

# TORAS AVIGDOR

AUTHENTIC TORAH THOUGHT FOR LIFE

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PARSHAS VA'ERA

WITH

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BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

## MAKKOS IN EUROPE

### CONTENTS

- Part I.** Studying the Makkos - 1  
**Part II.** Introduction to The Great Makkah - 4  
**Part III.** Studying the Great Makkah - 7  
**Part IV.** Understanding for the Future - 10

## Part I. Studying the Makkos

### The Makkos Don't Work

When we study the story of the ten *makkos*, it's important to make clear beforehand what their purpose was. And if we want to know what their purpose was, we have to establish at the beginning what their function most definitely was not: *The purpose of the makkos was not to set free the Am Yisroel.*

The fact is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu had said beforehand that the *makkos* wouldn't help: וְאֲנִי אֶקְשֶׁה וְאֶת לֵב פַּרְעֹה – I will harden Pharaoh's heart (Shemos 7:3). More than once Hashem said openly that He was going to harden the heart of Pharaoh anyhow and that it would only be at that exact time when Hashem wants, that's when the Am Yisroel would go free.

And that's precisely what happened – the *makkos* didn't set them free. Only that finally, when Hakadosh Baruch Hu decided that the time was right, He made Pharaoh get up in the middle of the night and chase the Am Yisroel from his land.

### Dreams and Headlines

Now, if the *makkos* weren't needed to set us free so it's a *kasha*; who needs the whole business? Hakadosh Baruch Hu could have saved us in a much

less complicated way. He could have sent maybe a dream to Pharaoh, like he had sent to *Lavan Ha'arami* when he was chasing after Yaakov; or like the dreams He sent to the king of the Plishtim and to the old Pharaoh in the time of Avraham Avinu. And Pharaoh would have gotten up in the morning and called together his ministers and he would have told them, "Look people. I've been thinking about this for a long time now and after a lot of solemn and prayerful deliberation I've come to the decision to let the Bnei Yisroel go."

And that would have been the end of things – it would have been a royal decree! In the Cairo Tribune, it would have been front page headlines: Source In The Royal Palace Reveals Pharaoh To Set Hebrews Free! And we would have walked out of Mitzrayim to freedom just the same, without all the hullabaloo of the *makkos*. Hashem could have made it happen that way – why not?

### Explaining the Eirev Rav

And so, if the *makkos* weren't needed to achieve the freedom of the Am Yisroel, what was their true purpose?

Now, we don't have to look far to find the answer because Hakadosh Baruch Hu stated it as clearly as could be. He told Moshe Rabbeinu what the *makkos*

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were for: וַיֵּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי אֲנִי הָשֵׁם – “So Egypt shall know that I am Hashem” (ibid. 7:5). That’s the purpose of the *makkos*.

And the truth is that very many Egyptians learned the lesson. Some benefited a little and some benefited more – and some even gained such great benefit that they decided to throw in their lot with the Bnei Yisroel. וְגַם עָרַב רַב עִלָּה אִתָּם – A big number of Egyptians left Mitzrayim with the Bnei Yisroel (ibid. 12:38). Why do you think they left? Because וַיֵּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם; they had learned the lesson!

But we understand right away that it wasn’t for the benefit of Mitzrayim that these *makkos* were given – it wasn’t the Mitzrim that concerned Hakadosh Baruch Hu most. Of all the *talmidim* for whom the lessons were intended, it was the Am Yisroel who were most important.

The lessons are for us! Who still reads the story in shul every year? The Mitzrim? Do the Mitzrim make a Pesach Seder to remember the lessons? So when it states, וַיֵּדְעוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי אֲנִי הָשֵׁם, it means וַיֵּדְעוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי אֲנִי הָשֵׁם. It means, “Even the people of Mitzrayim”; the Mitzrim will also learn, but by means of watching the Mitzrim learn the lesson the hard way, the real purpose will be fulfilled – the Bnei Yisroel will learn that I am Hashem.

### The Owner Reacts

And so, if the Mitzrim saw Hashem, then the intended recipients of the lessons, the Bnei Yisroel, saw Him a thousand times more. You have no idea what was accomplished by each *makkah*! Each one was another *shiur* in Awareness of Hashem. לְמַעַן תִּדְרְעוּ – “I did all this so that you will know – truly know – that I am Hashem your G-d” (Devarim 29:5).

That’s the great lesson that there are no accidents in the world. If you’re going to leave Mitzrayim now to become My people, then the very first lesson you have to learn is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is in charge of all the affairs of the universe and whatever happens comes directly from Him. The *makkos* were intended as a lesson that the world has an Owner and that this Owner reacts to what people do.

Now as was explained here once, Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn’t react by sending events *stam*, happenings that are entirely mysterious; instead He puts into each event a clue to give us a hint why it came. It’s a fundamental principle that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives us clues – when something happens, it’s not merely a misfortune, it’s a clue. And so, if you want to know *why* something is happening, study it – look at the way it happened and very many times you can discover *why* it came.

### An Eye for an Eye

The Mishna (Sotah 8b) says it like this: בְּמִדָּה שֶׁאָרָם לּוֹ מוֹדֵד מוֹדֵדִין לוֹ – *In the way a man measures out, so too is it measured out to him*. What does that mean? It’s telling us that the punishment a man gets in this world, in some way resembles the thing that he’s done wrong. And that’s the principle that’s commonly known as *middah k’neged middah*.

And that’s why Chazal understood that every *makkah* that came upon the Egyptians was planned *middah k’neged middah*. If you study the *midrashim*, you’ll discover many examples. In some cases you can use your own head and discover *middah k’neged middah*. What was the reason that just in this way the *makkah* had to come? Why with this and this detail? It was to compensate for something that was done by the Egyptians and this lesson was taught by means of the clues that were put into the *makkos*.

However, all this needs a lot of thought and if we don’t bother spending time thinking, we don’t get the full benefit. And the Mesillas Yesharim sets down the principle that most people don’t learn the lessons that Hashem wants to teach them because they’re just too busy to think. There’s more than one reason, but the main reason why people don’t learn is because they’re too busy with life. There are so many things to do, so many happy things, so many other things – whatever it is, but they’re busy all the time. That’s his explanation: הַטְּפוּל וְהַטְּרָדָה – *People are just too busy to think*. People don’t learn the lessons that they are expected to learn because they don’t make time to think, “Why is Hashem doing *davka* this and *davka* that?”

## Dever Times Ten

And now we can understand a *medrash* in our *parsha* (Rabbah, 10:1). It says there that **עַל כָּל מַכָּה וּמַכָּה הָיָה מִשְׁמַשׁ הַדָּבָר** – *Every time one of the makkos came, there was a dever, a pestilence, that came along with it.* Although one of the *makkos* was *dever* by itself, but a pestilence also went along with every *makkah*. When the water turned into blood, there was a *dever*. When the frogs came, there was also a *dever*. With *kinim*, there was a *dever*. And so on and so forth; *arov* came with *dever*, *shechin* came with a *dever*.

Now, we have to understand the significance of that.

The answer is that the Gemara (Bava Kama 60b) states a principle of how to behave when *chas v'shalom* there's an epidemic. It says there, **דָּבַר בְּעִיר, בְּנִס רְגֵלֶיךָ** – *When there's an epidemic in the city, stay at home!* It's very important advice you're hearing now. Don't go out and mix with people. Even when there's an epidemic of the common cold or of the flu, *chas v'shalom*, don't go where there are crowds.

First of all, why should you donate your germs to other people – keep it to yourself. And secondly, when there are a lot of people together, a lot of people donating germs to one big pool, so it's easier, *chalilah*, to catch it. So when there's a **דָּבַר בְּעִיר**, you keep away from crowds. What do you do? **בְּנִס רְגֵלֶיךָ** – *You remain home.*

## The Benefits of an Epidemic

And the Am Yisroel in those days had the good sense to make use of this time they had in their home because our forefathers had elders whom they looked to for guidance in everything. You remember when Moshe Rabbeinu came to tell the Bnei Yisroel the good tidings that they were now going to be redeemed, he didn't come to Goshen, to the Jewish street, and shout. He didn't put up signs on the walls. He went straight to the elders, to the *ziknei ha'am*. And that's because the Am Yisroel in those days had good leaders and they listened to them.

And so, when the *zekeinim* said, **דָּבַר בְּעִיר, בְּנִס רְגֵלֶיךָ** – “Stay at home during the *makkos*,” that's what everybody did. Everyone went into their little home

and they locked the door so that they shouldn't have any business with anybody else.

Now, if you're staying home, what are you going to do? You have nothing to do. You can't work. You can't take walks. You can't go apple picking. You can't hike. You can only stay home and talk. So the father and mother and the children and the grandparents too, they were all crowded together in one little house. What should they do all day? And so the leaders of the Am Yisroel taught them what to do.

## The Longest Pesach Seder Ever

The *zekeinim* taught the people what the purpose of the *makkos* really was. And the Bnei Yisroel listened! They studied the *makkos* because they understood that every *makkah* that came upon the Egyptians was planned purposefully *middah k'neged middah*. And so they spent their days and nights sitting and talking.

What's the news of the day? The current *makkah*, that's what's in vogue this week. What was the reason that just in this way the *makkah* had to come?

If you'll study the *medrashim*, you'll discover many examples of what the Am Yisroel discovered with their own minds. Those traditions in the *midrashim* are from *them*. It wasn't the later Sages who invented these lessons – it came from the Bnei Yisroel who sat there in their homes and observed what was taking place. And they understood that if Hashem was bringing punishment upon a people, it was to compensate them for what they did wrong; and they understood that the lessons were being taught by the clues that were put into the *makkos* themselves.

## Right Back At You

Let's say when *Makkas Dam* came; so they're sitting in their houses and talking. “Did you hear what happened to Mamrei the Egyptian down the road? He went for a drink and his mouth is all bloodied up as if somebody punched him in the lips. He's vomiting from disgust.”

“Aha! That bloody Egyptian now! You remember when he smacked me in the mouth and my mouth was bleeding? Now he's getting it right back in his face!”

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## Part II. Introduction to The Great

### Makkah

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#### The Historic Lesson

Now, whatever is in the Torah is a *torah*, a teaching. It's not merely an episode that happened – it's teaching us something for the future. And therefore we have to take this as a model – we shouldn't just relegate it to the past and say, "Then, that's what happened and that was the purpose in those days." We should take this as a model for other events that have happened in our history.

We're expected to live always with the principle that when troubles come upon people, Hakadosh Baruch Hu is teaching something. And it's up to us to react the way the Am Yisroel did in Mitzrayim and to think, "מַאי קָא מְשַׁמְע לָן – *What is Hakadosh Baruch Hu saying with this event?*"

There's a verse in Tehillim (94:10) which states it openly. It's a pity we say it so frequently and never stop to think. הַיְסוּר גּוֹיִם הֲלֵא יוֹכִיחַ – *The One Who brings punishments and suffering on the nations, isn't He showing something?* יוֹכִיחַ means to show something. הַמְלִמָּד אֶרֶם הָעַת – *Isn't He teaching mankind knowledge?*

#### A Most Painful Subject

Now, I have to bring up a very painful subject. Because although there are many things we can study, many things that happened to our people in the thousands of years since the *makkos*, it's especially important to look at events that happened in our time, in recent history, and to try to understand their messages. "Isn't Hashem showing something, isn't he teaching mankind knowledge?" And if an event of tremendous suffering was brought *not upon the nations, but on our nation*; if Hashem chose to decimate His chosen nation in what they call the Holocaust, so we understand that there were great lessons He was teaching.

Some Orthodox people don't want to hear this at all. They say it's sacrilegious to talk about such things – it's a *kitrug* on the *kedoshim*; it's 'accusing the holy ones.' But the *kitrug* on Hakadosh Baruch Hu, that

"Maybe in the wells there's some water they can drink?"

"Nothing doing! Look at the well next door – you see how red it is? Look at them – they're digging in the ground trying to find an underground spring. And his brother, the wicked slavemaster, he's walking around dehydrated begging for a sip of water. He looks like he's about to faint."

"Is that so? He's the one who forced us to work all day in the sun and didn't let us drink from the well. He's getting exactly what he deserves, *middah k'neged middah*."

#### An Intense Study

So they were talking all day long – but not like we're talking here. I'm just talking kindergarten talk now, but they went to the bottom of it. They had nothing else to do – they didn't read newspapers or novels in those days; they didn't waste time listening to the radio. And the *zekeinim* taught them how to use their time during the *makkos* – to think about what Hashem was trying to teach them and to talk about it.

It was a *mesichta* – *Mesichta Makkos*. It was a whole *mesichta* and each *makkah* was another *perek*. And they learned it with *meforshim*. They tried to pay attention to the details of each *makkah* and they talked it over. The Bnei Yisroel saw Hashem in every detail. And so, they talked and talked and talked; they went into all the details. It was exciting. To us, it's old news, but to them it was happening right now and therefore it was the rage of the moment.

The Am Yisroel studied *middah k'neged middah*, and they became wise; וַיִּדְעוּ כִּי אֱלֹהֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם – they knew Hashem more and more and more. The *emunah* got into their bones – into the marrow of the bones – that there's a *Shofet*, a just Judge over the world who has everything under His control. So the *makkos* succeeded! Not that they succeeded in setting free the Bnei Yisroel, but they succeeded in teaching the Am Yisroel the great lesson that because Hashem loves His people, He is always watching over the Am Yisroel and guiding them to perfection. And one of the ways He teaches His people is by means of the principle of *middah k'neged middah*.



they keep quiet about! Hakadosh Baruch Hu for nothing at all brought such a *kilayon*, a destruction?

Hakadosh Baruch Hu doesn't practice **דִּינָא בְּלֵא דִּינָא**. He doesn't do judgment without justice (Berachos 5b). And therefore, it's the biggest *chillul Hashem* if people keep quiet about that and instead they only make a propaganda that Hashem destroyed *kedoshim* and *tehorim*, and that there's nothing we can do to understand.

### **We Must Try To Understand**

When there's misfortune in the world, when there's terrible misfortune among Jews, we have to understand that Hakadosh Baruch Hu knows exactly what He's doing. And therefore we have to understand that these *reshaim*, the Germans, were the *shluchim* of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Hitler, *yemach shemo*, was a *shaliach* from Hashem.

So a man once said to me, "You mean to say Hitler was a *tzaddik*!?" No; he was a *rasha*, the biggest *rasha*, but **וְגַם רָשָׁע לְיוֹם רָעָה** – Hashem picks a *rasha* for a day of evil (Mishlei 16:4). Certainly. He doesn't appoint *tzaddikim* to kill people. He picks a *rasha* for that. But they were his *shluchim*, and there's no question that He did it with a purpose.

Certainly the Germans are *reshaim*, and they're all in *Gehinom* now – oh yes, they're being punished in *Gehinom* right now! If we could listen to their cries, our blood would run cold. We'd shiver from the cries of pain that they're suffering now. But that doesn't absolve us in the least from knowing that the righteous Hashem doesn't do judgment without justice. If Hashem brought a *churban* upon us, it was for a very good reason.

### **We Cannot Stop Weeping**

Of course we weep for what we lost; we weep for the **עַם הַשָּׁמַיִם שֶׁנִּפְּלוּ בְּהָרֵב**. The wicked Germans came to town after town spilling Jewish blood. I lived in a small town in Lithuania for a while and I knew the people there well; I was close to them. And the Nazis came in and marched all the men out to the field outside the town and shot them all down. My brother-in-law, they shot him down. A *Telzer yeshiva bochur*, a very nice

boy, they shot him down for nothing. In cold blood they killed him. Can you do anything but weep at that?

And a few weeks later they took all the women and the girls – my sister-in-law was among them; a beautiful and fine *frum* girl – and the Nazis shot them all dead in cold blood. Certainly we weep; we can't stop weeping.

My *chaveirim*, my best friends were all murdered. Rav Feivel Pilvishker, *zichrono l'vracha*, a *tzaddik*, a young man who was learning all the time. He was always thinking in *mussar* in his spare time. And they found his body in the field outside the town – he was shot there and left to bleed to death. Other friends too – Aharon Birzher, my *chavrusa*. He was the son-in-law of the *Kurdaneh Rav*, and he was murdered along with the *Kurdaneh Jews*.

My *rebbe*, Rav Avraham was burnt up alive in a fire when the Germans set fire to the hospital. Rav Elchonon Wasserman *zichrono l'vracha* was in *Slabodka* and they marched him out with all the *Slabodka boys* – my *chaveirim* – and they shot them dead in the Ninth Fort.

### **Justice Will Prevail**

Certainly we weep rivers of tears. The fact that we lost our people is a devastating blow that we will never cease weeping for. And the Germans – all the nations of the world as well – will be held accountable, no question about it. Hakadosh Baruch Hu will remember everything. **דִּרְשׁ דְּמֵי אֹתָם זָכֹר** – *The One Who remembers the blood of the innocent*, **לֹא שִׁכַּח צַעֲקַת עֲנָוִים** – *He won't forget their outcry* (Tehillim 9:13). He won't forget them forever. And we too will not forget them.

But we have to know that *sof kol sof*, Hashem is Just in His ways and that He's teaching us something. "The One Who brings punishment on people, is He not trying to teach us something?!" He won't do judgements without justice!

### **There Was A Breakdown**

All over Europe you have to know there was a breakdown. Of course there were *frum* Jews too but all over, the *Am Yisroel* was defecting from the Torah in great numbers. Today they tell you *narishkeit* that the towns were *chassidische* strongholds, nothing but

*chassidim*. No; there were Reform *kehilla*s established there, with Reform rabbis who didn't believe in anything. And every home was being affected, even the best ones.

Already in the Chofetz Chaim's time he said that **אֵין בַּיִת אֲשֶׁר אֵין שָׁם מָוֶת** – “There's no home that doesn't have someone who has left the Am Yisroel.” *Every house is ruined*, said the Chofetz Chaim.

I remember when a *rav* came to visit the Slabodka Yeshiva. He looked like an old-time *rav* – looking at him you would have thought that even his mother had *peyos*. But then I learned that in his family he's the only one of five boys who are *shomer mitzvos*. This beautiful-looking *rav* was only one of five who hadn't rebelled against Hakadosh Baruch Hu. And in general those who rebelled weren't quiet! They were poisonous! They were enemies of the Torah and they poured vitriol upon all the *frum* Jews and ridiculed them day in and day out.

### Declaring War

They used to make parades in the towns, parades against the Torah Jews. I have a picture upstairs. It's a photograph of a demonstration in the town of Chubashav, a May 1st parade. Who's parading there? Not children, not young people. It's well-dressed middle-aged Jews without anything on their heads marching down the street. And they're carrying a big banner; from one side of the street to the other a big banner is waving: “*Nider mit dem klerirkarlism.*” Down with clericalism! It means down with the rabbis. Down with religion! And it was *lifnei kol am v'eidah* – it was openly displayed in the streets of a Jewish town. Down with the rabbinate!

Another picture, a different town. They're marching with a big sign, “We Declare War On The *Klerikalim.*” War on the *rabbonim*, and the *frum* Jews. Through a Jewish town, that's how they paraded. And not one town. Many!

So Rav Elchonon Wasserman said, “You're declaring war on Hashem?! So Hashem will declare war on you!” That's what Rav Elchonon said.

### I Was There!

Here is a *talmid chacham* who wrote an article about Slabodka – he was describing Slabodka, a history. I read the article. He's telling about the old Slabodka Rav, Rav Moshe Donishefsky way back, a *talmid chacham*, a *gadol baTorah*. And then there was the *Slabodka roshei yeshiva*, and then another *gadol* took over. And then came Hitler.

Such a *sheker!* What do you mean and then came Hitler? What happened in between? I knew Slabodka; I lived there. What are you telling me stories? This *gadol*, and that *gadol*, and then came Hitler? What happened to the people in between? What about the Hebrew teachers? What about the schools that taught atheism? The *gymnasia* and the *Tarbus* schools! What about all the *apikorsim* who lived in Slabodka? I was there; I saw! Slabodka was a *churban*. There was a *yeshiva*, it's true, but the city itself was no good at all. Europe was being turned upside down by the Jewish *resha'im*.

### The Great Propaganda Campaign

Do you hear people speak about that when they teach about the Holocaust? No, you don't hear that. The whole subject is not even mentioned. People are busy carrying out a propaganda campaign against Hakadosh Baruch Hu. You know what they say? They say that they were all *tzadikim* in Europe. Ahh, it was a wonderful place – they were all righteous, all *kedoshim*, and we just don't know why Hakadosh Baruch Hu would do such a terrible thing to them. What do they mention? The wicked Germans, the wicked gentiles, the wicked Ukrainians, the wicked Poles. It's all the fault of the wicked nations.

It's like when a dog is hit with a stick so the dog gets angry and bites the stick. The dog doesn't think about the person who is wielding the stick. Did you ever throw a stone at a dog? The dog bites the stone. And so the Jewish masses blamed the stick. They blamed the Germans, and they blamed anti-semitism, and the Church. But did they say the truth, that the destruction that happened in Europe was because the Am Yisroel did not listen to Hakadosh Baruch Hu? No, no, no, that's not what they said.

## Whom Should We Listen To?

The Mizrachi came up with the theory that they preach in the whole world today. Do you know who's at fault that all those Jews were destroyed in Europe? It's not the fault of the atheist and the communist who abandoned Hakadosh Baruch Hu. It's the fault of the rabbis because they didn't preach that the Jews should forsake Europe. "All the *rabbonim* are guilty." I heard it myself.

They said that the *gedolim*, all the *tzaddikim*, the Chofetz Chaim *zichrono l'vracha* too – all the leaders of the generation are at fault because they didn't preach that the Jews should get up and move to Eretz Yisroel. That six million Jews should get up from Europe and go to Eretz Yisroel in those days when nobody would let them in anyhow! It was all a dream anyhow. And because the rabbis didn't preach that, so the blood of the six million Jews is on the rabbis' heads.

"Because the *frumme* didn't listen to Jabotinsky when he said that you should evacuate Europe, that's why our people were destroyed," that's what they say. So Hakadosh Baruch Hu allowed six million Jews to be destroyed because they didn't listen to an *oichel treifos*, a *mechalel Shabbos*; a *rasha gamur*, a man who didn't keep anything. Hashem punished us because we didn't listen to a radical atheist!!

## Pushed Into a Corner

The lesson *should've* been, why didn't you listen to the rabbis who said, "Go back to the Torah!" The *rabbonim* tried! Reb Elchonon Wasserman, *zichrono l'vracha*, cried out about it. The Chofetz Chaim too. But did anybody know what they said? Did they hear their opinion? No; they didn't have any influence at all on the Jewish masses. Reb Elchonon was shouted down. He was ridiculed. "He's no leader. He doesn't know anything. A *rosh yeshiva*, an old man – what does he know about politics? He's only a *rosh yeshiva*." That's what they said. "A man who's a *gadol b'Torah*, what does he know about leadership?"

The *gedolim* were pushed away in a corner. The *roshei yeshiva* were like they didn't exist. If you were in a yeshiva, so you knew he was your *rebbe* – you listened. But when you left the yeshiva, even though

you were a good *talmid*, once you left you had no contact. What did you have? You had the daily newspapers filled with articles written by poisonous *apikorsim* – that was your new *rebbe*. And so from day to day, you became worse and worse. People don't realize what the situation was in Europe.

## The Yeshivos Were a Minority

At that time, where I was, you didn't have even a hundred young people under the age of thirty who put on *tefillin*. Older people still maintained the old ideas but young people did not. You had a *tiferes bachurim* of about fifty men – that's all. It was a few *balebatim* who wanted to stay *frum*; the rest were throwing it all away.

In a city like Pinsk, there were 40,000 Jews in Pinsk – in 1928 there were 40,000 Jews. And you didn't have even ten boys who went to *yeshivos* outside of Pinsk. There were no *yeshivos* in Pinsk. Slabodka, Lomza, Telz, Radin, Mir, didn't have ten *bachurim* from a town of 40,000 boys. I have a letter written by a Pinsker Jew to the Jewish newspaper where he describes that. The world turned upside down.

And that's why our nation ignored the intended lessons. Instead of learning the lesson that Hashem intended them to learn, they learned just the opposite. And therefore one of the great lessons for which the Holocaust was intended went lost. At best, it's treated with silence. Instead of sitting and studying the terrible *makkah*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu and the gentiles are blamed.

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## Part III. Studying the Great Makkah

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### Why Germany?

If only the Am Yisroel would have huddled together in their homes with their parents and grandparents and discussed the news with a clear mind, a great many lessons could have been learned. "Why is this happening?" they should have thought. All of a sudden, Germany – a civilized country – is committing such barbarous acts against them? What's it for? They should have thought about and discussed it with the *ziknei hador*; the same way the Bnei Yisroel in



Mitzrayim spent time thinking about what Hashem was doing, the German Jews could have done the same.

Why did Hitler come from Germany? Because from Germany came forth the reform; the ideals of assimilation came from Germany. And from Germany, defection from the Torah and rebellion against Hakadosh Baruch Hu spread all over Europe. So the Nazis began in Germany because that's where the wickedness of the Jews began – the wickedness that ruined the Jewish people.

### **Leaders and Misleaders**

And then Hitler marched into Poland. Why did he march into other countries? Because in those places the Am Yisroel had forsaken the Torah. Even those who kept Shabbos, they already were poisoned and they despised the Torah. Who were their leaders? They looked up to the atheists! Who got all the votes in Poland when the Jews voted for leaders? All the votes were given either to the Bundists, that's the radical socialists, or they were given to the radical Zionists. The Zionists in Europe were radical atheists, and they were the ones who had the newspapers and the big organizations.

And even the Jewish masses, those who still kept *kashrus* and Shabbos, but inwardly they were rotten through and through. There still remained a small island, the Torah World – wonderful *yeshivos*. But they were a tiny minority because they had already been abandoned by the people. The heart of the people was already in the hands of the misleaders. And these misleaders didn't say, "Look at what Hitler is doing! It's time to do *teshuva*." The Chofetz Chaim *zichrono l'vracha* said it; Rav Elchonon Wasserman said it, "Do *teshuva*," but who listened to them?!

### **Studying German Law**

If they had listened they would have studied the lesson of *middah k'neged middah* when the Germans announced the Law Against Overcrowding German Schools – that's the name of the law – on April 25, 1933. In Germany, before this, everybody had to go to school on Shabbos. They weren't off on Shabbos, which meant that they were *mechalel Shabbos* and

also they mingled with gentile boys and girls – and that was one of the big sources of intermarriage.

So here was a law that you could study with great profit – why did the Germans exclude Jewish children from public schools, from colleges and high schools? Isn't it because German Jews were so eager to mingle and German Jews had so little regard for Shabbos? And so Hashem was putting a stop to it – with a heavy Hand Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, "No more!"

On September 15, 1935, they decreed a law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor. That means intermarriage between Jews and Christians came to an end – for a Jew and a Christian to live together was a crime. That's something to think about. It was a message *min haShamayim*. Hitler had to come and teach them that it's *assur* to intermarry and that if you do, there's going to be a very big punishment.

### **No Accident!**

On January 5, 1937, they decreed compulsory Jewish names. *Ooh wah!* That's some decree! So Hans Cohen was now called Israel Hans Cohen and Gretel Cohen was now called Sarah Gretel Cohen – whether she liked it or not. And she didn't! They hated Jewish names. Sarah! Gretel was fainting from embarrassment! All of a sudden Jews began carrying such genuine full blooded names. Israel Hans Cohen! Hans, who had tried his best to run away from Israel all his life and now they slapped the sticker on him: Israel. Wasn't that a lesson from Heaven?

On December 3, 1938, Jews were barred from the streets on Nazi holidays. Now the Jews would have gone out in the streets and participated. They would have danced together with the Germans and they would have raised their hands and participated in everything. But now they were being told that they were Jews and they shouldn't lose their identity because of patriotism. That was a great lesson.

December 28, 1939, the order was given that Jews should live only in all Jewish houses. You have to study that. You can't mix – all Jewish houses. Two days later on December 30, 1939, there was a decree barring Jews from dining cars – to remind them of *kashrus*.



These weren't anti-semitic accidents! They were all lessons that should have been studied and it's a pity they didn't utilize it – it could have saved their lives. At least spiritually they would have been saved.

### The Hints Get Stronger

Now, for a thinking person, these little hints might have been enough. *גַּי לְחַכְיָמָא בְּרַמְיָא* – A wise man, it's enough one hint. You don't have to tell them again. But when somebody is obtuse, he doesn't take a hint, you have to tell it to him over and over; and each time you tell it to him, you have to make it more and more open and finally if he doesn't take the hint, so you give it to him. People can save themselves from *yissurim* if they'll understand the first hint.

But the German-educated Jews were so dumb – their heads for so many years had been stuffed up with gentile ideas so they couldn't listen. They didn't learn. Some of them learned that they have to leave Germany. But that's all they learned; so they came to America and they assimilated even more; they intermarried or some converted to Christianity. They didn't learn a thing.

And so the lessons became worse. We have to study: why is it that the Jews were now enslaved more than in any previous time? Never before had there been such a *gezeirah* of such killing slave labor. And you can be sure that there were some Jews – not enough, but there were some who looked back now and recalled that the Shabbos had been destroyed in many places in Europe. Yes, there were some Jews who understood that because Jews profaned the Shabbos, that's why they were forced to work seven days a week at killing labor.

When I came to Slabodka in 1932, every half hour a busload of Jews left for Kovno to go to work on Shabbos. But by 1938 every five minutes a bus left full of Jews! Working on Shabbos! It was unheard of not long ago. But now every five minutes a busload of Jews was going to work. And because so many Jews now had chosen voluntarily to work on the Shabbos, so therefore they were now put to killing labor seven days a week without any rest at all.

### A Terrible Reminder

And it wasn't *chilul Shabbos* just for *parnasah*, because they needed food to eat. I went with a friend of mine, Rabbi Yehuda Davis *zatzal*, and together we walked one Shabbos afternoon to the port in Kovno, on the river. It was the summertime and the Jews in Kovno were gathered there at the port. And every fifteen minutes a steamboat full of Jews left to go up the river to a vacation place. Jews – men and women together, smoking, carrying packages, dressed of course in undress, all bare-headed, all being *mechalel Shabbos*. We didn't believe our eyes. Kovno?! That's a Jewish Kovno?! “A *leibidiker tug!* There's no G-d anymore! There used to be a G-d in Kovno but now we forgot all about Him.”

Well, He reminded them! He reminded them! And once more they all met again in that same place. Again they assembled, only this time it was for different purposes. This time they weren't going upstream to a vacation place; instead they were being put in cattle cars. Some were being led to the Ninth Fort where they were shot down en masse.

But not only shot down. Why did it have to be that the Jewish women were subjected to such indignity before they were killed? It just happened that the Nazis chose to strip them of their clothes, to act in the most vile way?

Because Jewish women began to dress in immoral dress in Europe – things that you never saw before – that's why the Jewish women were subjected to indignity before they were tortured to death. That's *middah k'neged middah*.

Because Jewish women began to dress in immoral dress in Europe, things that you never saw before, that's why they were stripped naked, the Jewish women. And they were subjected to indignities before they were tortured to death. Because once upon a time you couldn't find a Jewish woman who uncovered her hair. But now things changed, and that's why all the Jewish women were shaved bald before they were sent to the gas chambers; and they found tons and tons of human hair. They're still wearing them in America today as wigs. Human hair; tons and tons of

human hair from Jewish women. That's *middah keneged middah*.

### Who Massacred Children?

Why did it happen that the Germans were so avid in destroying children? The Nazis conducted their most cruel campaign against children. In every community the first ones to be taken away were the children. A million Jewish children were destroyed! That was a primary objective for the Germans – to capture all the children and to take them to their deaths, before the parents were exterminated.

But if we look back we'll discover that the parents had already massacred their children long before. You know which school system was the biggest, the most popular of all, in Eastern Europe between World War I and World War II? It was the *Tarbus* schools. The *Tarbus* school was spreading like wildfire and had ousted the old time *cheder* almost completely. Even where the old *cheder* remained, the *melamed* had only a handful of children; the *Tarbus* school had all the children in the towns and the villages. And these *Tarbus* schools were run by atheists who weren't ashamed to teach openly the doctrine of G-dlessness. They were *kofrim b'kol haTorah kulah* and great masses of Jewish children were now handed over to them to be destroyed.

Reb Elchonon Wasserman *zichrono l'vracha* said, רוב ילדי ישׂראל מתחנכים כגֵּוֹיִם – Most Jewish children are being brought up like gentiles. He meant like atheists; worse than gentiles. Because the *Tarbus* school was consequent; they didn't do things halfway. And the parents gladly handed over their children to them – to *apikorsim*! And therefore, the truth is that very many children had been destroyed even *before* Hitler came.

### It Was Foretold

And that's *why* Hitler came. Because the vast majority of Jewish children were taken out of the Torah schools and given over *willingly* to the hands of atheists to be taught atheism; that's why the Jewish children in Europe disappeared entirely.

There's so much more that can be said. The Jewish community was on a roller coaster that was speeding

downhill – the Torah was being abandoned all over Europe and Hashem was reacting.

And so when a man gets up here and yells at me – with indignation he yells! He says he asked everybody why such a thing happened in Europe and nobody could tell him.

*Why did it happen?!* It happened because it was foretold! It happened according to plan. אַם תֵּלְכוּ עִמִּי קָרִי – If you will go along and say it's accident; you'll see the world as if it's all due to natural causes, so וְהִלַּכְתִּי וְהִלַּכְתִּי קָרִי – I will treat you the same way (Vayikra 26:21,24). The *tochacha* is a *parsha* in the Torah – it's open *pessukim*. The mass defection from Judaism was unprecedented in the history of the world and therefore the terrible punishment that came was also unprecedented in the history of the world.

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## Part IV. Understanding for the Future

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### A General Certain Answer

Now, am I saying that all the events of the Holocaust are fully understandable to us? Certainly not. *Chas veshalom*, I should say such a thing. Nobody can claim to understand such a tragedy in all its details. When we sit here and say that we try to understand that Hashem does things for a reason, it's *b'derech klal*, on a general level. And so nobody claims to have all the answers. But what we *can* say is that it is certain – *absolutely certain* – that the Holocaust included a reaction to those that rebelled against Hashem violently and virulently, and with the worst kind of results had they been allowed to continue to exist. What could you expect as time kept on going? They were getting worse and worse. And so Hashem said, "It's enough. I'll bring it to an end."

Yes, that's one of the reasons. And it won't help if you call me up on the phone at twelve o'clock at night to yell at me. "Don't talk about these things!" he yells. It won't help because not only is it one of the reasons but it's a reason that Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants us to talk about! לִמְעַן תִּסְפָּר – In order we should speak about it, וְיִדְעֶתֶם כִּי אֲנִי ה' – and you will know that I am Hashem (Shemos 10:2). It's a *makkah* that He wants us to study and speak about so that we should always remember

that there's a Hashem – a Hashem who takes action – in order that such a thing should never happen again.

### **Heading Uphill**

And therefore in America where Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave us the opportunity to start all over again, we have to always remember what happened and why. And *boruch Hashem* we're doing that today. You don't realize there's been a revolution in America. Let me tell you something. In Europe before Hitler came it was hard to find a family with many children. I'm telling you the truth. It was hard to find a family with many children. *Boruch Hashem, boruch Hashem* today it's different. In Europe there were many families with *frum* women that didn't cover their hair at all. You say that's not so terrible. It's not terrible? All right, that was not so terrible. But in America all *frum* women cover their hair today. All *frum* women cover their hair.

In Europe the families were heading downhill. Yes, there were exceptions but the nation on a whole was heading away from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. The youth were in rebellion against Hashem. In America however we have youth who are rebelling against the gentile culture. We have *frum* schools growing everywhere. They didn't have that in Europe. There were very few places like you have today in America. Yeshivas are increasing. Some of them are so packed, they can't even take in anybody new. New classes are being added. New buildings are being built. *Baruch Hashem*, the garden of the Am Yisroel is growing. No question about it. Everywhere *frum* schools and the *frum* literature today. *Baruch Hashem*.

### **A Burgeoning Beautiful Community**

That the *frum* community is increasing, no question about that. The *frum* community are the ones who are *porim v'rovim*. They are the ones with big families. So many *frum* women today have 10 children. It's a fact. They're building the *beis Yisroel*. Now it's not enough. To make up for the loss of the others, they should have to have a hundred children each. However, there's a future for the Am Yisroel in America.

You know there are many *frum* professionals today. You know, there's a *frum* senator. A *frum* senator. He *davens* every day, three times a day. Something new. A senator, an Orthodox Jew who *davens* every day. Judges, *frum* judges. A judge yesterday handed in some tapes from Mesichta Beitza. A judge handed in tapes from Mesichta Beitza! Something is happening in America.

When I was a boy, there wasn't a single *frum* doctor. Today, *baruch Hashem*. It's a pleasure to see them. Now I don't say you have to be a professional. You can be a *frum talmid chacham* and not a professional, but *baruch Hashem* it's not like in Europe where the professionals were going away from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. So the way we see our future here, we have to be very optimistic.

### **Stay on Guard**

Of course we have to be on guard because anything can happen. Don't say it can't happen in America. In Germany they were just as confident that it could never happen there. Had you told a German in 1920 that someday his children would be burning Jews, he'd put his hand on his children's heads and he'd swear by his god that it would never happen. Because even to Germans it was unthinkable that they would kill people for nothing. Germany was a decent civilized country.

And therefore, the Jews of America and all other countries where they're enjoying liberty should take the Holocaust to heart and study it like we study the *tochacha*. But not the way it's discussed today in atheistic forums without reference to Hakadosh Boruch Hu. That's absolutely a waste of time.

All the Holocaust memorials are a waste of money, almost worthless. If they think they're going to shame the gentiles into being remorseful by making a big memorial to make the gentiles ashamed and therefore they'll become kindly towards the Jewish people, it's not so. The Holocaust memorials only give the gentiles more *cheishek* to do the same. The more they hear what Hitler did, the more they're inspired to emulate him. You have to know that. They're not going to back out. You can't make them sorry for what they did.

And it can happen because Hashem can do anything. That we see from what He did to us in Europe. Nothing is guaranteed in America. The *goyim* in America are capable of building better gas chambers than they did in Europe.

From the beginning there were always signs that there could be trouble for the Jews in America. You remember when a group of Jews tried to disembark to come to the new colonies, before the Revolutionary War, so the governor of New York – what's his name, the one with the wooden leg? Peter Stuyvesant. Yes, Peter Stuyvesant. He didn't want them; he didn't let them get off the boat. And even when they came in, he didn't want them. He made a lot of trouble. That crotchety old fellow didn't want to give him a break. So already from the very beginning you could see plenty of signs of what could be.

### Strong Till the End

But what those signs mean, they could mean nothing at all. Because it has nothing to do with the gentiles. We don't have to be on guard against the gentiles – they can't do anything on their own. What we have to be on guard against is a *yeridah*, a weakening, in our own *avodas Hashem*, our own dedication and loyalty to Hashem.

And so let's take the lessons of the past and keep rebuilding towards the future. Let's hope that we'll keep on building yeshivas until in Dayton, Ohio you'll have big *kollelim*. And way out in Sioux City and in Grand Rapids and California there'll be big Torah centers and the Jews all over America will come back to the Torah. We can learn the lessons of the great tragedy in Europe and not only will *we* come back closer and closer to Hashem and His Torah but all of our lost brothers will come back too. And we'll live here in Golus in peace and prosperity and *avodas Hashem* until Moshiach will come and sound the great *shofar* and we'll all board huge jets and *נַעֲלֶה לְצִיּוֹן בְּרִנָּה*.

### Have A Wonderful Shabbos

This week's booklet is based on tapes:

**R-24** – Good Misfortune | **80** – Afterlife in Scriptures

**155** – Lessons of the Makkos | **347** – Beginning of the Holocaust II

**E-118** – A Time to Remember

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ש א ת א ב ר ו ו י ג ד ר ז ק נ י ר ו י א מ ר ו ל ר

### QUESTION

**If a Jew is supposed to be friendly and have a sense of humor how does a person know that he's not going too far and becoming a letz?**

### ANSWER

And the answer is, forget about a sense of humor. I never said that you should have a sense of humor. A *frum* Jew has to have a sense of *seichel*, that's all. *Seichel*. That's enough. The phrase 'sense of humor' is an American invention. You won't find it anyplace in *divrei Torah*.

A *frum* Jew should be *malei simcha* because he understands how good Hakadosh Baruch Hu is to him, how lucky he is that he is able to see and able to walk and able to talk and able to hear; how lucky he is that he doesn't have any *mumim*. Everybody should be *malei simcha* when he understands that *כל עצמותי תאמרנה* – *all my parts say to You Hashem, מי כמוך* – *who is like You*. You're so happy you have a heart, you have lungs, you have kidneys, you have everything. And each one is singing to Hashem. That's called a man who is *malei simcha*.

And a person like that, certainly it's easy to get along with him. But a person who is *atzeiv*, he's sad, he's always worrying, he thinks he should have more than he has; he's angry because he didn't succeed in getting more money or more *kavod*, it's hard to get along with him.

And therefore, you don't need a sense of humor to succeed and to be liked by others. You need a sense of *seichel*. And a *sameyach b'chelko*, that kind of *seichel*, that kind of person is much easier to get along with.

June 1994