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SEFER SHEMOS - THE PENSON FAMILY EDITION

IN MEMORY OF REBBITZEN ESTHER JUNGREIS

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THE **PENSON FAMILY** EDITON

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**Year 3 | Issue 14**

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WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER זT"ל

Judgments With Justice

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*Part I. Studying the Makkos*

**Why Did The Makkos Come?**

When we study the story of the ten *makkos*, it's important to make clear beforehand what their function was. And therefore, one thing must be established at the beginning – *the purpose of the makkos was not to set free the Am Yisroel*. The fact is that Hakodosh Boruch Hu had said beforehand that the *makkos* wouldn't help.

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 – finally when Hakodosh Boruch 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.

Now, if the *Makkos* weren't needed to set us free so Hakodosh Boruch Hu could have saved us in a much less complicated way. He could have sent 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, after much 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 Erev 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 Hakodosh Boruch Hu stated it as clearly as could be – He told Moshe Rabbeinu what the *makkos* were for: **וַיִּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי אֲנִי הָשֵׁם** – "And 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*. Why do you think they left? Because **וַיִּדְעוּ 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 Hakodosh Boruch 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, **וַיִּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי אֲנִי הָשֵׁם**, it means **וַיִּדְעוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי אֲנִי הָשֵׁם**. It means, "Even the people of *Mitzrayim*!" The *Mitzrim* will also learn, but the real purpose is that the *Bnei Yisroel* should learn that I am Hashem.

### **We Have A Living G-d!**

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 תִּדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי הָאֱלֹהִים אֲלֵיכֶם – “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 Hakodosh Boruch 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, Hakodosh Boruch 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 Hakodosh Boruch 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: בְּמַדָּה שֶׁאָדָם מוֹדֵד לְאֵימָתוֹ – “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*.

### **Too Busy To Study**

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. הַטּוֹפּוֹל וְהַטְרָדָה – People are just too busy to think. People don't pay attention and they 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?”

And now we can understand a *medrash* in our *parsha* (Rabbah, 10:1). It says there that עַל כָּל מַכָּה וּמַכָּה הָיְתָה מְשֻׁמֵשׁ הַדֶּבֶר – 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, 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*, *sh'chin* 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, דְּבַר 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 דְּבַר 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, כְּנִס 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. So 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 *makkeh* 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 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!”

“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, *midah k’neged midah*.”

### **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; וְיָדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי ה' – they knew Hashem more and more and more. The *emunah* got into their bones – into the marrow of the bones – that there’s a *shoifet*, 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 *midah k’neged midah*.

## Part II. The Great Makkah; Introduction

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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, Hakodosh Boruch Hu is teaching something. And it's up to us to react the way the *Am Yisroel* did in *Mitzrayim* and to think, "מאי קא משמע לך" – *What is Hakodosh Boruch 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. הַיֹּסֵר גּוֹיִם הֵלֵא יוֹכִיחַ – *The one who brings punishments and suffering on the nations, isn't He showing something?* יוֹכִיחַ means to show something. הַמְלִמֵּד אֶת כָּל בְּרִיאַת אֱדָמָה – *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 Hakodosh Boruch Hu, that they keep quiet about! Hakodosh Boruch Hu for *nothing at all* brought such a *kilayon*, a destruction?

Hakodosh Boruch Hu doesn't practice הַיֵּינָא בְּלֵא בְּיָנָא, *He doesn't do judgment without justice* (Brachos 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 Hakodosh Boruch Hu knows exactly what He's doing. And therefore we have to understand that these *resha'im*, the Germans, were the *sheluchim* of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Hitler *yemach shemo* was a *shaliach* from Hashem. Once a man 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.

Of course, we should try if we are able to take *nekamah* on those murderers. Absolutely! Even to this day I say, if we had power, if we had permission from the nations of the world, we should make an army and march into Germany and destroy at least two million Nazis - at least. There's no question in my mind at all. **נִקְמָה נִקְמָת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**, **מֵאֵת הַמַּדְיָנִים**, certainly you have to take revenge for such wickedness. Two million?! More than that! But we can't do it, so we keep quiet.

### **We Cannot Stop Weeping**

Of course we weep for what we lost; we weep for the **עַם הַשָּׁם** **שֶׁנִּפְּלוּ בְּהַרְבֵּ**. 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. Certainly we weep rivers of tears. When we say here that we try to understand that Hashem does things for a reason, it's *b'derech klal*, on a general level. But the fact that we lost our people is a devastating blow that we will never cease weeping for.

### **Justice Will Prevail**

And the Germans – all the nations of the world as well will be held accountable, no question about it. Hakodosh Boruch Hu will remember everything. **רִדְשׁ דְּמִים אוֹתָם זָכָר** – *The One who remembers the blood of the innocent*, **לֹא שָׁכַח צַעֲקַת עֲנָוִים** – *He won't forget their outcry*. 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 was a reform *kehillah* established there, with a reform rabbi and they didn't believe in anything.

Already in the Chofetz Chaim's time he said that **אֵין בַּיִת אֲשֶׁר אֵין נֶשֶׁם מֵת** – "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 Hakodosh Boruch 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 – the youth marched in parades with big signs, “We Declare War On The *Klerikalin*.” That means on the *rabbonim*, and the *frum* Jews. So Rav Elchonon Wasserman said, “You're declaring war on Hashem?! So Hashem will declare war on you!” That's what Rav Elchonon said.

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 *yeshivah*, 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 Hakodosh Boruch 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 Hakodosh Boruch 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 Hakodosh Boruch 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 Hakodosh Boruch 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 *tzadikim*, 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 Hakodosh Boruch Hu allowed six million Jews to be destroyed because they didn't listen to an *oichel treifos*, a *michaleil 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 livracha*, 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 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*, Hakodosh Boruch Hu and the gentiles are blamed.

## *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 Hakodosh Boruch 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 *midah k’neged midah* 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 Hakodosh Boruch 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 haShomayim*. 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. **דַּי לְחֻכֵּימָא 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.

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 were 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 bareheaded – all being *michaleil 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.

### **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 livracha* said, רוב ילדי ישראל, מִתְחַנְּכִים כְּנִכְרִים – 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.

The Jewish community was on a roller coaster that was speeding downhill – the Torah was being abandoned all over Europe and Hashem was reacting. Because Jews profaned the Shabbos, that's why they were forced to work seven days a week at killing labor. 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*.

A man gets up here and asks me - with indignation, 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. **אם תלכו עמי קרי** - *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 **והלכתי עמכם בהמת קרי** - *I will treat you the same way*. The *tochacha* is a *parsha* in the Torah - it's open *pesukim*. 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.

## Part IV. Studying Life

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### A Lesson For Us

Now, it's important to make note of the fact that what we're speaking about here is a principle for how Hashem guides not only entire nations but individuals as well. **אם רואה אדם שישורים באים עליו** - *If a man sees that troubles come upon him*, a man sees that he has trouble with his leg, so he has to think, "Why did it happen with the leg?" If you have trouble with the arm, you must think, "Why with the arm?" If the doctor tells you that he sees something in your back and he's sending you to a spine specialist, so you'd better start thinking, "Why the spine - what happened?"

So if while you're eating supper you give a good bite on your tongue, instead of just cussing, give a thought. What's your tongue to blame? Could it be that something is wrong with your tongue? You're not such a *tzadik* after all. Maybe you should have bitten your tongue earlier in the day before you opened your big mouth to your wife. Could be! If you study *midah k'neged midah* something is bound to turn up. It's one of the systems by which Hashem lets us know what He wants us to discover, and therefore it's one of the principles by which a Jew should live his life.

### Get Your Money's Worth!

And you can't try to solve the problem by one second of thinking, or even one minute. You know, if a person goes to college and he

pays money for a course and now the instructor gives a lecture, does he spend only one minute trying to understand it? No! He goes home and he reads his notes because he wants to get his money's worth. He tries to understand what it is that the professor meant. And *lehavdil*, if somebody is in the *yeshiva* and he hears a lesson, a *shiur* by an *adam gadol*, a great man, does he think by one minute of thinking he can solve what the *shiur* is driving at?

And therefore, *kol shekein v'kol shekein* when Hashem is the One giving the lesson, you have to study it. That's why it says, if a man sees trouble coming on him, **יִפְשֹׁף בְּמַעֲשָׂיו**. *Yefashfesh* means he has to search. Not superficial lazy thought; he has to search, why did it happen? And if he searches, he's going to have some success.

And therefore its necessary to stop, to take off five minutes to think. Isn't that an important thing? A lot of people – even *frum* Jews – when the *slichos* begins in the month of *Elul* so they say every day, **נְחַפְּשֵׁה דְרַבְּנֵינוּ וְנַחְקְרָה** – “*Let us search out our ways.*” But how many of them have stopped and have given five minutes to think over the events of the past year? And five minutes inventory, five minutes of bookkeeping is very little for a whole year of business. And yet, it would be a great thing if somebody could boast, “I was *mekayeim* **נְחַפְּשֵׁה דְרַבְּנֵינוּ וְנַחְקְרָה** – I spent five minutes thinking about what lesson Hashem has sent me during the past year.” It's a very poor little boast, but *halevei v'halevei* – even five minutes are not forthcoming. The truth is that it's essential to have a lot of time! Five minutes is not enough to think about what happened and why it happened. **מָה זֹאת לָנוּ עֵשָׂה אֲלֵקִים לָנוּ**? You need a lot of time to think that out!

### **Maybe It's Not The Real Reason**

“Oh it's so silly,” somebody will say. A “*chochom*” will say, “Am I going to waste my life thinking about the things that happened, imputing them to sins which I don't know about; saying that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is sending them upon me for this or that imaginary reason? Maybe it's not because of that. It could be it's not because of anything wrong for all I know.” The answer is that it pays to be silly. If you'll discover a pot of gold, it pays to be silly. Discovering your wrongs and doing *teshuvah* is worth more than gold. And there's no question you'll discover it. If you look very hard, you're going to discover.

Now, suppose a person searched and he didn't find – it's improbable; what it means is that he wasn't searching. But let's say

he searched and he didn't find. So the *gemara* says: *yitleh b'bitul Torah* – let him attribute it to neglect of Torah study, insufficient study of Torah. Torah study! You can always attribute it to that. And some say a *peirush*; if a man searches and he can't find any sins, *yitleh*, he has to say, “What's the reason I can't find any sins? Because of *bitul Torah*. It's because I didn't study enough Torah, so I think I'm a pretty good fellow. If I would study more I would know what's expected of me and I would discover a lot!”

### Discovering Success

And the truth is that if a person is going to search in himself and find anything, so whatever he finds is a success. Your duty as a Jew is to attribute your troubles to your own faults, and the result will be that you'll become improved. That's what counts. Let's say he made a mistake, and really that's not exactly why he is being punished. So what of it? Let's say I sent you into the next room to look for a ten dollar bill. And so you're looking around in that room, and instead of the ten dollars you find a big box of golden coins. So will you be disappointed? Will you be displeased that I sent you searching?

If you'll make use of the opportunity, even if you won't guess the real reason, you still struck gold! Let's say you'll blame yourself for something else that wasn't the real reason – but at least in that one thing you'll improve. And that's already a great *hatzlacha*. Rabeinu Yonah says in *Sha'arei Teshuvah*: **בְּאִשֶּׁר יִקְבַּל הָאָדָם מוֹסֵר הַשֵּׁם**, “If a man accepts the instruction of Hashem, **וַיִּיטֵב הָרָבִיּוֹ וּמַעַלְלָיו**, and he'll improve his ways or his deeds, **רְאוּי לוֹ לְשִׂמְחָה עָלֵיהֶם**, he should rejoice on his misfortunes, **בְּעַל הַצְּלָחוֹת הַגְּדוֹלוֹת**, as he would rejoice upon the great successes of life”. Because there's no better fortune in life than to discover something wrong and to have the opportunity to fix things up while you're still here in this world.

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# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

שאל אביך ויגדך ויקניך ויאמרו לך

Q:

**When a father is blessing his children on Friday night, what should he have in mind? And also, what should the child who is receiving the blessing have in mind?**

A:

A *bracha* is said by the parents because they love their children. So you're saying it *b'lev shaleim*, with a full heart. And therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu listens. He listens because it's being said with more *kavanah*. A *bracha* of a parent is more sincere. *Birchas av, barcheini avi*. A father's *bracha* is more genuine than a stranger's *bracha* and therefore it's very important.

Of course, you could always add even more *kavanah*. And what's the most important thought you should add? You have to know that it's not your *bracha*; it's the *bracha* of Hashem that you're asking for. You're asking Hashem, "Please Hashem, bless my children they should all be well and live long; they should all be *tzadikim*; all should have the best *shidduchim*; all should be *talmidei chachamim* or the wives of *talmidei chachamim*; all should be healthy and they should have the most beautiful children; and after a long life, after 120 years, they should all be to go to Olam Habo." You want to add the last one? You can add it, there's no harm.

Now, what should the children think? Your children think, "Ribono Shel Olam, I don't know what my father is thinking, but I'm thinking all these *kavanos*." So the child puts all the *kavanos*, all these thoughts, into his father's words – and Hakadosh Boruch Hu is listening to his thoughts as well.

TAPE # E-44 (December 1995)

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