to God's silence. In biblical terminology, this concept is expressed by the Hebrew phrase *hester panim* (the hiding of face). When suffering occurs, God hides His face from human evil. For centuries, Jews struggled against God's seaming indifference to tragedy: two temples destroyed, the dispersal of Jewish people, the Spanish inquisition, crusades, Black Death, and Khmel'nitsky's massacres. Yet rabbinical Judaism insists that God is present in His

silence. God hiding His face is not due to divine indifference. Rather, His intention is to create space for human freedom.

According to Berkowitz, freedom and responsibility are the essence of humanity. If human beings are to exist, they must be allowed to sin. The God of history is thus both absent and present concurrently. Berkowitz writes:

He is present without being indubitably manifest; he is absent without being hopelessly inaccessible. Thus, many find him even in his "absence"; many miss him even in his presence. Because of the necessity of his absence, there is the "Hiding of the Face" and suffering of the innocent; because of the necessity of his presence, evil will not ultimately triumph; because of it, there is hope for man.

Jewish survival has always confounded Israel enemies. It is a great mystery. Jewish people have had no country, organized government, or material resources yet they have preserved their own identity. In the Middle Ages, the mystery of the continuing presence of the Jews was explained as the work of the devil. In modern times, the "Satan of Christendom" explanation was replaced by the idea of secret international conspiracy by the Elders of Zion. Such a vision led to the Nazis attempt to eliminate the Jewish people.

According to Berkowitz, the Germans were motivated by a metaphysical fear of the true mystery of God's presence in history, as revealed in the continuing survival of Israel. The Jewish people who bear witness to the presence of God are His suffering servants. The question after the Holocaust should *NOT* be how God could have tolerated such evil, but whether the Jewish people can still testify to His elusive presence.

For Berkowitz, Jewish survival through the ages, and the gathering of the exiles in the land of their fathers, proclaimed God's presence in the very heart of His unreadable concealment. The fear of faith is therefore left with a perplexing duality. Auschwitz is perhaps the most horrifying manifestation of divine silence,

but the establishment of a Jewish state and the culminating triumph of Jewish survival is the vivid proclamation of God's presence.

### IGNAZ MAYBAUM

Like Bernard Maza, the British reform theologian, Ignaz Maybaum, believes that the Holocaust was the result of divine providence. In contrast to Maza, Maybaum argues that God did not pour out His fury to revitalize Torah Judaism. Rather, Maybaum believes that the six million Jews who died in the concentration camps were chosen by God to become sacrificial victims, in order to bring about God's purposes for a modern world.

Maybaum writes, in *Face of God After Auschwitz*, that since 1933 he had struggled to make sense of what happened during the Nazi period. The events of 1939-1945 seemed unparalleled in mankind's history. Many Jews were stunned into silence; some into religious rebellion of God. If God has allowed the Holocaust to happen, what has happened; where is God? Slowly, attempts were made to emerge from the gripping nightmare and to find both a logical and religious response.

Maybaum contends that the Jewish world has experienced three major disasters, each of which he refers to as a *Churban* (an event of utter destruction). A *Churban* is an operation in which God, like a surgeon, cuts out a part from the body of mankind so that a new span of life can begin – in revived health.

The first *Churban* was the destruction of the temple of Solomon, which made Jews a displaced people. For the first time in history there was a nation without land, which nevertheless believed it had a holy mission. The destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. enabled the Jewish community to bring knowledge of God and Torah to the pagan nations beyond Judea's borders. Thus the first *Churban* was an act of creative destruction brought about by divine providence.

The second *Churban* destroyed the Temple of Herod and thereby established the synagogue as the fundamental institution within Jewish life. For the first time, mankind saw an example of worship where prayers took the place of sacrifice. The expulsion from Spain and the Inquisition's massacre of Jews are to be understood as *gazeizrot* (evil decrees) but were not examples of *Churban*.

The third *Churban* in Jewish history was the death of six million Jews in the concentration camps during World War II. Maybaum recounts events from his own life:

My mother died in Theresienstad, my two sisters and other relatives died in Auschwitz. Can I bring myself to conceive any kind of progress coming as a consequence of the third Churban? The Jews must remain the people believing in God, the redeemer, from Egypt. Six million martyrs perished in the camps, but 2/3 of the Jewish Covenant survived. How should Jews encounter the awful God who visited in Auschwitz?

For this act of creative destruction, the home of Eastern European Jewry was destroyed. Nevertheless, these horrors led to progress and the creation of the nation state of Israel. Understanding the Holocaust in this way the Jewish community need not be embarrassed.

In the Hebrew bible, the prophets were called upon to interpret the calamities of their own day. The same task applies to Jewry today. According to Maybaum, Hitler should be understood as an instrument of God's will. In the scriptures, Nebuchadnezzar is depicted as destroyer of Jerusalem, nonetheless he is referred to as Nebuchadnezzar, my servant (Jer. 27.6). God used him as an instrument to purify, to punish a sinful world. The six million died an innocent death; they died because of the sins of others.

After World War II, the majority of Jews had only a "Job-like" submission as a response to the Holocaust. But contemporary Jewry must adopt the divine renewal in belief and welcome the new era which inspires us with hope and joy. The surviving remnants of the Jewish community must change. Jews

must eliminate indifference, pettiness, and lazy thoughts from their minds and lives. They must become better Jews than they were before the *Churban*: more devoted to the holy tradition.

According to Maybaum, Auschwitz is the pagan Golgotha of our times. A Christianity withdrawn from the responsibility of history shares the responsibility for the twentieth century Golgotha of six million Jews. Thus, despite the sincere fellowship expressed by many Christians towards Jews today it must not be forgotten that the Church was largely silent and a bystander as millions of Jews were murdered in the death camps.

Having looked into the abyss, twentieth century man can perceive that hope for the future rests on greater charity and compassion. In this context, only the biblical view concerning the world as a creation of God, and every human being as created in His image can save us from utter catastrophe.

#### **EMIL FACKENHEIM**

The Jewish philosopher and theologian, Emil Fackenheim, at one point discovered that Jews throughout the world, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, believer and non-believer, faced with the radical threat of extinction were stubbornly defying it. They opted for the survival of themselves and their children as Jews.

Those who seek to explain the horror of the Nazi period believe they can categorize these events in various theological frameworks, such as sin and punishment. For Fackenheim, these solutions do not take into account their full terror. What is required instead is a sensitive awareness of the enormity of this catastrophe. He feels obligated to give guidance to the community, and he also contends that it is a sacred obligation to remember all those who were murdered. Further, he argues that Jews must connect God with modern history.

According to Fackenheim, the Holocaust was as unique event. There are two central factors, he argues, which distinguish this event from other occurrences. First, six million Jews were murdered not because of their religious beliefs, but because their grandparents continued to see themselves within the Jewish Covenant. And second, the process of killing was seen as an end in itself, unlike previous massacres. Jews did not face death in order to bear witness to their death. Killing of Jews became a goal on itself, and such an intention, Fackenheim calls radically evil.

Even though modern Jews might wish to divorce the Holocaust from previous Jewish history, this is impossible. It serves as a reminder that Jews cannot escape their own identify. The Holocaust was essentially an epochal event – an occurrence bringing faith into conflict with experience. Epochal events, Fackenheim believes, endanger the continuity of Judaism since they test the ability of the community to accommodate Jewish suffering into a divine providential scheme. Such challenges call into question God's power over human history.

If the Holocaust is similar to such tragedies, it has the capacity to undermine Judaism. Never within Jewish history have men anywhere had such a dreadful, horrifying reason for turning their backs on God. At the same time, Fackenheim believes that the Holocaust is also a root experience where the presence of God manifested itself in the death camps in the same manner as his saving presence at the Red Sea, and his commanding presence at Sinai.

Fackenheim postulates that in the death camps God revealed a further commandment to his chosen people. The 614<sup>th</sup> commandment, added to the 613<sup>th</sup> contained in the Torah, is directed to the post-Holocaust Jewish community. In his *God's Presence in History, Jewish Affirmation and Philosophical Reflections*, Fackenheim explains:

Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories. They are commanded to service as Jews, lest Jewish people perish.

They are forbidden to despair of man and this world. Finally, they are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish. The commanding voice of Auschwitz demands that those who perished must never be forgotten. It is a holy duty to remember and tell the tale such an obligation is not negotiable.

Further, Jewry is commanded to abandon the time-honoured Jewish exaltation of martyrdom. After Auschwitz, Jewish life is more sacred than Jewish death. Fackenheim insists that the commanding voice of Auschwitz implores Jews not to abandon the world to the forces of darkness. It is because of Auschwitz and their role as Jews that they must identify with all humanity.

Moreover, the voice of Auschwitz commands that the religious Jews wrestle with God in revolutionary ways. The stance of the pious Jews must be one of protest. In confronting God, such a stance would result in taking issue with God. As far as the secular Jew is concerned, he too must not forsake the Jewish tradition. The voice of Auschwitz demands Jewish unity.

Regarding the interpretation of Auschwitz, Fackenheim believes that God's presence is a mystery; all attempts to provide a theological explanation are doomed to failure. He writes, "The Jew of today can endure because he must endure and he must endure because he is commanded to endure."

In *To Mend the World – Formulations to Future Jewish Thoughts*, Fackenheim argues that the Holocaust has created a rupture in history. This rupture must be mended by acts of *tikun* (repair) drawn from the Jewish mystical tradition. Such reconstruction he believes cannot take place only in the realm of thoughts but in deeds of goodness and resistance to evil.

## **RICHARD RUBINSTEIN**

In contrast to the theologians I have been discussing so far, the Jewish scholar and theologian, Richard Rubinstein in *After Auschwitz*, urges that it is impossible to sustain a belief in a supernatural deity after the events of the

Holocaust. This conclusion was reinforced by his encounter with a distinguished German clergyman, Heinrich Grüber, Dean of the Evangelical Church in East and West Berlin in 1961.

During World War II, Grüber helped baptize Jews and opposed the anti-Semitic program of the Nazis. As a result, he was incarcerated in Sachsenhausen concentration camp. In 1961, he was the only German to testify at the trial of Adolph Eichman. In his conversations with Rubinstein, the Dean affirmed that God was active in history and was responsible for the Holocaust, quoting Psalm 44.22, "For thy sake are we slaughtered every day."

Grüber explained that for some reason it was part of God's plan that the Jews died. Comparing the terrible event of the Nazi regime with contemporary happenings he declared:

At different times God uses different people as His whip against His own people, the Jews, but those whom he uses will be punished far worse than the people of the Lord. I know that God is punishing us because we have been the whip against Israel.

Though he did not explain why God punished the Jews, Rubinstein concluded that for Grüber it was because of their unwillingness to recognize Jesus as their saviour. That was the view of the German Ecumenical Church.

Three years after the war, in 1948, at the meeting in Darmstadt, the Church asserted that the Holocaust was a divine punishment visited upon the Jews and they called upon the Jewish community to cease their rejection of Christ. Though Rubinstein was shocked by Grüber's words he recognized that there was nothing new in his attempt to understand history as the unfolding of God's plan. The same interpretations of Jewish history were held by biblical prophets, rabbis, and the Church fathers. Rubinstein writes in *After Auschwitz*:

Given that the Judeo-Christian conception is so strong in scripture that God is the ultimate actor in the historical drama no

other theological interpretation of the death of six million Jews is tenable. If one views all time and history through the perspective of the Christ, one would ultimately have to assert that God caused the Jews to be exterminated by the Nazis because of their continuing failure to confess and acknowledge the Christ. If one shared Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkais' view, one would be drawn to assert that the Jewish people had been exterminated because of their failure to comply with the Lord's commandments in the Torah.

When Rubinstein left Grüber's house he knew he could no longer avoid the issue of God's relation to the Holocaust. It seemed amazing to him that Jewish theologians still subscribed to the belief of an omnipotent, beneficial, all-loving God after the death camps.

Traditional Jewish theology maintains that God is the ultimate actor in history. It interprets even tragedy as God's punishment for Israel's sinfulness. But Rubinstein was unable to see how this position could be maintained without accepting Hitler as an instrument of His will. And this idea, says Rubinstein, is simply "too obscene for me to accept."

According to Rubenstein, a void now exists where once Jewish people experienced God's presence. Though Rubinstein rejects the image of God in the Hebrew Scripture, he insists that it would be a mistake to construe his position as atheism. He writes:

When I say we live in the time of the death of God, I mean that the thread uniting God and man, Heaven and Earth, has been broken. We stand in a cold, silent unfeeling cosmos unaided by any powerful power, beyond our own resources. After Auschwitz, what else can a Jew say about God?

In his rejection of the traditional concepts of God, Rubenstein mentions that although Jews have lost all hope and consolation related to a supernatural deity, they can still find spiritual vitality through traditional observance. Rubinstein argues that in the post-Holocaust age, the death of six million Jews should be understood as a sacrificial offering by the German nation. The

Holocaust was an explosion of violence in which the German nation chose Jews as a sacrificial victim for society's ills.

After the death camps, Jews do not expect anything from man or God. They can apprehend the true nature of evil and the necessity of its containment.

During the Holocaust, Jewry experienced the most degrading death in the concentration camps, yet this was not the last word. Death in Europe was followed by the resurrection of the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland. In the crisis of mass murder, Jews discovered that they were totally and nakedly alone. Nevertheless, by their own efforts, they have renewed Jewish existence in Zion. Zionism's real significance lies in the fact that twenty centuries of self-determination, self-estrangement and self-blame have ended. Jews are now free to live at every level of emotional and cultural experience. In ancient times the Jewish dispersion was seen as the result of a sin. So, the end of Jewish guilt should bring about an end of negativities of Jewish existence. Zionism provided the means by which such a goal could be attained.

#### IRVING GREENBERG

More than any other orthodox thinker of our age, Jew or Christian, Irving Greenberg, in *Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire*, attempts to deal with the implications of the Holocaust in human history. According to Greenburg, even though the content of the Covenant has been altered and the relationship between God and the Jewish people has changed, continuity remained in the Covenant that binds Israel and God.

The descendant of a distinguished rabbinic family, Greenberg is an ordained rabbi and also a Harvard trained historian. Unlike most of his orthodox colleagues who speak of sacred incontestable biblical and rabbinic teachings, Greensberg daringly writes of the shifting role between Israel and God, and the revolutionary impact of history. According to Greenberg, in the biblical era, God

was more active. In the rabbinic era, direct revelations ceased. Divine presence is now to be found in Torah study and in deeds of kindness. God is not only in the temple but He is in secular environment as well.

Greenberg speaks of a shattered Covenant in the Holocaust and recognizes that the Holocaust has altered our perception of God and humanity. He offers a powerful verification, which must become the test of religious integrity after the Holocaust. He writes, “No statement theological or otherwise should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children”.

Greenberg argues that the Covenant was broken in the Holocaust, but the Jewish people chose voluntarily to renew it. The choice to remain a Jew is a response to the Covenant with God and between generations of Jews. The tasks of Jewish existence after the Holocaust are threefold: to recreate the divine and human images that were destroyed in the Holocaust, to respond to death by creating life, and to continue the Jewish people’s journey in history. Jews must labour in order to bring redemption.

Greenberg also explores in depth the implications of the Holocaust for the Christian vision of humanity. By its very nature, the Holocaust is obviously central to Jews. Six million Jews were killed (80 percent of the Jewish rabbis and scholars alive in 1938). Since there can not be a covenant without the covenant people, the fundamental existence of Jews and Judaism is thrown into question by this genocide.

For this reason alone the trauma of the Holocaust cannot be overcome without some basic reorientation, in light of it, by the surviving Jewish community. For Christians, it is easier to continue living as if the event did not make any difference, as if the crime belongs to the history of another people and faith. But such a conclusion would be and is sheer self-deception. Failure to confront and account for this evil would turn both religions into empty meaningless assertions.

Holocaust poses a yet more devastating question to Christianity: what did Christianity contribute to make the Holocaust possible? In 1942, the Nietra Rabbi went to Archbishop Kametko of Nietra to plead for Catholic intervention against deportation of the Slovakian Jews. The Archbishop replies:

You will not die from hunger and disease. They will slaughter all of you there, young and old, women and children at once. It is the punishment you deserve for the death of our Lord and redeemer, Jesus Christ. You have only one solution, come over to our religion and I will work to annul this decree.

There are many similar anti-Semitic statements by individuals reported during the Holocaust. It is clear that anti-Semitism played a role in the decision not to shield Jews, or to actually turn them in. If the teaching of contempt furnished an occasion for Christians to feel they were doing God's duty in helping kill Jews – or in not stopping it – then Christianity may be hopelessly and fatally compromised. If stereotypes, which brought the Nazis to focus on the Jews as scapegoats in the first place, created a lasting residue of anti-Semitism in Christian Europe, then Christianity again may be fatally compromised.

The fact is that during the Holocaust Church protests were primarily on behalf of converted Jews. This suggests that something in Christian teaching supported or created a positive context for anti-Semitism, and even murder.

One of the fundamental steps Christianity must take after the Holocaust is to quarrel with the gospels themselves for being a source of anti-Semitism. For the devout Christian, the New Testament is the word of God. Yet even the word of God must be held to account for nourishing hatred as well as culpability in or being an accessory to the fact of genocide. Nothing less than a fundamental critique and purification of gospels themselves can begin to purify Christianity from being a source of hatred.

The Holocaust reveals that Christianity has the stark choice of repentance and self-purification or the continued temptation to participate in genocide or pave

the way for it. For us Jews, the moral necessity is the search for religious experience rather than surrender to the logic of non-belief.

If the Holocaust strikes at the credibility of faith, especially unreconstructed faith, it at the same time erodes the argument of the secular option. In so far as the Holocaust grew out of Western civilization, then at least for Jews it is a powerful incentive to guard against being over impressed with this culture's intellectual assumptions and to seek other new philosophical and historical frameworks. The Holocaust calls on Jews, Christians, and others to absolutely resist the total authority of the technological miracles. The post-Holocaust era will not turn its back on many aspects of modernity, but clearly it will be freer to reject some of its elements, and to take from the past much more fully.

## ELIE WIESEL

In contrast to the theologians who have attempted to provide a positive theological response to the death camps, or those who proclaimed the death of God, Elie Wiesel has been a major spokesman for religious protest. In the autobiographical memoir, *Night*, he portrays the evolution of his despair and the transition from youthful belief to disillusionment.

Wiesel describes himself as a young boy fascinated with God's mystery, studying Talmud and Kabala in the town of Shiget in Transylvania. Later he was transported to Auschwitz where the erosion of his faith began. He says:

Some talked of God, of His mysterious ways, of the sins of Jewish people and their future deliverance. But he ceased to pray.

In short time, his religious rebellion deepened. In particular, he was shocked by the incongruity of the Jewish liturgy that praised God and the events

of the camps that indicted Him. Dismayed by the new arrivals who professed their sins when they recognized their destiny, he felt revolt rise within him.

In his second novel, *Dawn*, Wiesel advocates that to be independent and self-reliant Jews must extinguish the dependency on God, and create their own salvation. In his next novel, *The Accident*, the character Eliezer, the correspondent for an Israeli newspaper meditates on the nature of God. For him, God is a sadist rather than the just and saving God of Israel. Man prefers to blame himself for all possible sins and crimes rather than come to the conclusion that God is capable of most flagrant injustice. Here the doctrine of loving God is replaced by the concept of a spiteful deity who abuses humanity for His own pleasure. In such a universe there is no justification for the suffering of the innocent.

Wiesel provides no religious explanation for the events of the Holocaust. Instead, in his three novels, he depicts a Godless world in which there is no possibility of human redemption.

In *Oath*, Wiesel portrays Moshe, the saint who lives in the village and confessed to a murder he did not commit in order to save the Jewish population. But he soon realized that his sacrifice was futile. The Jews would still be blamed and destroyed. Yet human beings must stubbornly pursue life even though there is no providential God who watches over their destiny. Wiesel thus doesn't deny the existence of the void yet this affirmation of life offers a more optimistic vision than is found in his earlier novels.

Wiesel is bewildered by God's apparent indifference and castigates Him for His lack of interest in the fate of His faithful servants. Yet atheism is no alternative for Wiesel. He is engaged in a dialogue with God. The Holocaust has made questions about God's theology all the more urgent. Wiesel, the survivor, refuses to let God go but he is at odds with Him, anxious to point out that the flames of Auschwitz have destroyed the traditional belief in a benevolent God who is concerned with the Jewish people.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The varied attempts to come to terms with Holocaust which we have examined suffer from numerous defects.

Rubenstein rejects the traditional Jewish understanding of God's nature and activity and argues for a concept of a deity far removed from Jewish heritage. Wiesel's agonizing struggle with religious doubt plunges the believer into a deeper despair. Writers, who have attempted to defend the biblical and rabbinic concept of God, like Maza and Maybaums, view that God used Nazis for His own purpose, which is a monstrous conception. Fackenheim's assertion that God issued a 614<sup>th</sup> commandment through the ashes of Auschwitz seems to be nothing more than wishful thinking. Berkowitz's view that God was hiding during the Holocaust offers little consolation.

Thus, contemporary Holocaust theology is in a state of crisis. For the first time in history, Jews seem unable to account for God's ways. The optimistic atheists of the nineteenth century thought that by removing God they gave man a place to be man. The pessimistic atheists of the twentieth century have discovered that by removing God they have removed any place for man to be a man. The Orthodox Jews retained the steadfast belief in the God of Sinai without any qualifications, as *fait accompli*. The rest of Jewry is still searching for the explanation to the mystery that was the Holocaust, and to the role of God in this tragic mystery.

Thank you

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<sup>1</sup> In preparing for this lecture the author considered the following sources: Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War against Jews* (NY, 1975); Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Holocaust Theology* (Essex 1985); John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaur, *Holocaust* (NY

1989); Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Jewish Theology and the Holocaust* (Oxford, 1983); Richard Rubinstein, *After Auschwitz* (Indiana, 1966); Elie Wiesel, *Night* (NY, 1973); Elie Wiesel, *The Gates of the Forest*; Elie Wiesel, *Oath*; Elie Wiesel, *The Trial of God*.

**JUSTICE**

## AMERICAN JEWS AND THE HOLOCAUST

*Paper delivered March 30, 2004, at  
Shaarey Zedek Synagogue.  
Sponsored by 8 friends of the Hebrew  
University, Shaarey Zedek  
Congregation, and Gertrude and  
Philip Weiss Endowment for  
Holocaust Education.*

**W**hy are we Jews obsessed *now* with the Holocaust? Or are we? I came a long time ago to the conclusion that we are saturated with material about European Jews and their behavior before and during the Holocaust. Yet, the American Jewry is in retrospect a blank card – a completely unknown factor – even though it played an extremely important role in Jewish World affairs, before, during, and after the war.

Why so little information is available to us is not a mystery. I presume the destruction of European Jewry forced the attention on them although it came too late and did not change the end result.

In most cases historical events of some magnitude demand our immediate attention while the memory is still fresh. Then slowly with the passage of time those events dissipate into the oblivion of historical importance. With the Holocaust the opposite occurred. For nearly a quarter of a century a complete silence prevailed. Holocaust survivors were not encouraged to speak on their experiences, the society was not willing to listen and the press theatre, movie producers, writers, and clergy all ignored the topic. And then the floodgates

suddenly opened, the barriers broke loose. The Holocaust arrived on the American scene. How did it happen? Who was responsible for it? To answer the two questions I had to rely on American sources as this was unknown to me during the war as I was in the concentration camps, and after the war there was a meager amount of information available. Lately, this improved. Some writers concentrated on American Jewry and their role in the Holocaust and post-Holocaust period. As a Holocaust survivor I understand the deep involvement of Germany with issues of the Holocaust, as it was the country where the anti-Semitic laws originated, and where their application led to the destruction of European Jewry. I also understand the role that Israel is exercising as the repository of the survivors' community of World Jewry. But why the USA?

The small percentage of Holocaust survivors who settled in the USA after the war did not have the economical or political influence to exercise. And yet directly or indirectly they were the original carriers of the Holocaust virus. Today the scenery has changed. Let me describe how it happened. It is my intention to lean heavily on recently published books which give a complete inside-look at the story. Their research is thorough and fascinating. In "The Holocaust in American Life" by Peter Novick we get his interpretation why now and why here? Some believe, as he claims, that America is only now dealing with the Holocaust because of the trauma of the Holocaust. For a long time the Holocaust was repressed as it was too traumatic for daily life. And yet Novick says nothing suggests that the Holocaust traumatized American Jews. They were shocked and visibly saddened but not traumatized.

The other explanation for the growing consciousness of the Holocaust in the US is the so-called, "collective memory" hypothesis, which in the Jewish tradition are very long-lasting, for example: the Exodus from Egypt, Massada, and Chanukah – retained over the centuries a potent hold on the imaginations of Jews of medieval Europe with their positive, gratifying images, and they do it even today as well.

Some claim that the Holocaust, and Israel, are the only common denominators sustaining the American Jewish identity in this century and stands out proudly as the symbol of this identity by producing institutions dedicated to Holocaust memory and observance and training, a large nucleus of Holocaust professionals eager to carry the torch of Holocaust memory into the future. This in turn brought some warnings from Jewish commentators that Holocaust-centered Judaism cannot ensure Jewish survival and the development of Jewish culture, especially among Jewish youth.

Whether or not this proves to be true in the long run, so far this did not happen. In growing numbers Jewish teens are being “twinned” at bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies with a young victim of the Holocaust, who never lived to have the ceremony, and thousands upon thousands of Jewish youngsters and adults participate in organized tours to the concentration camps in Poland – Auschwitz and Treblinka come back “reborn Jews” with their new mission to stay proud Jews as never before. You just have to observe all the people flocking to Holocaust courses and discussions to understand the tremendous power of this Holocaust education on American Jewry. This guarding and perpetuating of the memory of the Holocaust is very much a part of the Jewish tradition, forgetting it would be anomalous and blasphemous. The principal atrium, the truthful representation of American Jewishness to the total world community is the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.

The public reason for Americans to confront the Holocaust is that the Holocaust is the bearer of important messages that we all ignore at our own peril. For some within the conservative community the Holocaust exposed the consequences of the breakdown of religious and family values in Germany and for democrats the abandonment of European Jewry meant the moral bankruptcy of the American establishment, including President Roosevelt. And for All Americans the Holocaust was used to invoke the differences between the demoralized “Old World” and the vibrant, pure “New World” with all the freedom and liberty. My

aim is to give with this lecture a short historical background of American Jewry before the Holocaust, during the fateful years of destruction of European Jewry, and the years after the war: their hopes, dreams, illusions of power, and their sad expectancies, and their powerlessness. My hope is that this background will create a frame in which we can better understand the role of American Jewry in the global sense.

### **PRE-WAR YEARS 1930-1939 – TIMES OF APATHY**

Pre-war actions against German Jews, from the early hooligan excesses to the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935 and the destruction and looting of synagogues and businesses, the imprisonment of Jews in the Dachau concentration camp during the fateful Kristalnacht in 1938n were well publicized in the American press and strongly denounced throughout the world. Despite Nazi strong armed measures to keep their borders hermetically sealed, it was not a secret what was going on in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany in the thirties, and this brutality was vividly described in all dailies of the free world.

Though American Jews responded with greater horror to pre-war Nazi atrocities than gentile Americans (which is understood) many of them reasoned that such periods of oppression had occurred over the centuries and they would eventually pass. In the majority of cases this was also the thinking of German and other European Jews at this time.

In the West, the beginning of the war resulted in less rather than more attention being paid to the Jews of Europe. The dramatic dispatches from the front drove Jewish tragedy from the front pages of the world press and from 1939 to 1941 everyone's attention was concentrated on the military events: the war at sea, the fall of France, the Battle of Britain, the invasion of the Soviet Union – rather than the Jewish carnage in Poland.

Let's speak now about the American Jews. It would be totally wrong and misleading to call the American Jewish Community of 1920-1940 a cohesive unit. So was also the case with the European Jewish Community of this time. From about 1960 we could say that the overwhelming majority of American Jews were united in support of the State of Israel, but in 1940 there were no major political or religious commonalities that fused the American Jews. American Jewry was much more diverse then than it is now. There were the old-country divisions and jealousy, among Jews of German origin and Ostjuden and they still differentiated between Litvacks and Galizianers. The Orthodox splintered themselves into small sects, fighting with each other. Reform Jews were just "beginners" and to them Orthodox Jews were superstitious and belonging to another century. Secularists called them all ignorant.

There was very little love and common interests between the up-town republican bankers and the leftist unionists from the Lower East Side. Only the Landmanshalft (home-town associations) preserved some connection with Europe but even this was in decline. The circulation of Yiddish newspapers was losing ground rapidly. Hitler's rise to power, and the helplessness of European Jewry did produce among many American Jews a greater sense of Jewish identification and their responsibility. Yet in the early 'thirties and 'forties the question of the primacy of Jewish over American loyalty was unthinkable, although this is today accepted as 'normal'. It is right to say that the Yiddish-language press was much more vocal on issues of European Jewry than the Anglo-Jewish press. The poorer immigrant centers like the Lower East Side of Manhattan and the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn were humming with the memorial wartime activity, but young, better educated Jews, influenced more by the American culture, stayed away, as they do even today because they consider themselves more American than Jewish.

**WAR YEARS 1939-1945 TIMES OF AGONY**

We can speak about the enormous diversity of responses to the Holocaust among American Jews. On one hand, moral and spiritual devastation verging on emotional discomfort, on the other, indifference, verging on subconscious forgetfulness. Yet practically the same could be said about the Jews in Palestine during those years, and those were Jews who left Europe around 1933.

The Palestine Post on Nov 25, 1942, carried a report from the Polish government-in-exile of an alleged order by Heinrich Himmler to kill all Polish Jews by the end of 1942. It got four brief paragraphs, with choice space given to “soviet Army scores smashing victory at Stalingrad” and “Allies advance in Bizerte, Tunisia”. A month of mourning proclaimed in Palestine when the scope of the ongoing murder became clear proved to be a great burden on the public. Only the first of weekly days of prayer was observed. Movie houses that were to be closed for the month were reopened after their owners complained that their livelihood was threatened. How much did American Jewry press for the rescue efforts? Orthodox Jewry worked tirelessly to save the rabbis and the yeshiva students, the labour movement did everything to save Jewish trade unionists and socialists, academics tried to assist scholars and intellectuals, Zionists had their priority to save Zionists, and of course everyone exerted themselves on behalf of their own family members. But in general rescue was not a high priority for major American Jewish organizations or their leaders during the war. The largest wartime effort to unite American Jewry- the American Jewish conference of 1943 – did not originally include rescue of European Jewry on the agenda. There were a few mass meetings demanding action but usually without any thought-out and concept what that action might be. There were high profile private approaches to the Roosevelt Administration and the president himself, but they were not diligently pursued.

The leading organizations boycotted and sought to discredit the only groups that worked most energetically for rescue, the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, founded by Peter Bergson, a representative of the Zionist-Revisionist Irgun in the United States. Why did it happen? What was the cause of this great animosity? Many explanations have been offered. Some claim the indifference of the American Jews was the cause. The broader explanation puts the fault on the general timidity of American Jewry and in particular its fear that strong agitation for rescue would accelerate domestic anti-Semitism. One also hears opinions that the devotion of the American Jews and Rabbi Stephen Wise, especially to President Roosevelt, prevented them from confronting his administration.

It is also well-known fact that working for the creation of the Jewish State took precedence over working for the rescue of European Jewry. And this was the priority in the USA as well as in Palestine. Ben Gurion himself delegated the rescue work to Yitzhac Greenbaum, who insisted that “Zionism is above everything.” Zionists, like non-Zionists, were not “writing off” European Jewry as critics claim. The Jews of Europe were in their views, already written off by circumstances beyond their control and the “Festung Europe” (The Fortress Europe) made rescue impossible. Meanwhile Zionists took advantage of the wartime sympathy for the plight of Europe’s Jews and hoped for a “positive” solution to the Jewish question after the war.

#### **POST-WAR YEARS 1945-1960 TIMES OF SILENCE**

Between the end of the war and 1960 as one who lived through the years, I can testify, the Holocaust made scarcely any appearance in the mainstream of American, and Canadian, society and hardly more in the Jewish public opinion. Only a handful of books dealt with it and with the exception of the *Diary of Anne Frank*, few of them did pride themselves with large readerships. Only two

historical portrayals of the Holocaust were available in the United States, both were imported from Europe and none of them attracted keen interest. Gerald Reitlinger's *The Final Solution* and Leon Poliakov's, *Harvest of Hate* never received strong reviews from major historical journals. The presentation of the Holocaust at schools and universities was practically non-existent. Movies until 1960 hardly touched upon the subject. Alain Resnais's *Night and Fog* is considered a Holocaust film, but in reality it deals with Nazi action against members of the French resistance and does not have anything pertaining to Jewish issues. The same could be said about the *Judgment at Nuremberg* which deals with the crimes of the Nazi regime: *Judgment at Nuremberg* and the *Diary of Anne Frank* were not box office hits.

Contemporary American Jewish theological and religious thinkers in most cases avoided the Holocaust topic. I suppose like everyone else they were overwhelmed by the sheer size of the tragedy, so there was silence in the synagogues (and a definite silence in the church pews for many years). Secular commemoration was mostly observed by survivors. Throughout the 1950s the World Jewish Congress encouraged Jewish organizations around the world to hold annual commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Nowhere did they have less success than in the USA. Nobody dreamed about monuments and nobody had a lot to say about the issue, definitely not in public. American Jews did not speak about the Holocaust, and the survivors were definitely not encouraged.

Novick notes that in 1957 the *New Leader* ran a series of essays to find out what the minds of five million Americans, who had graduated from college after Hiroshima, had absorbed. At least two-thirds of the respondents were Jewish. In their replies of what had stated their thinking they mentioned many historical events from the Great Depression to the Cold War. Not a single reply touched on the Holocaust. Allan Dershowitz, growing up in a typically Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn in the 'forties and 'fifties recalls no discussion on the Holocaust either with his classmates or at home. Holocaust survivors did not have a visible

presence even within American Jewry. They were, on the whole, young, only beginning to learn English, and pre-occupied with rebuilding their lives. They kept to themselves and rarely, at least in the early years, had much to do with Jewish organizations except for those who were recipients of some assistance. (This situation was identical with the behavior of survivors in Canada, as a survivor, I can vouch for it). We are faced today with some of the painful memories, which survivors have repressed and only after the passage of many years can we bear to speak of what we had undergone. No doubt there is some truth in it, but I know for a fact that many were anxious, more than willing, to talk about their experiences, but made a deliberate choice not to, except among themselves. Both in Israel and the United States survivors found listeners reluctant to hear of their ordeal, and were told constantly to forget about their past and concentrate on the future. They were told that it was in their own interests to proceed with building their new lives and create the nucleus of their families in the new land. Later on they broke the isolation from the mainstream of American Jewish life, and became important in initiating Holocaust observances. The intermarriage of the second generation of Holocaust survivors, to American born Jews, brought them into active participation with Holocaust memorialization. Whereas today the status of victim has come to be prized, in the 'forties and 'fifties it evoked at best the sort of pity mixed with contempt in both the United States and Israel for different reasons.

### **1970-1990 TIMES OF ACTIVITY**

The silence, the deafening silence of the 1950s and 1960s turned into the most productive and enriched years from 1970-1990 in the United States. First and foremost, William L. Shirer's best-seller, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, reverberated throughout American society for years. The book put Nazism and the Second World War in practically every household. Then – the sensational

announcement by David Ben Gurion in the Knesset about Israeli agents apprehending Adolf Eichmann, and his transportation to Israel to stand trial electrified World Jewry and the world at large. There was naturally some concern expressed by American Jewish leaders about the legitimacy of the procedure and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) distanced itself from Eichmann's kidnapping, claiming that American Jews could not be held responsible for Israel's actions, yet the backlash that Jewish agencies anticipated never took place. There is no doubt in my mind that during the long run of the trial American Jews lost a good deal of their inhibition about their discussions of the Holocaust. The coverage of the trial, and related historical feature programs disseminated much more information about the Holocaust than was available until then. The result of it was the firm linkage of the word Holocaust to the murder of European Jews. There was also one more issue concerning the Holocaust that had to be addressed. The silence of Pope Pius XII included his failure to denounce the "Holocaust" during the Second World War. This painful issue developed with the announcement that *The Deputy* written by a young German playwright named Rolf Hochhuth would be opening on Broadway. The play was a stinging indictment of Pius's inaction, which was responsible for an angry confrontation in Catholic Europe. The American Jewish Committee, always sensitive to world opinion, did its utmost to prevent it from going on; and informed the church officials of its intentions. The ADL went even further, its foreign affairs expert, Joseph Lichten wrote an article for the National Catholic Welfare Conference in defense of Pius's silence. The publicity was overwhelming. The American public enjoyed the full exposure of every detail concerning the church and its position on the Holocaust. That was highly cherished compensation for the "years of silence". And so emerged in American culture, a distinct phenomenon called the Holocaust, an event fully independent of Nazi barbarism in World War II. Now Israel and the Holocaust became twin pillars of American Jewish secular belief, symbols that bind American Jewry as much as Judaism itself. It is interesting to observe, that Israel, like the Holocaust,

until the mid-‘sixties, did not play an important role in American Jewish awareness. In the ‘sixties and early ‘seventies Israel became pivotal to American Jews. The spring of 1967 was the dramatic turning point in American Jews’ relations toward Israel and Israelis, and it was also the time of their acceptance of the Holocaust as part of the Jewish national identity. The fear of a renewed Holocaust on the eve of the Six-Day War left a deep mark on the American Jewish consciousness. Also the image of Jews as military heroes erased the negative stereotype of Jews as weak and passive victims, which inhibited previously the American Jewish Holocaust involvement.

It was the Yom Kippur War of October 1973 which proved to American Jewry the great vulnerability and isolation facing Israel and the similarity of conditions to that of European Jews thirty years earlier. Reflections on the Holocaust not only took off in America but became institutionalized. It also proved to Israelis their dependence on world Jewry. So it was in 1974 that the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Committee asked member agencies to sponsor Holocaust Day observances around the country, to promote teaching of the Holocaust in schools, and to include the Holocaust as the primary item in Jewish-Christian dialogue. After the Yom Kippur War the issues of wartime silence, indifference, and the abandonment of Jews became the centre-point of American Holocaust discourse. Elie Wiesel wrote of being for the first time in his adult life “afraid that the nightmare may start all over again”. Martin Peretz thought “indifference” too soft a word to describe America’s role during the Holocaust. He complained that America was acquiescent and complicit, and warned that it might happen again if Israel is threatened with destruction. Many American Jews came to the conclusion that the United States supported the birth of Israel out of guilt and that the very existence of Israel was the proof of the world’s guilt. The slogan “Never Again” meant now, “never again would we let others fool us or would we fool ourselves about the intention of those who intend to destroy Jews” said Milton Himmelfarb. Never again would we expose

ourselves to our own reproaches for having done less. From the late 'sixties on words like "our timidity", "our cowardice", and "our failure" figured ostensibly in the American Jewish discourse on the Holocaust. So now the time is for me to pose a question – "What about the Future?" and this shall bring us to the final chapter of today's lecture.

### **1990-2004 TIMES OF CONTEMPLATION**

As we have seen, the Holocaust moved from the margins to the center of American Jewish consciousness in a very short period of time: from an event hardly on the mind of the American public to one of an omniscient presence. So the question now is – will it continue and for how long? Will the Holocaust retain its importance a generation or two from now on, will it inspire the future generations of young American Jews the same way it does today? And possibly, the most important question – will it retain its primary importance not only with young Jews, but with young Americans? Will the memory of the Holocaust survive not only as an American Jewish memory but as an American memory? And what is the lesson of the Holocaust? In the United States (as well as Canada) the teaching of the Holocaust in public schools is regulated by law. Instructions for conducting Days of Remembrance are disseminated throughout the American military; a direct personal appeal by the President of the USA urges Americans to participate in preserving the memory of the Holocaust. The cost of sustaining the operation of the Washington Holocaust Museum, once looked after by private donations, was replaced nearly in total by the federal government. From coast to coast seeing "Schindler's List" became a civic duty. It is also strongly advocated, that survivors' memories are extremely important to be preserved and many projects are underway to collect them. Only the future will tell what audiences they'll command in the next generations.

There is a possibility to consider, that the gradual departure of survivors themselves will reduce the importance of the Holocaust. The sheer excitement of interviewing or quoting a living survivor will be lost and the lack of their sheer physical presence at commemorative activities will diminish the historical authenticity. This may reduce the amount of attention given today to Holocaust observance, and yet at the same time we should not underestimate the extent to which the commemorations become solidly institutionalized, basically carved in stone. There is in existence now a large cadre of people dedicated to the causes of the Holocaust who are eager to train young and willing individuals to take their places.

With the times, changing conditions will influence the choices and directions how we shall observe the remembrance of the Holocaust. Those changing conditions will be definitely responsible for our own choices, yet I am confident that all the freedom loving governments, all people with their strong sense of justice and democracy and especially we Jews, enjoying our unprecedented freedom in the 21<sup>st</sup> century shall remain most dedicated teachers of Holocaust history.

Thank You.

## KANADA AND CANADA: DIFFERENT, YET THE SAME

*Paper delivered to students at the  
University of Winnipeg*

I am a survivor of a ghetto, six labor and concentration camps. I was there, not because I was a political prisoner (at the time I did not have any political affiliation), not because I was charged with some criminal activity. I was there for only one reason: I was a Jew. I was there because the Western democracies did not allow Jews in. I was there because Western democracies – and that includes Canada – did not wish to allow Jews in and did everything possible to keep them out.

To the incarcerated Jews in practically every labour camp, Kanada, with a 'K', had an important meaning. It was a sign posted on all of the barrack where everything under the sun could be found: food, clothing, gold, diamonds, leather goods, china, and also gold teeth, photographs and eyeglasses. Everything taken from the living and the dead prisoners was stored there. It represented life, future, materialistic wellness. It was a paradise in *Gehenna*, paradise in the immense inferno. This paradise, however, was completely unreachable, as was Canada with the capital 'C'.

In the years 1930-1940 as a youngster in Poland, I was very much interested in novels by a German writer, Karl May. Karl May never was in the New World, but his novels described in the most interesting ways the life on the new frontiers in the Wild West. The Huron's, the Sioux, the pioneers of the wild west, cowboys, the saloons, the brutality of the white man and the helplessness of the Indians. This was my first impression of Canada. The immense territory, the

richness of the land and its native cultures. A land of the future, for future generations. And I think that was the impression of practically every Jew of Europe about Canada: an enormous, wealthy paradise, but unreachable.

Today, Canada has the international image of being a country of immigrants. A country welcoming those persecuted, offering them a place to live and a place to develop their aspirations. Canada remains a leader today in refugee re-settlement. But, it was not always this way. During the twelve years of Nazi terror (1933-1945), Canada admitted 5,000 Jews. During this same period, U.S.A. admitted 200,000, Palestine 125,000, Britain under siege 70,000, Argentina 50,000, Brazil 25,000, China 25,000, and Chile 14,000.

To be completely honest, Canada and Kanada have the same record. They were both unreachable to Jews when Jews needed them most. The Canadian government always welcomed American and British agricultural immigrants; they were many times subsidized. Then came Western European immigrants, and in emergencies, Eastern Europeans. At the bottom of the ladder were Blacks, Asians and Jews. With the beginnings of the Great Depression, Canada's doors to immigrants were hermetically closed.

In the Thirties and the Forties, the restrictions against Jewish immigrants were extremely harsh. That was the period of time when the need for open-immigration was the greatest. As Nazi control of Europe increased, the number of Jews seeking asylum swelled. The answer from the Canadian government and the Jewish organizations was the same: We are sorry but Canada at present does not admit Jews.<sup>1</sup>

Some scenes stand most vividly in front of my eyes: The crumbling of the Berlin Wall, full trains of Eastern Germans traveling in sealed cars through Germany and Czechoslovakia towards Western Germany, meeting welcoming masses of humanity to assure them of their understanding, their love, compassion and help.

When sealed wagons traveled the space of Europe from France,

Belgium, Holland, Italy, Germany, toward the gas chambers in Poland, the reception at that time was completely different. It was hostile and confrontational. Marching from the ramp at Mathausen Station toward the camp, we were spat upon and beaten up by German women. This was the reaction toward the Jewish tragedy in Europe. How did the so-called democratic Western nations behave? How did Canada act in the face of constant news of killing, plunder, murder and brutal atrocities toward the European Jews?

Canadian immigration policy had always been as ethnically selective as it was economically self-serving. With the inclination on the part of less desirable immigrants to drift into cities and the gradual decline in the demand for unskilled labourers, the Canadian government had begun, by the mid-Twenties, to restrict the immigration of those on the bottom rungs of the ethnic preference ladder.

In 1930, an Order in Council was passed allowing into the country only those with enough capital to establish and maintain themselves on farms. Frederick Charles Blair of the Immigration Branch was the man responsible for enforcing Canadian immigration policy and he successfully mirrored the anti-immigration spirit of his times. He believed that people should be kept out of Canada instead of being let in. For Blair, the term "refugee" was a bad word. He constantly warned the Minister responsible for immigration that Canada was in danger of being flooded with Jewish people. Blair expressed a strong personal distaste for Jews. He saw a conspiracy behind Jewish attempts to get their co-religionists into the country. Yet, he was not the only one to be blamed for the Canadian response to Jewish immigration. The decision not to accept refugees was a political decision, not a bureaucratic one. It was the Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, and his cabinet ministers who, in final analysis, were responsible for keeping Jews out of Canada.

The Prime Minister was obsessed with the notion that the admission of Jewish refugees might destroy his country. "We must seek", King recorded in his

diary, "to keep this part of the continent free from unrest, and from too great an intermixture of foreign strains of blood."

Allowing Jewish refugees into Canada, he told his cabinet, might cause riots and would surely create difficult relations between the Federal Government and the Provinces. The realities King had in mind were the attitudes toward refugees in general and Jews in particular within Quebec.

With the worsening of the situation in Europe, the Evian Conference was called in 1938. The mandate of Evian was to solve the tragic situation of European Jewry, due to Nazi brutalities. However, the outcome of the conference was a unanimous resolution that the nations of the world would no longer undertake any obligations toward financing involuntary immigration. The Evian Conference had clearly shown that no one wanted Jews. The Jews were now solely Germany's problem and in the eyes of the Nazis, the world had given them the right to solve the "Jewish problem" their way.

Even the tragic "voyage of the damned" did not alter the Canadian government's response to Jewish hopes for leniency in immigration policies.<sup>2</sup>

The failure of Evian exposed the impotence of world Jewry in general and Canadian Jewry in particular. It sent Jewish authorities a strong signal that their future dealings, with the Canadian government and other governments of the world, should become more militant and aggressive.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> For an extensive treatment of this subject, see: Abella, Irving M., *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (New York: Random House, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> This ship loaded with 907 Jews from Hamburg was on its way to Cuba but Cuba refused it. The U.S. and Canada refused them and Canada even sent out a "gun boat" to shadow them.

## JUSTICE AND NAZI WAR CRIMINALS: WHAT EVERY CONCERNED CANADIAN SHOULD KNOW

*Paper delivered on October 7, 1997  
at Shaarey Zedek Synagogue.  
Lecture sponsored by the friends of  
Hebrew University, Shaarey Zedek  
congregation, friends of Simon  
Wiesenthal Center and the Gertrude  
and Philip Weiss Endowment for  
Holocaust Education.<sup>1</sup>*

We are standing now at the threshold of the 21st Century retaining in our memory the most unspeakable 20th Century *Gottesdammerung* in the history of mankind. Justice in the late months of 1945 was that any SS man, after being stripped and found to have an SS tattoo under the armpit, was shot on the spot. No military court, just a summary execution. But this was Europe in 1945. As the twilight of the 20th Century, and the twilight of our own existence as Holocaust survivors comes upon us, it is important to reflect on the personalities and the events of the 20th Century that we all remember:

We remember World Wars I & II, the revolution in Russia, the Berlin Wall, the landing on the moon, the fall of the Soviet Union, the creation of the State of Israel and the Holocaust – the destruction of European Jewry. To me, the Holocaust is synonymous with the total abdication of morality, humanity and the responsibility toward mankind on the part of Western civilization. And because I am in the twilight of my existence, I am compelled as a Holocaust survivor to comment on two Holocaust issues that are of utmost importance to me and hopefully to all of you – justice and truth. Or as I see it, injustice and complete

perversion of truth in our society, in our country, and in the world at large.

The world's untried war criminals represent to us Holocaust survivors an unending pain of desperation, disappointment, mental cruelty, and betrayal. The betrayal of our hopes for truth and justice.

Justice has become a theatrical farce. A farce, written, directed and acted out by politicians, public servants and the governments of U.S., Britain, Canada and others. We Holocaust survivors are experiencing now the greatest psychological humiliation and the second genocide of mind and spirit imposed on us by the Western democracies.

My goals tonight are to familiarize the audience with the facts which are often swept under the carpet or completely falsified, and to expose the audience to a survivor's viewpoint on issues always debated by politicians, historians and academics who speak to us Holocaust survivors, speak about us, but seldom speak for us.

Although I am not qualified to discuss the issue of French, Hungarian, Romanian, Belgian, or Dutch collaboration with Nazi Germany, I am fully knowledgeable of the destruction, plunder and murder perpetrated by Polish *Volksdeutsche* and Ukrainian criminals during the pogroms in 1941, and the full participation of the auxiliary Ukrainian militia in the destruction of Eastern Galicia Jewry. I am knowledgeable because I was there and I saw it. I witnessed the Ukrainian militia take Jews from their homes and labor camps to Bronica Forest, not far from my home town Drohobycz, and return with blood-stained clothing piled up on their trucks.<sup>2</sup>

For five years, from 1941 until 1944, this was a daily occurrence with hundreds of thousands of children, women and men being killed by German Nazis and their local henchmen. I am speaking about the territory of Galicia, Poland, Western and Eastern Ukraine where 4,000,000 Jews perished in the years 1944-1945.

I witnessed the tremendous outpouring of jubilation on the part of the

Ukrainian population, bouquets of flowers, kisses and hugs of love for the German military and units of SS marching into Drohobycz.

I was a witness to the pogroms in Drohobycz, and Boryslaw, in 1941 when many of the Ukrainian nationalistic community members participated with axes, hoes and pitchforks in murderous destruction of Jewish life and property.

My parents, sister and brother were hidden by Polish-Ukrainian people and saved from certain death. Let not anybody think for a moment that I am prejudiced and adversely inclined toward Polish and Ukrainian people. There are many individuals (never too many) in both communities who helped Jews in times of need and this should not be forgotten. But at the same time, the truth of history demands the full disclosure of the collaboration of Ukrainian nationalistic organizations in the destruction of Eastern European Jewry. In the majority of the cases, the Ukrainian nationalist organizations were anti-Semitic and eager to participate in the genocide, many times outdoing the Germans in their brutality.

#### **EVADING ACCOUNTABILITY**

In Nazi Germany, in Austria and in the formally occupied territories of Eastern Europe, hundreds of thousands of Nazi war criminals, collaborators, Nazi sympathizers and persecutors began preparations for post-war life and their escape from accountability as the twelve year span of so-called thousand years German Reich was nearing total defeat. At the war's end, millions of people throughout Europe whom the war either uprooted or who had volunteered to work in Germany began to return to their homes. However, informed sources indicate that there were at least one million displaced persons unwilling or unable to return to the homes they had known before the war.

Under the auspices of Allies, assembly centres or camps for displaced people were set up. Almost immediately the administrative personnel were pressed for care and re-settlement. Compounding these problems was the fact that

these were the gathering places for the innocent victims of the war and Nazi terror as well as for many tens of thousands of murderers and persecutors whose motive for relocation differed dramatically from those of other displaced victims. The motives of the latter group centered on an escape from accountability and many of these individuals became the infamous “quiet neighbours” in the U.S., Canada, England, South America and Australia.

Elaborate conspiracies of silence, cover up, misinformation and suppression of all the evidence were characteristic of most European post-war communities that shared complicity in Nazi atrocities. In most cases, they were fully successful. However, not all anti-Semites went underground. Even after the war ended the spillover of Jew hatred was exemplified by the Kielce pogrom (Poland) that resulted in 41 Jews being killed and severe beatings of at least 75 more. Underground escape routes were put into place to camouflage the true identities of the more prominent war criminals, to forge their documents and to transfer plundered wealth out of Germany to give them sanctuary and political and economic benefits.

The U.S. and Canada soon became a new home for those displaced persons who opted not to return home and live under communism and those who had committed crimes and sought an escape from justice. The *Displaced Person Act* of 1948, passed by U.S. Congress, opened the floodgates into the U.S. for predominantly Eastern European immigrants. It appears that the provisions of the Act were designed to exclude the foremost victims of Nazism, the Jews, while the Act provided a route by which many war criminals found refuge. The same situation applied to Canada where many victims of Nazism were stopped, while the criminals found refuge in Canada.

By the time the *Displaced Persons Act* expired on June 30, 1952, 400,000 immigrants had entered U.S. and Canada. An estimated 10,000 war criminals were welcomed to a new life on this continent.<sup>3</sup> There were a number of

prominent Nazis and passionate supporters of Nazism given a deliberately covert passage to the U.S. and Canada.

The Canadian and U.S. governments' uneven handedness in immigration polices in respect of European displaced persons was racist and morally repugnant. But Canada and the U.S. went one step further. Both countries deliberately sought out of former Nazis and brought them to the U.S. and Canada. Intentional schemes, carried out by some U.S. Canadian officials, located former Nazi scientists, technologists and technicians, and brought them to North America by concealing their identities.<sup>4</sup> These morally outrageous actions call for the strongest condemnation on the part of Canadian people.

Any discussion of the hunt of hidden Nazi criminals in Canada, or more properly the lack of any hunt, must begin with a look at Canada as a multi-cultural society. Of a population of approximately 30,000,000, more than half a million Canadians are Ukrainian and a similar number are of other Eastern European stock. Many of these Canadians are post-war arrivals. These groups are closely knit and form a potent political force that is courted by provincial and federal politicians. To a great extent, the history of Canadian inactivity in pursuing war criminals, and probably the future of any hunt for Nazi war criminals, must be viewed with this population's political clout in mind.

#### **INTERNATIONAL LAW: PART OF THE PROSECUTION PROBLEM**

During and after the Nazi genocide, existing international law obstructed bystanders from rescuing victims of mass crimes and in some cases from punishing the perpetrators. The fact is that no clear international law against crimes against humanity existed prior to 1945, due in large part to U.S. opposition. The international failure to bring both the Turks who committed crimes against the Armenians and the Nazi Holocaust's perpetrators to justice was, in essence, the logical result of the fact that mass murder had been committed

legally, within the context of international law, as it then stood.

During World War II, the structure of international law not only obstructed efforts to rescue European Jews, but it was also contended that Hitler's crimes inside Axis countries were legal, technically speaking, and that Hitler himself was immune from prosecution because of his status as Head of State.

British Foreign Minister, Anthony Eden, and U.S. State Department Chief Legal Advisor, Green Hackworth, argued the Allies should avoid making too much of an issue of Nazi crimes because most atrocities would be impossible to prosecute. Allan Dulles exploited his post in the Office of Strategic Services, U.S.A. to quash the war crimes prosecution of senior Nazi officials and German business leaders who had cooperated with him in a series of clandestine schemes to secure U.S. advantage in Central Europe.

Dulles protected SS *Obergruppenfuhrer*, Karl Wolf, the highest-ranking SS Officer to survive the war and the principal sponsor of the Treblinka extermination camp. Similarly, he protected a number of Wolf's senior aides who had been responsible for deportation of Jews to Auschwitz and the massacres of Italian partisans. He personally intervened to ensure the escape from prosecution of major German bankers and industrialists who were complicit in Nazi exterminations through labor programs, according to archival records.

Going back to international law, the principal U.S. government experts on international law were usually staunch advocates of conceptions of legality that supported the Hitler government's claims that it could treat its civilians as it wished. The international law experts at the U.S. Department of State considered German forced labor to be legal or perhaps, more precisely, not illegal under international law and custom as it then stood.

The public pattern of Nazi crimes fell outside the realm of what many Western experts considered crimes. For them, Germany's forced labor seemed little more than a particularly harsh solution to problems that were common to the U.S. and German elite. During the war, they ignored the reports of the Holocaust

that had begun to come out of Nazi-occupied Europe and some even went out of their way to discredit accurate information about what the Nazis were up to.

George F. Kennan, U.S. diplomat, discounted reports of Nazi atrocities, attributing those massacres to random violence of war. The special measures that the Nazis had publicly initiated against Jews were regrettable, he said, but were not a matter in which the U.S. government wished to interfere. The situation in the British Foreign Office was similar.

In international law, the prevailing concept of national sovereignty gave the governments of Nazi Germany and other Axis states virtually unlimited authority over their own population. Jews and so-called “stateless” refugees in Germany, Austria, Hungary, Italy and Romania enjoyed no real protection under international law from prosecution by the governments of those countries. The same was probably true for civilians in Nazi puppet states such as Vichy France, Slovakia and Croatia.

Thus, Germans and German companies involved in forced labor inside Germany seemed to be immune from prosecution. The Nazis systematic persecution of Jews and others trapped inside Axis countries thus appeared to be legal international law, as it then stood.

#### **INTERNATIONAL LAW RECOGNIZES CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY**

The London International Assembly contended that the Axis decision to launch a war in Europe was an international crime, a crime against humanity. And, that the heads of state responsible of for the actions of the countries they led could be extradited.<sup>5</sup>

Only three years after the end of the war, on July 13, 1948, the British Commonwealth Relations Office sent a secret telegram to the seven Dominions stating that cases which were still awaiting trial should be disposed of by August 31 1948 and no fresh trials should be started after December 31, 1948. The British

government asked for comments by July 26th. Canada answered on 22 July by an equally secret cable, "This is to advise you that Canadian government has no comment to make."

So the matter of war criminals quietly disappeared. In the thirty years from the scene and that followed, Canada devoted not the slightest energy to the search and prosecution of war criminals, until the search was reactivated, mainly at the initiative of the Solicitor General, the Honorable Robert P. Kaplan.

As recently as February 16, 1982, the following answer was given by the government to a question put by a member of the House of Commons, "Are attempts being made to track down and prosecute former SS, Gestapo and SD members living or suspected of living in Canada?" answer, "No".

### **THIRTY YEARS OF CANADIAN GOVERNMENT APATHY**

Let's take a more detailed look at thirty years of inactivity and apathy of the Canadian government on the issue of Nazi war criminals.

The dismal record of inactivity goes back to the liberal government of Pierre Elliot Trudeau. He had little sympathy for ethnic disagreements. He did not side with the Japanese-Canadians demand for reparations associated with their World War II internment; neither with the Chinese call for repayment of their head tax, nor the Ukrainian call for an apology for internment of their community members during World War I. In Trudeau's view, the recycling of the past might serve the needs of ethnic communities but not the needs of Canada. It is possible that he placed the Jewish community pressures in the same class. With the Jewish vote already in the liberal bag and nothing political to gain, it was better to avoid the issue.

The May 22, 1979 election left Canada with a minority government under Joe Clarke. Saul Hayes reported to the Canadian Jewish Congress National Office (Congress) in September, 1979 that federal consideration was being given

to the establishment of a special office to investigate and prosecute suspected criminals resident in Canada.

On December 3, 1979, the minority government of Joe Clarke fell. In the meantime, the conservative Minister of Justice sent Congress Officials a letter stating that, not a body of Canadian law is in existence to help prosecute war criminals in Canada.

Some survivors advocated a dramatic protest to emphasize their anguish at the Canadian government's inactivity. They were dissuaded by Congress Officials from undertaking a mass demonstration or a hunger strike to bring this to the attention of the general public.

The Congress played, again, the diplomatic game of not offending the government officials. In Toronto, Sabrina Citron, a Holocaust survivor and formerly a force within Congress, charged that on critical issues Congress leaders, like Jewish leaders in pre-war Europe and America, waited too long and were reluctant to take action. She claimed that they opted for quiet diplomacy. In her view, such methods were doomed to fail. It was time to directly confront issues such as war criminals residing in Canada using every legal means at hand including public protest. For the Congress, however, the focus was still fixed on lobbying the Cabinet.

In February 1980, Pierre Elliot Trudeau appointed Robert P. Kaplan as the Solicitor General, who reactivated the search and prosecution of war criminals. In the spring of 1982, after 31 years of inactivity, Albert Rouca was brought before the courts.

In the spring of 1983, Christopher A. Amerasinghe, Crown Prosecutor in the Rouca case, stated that extradition hearings, and the revocation of citizenship leading to deportation from Canada, is not only possible but the most effective way to deal with Nazi war criminals in Canada.

In September 1984, Brian Mulroney was sworn into office as Prime Minister. Under his watch, the Deschenes Commission was initiated on February

7, 1985, headed by Judge Julius Deschenes. The Commission's report and its conclusions – what Canada can and should do and which specific individuals should be investigated as war criminals – was the sole effort of Deschenes. He set himself up as the final and sole arbitrator of every decision about the guilt or innocence of an accused and he personally made every critical recommendation.

Early in the Commission's life, Deschenes announced that he would be going to the Soviet Union to work out an agreement for access to Soviet held records. This brought an avalanche of protest from Canada's Eastern European immigrant communities and from their representatives in Parliament. The trip was postponed and a statement was issued that there was no time to go to the Soviet Union. Three-quarters of the names on the Commission's master list represented Eastern Europeans on whom little or no data was available in Germany. In my opinion, hundreds of the Commission's cases should have remained open until Soviet-controlled archives could be checked.

The leading perpetrators of genocide needed mass mobilizations to actually implement their agenda. For example, the real spearheads of genocide in Germany – the Nazi party, SS, SD and similar groups – by themselves lacked the resources to persecute and eventually murder millions of Jews. Nazis succeeded in genocide in part through offering bystanders money, property, status and other rewards for their active or tacit complicity in the crimes.

#### **CORRECTING DESCHENES COMMISSION STATEMENTS**

I am here not to re-open the old wounds but to correct and clarify statements made by government officials, community leaders, historians and professionals who, with their good intentions (I hope) but limited knowledge of Eastern Europe during the Nazi occupation, failed completely to understand the concerns of Holocaust survivors.

This is fully reflected in the opening statement of Justice Deschenes'

Report, "This Commission is not directed at any group of people of any ethnic origin whatsoever and is not, therefore, to be used as a kind of platform where old wounds would be reopened."

A dignified statement, but completely wrong as there were many ethnic organizations implicated in the murder of Jews, gypsies, civilians, Russian soldiers and partisans, that should have been held accountable: the Romanian Iron Guard, Hungarian Averow Cross, Croatian Ustashi, Ukrainian militia, and Slovakian Hlinka guards.

I personally gave testimony before the Commission. My personal testimony, pertained to the criminal activity of auxiliary Ukrainian police, was aborted. I was not permitted to speak, due to the interference of John Sopinka, who represented the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), and the Waffen-Grenadier Division der SS 'Galizien'.

Unfortunately, Sopinka was not challenged by either the legal representatives of the Jewish Congress or the representative of B'nai Brith. Not one of the Jewish representatives objected. There was a complete lack of communication and cooperation between those who testified (Holocaust survivors) and the Jewish organizations. There were submissions by the Jewish delegation to the authority of the Deschenes Commission in Winnipeg and I presume elsewhere as well. This took place on May 22, 1985, after 40 years of Canadian inactivity versus war criminals residing in Canada.

Based on my personal knowledge of the events and perpetrators involved, I would like to state that I strongly disagree with some of the conclusions reached in the report the Deschenes Commission ultimately filed:

- ◆ Paragraph 55: "Overestimated number of war criminals." –  
WRONG
- ◆ Paragraph 56: "The Galicia Division should not be indicted as a

group." – WRONG

- ◆ Paragraph 59: "Further in the absence of evidence of participation in or knowledge of specific war crimes, mere membership in the Galicia Division is insufficient to justify prosecution" (page 261) - even though the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg pronouncements were all-encompassing. – WRONG.

### CURRENT STATUS OF PROSECUTIONS

If we seek to asses blame for the infiltration of Nazi war criminals into the U.S. and Canada we ought not to kid ourselves. They came in not because of officials who ran amuck, but because the countries enacted laws that made their entry so easy.

Nazi war criminals are still at large in Toronto, Montreal, Windsor, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Detroit, New York, San Francisco, Baltimore and Chicago. Between 1945 and 1985, the RCMP opened 294 investigations concerning war crimes out of which no less than 252 (86%) were initiated from the spring of 1982.

Our indecision on Nazi war criminals continues in this country with our failure to deport them or even to investigate them. The decision not to pursue Nazis, like the decision to leave the doors open to begin with, was never an official government policy. It was never articulated, but I would call it an "unwritten law". The tolerance of Nazis thus became not so much a policy as the result of an absence of policy.

An absence of policy was also the result of lack of public interest, the meekness of Jewish organizations in dealing with the government representatives, and the passivity on the part of the Holocaust survivor community. There is no question that we failed and one of the reasons was the lack of general public

knowledge, in Canada and the U.S., of Nazi war crimes. But, that ignorance was self-imposed. We did not know because we did not want to know. We did not want to know about the Nazi war criminals, nor about the Holocaust in general. A curtain of silence fell over the Holocaust in Canada and much of the world until the late seventies.

To many of us, the necessity and justice of bringing accused Nazi war criminals before the law even at this late date is self-evident. David Matas' statement on page 266 of *Justice Delayed: Nazi War Criminals in Canada* says:

If Canada is not to have a permanent stain on its justice system, if we are not to rip the foundation of justice beneath future generations, we as a country must waste no more time in bringing the remaining Nazi war criminals in Canada to justice.

Join me in demanding from the Canadian government act immediately, before the last Holocaust survivor is displayed at the Smithsonian Institute, Anthropology Department as an extinguished specie of man.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> The author publicly acknowledges the following individuals who have dedicated their integrity, time and energy to the cause of truth and justice: Robert Kaplan, Kenneth Narvey and David Matas. As a survivor, I would like to thank them for their unending struggle to restore the honour and dignity which has been denied to Holocaust survivors since the end of the war. They fully understood that the negation of responsibility on the part of government will weigh heavily upon the future generations.

<sup>2</sup> There were 460 Jews massacred in Drohobycz between June 22<sup>nd</sup> and July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1941.

<sup>3</sup> For example, in the spring of 1943, the German authorities, with the Ukrainian assistance, began to recruit a Waffen SS division in Western Ukraine (Galicia Division or Halichyna Division). There was no shortage of recruits and within weeks 82,000 men came forward, of whom 13,000 were consigned to the three divisional regiments which made up the Galicia Division. They were sent to

Germany for training. Some of the other volunteers were incorporated into several SS police units trained for anti-partisan activities (which meant also anti-Jewish), and against the underground cells in Poland and elsewhere.

In May, 1944, the divisions were dispatched to the eastern front. At the Battle of Brody in mid-July, the divisions were decimated by mechanized Soviet units with superior fire power. Of the 13,000 men who entered the battle, only 3,000 withdrew in battle-ready condition. The survivors of Brody and another 8,000 of the original Ukrainian volunteers first dispatched to the police units were integrated into the Division and then dispatched to put down the partisan uprising in Slovakia and Yugoslavia and then transferred to Austria where they surrendered to the British.

The Galizia Division members who refused to go home were soon joined by tens of thousands of other Ukrainians who were outside the Ukraine at the wars end and unwilling to return to the Soviet Union. They collected in displaced person's camps in Germany and Austria and became eligible immigrants to the U.S., Canada and England.

<sup>4</sup> See Clare Lasby's book *Operation Paperclip*.

<sup>5</sup> The American representative to the United Nations War Criminal Commission, Herbert Pell's, definition of international crimes includes all offenses against persons because of race, religion or political beliefs, irrespective of the victim's nationality or the territory on which the crimes were committed. War crimes, crimes against peace, crimes against humanity, eventually became the centerpiece of the prosecution strategy at Nuremberg.

Colonel Murray Bernay's principle of international law states if the Gestapo was found to have been a criminal conspiracy, any member of the organization could theoretically be prosecuted for each crime committed by its members. The same would apply to leadership corps of the Party, SS, Germany High Command and for other criminal groups.

## THE CURRENT ANTI-SEMITISM: ILLUSION OR REALITY?

*Text from speech delivered on November 7, 2004 at Shaarey Zedek Synagogue. The lecture was delivered to the community at large and was sponsored by Asper Foundation, Ben-Gurion University, friends of the Hebrew University, Shaarey Zedek congregation, Winnipeg University and Gertrude and Philip Weiss Endowment for Holocaust Education.<sup>1</sup>*

I came to the shores of the New World, to the shores of Canada, to the immense prairie of Manitoba to breathe the pure air of 1948 Winnipeg. I came to Canada to escape European anti-Semitism and its final tragic epilogue, the Holocaust. I came to breath the air of freedom and tolerance. It is therefore fitting for me to speak on anti-Semitism today, as it raises its ugly head in our society.

Since September 11, 2001, when 19 Saudis slammed the hijacked planes into the World Trade Centre buildings and The Pentagon, Jews throughout the world have once again have become “prisoners” in the countries they lived in for centuries. We have guards posted at this place of worship, for this lecture, and there are guards in all of the synagogues in Canada, the United States and Europe. Is this a consequence of our Jewish paranoia, our delusion of reality, or the correct response to the most palpable rise in anti-Semitism since the Holocaust? Let’s analyze the current situation and see if we can come to the correct conclusion:

- ◆ In 2002, Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl is forced to say that he is a Jew who comes from a Zionist family before he is decapitated. The videotape taken at the scene by a Pakistani Muslim terrorist, and televised by Al Jazeera, shows Daniel's head being held aloft, as a warning to Jews everywhere.
- ◆ Signs at a peace rallies in Brussels, Amsterdam, and London, in the years 2002-2003, read "Death to the Jews!" Since 1933, I take these messages very seriously.
- ◆ Posters found in college dorms in the U.S. read "Jews = Nazis."
- ◆ The official newspaper of the Palestinian Authority declares that the Holocaust is a myth that the Jews exploit to get sympathy.
- ◆ Jordanian children learn that the Torah is perverted and the Jews have only their own evil practices to blame for the Holocaust.
- ◆ Egyptian TV viewers watch forty serialized segments of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion.
- ◆ European and U.S. Academics spearhead a campaign to shun Israeli professors simply on the basis of their nationality.
- ◆ An anti-Israeli rally on an American campus shows a photo of an eviscerated baby with a tag "Slaughtered according to Jewish Rites."
- ◆ A newspaper cartoon published in January 2003 in *The British Independent* displays Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon eating Palestinian babies.
- ◆ In 2004, Nathan Sharansky, Minister of Diaspora Affairs, shows journalists scenes from a recent Arabic-language television series that depicts Jews sacrificing a Christian boy and draining his blood for use in Passover, thus reviving a conspiracy theory that was widespread in medieval Europe.

I think I have highlighted enough recent incidents of anti-Semitism here for me to rest the case right now, but my pain – the pain of a Holocaust survivor – is

too great to end the discussion here. I wonder if I am living through the reincarnation of The Nuremberg Laws on Citizenship and Race: September 15, 1935, when Jewish intellectuals and officials were purged from public offices, universities, and schools, and their voices therefore silenced. We must delve more fully into such examples of immense insensitivity and pure hatred. Once again, I believe, it is very dangerous to be Jewish.

The vitriolic propaganda that I described matches and supersedes everything that the *Stürmer* offered in Germany in the years 1930-1945. Should we be surprised by these Nazi inspired images? I am not. Yassar Arafat, in 1954 as a young engineering student in Cairo, befriended Otto Skorzeny, the scar faced liberator of Mussolini, a fanatical SS officer and Hitler's darling. Arafat was very close to his relative and mentor, Hajj Amin al Hussani, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, a guest of Hitler and Himmler in Berlin during the war, and the founder of the Bosnian-Moslem Waffen SS volunteers. Arafat became an exceptional pupil of those two mass killers and the leader of anti-Jewish Arab propaganda.

Neo-Nazi violence against Jewish people and institutions has escalated throughout Europe. Millions of Muslims, indoctrinated by state sponsored propaganda, believe that Israel is responsible for the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>.<sup>2</sup>

Anti-Semitism has been called "the longest hatred" and judging from events like these it seems to have retained its extraordinary durability. In recent years it has globalized into an ugly mix of neo-Nazi violence, Islamic religious and racist Jew-hating, Palestinian terrorism, ultra-left anti-Zionism, and the demonization of Israel throughout the world, particularly in Arab and Muslim nations and in Palestine. Phyllis Chesler in *The Current Crisis: The New Anti-Semitism and what we can do about it*, describes it as more dangerous and threatening to Jews than anything that has occurred since World War II. The most vicious propaganda in the media since Hitler, describing Jews as a race of vermin

to be exterminated, is now widely disseminated in the Middle East including Palestine.

Depictions of Jews as rats, lice, snakes, demons, parasites, hook nosed liars, who made up the Holocaust tales of evil Nazis and treacherous conspirators, who plan to take over the world, are injecting whole populations with anti-Semitic toxins on a scale that is historically unprecedented. Increasingly, Holocaust denial, or worse blaming Jews for the Holocaust, is a strong feature of the anti-Zionist onslaught in the Arab and Muslim world as is the injurious equation of Zionism with Nazism.

Those who are impartial observers have noticed how leftist statements against Israeli policy easily spill over into generalized vitriolic anti-Jewish sentiments at demonstrations, meetings, academic discourses and private gatherings. Many leftists cultivate immoral blindness to anti-Semitism around the world and see it as largely a thing of the past. Others charge that anyone who raises the flag of anti-Semitism in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has the ulterior motive of “silencing legitimate criticism of Israel.”

Not surprisingly most thinking on the subject of Israel, Palestine or anti-Semitism is limited to pre-selected information and dominated by either/or contradictory statements: either Palestinians are anti-Semitic or Israelis are racist Zionist colonialists. Either Israel is the Promised Land, the only democratic government in the Middle East, or it is a Nazi-like apartheid state bent on racial genocide and therefore must be eliminated.

Having said all that, let me be clear that I don't lay claim to a “neutral objectivity” on this subject. I openly state my bias: as a survivor of the ghetto and six camps, I am passionately concerned about the fate of the Jewish People. I've already witnessed the unspeakable degradation and extermination of my people in Europe once. We can't allow history to repeat itself. We are two days away from the November 9<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *Kristallnacht* (Crystal Night) observances of the beginning of the destruction of European Jewry. I am hearing today the echoes

of the past, the voices of those Jews who were somewhat embarrassed by Jews speaking on behalf of other Jews. We were told to remain calm once before, not to panic. That approach cost us 6,000,000 of our people.

We are told today to put our faith in our negotiating partners. And who are they? The suicide bombers? The question is: can Israel afford this gamble? I do identify with the Palestinian's lamentable situation, but let's put the blame for it where it belongs. I am angry with the rabid anti-Semitism on the streets of the West Bank and Gaza. I feel a profound sense of betrayal in relation to my leftist friends, some of them Jewish, who obsessively condemn Israel's sins while consistently ignoring tyranny, misogyny, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism in the Muslim world; who excuse the murder and mutilation of Jews in Israel; who failed to raise their voices or rally against the current anti-Semitism.

#### **CLAIMS TO LAND FUEL ANTI-SEMITISM**

The rejection of Jewish polity is closely related to the refusal to recognize the collective legitimacy of the Jewish people who are entitled to their place among the nations of the world and I consider it an example of blatant anti-Semitism.

If this is all about Israel and Palestine, let me first inform you that we Jews have as solid and valid claim to Israel as Palestinians have to Palestine. I correct myself, we have a much greater claim to Israel. The Palestinian propaganda machine spits out the accusation that Israel stole their land. This is a complete distortion of history; it is a pathological lie. Israel did not steal anybody's land. The land legitimately belongs to Israel by the facts of our ancient history, by legitimate land purchases from wealthy Arab landowners living abroad, by U.N. resolution, and as the result of defensive wars, which Christian theologians call "just wars." We did not steal land. We came back to our land: we came back home.

Israelis were welcomed by Arab armies, armed to the teeth – not the friendliest of greetings. However, this was to be expected. Holocaust survivors returning to their homes in Poland, Holland and elsewhere after the liberation were met with armed resistance, lynching and pogroms upon asking for the return of their property. Mobs seldom adhere to the rule of law.

Palestinians are at war with Israel because of their nationalistic claim either to part of the land or the whole land. Their slogan is “We shall push them to the sea.” As you all know, they rejected the U.N. resolution of the division of the land and responded with armed aggression and rejected peace offers many times. The issue can only be solved by peace talks. Intimidation, terror and indiscriminate killing will never bring peace. This is the basic tenet of Israeli policy based upon the world’s passivity in the past.

There never was a Palestinian state, just as there never was a Jordan, Lebanon or Saudi Arabia. They are creations of diplomats and politicians, often politicians of doubtful motives. Iran and Iraq came into being as a result of the dismembering of the Ottoman Empire and after the end of the Second World War. In both cases the Western democracies were victorious and dictated peace on their terms. This is the real basis of Islam’s quarrel with and hatred of the Western World and Israel.

Yasser Arafat foreswore not to yield one inch of the sacred Palestinian soil to Israel. This presents a very serious problem because the very same soil is sacred to Israel as well. In practically every Jewish household in pre-war Europe, no matter how poor, the collection box “the pushke” blue and white of the Jewish National Fund was most prominently displayed. The collection of every penny available, with the aim of purchasing the smallest parcel of land in the Holy Land, was one’s responsibility to God and the Jewish People.<sup>3</sup>

So there are not only the cold, political issues of today that must be considered, we are discussing deeply emotional, historical and religious events that have to be solved in the most delicate, sensitive and diplomatic way. The

chair of the School of Religious Studies, Department of Theology, Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., Peter C. Phan states in his book *Removing Anti-Judaism from the Pulpit*, “No question the foundation of the State of Israel is the single most important event in the Jewish history since the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple by Romans in 70 C.E.”

Approaching the Israel-Palestinian question one can find facts to support almost any position one takes on this issue. The facts themselves are in dispute and most of us are not Middle East scholars. It should be noted that even Middle East scholars differ in their opinion. What we choose to believe depends a lot more on our “gut emotions” than most people care to admit. Yet no matter what our emotions are, one fact is incontestable; disputing the existence of a rich and old culture of Judaism in the ancient Holy Land is synonymous with disputing the birth of Christianity in this land.

This cradle of Judaism that Arafat arrogantly disputes existed in the land of Judea Samaria, Eretz Israel, long before the birth of Mohammed and his conquest of the Arabian Peninsula in 632 C.E.

#### **PALESTINIAN REFUGEES AS A SOURCE OF ANTI-SEMITISM**

At this point I would like to touch upon the issue of Palestinian refugees, which became a “cause célèbre” for pure-hearted intellectuals and a major obstacle to peace. There is a great deal of misunderstanding and misinformation here. I speak again from experience of a holocaust survivor and as a refugee after the Second World War in a DP (displaced person) camp in Austria.

At the Potsdam Conference, the Allies granted Eastern European nations the right to expel all their ethnic German citizens, people who had been living in those areas for generations, but whose forbearers were Germans and used the German language. Call it the victor’s prerogative if you will. Roughly 12 million of these Volksdeutsche were in fact expelled, their property confiscated, and as

many as 2 million may have been killed by Poles, Czechs and Hungarians in the process.

The surviving Volksdeutsche settled in bombed-out houses in Germany and Austria and integrated themselves speedily into new communities. Today their children and grandchildren are leading citizens of those countries, prominent industrialists, businessmen, professionals and politicians. They did not establish a “Volksdeutsche Liberation Army” murdering Polish, Czech and Hungarian children in acts of revenge; they did not waste their time in refugee camps for half a century waiting for handouts from the United Nations Relief Agency, while their leaders opened multi-million dollar accounts in Swiss banks. This post-war example is a showcase of sound political leadership based on the welfare of people and not on corruption and self-interest.

I came to Canada after the war in which my family and tens of thousands of other Jews lost everything they ever had. We were displaced from our birthplace where my family settled in 1800. We knew we had to start from scratch and it took years of hard work and perseverance to establish ourselves in the new country.

From the territory where I was born, Eastern Poland, 6 million Poles were displaced to their new homes in the former eastern German provinces and 5 million Ukrainians occupied the Western Ukraine in land that was formerly Poland. They all settled, became part of their new land and established themselves with their families as productive members of their new communities. The 870,000 Jews expelled from Arab countries in 1940 and 1950 similarly settled in the United States, Europe and Israel. They are not blowing up Iranian, Iraqi, Moroccan and Algerian embassies and planes and this is the main reason you don't know about them. Please, think about it.

The list of people who were displaced by the events of World War II and decolonisation is endless. The only group that anyone pays attention to is Palestinians. If they would stop blowing up airplanes, pizza parlours and innocent

civilians, tomorrow they would cease to be world's number one "problem" and CNN, CBC and BBC's main attraction.

Arab leaders don't care about non-violent Palestinians; they contribute practically zero toward the upkeep of the camps. They destined them to a life of illiteracy, poverty and squalor – a breeding ground of hatred, discontent and murder. The only Arab nation that has offered Palestinians citizenship is Jordan. In Egypt and Saudi Arabia, a Palestinian family that has lived there for several generations will still be aliens with no rights to a permanent residence.

In 2002 the Saudis contributed \$5.8 million, the United States \$120 million for the Palestinian Relief Agency but the Saudis raised \$100 million to aid the families of Palestinian bombers. King Fahd spent \$300 million on his family's vacations in Spain in the year 2002; Iraq, which contributed nothing to the Relief Agency, donates \$10 million per year to the families of bombers and Iran contributed weapons and money to Hezbollah and Arafat's army.

#### ANTI-SEMITISM IN INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNMENTS

Please imagine for a minute that Israel's penal code permitted the severing of limbs of thieves as punishment for their crime; permitted the stoning to death of women accused of infidelity. Would not the United Nations be the first in condemning the State of Israel as a barbaric, uncivilized entity? Would not the U.N. press for the most severe sanctions? Yet these medieval tortures are practiced on a daily basis in Islamic countries without a murmur of horror or repugnance. It is no secret that the United Nations is held hostage to Islamic countries. Many believe that the U.N. is a toothless, spineless, corrupt organization which requires a radical facelift. Dr. Lloyd Axworthy, in his recent book *Navigating a New World*, at page 225, states: "The UN is not the shiny beacon on the hill that it once was." I agree with this statement, but, my

interpretation is that the UN now needs a new foundation, as well as “new wiring.”

The politically motivated Left, “the harbinger of justice and tolerance” is numb, paralysed, and deafeningly silent in the face of growing anti-Semitism. And the majestic “Holy See” stays calm without a ripple on the surface waiting for God to remind him of the obligation to steer the bewildered and confused ship of humanity to a safe harbour.

The sophisticated, well-bred and highly educated French ambassador to Britain, Daniel Bernard, would not use this expression at a London reception; instead he spoke of Israel as “that little shitty country” with a mouth full of caviar and champagne. European intellectuals call for a boycott of Israeli scholars and academics not to be outdone by their Moslem colleagues. Current anti-Semitism is accelerating throughout Europe masquerading as a human rights issue. This competes favourably with Goebbels “Big Lie”. In our time the lies are disseminated by governing elites, the world press in all capitols, by diplomats and university professors, those who consider themselves purveyors of “truth”. In Franz Kafka’s words, “Lie becomes the way of the world.”<sup>4</sup>

One of the giants of Jewish contemporary thinking in the United States, Dennis Prager speaking here at Shaarey Zedek on October 28, 2003, appealed to the audience, “Please don’t send your children to universities, they are cradles of the most vicious anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish hate.” The next day I received a letter from David Burley, professor and chair of history at the University of Winnipeg. I would like to read it for two reasons: the first reason is I don’t get too many letters addressed to “Dr.” Philip Weiss; the second much more important reason is its message, “to study history is to accept an obligation of informed vigilance.”

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Thank you Dr. David Burley. Thank you University of Winnipeg, as I am confident that David speaks in your name. Thank you faculty members and educators for keeping the University of Winnipeg and schools clear of bigotry, hatred and falsehood. Please don't become Concordia.<sup>5</sup> I am proud to be associated with the University of Winnipeg, your motto speaks for itself "Lux et Veritas Floreant" – Let light and truth flourish." I hope that other institutions of learning will follow the same path. We Manitobans are not the epi-centre for Canada's political activities but with determination, perseverance and yearning we could easily become the most enlightened, just and tolerant society of this great country. Let's make this dream a reality and let's get the museum built.

I am grateful to see the *Winnipeg Free Press* becoming the voice of compassion and justice. I would like to commend the paper for its February 29, 2004 article, "We should all bear memory – don't leave Jews alone to deal with the horror of the Holocaust," by Tom Olson. My gratitude Mr. Olson, you have my personal invitation to become an honorary member of our Holocaust activity. Another article, in the May 13, 2004 edition, titled "Two sides, one choice" describes the beheading of Mr. Nick Berg, the terror and bestiality of the Islamic terrorists, and the lesson we citizens of Western culture have to learn.

The voices of compassion, tolerance and justice, are important and fully appreciated by the Winnipeg Jewish Community. But we must do much more to overcome the ignorance, intolerance and hate so prevalent in our society.

I would like to address myself now to Carole Wylie, the chair of the University of Winnipeg Board of Regents and Elaine Goldie, Vice President External, University of Manitoba, clergy, educators media representatives and political personage whom we are honoured to have here today. To do so I would like to quote Lorence H. Summer, the president of Harvard University in his address at the Memorial Church, Harvard University on September 17, 2002:

But today, I am less complacent and comfortable because there is disturbing evidence of an upturn in Anti-Semitism globally and also because of some developments closer to home. But where anti-Semitism and voices that are profoundly anti-Israel have been the primary preserve of poorly educated right wing populists, profoundly anti-Jewish views are increasingly finding support in progressive intellectual communities.

Serious and thoughtful people are advocating and taking actions that are anti-Semitic in their effect if not their intent. We should always respect the academic freedom of everyone to take any position. We should also recall that academic freedom does not include freedom from criticism. The only antidote to dangerous ideas is strong alternatives vigorously advocated. It is my greatest hope and prayer that the idea of rise of anti-Semitism proves to be a self-denying prophecy – a prediction that carries the seeds of falsification. But this depends on all of us.

Dear students, today you have heard my perspective on issues of great importance to all of us, I know that my interpretation differs from what the majority of you hear at home, school, university, church and in the mainstream of encounters. My bias, did not prevent me from being candid, straight forward and open minded. Take my advice, if Noam Chomsky's *Hegemony or Survival: America's quest for global domination* is a compulsory read, the student should also study the *Anti-Chomsky Reader*, by Peter Collier and Davis Horwitz, for a more balanced outlook on many world issues. Also Michael Ignatieff's *The Lesser Evil: political ethics in an age of terror* is not to be overlooked. Expand your horizon of knowledge, seek information from different sources. Study not only historical data but also the history of issues, speak and listen to different people, people with different view-points and I am confident that you'll find my presentation truthful and historically correct.

I'll end with a quotation from Martin Luther King Jr., "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Thank you.

<sup>1</sup> Today's lecture is dedicated to my parents, Cilia and Solomon Weiss for teaching me to distinguish between truth and falsehood and to my daughter Shelly Weiss for her conviction that we shall never be intimidated by falsehood. Today's lecture was made possible through the assistance of Jeff Morrey; Moe Levy, representing the Asper Foundation; Dena Perlow; Mark Kantor (BGU); Brenda Gurvey; Professor Bryan Schwartz (H.U.); Rabbi Allan Green; Anna Shore; Shira Uretsky; Jackie Wasserman; Robert Diduch; Rocky Pollock (Shaarey Zadek Congregation); Darcy Dugan; Kathrin Unruh; Professor Robert Young; and Carol Wylie, from the University of Winnipeg.

<sup>2</sup> It is not only Muslims that hold this belief. Ask the question to a member of the Associated Students of San Francisco State University allied with the General Union of Palestinian Students and the Muslim Student Association and you will hear that the Israeli secret service, the Mossad, did it by remote control from Tel Aviv.

<sup>3</sup> We Jews, throughout the Diaspora, recited the 137 Psalm at every occasion. "If I forget thee O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget her cunning, may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I remember thee not." Scholars attribute the 137 Psalm to the prophet Jeremiah and believe it was written somewhere in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. You are now all seated facing the "Oren Kodesh" the Holy Ark that in every synagogue in the world is mounted on the eastern wall in the direction of Jerusalem. We pray three time a day, morning, afternoon and evening, facing east saying, "Viyerushulaim irhu berachamin tashuv" which translated is "Have mercy Lord and return to Jerusalem, your City." On the level of theology of exile and the ever deferred return, the places outside the land of Israel were provisional, never considered the ultimate status of a real, original place.

Once cursed with eternal life, the wandering Jew could celebrate an end of wandering by trading his immortality for a simple grave. Israel appears as one vast cemetery for the ancient dead whose unearthed skeletons provide bones of contention among politicians, archaeologists, historians and ultra-orthodox burial societies. These ancient graves and caves carry the answer to the riddles of my peoples beginning and destination.

Jerusalem for her part is preserved in the imagination of the wandering Jew awaiting centuries for his redemption, which will happen when the Jews will return. The only death that really counts will take place in Jerusalem. For centuries the Jews of Samarkand, Uzbekistan in preparing to meet their Maker, would by one gravesite in a local cemetery and another plot in Jerusalem. Thus, on the day of redemption, the dearly departed Sanarkadian will already have a reserved place. Every religious Jew considered his burial in Jerusalem on Mount

Olive or in Israel a sacred duty. I remember well older Jews in pre-war Poland selling all of their possessions to get the money needed for the burial in Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup> Franz Kafka, *Der Process*.

**EDUCATION**

## THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN ENCOURAGING TOLERANCE

*Paper delivered to the Canadian  
Association of Statutory Human  
Rights Agencies Conference,  
"Encouraging Tolerance in Canada:  
What is the Role of Statutory Human  
Rights Agencies in Responding to  
Hatred?" June 1995.*

**W**ithout pushing a panic button, I would state that only quick and positive solutions to the issue of hatred, so prevalent in our times, can save our society from future disaster.

I'm not a professional educator, I am a Holocaust survivor. For me, to speak about tolerance and to leave here a message of hope is difficult, but it's not impossible. I have to bring to your attention a statement:

I do not want an intellectual education. By knowledge I shall spoil my youth. From most difficult experiences they must learn to overcome the fear of death, this is youth's level of heroism. For it they will reach the level of free man, the man the God. Man was created for action. Heavenly thinking people, all spiritual people are dead since the taste of life had been taken away from them. Every act has its flavour, even the act of crime. In comparison to this, every passivity is tasteless and alien to life. Thus there is a Divine right to exterminate the ones that stand still. The Mt. Sinai tablets lost their value. The conscience is only a Jewish invention, against the Christian principle of the infinite soul and his personal responsibility. I place with a clear mind the redeemed principle about the nothingness and valuelessness of the individual. Instead of the formation of the soul by the great suffering and the death of the Godly savior comes the reformation according to the life and

action of a new leader who liberates the masses of believers from the shackles of the free decision.

– Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 1923

Please pay attention to the man (or madman) who in 1923 speaks about his divine right to exterminate people who stand still, who differ from his ideology. The dictator denies the individual his or her right to intellectual freedom and denies the yearning for the spirituality and humanity.

Yet the intellectual world remained silent; passive to the atrocities of the Holocaust. And in many instances, intellectuals cooperated with the insane master of Germany.

I am a Holocaust survivor who went from Ghetto labour camps to the most advanced form of incarceration in so-called *Vernichtungslagers*, otherwise known as Destruction Camps. The Ghetto, Labour camps, concentration camps became the institutions of higher learning in my life. Lessons in history, social studies, political science, spirituality, and religious observance were the integral parts of my experience.

Intolerance and indifference were the most important components of this curriculum of hate and bestiality in the years 1939-1945, the years of shame. I feel that those experiences give me the right to speak to you openly and candidly.

Learning about the Holocaust makes us understand suffering, death, indignity and evil. The Holocaust also provides a very strong message to remember our responsibility towards the future generations, and to focus our attention on the dignity of the human spirit. Learning about the Holocaust also makes us realize that such historical atrocities have much in common with more modern genocides in Vietnam, Cambodia, Sudan, Biafra, Ireland, and Yugoslavia, to name just a few. Although smaller in scope and intensity, hatred threatens the very existence and the fabric of societies, when it takes hold.

To teach about the Holocaust means to teach about the total dehumanization of twentieth century man and to demystify the belief that modern science and technological achievement is an end in of itself.

Today, all of us, Gentile and Jews, have the sad privilege of a new technological sophistication. We no longer doubt what the media tell us of the massacres the world over. Our readiness to believe the inhuman is now very nearly limitless. The really important question, however, is this, “Does the openness to horror make us any better prepared, any more willing to act, or has it made even thicker the skin of our indifference?”

To learn about the Holocaust is to understand that the “Final Solution” was the end product of a modern technology of death combined with the political philosophy of an insane government and the complete abdication of responsibility on the part of theologians and educators.

To learn about the Holocaust is to question the educational system in our society. Is it right for us to justify an educational system that emphasizes excellence in math, chemistry computer science and technology without spending the equivalent amount of time to educate the new generation of young people in the art of decency and tolerance?

Within a short period of time, Nazi scientists and educators were able to poison the minds of brilliant people, who were the product of the best schools and universities during the Weimar Republic. Doctors, architects, scientists, and clergymen became active and willing members of the most destructive killing apparatus in modern history. The elite of the most progressive educational system in Europe became wholesale murderers.

It was the doctors, some of them with the most impressive credentials in the field of medicine, who supervised the selections in the concentration camps – deciding who would live to work, who would die in the gas chambers, and who would become a guinea pig in barbarous experiments justified in the name of science.

Witnessing these events gives me an undeniable right to warn you (not to scare you) about the end results of intolerance and hate. I believe strongly in exposing this evil to young students, as well as to others. And yet, at the same time, I need to explain the reasons why during this most tragic period in human history some people risked their own lives to save a complete stranger from his or her death.

That is why I undertook to show Stephen Spielberg's movie "Shindler's List" to approximately 3,000 students – to teach them about human goodness and human spirit that can continue to exist, even when surrounded by a sea of evil and bestiality.<sup>1</sup> The younger generation must comprehend and embrace this message. Above all else, what the educational system must teach and instill is "tolerance".

Jan Karski, Polish spy for the underground in World War II and today professor of Eastern European political science at Georgetown University, was smuggled into the Warsaw Ghetto and Belzec death camp. He reported about the end of humanity to leaders of Western democracies. His words resonate today:

But what teachers of the Holocaust must remember is they must be careful. If the teacher is not qualified he or she will run the risk of corrupting the young minds. Corrupting the minds of young people will cause them to lose faith in humanity and we don't want them to lose that faith. Don't lose faith in humanity. This is the message to Jewish children. For non-Jews should understand – yesterday Jews, tomorrow maybe Catholics, yellow or blacks... Secondly, they should know what obedience to the second commandment "love thy neighbour as yourself" can do: It can save people destined to hell by other people.

Maybe it is still not too late to teach the next generation but it may be too late if we wait much longer. I would like to end with a statement, which only a survivor of the Holocaust can fully comprehend. All of you, I hope, will cultivate these words in the future:

I know how difficult, how dangerous, how piteous, it is to be a human being. And I also know how grand, how glorious it is to be a human being.

Thank you

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<sup>1</sup> As of March 2005, the author has screened “Schindler’s List” to 7,000 students from Winnipeg schools.

## ADDRESS TO THE GRADUANDS

*Text from speech delivered, on June  
1, 2003, at the Spring Convocation  
Ceremony for the University of  
Winnipeg.*

**D**r. Patrick Deane, distinguished guests, dear family and friends, graduates of the class of 2003, ladies and gentlemen. First of all, I would like to thank all responsible for this most cherished honour vested on me today by The University of Winnipeg, so I say a big "Yaashe Koah", which in Hebrew, expresses much more than the usual thank you.

It is easy to accept an honour; it is more difficult to rise to its standards. Thank you for your confidence, and I hope to live up to it.

As I stand before you, attired in the gown, which symbolizes knowledge, dignity, and justice, the kaleidoscope of memories flashes the unforgettable pictures of the gruesome, bitter months in 1944-45, which were completely void of dignity and justice. So in fact everything today seems surreal.

A very emotional part of receiving this honour is the invitation to address the graduates and the hope of gaining their confidence. I trust that this graduating class is immersed in the ideology of tolerance and freedom of expression for which The University of Winnipeg is well recognized. I am also positive that the graduates are well aware that Canada did not always pride itself with the best record in human rights and tolerance. The Canadian Government has discriminated over the years, against Jews, Ukrainians, Japanese, native people, Chinese, women and others. Being honoured today attests to the important changes which have taken place in Canada since then and I bow to those men and women who fought for these changes.

Marcel Proust expressed it so beautifully, "We don't receive wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey that no one can take for us, or spare us." I am not a professional educator, I am a Holocaust survivor, and my message today about compassion, hope, and tolerance is not an easy task, but rewarding for me. Sometimes we all need strong words to awake us from the lethargy of stupor in our daily lives and this is an ideal place for it, having 400 young graduates ready to face the challenges of tomorrow, head on.

So I shall present you with Adolph Hitler's statement, found in *Mein Kampf* (1923):

I am not interested in an intellectual education, by knowledge I shall spoil the German youth. Heavenly thinking people, all spiritual people are dead, since the taste of life had been taken away from them. Every act has its flavour, even the act of crime. In comparison to this, every passivity is tasteless and alien to life. Thus, there is a Divine right to exterminate the ones who stand still. The Mt. Sinai tablets lost their value. The conscience is only a Jewish invention. Against the Christian principle of the infinite value of individual soul and his personal responsibility, I place with a clear mind the principle of nothingness and valuelessness of the individual. Instead of the formation of the soul by great suffering and the death of the godly saviour comes the reformation according to the life, and action of new leader who liberates the masses of believers from the shackles of the free decision.

This was the synopsis on life and death, which permeated the Nazi society to the last days of the Third Reich. Ghetto, labour camps, and the last form of incarceration, the Vernichtung Lager – destruction camps became my institutions of higher learning: history, social studies, political science, spirituality, and theology were the integral part of this experience. Intolerance and indifference were the most important components of this curriculum of bestiality and hate in the years 1941-45. I graduated from this academy of perversion and shame – "cum lauda", with a clear mind, broken in body but alive.

I always felt that those experiences give me the right, but also the responsibility to speak to young people openly and candidly. So I shall do it right now.

Teaching Holocaust makes us understand suffering, death, indignity, and evil, and yet Holocaust sends our way a very strong message to remember our responsibility to the future generations, and focuses our attention to the dignity of human spirit.

Teaching Holocaust makes us realize that it takes place today, again, all over the world. Even though smaller in scope and intensity, it is here, and threatens our sheer existence and the fabric of our society.

To teach Holocaust means to teach the total dehumanization of man and to understand that the "Final Solution" was the end product of modern technology of death, combined with the political will of a legitimate government and total abdication of responsibility on the part of educators, theologian, and political leaders.

To teach Holocaust is to question the educational system in our society now. Is it right for us to justify an educational system structured on the sheer emphasis on excellence in math, chemistry, computer science, and technology without spending equivalent resources for development of a new generation of young people dedicated to decency, tolerance, and justice?

Within a very short time, Nazi scientists and educators were able to poison the minds of brilliant people, product of the best schools and universities of the Weimar Republic.

Doctors, architects, scientists, clergymen and theologians became active members of the most destructive killing apparatus in modern history. The elite of the most progressive education system in Europe became wholesale killers.

I believe strongly in exposing this evil to young people, and yet at the same time explain to them the reason why during this most tragic period in human history some people risked their lives to save a complete stranger from his or her

death. The only shining stars on this endless firmament of inhumanity and hate were the Righteous Gentiles, their heroic effort tragically dimmed by the sheer magnitude of the crime.

Jan Masarek, the son of the first president of Czechoslovakia, an ambassador to England, and after the Second World War, the minister of foreign affairs, expressed his own views on tolerance and freedom, "It should be taught in schools along with reading and writing. Only then would children grow up with the understanding of what freedom and compassion mean."

As our technological sophistication expands at an alarming rate, our moral and intellectual sensibilities are left far behind. So we have to ward off our complaisance, and fully understand that progress cannot and must not be achieved at the price of destruction and hate, lest we repeat the mistakes of the last century.

And our creed must be that humaneness finally must be the true measure of progress if we are to avoid the tragedies of our past generations. The future societies will demand not only brilliant lawmakers, but creative thinkers and teachers to shape their destiny. They shall achieve peace and order, not through violence, hate, and coercion but through abolishment of every kind of slavery be it political, economical, or spiritual, through intelligence and respect.

And this is my message to you, dear graduates: First let me congratulate you on your achievement. You are half way to the summit, the peak is within your reach, but as you embark now on last most perilous journey of your destination to become future leaders in every phase of communal needs, please join the forces of peace and tolerance to help it become a reality. Every man constantly produces thoughts, words, ideas, and deeds committing them either to the powers of light or darkness. He is constantly engaged either in building or in destroying. The choice is yours and yours only.

I am confident that you will become great builders of the new society, the society of justice and truth, so, please, accept my best wishes to your own fine future.

I thank you for the honour; it reinforces my hopes that the dream I carry, one day shall become a reality.

Thank you.



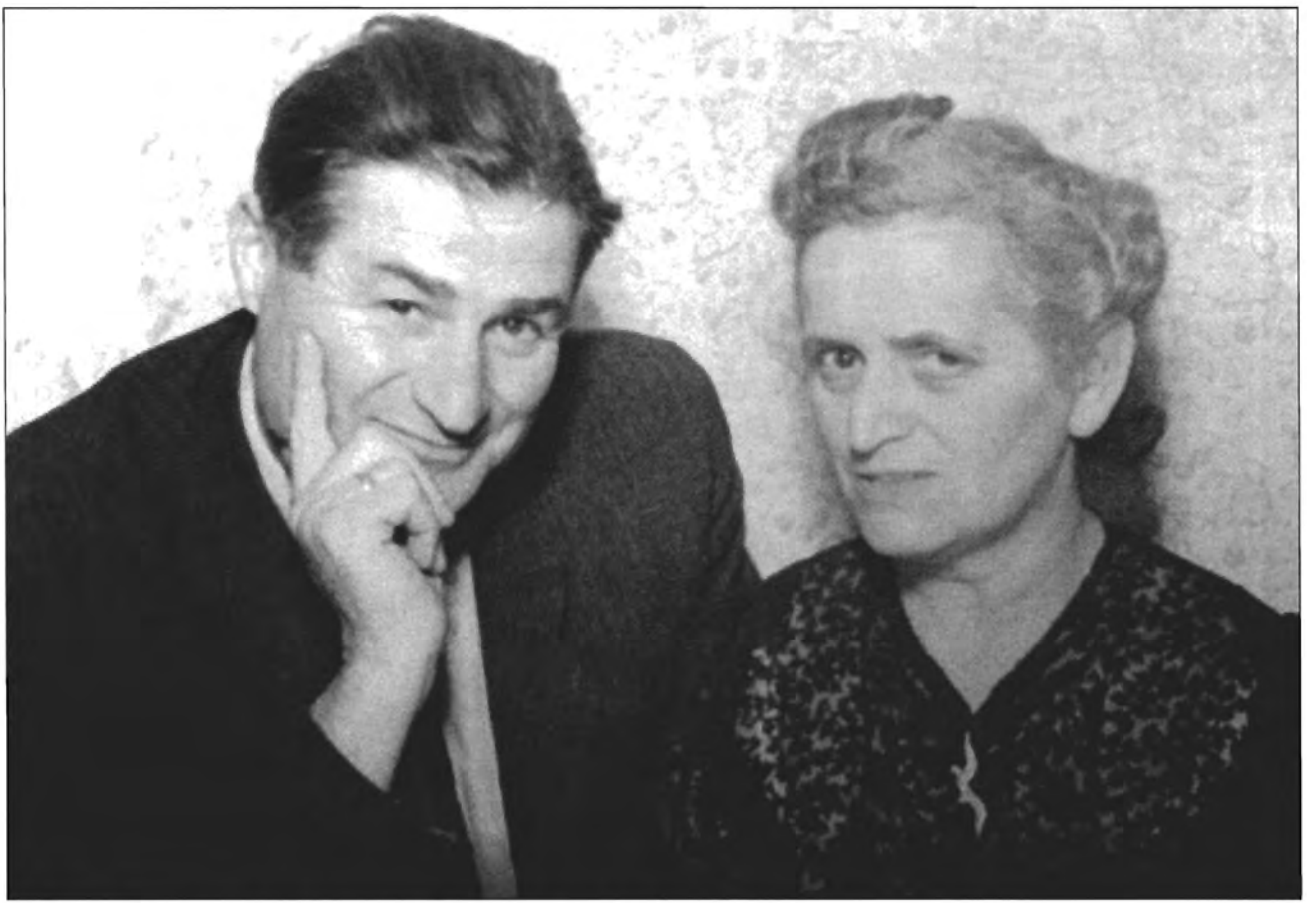
*My mother, Celia Weiss, sister Erna, brother Leo and Philip circa 1929*



*My sister Erna, brother Leo and Philip in a school outing in 1937 at Skole Poland*



*Philip Weiss one year after his liberation in 1945*



*My father Solomon David and mother Celia circa 1946*



*From the left: my sister Erna, brother-in-law Herman, brother Leo, Philip, father Solomon, mother Celia and guest in Linz, Austria during holiday observance in 1947*



*Gertrude and Philip in 1975*



*Daughters Shelley, Francie, Beverley and Philip, 1998 in Ottawa*



*Philip with grandchildren from the left, Jill, Evan, Abby, Richard, Erin, Michael and Lainie in 2006*



*Granddaughter Jill and Philip, in front of Israel's Monument in memory of 6,000,000 Jews killed during the Holocaust in Mathausen, Austria 2004*

*AS MORE AND MORE YEARS GO BY, FEWER AND FEWER PEOPLE WILL BE ABLE TO HAVE THESE PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS AND MORE AND MORE PEOPLE WILL BE DISTANCED BY TIME AND GEOGRAPHY FROM THE OVENS OF AUSCHWITZ. THE HEAT OF THE SCORCHING FLAMES OF CREMATORIA WILL BE COOLED AND THE CHILL OF THE BITING WINTERS IN CONCENTRATION CAMPS WILL BE TAMPERED. THE OCEANS OF TEARS WILL DRY AND THE ECHOES OF CRIES WILL FADE. AS THE SHOAH BECOMES LESS AN IMMEDIATE, PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND MORE A DISTANT HISTORICAL ACCOUNT, HOW WILL WE ENSURE THE SURVIVAL OF MEMORY? THE RESURRECTION OF THE SIX MILLION SOULS FROM THE FIRES OF CREMATORIA DEPENDS ON THE TYPE OF PASSION WE SPEAK IN OUR SOULS AND IN THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF NEW GENERATIONS OF JEWS. THE SURVIVORS CANNOT FORGET AND THEY CANNOT ALLOW OTHERS TO FORGET. THEIR MEMORIES AND THEIR STORIES CANNOT BE BURIED. THEY MUST REMAIN FOREVER ALIVE.*

**- RABBI MARK DRATCH**