



DR. HILLEL SEIDMAN  
Chronicler

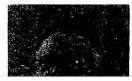
# THROUGH THEIR EYES

20th Century Perspectives on the Holocaust



## Mourn Rabbi Shatzkes

More than 1800 people filled Lamport Auditorium Tuesday, December 30, to hear Dr. Samuel Belkin, Rabbi Dr. Joseph Soloveitchik, Rabbi David Lifschitz



Torah scholar who passed away Monday, December 29. At M.T.J., others listened to Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, to read yeshiva Rabbi Henkin of the Ezra Torah Fund, and Rabbi Kalmanowitz of the Mir Yeshiva, eulogize the sage.

Rabbi Shatzkes, known as the *Lewisa Rav*, was with the Yeshiva since 1941 and was a member of the ordination board.

That same day, Tuesday, December 30, Rabbi Shatzkes' body was taken to Idlewild Airport and flown to Israel. He was buried near the graves of Rav Isaac Meir, and his brother-in-law, Rabbi Korb, former *rosh yeshiva* in Chicago. Rabbi Nissim and Rabbi Isaac Herzog, chief Rabbis of Israel, participated at the funeral.

## Council Resolution Program Ban

Protested the discontinuance of in Israel, was drawn up at a December 24. The university

## Committee Named Probe Activities

Committees to study this *Commentator*, and Co-op Stores "their functions and a Bel-

See Editorial on Page 2

Guidance program committee have been appointed by Student Council. The Committee for THIS *Commentator* consists of Benjamin Sch '60, chairman, Joel Daner and Yehuda Sorecher '59. For many years, doubt has existed as to the philosophy of these votes and their exact connection with Student Council. These committees will attempt to clarify their relationships and make precisely what their roles "stated Mr. Hirsch.

## Yeshiva U. To Lose Uniqueness



Article conception of Jewish University of America. From left to right: Dormitory (already built) with cafeteria and classroom; and it is women's liberal arts building. Center: Yeshiva building; Liberal Arts College for men and fieldhouse. In rear are side fields.

by Bernard H. Kaplan

The Hebrew Theological College of Chicago has recently decided to expand its facilities to include a Liberal Arts College. Yeshiva, within a few short years Yeshiva College will not be the only American college under Orthodox Jewish auspices. It will be the first.

Mr. Low urged all students who signed up for donations at the earlier date to give blood once again in March.

# The Commentator

Official Undergraduate Newspaper of Yeshiva College

VOLUME XLVIII

NEW YORK CITY, MONDAY, JANUARY 19, 1959

NO. 7

## Dr. Belkin Is Host To Student Council At Tea, Discussion

Dr. Samuel Belkin, president of Yeshiva University, was host to a tea for Student Council Tuesday, January 6, at 8 o'clock.

Dr. Belkin, in answer to questions posed by the Student

See Editorial on Page 2

Council, stated that he was aware of the need of a Religious Guidance Program in Yeshiva, which would help solve the religious problems of the Yeshiva College student.

The President of the University expressed his hopes for the establishment of a new program whereby Yeshiva students will be able to spend some time in Israel.

## Praise Given

High regard for this year's Student Council was expressed in that the relationship between the administration and the students had been so far out of co-operation.

The members of Student Council lauded the gathering informative and expressed the hope that future Councils would have the opportunity of meeting with Dr. Belkin.

## Playday

The Dean's Reception will take place on February 8, in the Joan of Arc High School Auditorium on 93rd St. in Manhattan, announced Stanley Harrison '60, chairman of the Student Activities Committee. It will begin at 7:30 P.M.

Hyam Wauerman '60 and Joseph Lifschitz '61 are in charge of tickets and reservations.

"This achievement has been realized to a great extent because of the uniting efforts of the committee," concluded Dr. Saphire.

## S.C. Unanimously Votes Student Activities Fund

Student Council unanimously approved the enactment of a five-dollar student activities fee, effective next year, at a meeting held Monday, January 5.

## Makes High Score



Saul Berman

On the Law School Aptitude Test, given Sunday, November 9, Saul Berman '59, placed in the top 2% of Aptitude Test winners in the United States during the past ten years.

## Dr. Saphire Boasts Of Pre Med Record

93% of Yeshiva College's pre-medical and pre-dental majors have been accepted by professional graduate schools, revealed Dr. Shelley R. Saphire, chairman of the Pre-Medical Committee.

Commenting on an article in the "Harvard Crimson" which boasted that 90% of Harvard's pre-meds and pre-dents reached graduate school, Dr. Saphire stated, "Yeshiva has outdone Harvard in this matter." Since my appointment as chairman of the Pre-Medical Committee," he continued, "88 out of 94 applicants for medical and dental schools have been accepted."

"This achievement has been realized to a great extent because of the uniting efforts of the committee," concluded Dr. Saphire.

## Cafeteria In Red; Prices May Go Up

Food prices will be increased unless more students patronize the College Cafeteria.

"The Cafeteria has a deficit of forty thousand dollars a year," said Mr. Alfred Parker, director of Yeshiva University Cafeterias. "The deficit has been too large," he continued, "and the only answer to the problem is to have 100 to 150 more students coming for breakfast and luncheon meals."

In addition to his duties here, Mr. Parker directs the operations of the Stern College restaurant and the College Inn, the Cafeteria of Einstein Medical School.

Establishment of the fee was necessitated by the increasing Council expenditures such as THE *Commentator*, Mitzvah, the Dean's Reception, senior awards, and films for clubs. The cost of these activities has gone up in recent years while Student Council's income has remained fairly constant. As a consequence, Student Council's budget has operated at a deficit.

**Better Student Service**  
Student Council members expressed the hope that the fee would usher in a new era of service for students, including expanded club programs and dormitory film shows. The films had been discontinued last term because of a lack of funds.

In addition, it was felt that because of the new source of revenue, the burden on Co-op would be lessened and prices thereby reduced, thus affording students further benefits.

"Although Council will not enter into any wild spending sprees, we are confident that every student will be greatly benefited by this fee," stated Raphael Weinberg '59, President of Student Council.

## Rav Delivers Shiva To Overflow Crowd

The sanctity of the *Seder Turah*, *Tephilin*, and *Mearasa* were discussed by Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik at the annual *Yahrzeit Shiva*, January 11.

The *Shiva*, commemorating the anniversary of the death 18 years ago of his father, Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik of blessed memory, was delivered to an overflow crowd at Lamport Auditorium. The assembled throng included many of the Torah world's outstanding luminaries, Yeshiva University alumni and present students of Y.U. and other Yeshivas.

Rabbi Soloveitchik, descended from one of Judaism's greatest families, was granted the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by the University of Berlin in 1930. Upon entry into the U.S., Rabbi Soloveitchik founded the Rumben Yeshiva of Boston, Mass., which he now heads. He is also Chairman of the Halacha Committee of the Rabbinical Council of America.

At present, Rabbi Soloveitchik conducts the most advanced College *Shiva* in Tractate Sanhedrin and a class in Tractate Shabbat for students engaged in *Smicha* studies.







*Translator's Note: The following is from the aggadic section of a yortsayt shi'ur given by R. Soloveitchik in Yiddish entitled "A Yid iz Geglikhn tsu a Seyfer Toyre" – "A Jew is Compared to a Torah Scroll." [The first half of this shi'ur was a halakhic discourse and was printed in R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Shi'urim le-Zekher Abba Mari, Za"l, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Mekhon Yerushalayim, 1982/3), pp. 240ff.] The shi'ur was transcribed by Dr. Hillel Seidman and published originally in 1959 in Di Yidishe Vokh. Dr. Seidman then republished it, with an introduction, in R. Elchanan Asher Adler (ed.), Beit Yosef Sha'ul, vol. 4 (New York: Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, 1994), pp. 17-67. A Hebrew translation by R. Shalom Carmy appeared in the same volume (pp. 68-103). See Nefesh ha-Hayyim Shaar Daled, Perek 11 (h/t Seligsohn) The present translation – the first rendering of this shi'ur into English – was prepared by Shaul Seidler-Feller*

## Section I:

A Jew is compared to a Torah scroll. This equation is axiomatic in Halakhah and Aggadah. Let us cite several examples, both halakhic and aggadic, of this very equation.

## **Halakhah**

1) The Gemara says in *Shabbat* (105b):

One who stands over a dying person at the time of the soul's departure is required to rend [his garments]. To what is this comparable? To a Torah scroll which was burned.

When one is present at the death of a Jew, of every Jew, one must tear *keri'ah*. Why is that? For when a Jew passes away, a Torah scroll disappears along with his death, and at the burning of a Torah scroll, one is obligated to tear *keri'ah*.

Rashi's words on that Gemara in *Shabbat* are interesting:

[One must rend one's garments when a Torah scroll is burned] as we say in *Mo'ed Katan* (26a) regarding the scroll which Yehoyakim burned, "They did not fear nor rend their garments."<sup>1</sup> So, too, is the soul of an Israelite, when it is taken, similar to this, for there is no [completely] empty person in Israel who has no Torah in him and has not fulfilled [any] *mitsvot*.

2) In the Gemara in *Megillah* (26b), it is said:

And Rava said, "One buries a Torah scroll which wore out next to a Torah scholar."

Rambam rules that "one places a Torah scroll which wore out or was invalidated into an earthenware vessel and buries it next to a Torah scholar – and that is called 'its *genizah*.'"<sup>2</sup>

When a Torah scroll is physically destroyed, one must bury it exactly as one buries a person who has died.

3) The halakhic requirement to stand up before a Torah scroll when it is carried by is based on the *mitsvah*, "Before an elderly man shall you stand and you shall honor the countenance of an old man,"<sup>3</sup> which obligates each person to honor Torah scholars.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Yirmeyahu* 36:24.

<sup>2</sup> *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos Sefer Torah* 10:3.

<sup>3</sup> *Va-Yikra* 19:32.

The Gemara in *Kiddushin* (33b), regarding the requirement to stand up before a Torah scroll, states as follows:

It was asked: “What is the halakhah regarding standing before a Torah scroll?” R. Hilkiyah, R. Shim‘on, and R. El‘azar would formulate an *a fortiori* argument: if one stands before those who learn it, should one not stand before [the Torah] itself?

4) The identification of a living person with a Torah scroll is also symbolically demonstrated, according to the Halakhah, in another way. According to the law in the Gemara, at the time of the funeral procession of a Torah scholar, a Torah scroll must be carried out [as well].

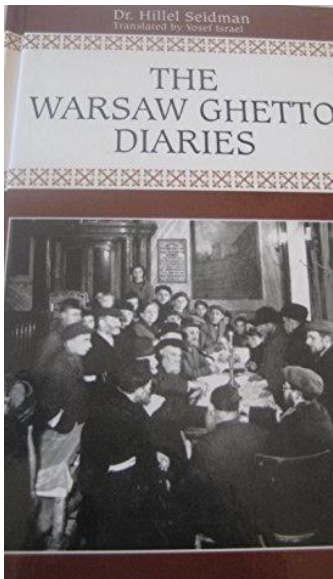
In *Bava Kamma* (17a), it is said:

“Our Rabbis taught: “They honored him in his death”<sup>4</sup> – this [refers to] Hizkiyah, King of Judah, etc., upon whose bed they laid a Torah scroll and said, “This one fulfilled what is written in this.” And today, do we do this as well? We carry [the Torah scroll] out, but we do not lay it down.”



---

<sup>4</sup> II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 32:33.



**HILEL ZAYDMAN (HILLEL SEIDMAN)** (November 27, 1915-August 28, 1995)

He was born in Skalati (Skalat), eastern Galicia. He received a stringently religious education, later studying at Warsaw University, and in 1939 he received his doctor of philosophy degree. He contributed to the Orthodox daily newspaper *Dos yudishe togblat* (The Jewish daily newspaper), 1930-1939, and to *Moment* (Moment), 1938-1939. In the 1930s he was secretary of Kolo, the Jewish club of deputies in the Polish Sejm. He was also secretary at the time for Agudat Yisrael in Poland and a leader of Agudah youth. From 1937 he worked in the archive of the Warsaw Jewish community. In 1939 he was also a member of the Warsaw city council. He co-edited (1939) Dr. Feldshuh's *Idishe gezelschaftlikher leksikon* (Jewish communal handbook) in Warsaw and *Głos gminy żydowskiej* (Voice of the Jewish community), organ of the Warsaw community. With the outbreak of WWII, he was confined in the Warsaw Ghetto, continued his work for the Jewish community, and on several occasions was narrowly saved from "deportations." He procured papers as a citizen of Paraguay (South America), was held for a certain amount of time in the Pawiak prison, but was then sent with a transport of American and English citizens to prison in Vittel, France, from which in September 1944 he was liberated by the American army. In 1946 he came to the United States and settled in New York. From 1946 he was a contributor to *Tog* (Day) and *Tog-morgn-zhurnal* (Day-morning journal), in which he wrote articles on various topics and for the Friday issue on the "weekly portion of Torah and Prophets." He was active in Agudat Yisrael and in Poale Agudat Yisrael (Workers for [ultra-Orthodox] Agudat Yisrael) in America. From 1956 he was editor of the organ of religious Jewry in America, *Di idishe vokh* (The Jewish week), in which he ran a column entitled "Di vokh" (The week). He also published articles in: *Haboker* (This morning) in Tel Aviv; *Hamodia* (The herald) in Jerusalem; *Hadoar* (The mail) in New York; and others. In book form, he published in Polish: *Szlakiem nauki talmudycznej* (On the trail of Talmudic studies) (Warsaw, 1934), 81 pp.; *Prawda o uboju rytualnym* (The truth about Jewish ritual slaughter) (Warsaw, 1936), 87 pp.; and monographs on oaths according to Jewish law (1937), the religious renaissance of Jewish women (1937), the religious school curriculum in the context of Polish legislation (1937), Jewish community taxes in Warsaw (1938), and the abolition of the Jewish community in Warsaw in 1820-1822 (1939). In Yiddish, he wrote: *Dos yidische religyeze shulvezn* (Jewish religious school curricula) (Warsaw, 1938); *Geshikhte fun yidn in erets-yisorel* (History of the Jews in the land of Israel) (Lemberg: N. Rayf, 1939); *A kholem vegn a yidische melukhe* (A dream of a Jewish state) (Warsaw: Goldberg, 1939). While in the Warsaw Ghetto, Seidman kept a diary from July 12, 1942 until the uprising at the end of April 1943, later published as: *Tog-bukh fun varshever geto* (Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto) (Buenos Aires, 1947), 321 pp. It also appeared in Hebrew as *Yoman geto varsha* (Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto) (Tel Aviv, 1945/1946; New York, 1957), with a preface by Yosef Heftman.[1] He later published: *Di sedre fun der vokh* (The weekly portion of Pentateuch) (New York: Bel Harbor Publ., 1965); and many more books.

Sources: Yonas Turkov, *Azoy iz es geven* (That's how it was) (Buenos Aires, 1948), pp. 56, 92, 246; *Who's Who in World Jewry* (New York, 1955).

Zaynvl Diamant[Additional information from: Berl Kagan, comp., *Leksikon fun yidish-shraybers* (Biographical dictionary of Yiddish writers) (New York, 1986), col. 261.]





# אישים שהכרתי

106/09/2018

דמויות מעבר קרוב  
במזרח אירופה

אוצר החכמה

מאת

ד"ר הלל זיידמן



כל הזכויות שמורות למסוד הרב קוק, ירושלים תש"ל  
Copyright by Mossad Harav Kook, Jerusalem 1970

Printed in Israel

דפוס אלפא, ירושלים

הודפס מאתר אוצר החכמה [tablet.otzar.org](http://tablet.otzar.org) עמוד 2

התוכן

יא

בל יהפך תהום הכליה לתהום הנשיה

1



הרב אברהם גרודזנסקי

106/09/2018

הרב אברהם יצחק בלוך

הרב אהרן יאלקין

הרב אלחנן ואסרמן

הרב אליהו תאומים-פרנקל

הרב אלימלך תאומים-פרנקל

הרב אליעזר יהודה רבינוביץ

הרב אליעזר מינצ

## THE RADOMSKER REBBE

**R**av Shloma Chanoch Rabinovitch was an unusual Rebbe in many aspects. Even when he was recognized as a prominent Rebbe with thousands of Chasidim, he would still personally travel to many other Rebbes — particularly Rebbe Yisrael Chortkover — as if he were a simple Chasid.

When he became Rebbe in 1910, at the young age of twenty-nine, he had already been successful in business — with interests in Berlin, Lodz, Warsaw, and Cracow — so that instead of accepting the customary donations from his Chasidim, he was far more likely to support his Chasidim



financially as well as spiritually. Although the Radomsker Rebbe was a formidable Torah scholar blessed with a sharp brain and a retentive memory, coupled with enormous diligence in study and prayer, he shrank from displaying his vast knowledge and eschewed all forms of *pilpul*. Despite his great wealth, he spent very little on himself or his household and devoted most of his riches to a network of thirty-six yeshivos throughout Poland that he had established under the title of “*Keser Torah*.” Unlike Lithuania, the formation of yeshivos in Poland, especially by Chasidim, was quite an innovation. The Radomsker Rebbe was not particular that his *roshei yeshivah*, or indeed the *bachurim*, were Radomsker Chasidim; nor did he insist they learn *chasidus*, but he did demand they retain a fear of



heaven and a love of Torah.

Notwithstanding the Radomsker Rebbe's display of robust health, he was in fact quite a sick man who was hospitalized many months a year with diabetes. During Shabbos and Yomim Tovim, his *tisch* had to be interrupted before Kiddush so that his physician could administer an insulin injection. He was greatly loved by Chasidim from both Poland and Galicia, and such was his own regard for all other groups and personalities that he steered clear of all politics and argument. The Radomsker Rebbe's humility was legendary, yet carried off in so simple a manner as to render it hardly noticeable.

When the war erupted, the Radomsker Rebbe was in Galicia, resting at the Carpathian Mountains. He returned to Lodz, where his Chasidim urged him to escape on the last few air flights, but he refused, replying simply, "I want to be with all the Jews!" He arrived with his family in Warsaw during Chanukah that year and resided with his wealthy and learned Chasid R. Nosson Pinchas Ehrlich at 30 Nowolipki Street. Throughout the Ghetto's existence, regular *minyanim* took place at his apartment and each Shabbos the Rebbe conducted a *tisch* for *shalosh seudos*. Many Chasidim would gather to hear the Rebbe's *divrei Torah*.

The Radomsker Rebbe's diabetes had deteriorated but he continued his tight schedule of Torah study — mainly by heart because of his failing eyesight. Every so often plans were hatched to spirit the Rebbe out of danger, but the Radomsker Rebbe firmly rejected them all with one standard refrain: "I shall remain with my people!" The Radomsker Rebbe was well aware of the impending catastrophe, yet he remained optimistic that Amalek would eventually be defeated — but he expressed his doubts whether the Jews of Warsaw would survive

to see it. Nonetheless, he was firmly resolved to make no attempt to escape.

Despite the danger for religious Jews to appear on the streets, the Radomsker Rebbe continued his unusual custom of visiting other Chasidic Rebbes. He also retained his tradition of generously supporting the needy, though he had been deprived of his vast wealth and was personally subsisting on loans. On that infamous "Black Shabbos" — in the afternoon of 18 Av 1942 — a *Wehrmacht* battalion ran amok in his tenement block, going from apartment to apartment, ruthlessly shooting approximately 150 people. They brutally murdered the Rebbe, his wife, daughter, and son-in-law. The Radomsker Rebbe was buried within the Novominsker *Ohel* at the Warsaw Cemetery.

His son-in-law, R. Moshele, who married the Rebbe's only daughter Raizel, deserves a biography of his own. As his family name, Rabinovitch, implies, he was a cousin of the Radomsker Rebbe. In his home town, Krimilow, he received the standard education at the local *cheder* but his remarkable diligence set him apart from his contemporaries. Nothing interested him outside the study of Torah to which he devoted day and night — literally. He soon became renowned for his wide Torah knowledge, his faultless memory, and penetrating analysis. Famous Torah scholars generally averse to empty compliments nevertheless showered him with praise and acclaim. After his marriage in 1928 at the age of twenty-two, he was entirely free of money worries and could continue to devote himself to Torah — up to twenty hours a day!

When his father-in-law established the *Keser Torah Yeshivos*, R. Moshele became one of the *roshei yeshivah*, painstakingly examining the yeshivah students and setting their curriculum. Thrice a day he would deliver a *shiur* to the leading



hundred and fifty *yeshivah bachurim*, as well as a number of other *shiurim* to the remaining *bachurim*. Despite his retentive memory and wide knowledge, he prepared each *shiur* thoroughly with great responsibility and was greatly loved by his disciples. Unlike contemporary yeshivos, the Keser Torah network under his guidance also studied unusual *masechtas* such as *Zevachim* and *Berachos*, as well as the Jerusalem Talmud.

For personal reasons, he refused to publish any of the outstanding novella he had composed on a number of *masechtas*. However, some of his *chiddushim* transcribed by his students appeared in the yeshivah periodical and made an indelible impression on the Torah scholars of Poland (some of these were later republished in New York by his *talmid* R. Yechezkel Besser). His novellas were unusual yet penetrating, logical, and anything but superficial. Apart from a short period of study with the Tchebiner Rav, he was entirely self-taught. Later, the Tchebiner Rav related that when he met him some years afterwards, he did not recognize him — so far had he progressed in Torah studies.

Despite his father-in-law's enormous wealth, replete with widespread and complicated business dealings, R. Moshele had not the slightest interest in monetary affairs and barely recognized the value of everyday coinage. Even gulping down his meals so as not to waste precious study time, he led a totally saintly existence bound up with heavenly fear, Torah study, and heartfelt prayer.

To free him from forced labor in the Ghetto, he was officially registered as an employee of Mottel Pinkert's Undertakers in Grzybowska Street and wore a Pinkert's work cap as protection. (He used to comment, "Warsaw has become a factory for corpses!") On erev Tisha B'Av 1942 he was enrolled in the

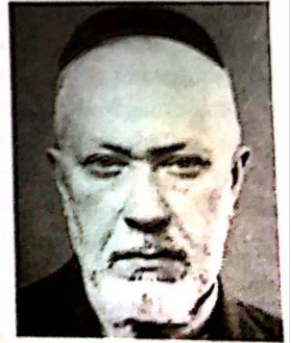
Shultz workshop run by Avraham Hendel. Despite the danger, he refused to trim his beard. He was murdered at the same time as his father-in-law, the Radomsker Rebbe, on that fateful Shabbos afternoon of 18 Av, 1942.

## REB YAAKOV TROKENHEIM

In countless forums, religious Jewry was ably represented by R. Yaakov Trokenheim. On behalf of Agudas Yisrael, he was a member of the Warsaw Kehillah and its president from 1926. Simultaneously, he was a member of the Warsaw town council for twenty years (from 1919–39), a senator in the Polish parliament from 1935–37, and a member of the Polish Sejm (the lower parliament) from 1937 until Poland fell to the Germans. There was hardly an important Polish arena in which R. Yaakov Trokenheim did not represent Agudas Yisrael.

Surprisingly, R. Yaakov Trokenheim was not a renowned orator nor particularly erudite. Certainly, he possessed as much book learning as the average learned layman, but he was not famed as a scholar. Likewise, in common with most Polish Jews, he was no fount of secular knowledge. Not one to initiate ideas or campaigns of his own, he was scrupulous about carrying out the plans of others. One can sum up his continuing popularity in one word — integrity.

He never claimed to do more than his capability, and though he greeted everybody



warmly and listened to their problems in detail, he made no rash promises. Even at election time he did not frame any grand promises and was not fond of empty slogans. He had no false pretensions, fully recognizing his duty to those who voted him in. When he spoke in parliament on Jewish issues, he used the simple everyday language of an ordinary businessman from Nalewki Street, Warsaw. Although he was well aware how publicity brought votes, nonetheless, where he felt the publicity would be counterproductive to those he was helping, he acted as discreetly as possible. He was extremely organized, worked in an objective manner, and did not confine himself to narrow party issues.

R. Yaakov Trokenheim was born in 1888, his father a well-known and prosperous Gerrer Chasid of the Sefas Emes; he later married into the rich Kirshenbaum family of Lublin. With his brother, he inherited a large tenement block at 37 Nalewki Street, housing hundreds of Jewish families as well as four courtyards containing many shops. Following the First World War, in 1919, the Warsaw City Council had democratic elections, and Agudas Yisrael put forward two candidates. Their first was R. Eliyahu Kirshenbaum, who represented the Ashkenazim, so the Chasid R. Yaakov Trokenheim (although he was only thirty-one) was chosen as a counterbalance.

Reflecting his serious nature, R. Yaakov Trokenheim never missed a public sitting of the City Council and always spoke on subjects affecting the Jewish population. He was also involved in private negotiations on behalf of Jewish voters. For instance, Warsaw's City Council planned a new thoroughfare connecting the north and the south which would necessitate knocking down many apartments in the Jewish area, particularly along the Orzech Market which stretched from Senatorska to

Franciszka Streets. R. Yaakov Trokenheim spent long hours ensuring the inhabitants of these areas received adequate compensation (yet he resisted all publicity, lest it harm those he was trying to help).

In 1926, R. Yaakov Trokenheim was among the first on the Aguda list for the democratic elections to the Warsaw Kehillah, where he served in various capacities until the War. He thoroughly reorganized the Kehillah's Religious Department, which had been in utter disorder. Since 1922, R. Yaakov Trokenheim had unsuccessfully stood for the Polish parliament a number of times. However, in 1925, the government nominated their own candidates as senators. In a show of independence, it chose nominees not selected by their own parties — including R. Yaakov Trokenheim. At the next elections, in 1937, he was elected as an Aguda member to the Sejm, the Polish parliament. When the anti-*shechitah* campaign was at its peak, R. Yaakov Trokenheim invested much energy into safeguarding *shechitah* and established a *nikkur* institute that was most helpful when a restricted supply of kosher meat was finally permitted. As the only Jewish parliamentarian residing in Warsaw — and concurrently a leader of the Warsaw Kehillah — he was pivotal to the *shechitah* defense, respected by the government and admired for his shining integrity.

When the War broke out in 1939, R. Yaakov Trokenheim fled to one of his sons in Vilna (where he set up a soup kitchen in cooperation with the Joint), while his wife and two daughters remained behind in Warsaw. In obvious peril from Nazi death squads due to his prominent personality, he desperately tried to get a passport to America or a certificate to Eretz Yisrael, despite his reluctance to abandon his family. However, the Russians refused him permission to leave. The Soviet army first



overran Vilna on September 19, 1939, yet it was ceded to an "independent" Lithuania until July 15, 1940, when the Russians incorporated all three Baltic States into the Soviet Union. On June 24, 1941, Vilna was captured by the Germans and the mass shootings rapidly began in the nearby Ponary Forest. R. Yaakov Trokenheim (together with his parliamentary colleague, the Agudist R. Leibel Mintzberg) fled to Bialystok where he lodged with the Rav, Dr. Gedalia Rosenman, until November 1941. Despite the danger, he returned to Warsaw together with his son Elazar, and the family was reunited.

At first he hid among friends, but after a number of weeks he realized that the Germans were not searching for him — they viewed all Jews alike, equally suitable for destruction. So he stayed openly with his daughter who ran the Jewish hospital at 1 Leszno Street. In cooperation with R. Zisha Friedman and R. Yosef Konigsberg, he organized soup kitchens for *yeshivah bachurim* and scholars. By being registered as a clerk at the hospital, he managed to evade the early deportations, but in March 1943 he was deported to the Poniatowa Camp near Lublin. R. Chaim Yisrael Eiss sent him a Paraguayan passport from Switzerland but — just as with R. Zisha Friedman, Dr. Yitzchak Schipper, and others who were also in the same camp — this passport was of no avail. In November 1943, he was deported to Majdanek and murdered in the gas chambers.



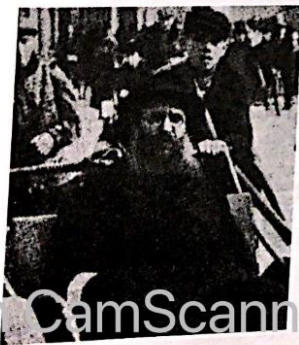
## RAV SHIMSHON STOCKHAMMER

Rav Stockhammer was a man of many talents. He was born in 1899 in Sokal, Galicia where his father, a Belzer Chasid, was a *talmid chacham* and ritual slaughterer. The young Shimshon learned at the local Belzer *kloise* (as the

### THE WARSAW GHETTO DIARIES

Galician *shtiebl* was often known) and delivered an astounding *drashah* at his bar mitzvah on the brink of the First World War. Later he visited the Belzer Rebbe a number of times, and at the age of twenty he received rabbinical ordination from prominent rabbis. In 1925, he married into a rabbinical family on the outskirts of Warsaw and drew close to Rav Menachem Ziemba, who was then ostensibly an iron merchant in Praga, the Warsaw suburb. Since R. Shimshon's wife worked in the Warsaw Kehillah, this enabled him to continue his learning schedule undisturbed.

In common with many of Galicia's younger generation, R. Shimshon was a facile writer both in Yiddish and Hebrew and authored numerous articles in Aguda's daily and weekly newspapers. When the *Togblatt* reappeared in 1929, Rav Stockhammer had a regular column every weekend, generally concentrating on *kashrus* or Shabbos observance. His position on the paper was enhanced in 1933 when a controversial article in the *Togblatt* raised the ire of many readers, and R. Stockhammer was delegated to ensure the quality of future issues. Rav Stockhammer's own articles were clear and succinct and fired with all the enthusiasm of his Chasidic soul. He always dealt with the issue at hand, avoiding all personal attacks, and his authoritative writings earned his readers' respect due to his intimate knowledge of rabbinical affairs. In effect, Rav Stockhammer acted as a media



### PERSONALITIES I KNEW IN THE GHETTO

357

spokesman for rabbinic circles and he was particularly close with the Agudas Harabbanim.

Since 1878, with the passing of Rav Yaakov Gesundheit, Warsaw had not had a Chief Rabbi. Only seven *rabbanim* operated within the Warsaw Rabbinate, ostensibly catering for the largest European *kehillah*, estimated at 370,000 souls. In 1934, two Kehillah leaders, Eliyahu Mazur and Yaakov Trokenheim (both representing Aguda) tried to change this. At first they chose R. Aaron Lewin (Rav of Reischka and Sejm member) as Warsaw's new Chief Rabbi. When that plan ran into technical difficulties they decided to at least enlarge the Rabbinate. After much political bargaining and jockeying between the parties, a number of *rabbanim* were appointed, including Rav Shimshon Stockhammer. Rav Stockhammer took his new appointment seriously, continuing his lifelong interest in *kashrus* and Shabbos observance. His talents as a publicist were given full play, and many Kehillah proclamations and public notices sprang from his fertile pen. Unusually for a Belzer Chasid, he rose to the higher echelons of the Polish Aguda and took an active part in its meetings.

By the outbreak of the War, he was a much respected personality, brimming full with energy and ambitions. When the Germans captured Warsaw in October 1939, Rav Stockhammer was residing in the Praga suburb. Later, after some *Judenrat* members escaped to America and Eretz Yisrael, Rav Stockhammer was co-opted onto the *Judenrat*.

Working together with R. Meshulam Kaminer, R. Isaak-Ber Ackerman, and Rav Dovid Shapira, he displayed hitherto unknown reserves of dedication as one of the few religious voices on the *Judenrat* trying to protect the Orthodox masses. The devout Jews were the hardest hit in the Ghetto. Their distinctive

appearance, their lifestyle, and mitzvah observance made them an obvious target for the accursed Germans. Communal organizations also discriminated by employing very few Orthodox Jews among the thousands working for them; the religious did not enjoy the relative safety afforded by *Judenrat* or Joint employment and received little financial support. Since Rav Stockhammer wielded far less influence than the assimilationists who filled the most important posts, he required strenuous effort to help those in need — yet he turned no one away.

On 4 Av 1942, before the deportations began, he was among those temporarily incarcerated in the Pawiak Prison as hostage against any resistance. During the deportations, Rav Stockhammer was profoundly depressed and had no illusions about the deportees' fate. Together with his family, he went into hiding to evade deportation but was captured during Shevat 1943 (his wife and four children had already been murdered by the Germans) and deported to the Poniatowa death camp near Lublin.

From Poniatowa he was transferred to Flossenbergl concentration camp in Bavaria, Germany, where he survived for approximately twelve months. Rav Stockhammer was a tremendous source of encouragement to his fellow inmates. He never complained about the backbreaking work nor referred to the destruction of his family. He zealously kept *mitzvos* under unspeakable conditions. During Pesach 1945, he subsisted on water alone for eight days rather than eat *chametz*. Somehow he managed to keep up with the slave labor during Pesach despite his prolonged weakness and previous emaciation. When fellow camp inmates remonstrated that he ought not endanger his life by abstaining from the daily loaf of bread, he replied that at least one Jew out of the 2,500 imprisoned in Flossenbergl ought

to observe Pesach, and he was glad to be that lone Jew!

A month after Pesach, at the approach of the Russian army, the Germans moved their Jewish prisoners westward. The train they were traveling on was frequently bombed by allied aircraft, and Rav Stockhammer was critically wounded by a piece of shrapnel. He never recovered and died on 13 Iyar 1945, three days before liberation.

## RAV MENACHEM MENDEL ALTER

One of the foremost leaders of religious Jewry before the War, Rav Alter was a formidable personality — an original genius who never hesitated to speak his mind or act as he saw fit whatever the consequences. As the youngest son of the Sefas Emes and the brother of the current Gerrer Rebbe (R. Avraham Mordechai — the Imrei Emes), he was accustomed to authority, and the mantle of leadership rested easily on his shoulders. Blessed with penetrating insight, a sharp tongue and a sharper brain, he was not one to automatically conform to the general consensus nor follow the common path trodden by others. Born in 1877, as an integral part of the aristocratic family of Gur, he grew up at the center of religious influence and power. He rapidly matured an adult understanding of world affairs and would discuss the problems of the day on an equal footing with venerable

