

Snapshots: Teachings Out Of The Darkness Of The Shoah¹

1. *Wear it With Pride, the Yellow Badge (April 4, 1933), Robert Welsch²*

We live in a new period, the national revolution of the German people is a signal that is visible from afar, indicating that the world of our previous concepts has collapsed... April 1, 1933, can become the day of Jewish awakening and Jewish rebirth. If the Jews will it. If the Jews are mature and have greatness in them. If the Jews are not as they are represented to be by their opponents. The Jews, under attack, must learn to acknowledge themselves. Because the Jew did not display his Judaism with pride, because he tried to avoid the Jewish issue, he must bear part of the blame for the degradation of the Jews... The Jew is marked as a Jew. He gets the yellow badge... We will take it up and make of it a badge of honor. In addition to other signs and inscriptions one often saw windows bearing a large Magen David, the Shield of David the King. It was intended as dishonor. Jews, take it up, the Shield of David, and wear it with pride!

2. Letter from the German Jewish Community (1933)³

Letter to Hitler

Frankfurt am Main, 4 October 1933

The Herr Reich Chancellor,
Berlin.

The undersigned, the most respectful Free Association for the Interests of Orthodox Jewry, has the honour, also on behalf of the two co-signatory organizations, to submit a memorandum on the German Jewish question in the hope that it may receive favourable consideration.

The undersigned Orthodox Jewish organizations, representing that section of German Jewry which considers the Jewish religion as the sole ground and justification of the historical existence of the Jewish people, feel compelled, Herr Reich Chancellor, to set forth openly and honestly their attitude to the Jewish question. In the wake of the National Revolution and the measures taken by your government, this question has become so burning an issue that it must be resolved in one way or another if German Jewry, and ultimately Germany herself, are not to suffer the most serious damage.

The German National Socialist party claims that the Jewish race is pernicious and inferior. We would be going too far were we to question the evidence and results of scientific race theory. There is just one thing we would be so bold as to assert:

The Jewish people are *no unknown strangers* to Germans, even in the intellectual field. The Jewish Bible and the Books of the New Testament, conceived and written by Jews, have been impressing indelible traces on the German essence for a thousand years, have shaped and determined it from within. Who is to say whether the Psalms of David and the exalted morality of the Jewish Prophets have a larger or smaller share in the soul that German people, German artists, and German spiritual leaders have inherited from humble and pious mothers and fathers than the Nordic blood of the Vikings and the heritage of German heroes?

Yet the call for liberation from alien Jewish influences is being applied even to the Bible by some individuals in the National Socialist camp.

As it is, the present situation of German Jewry, as created for them by the German people, is a *completely intolerable one, in respect of their legal position and also of their economic existence, their good name, and their scope for religious activity.*

The legal position of German Jews after the implementation of the laws passed by the National Government may be summed up as follows. Jews are excluded from government and municipal service, from cultural life, from educational institutions and the academic establishments. No more than a limited number of the

Jewish students and pupils at universities and secondary schools will be admitted to some, but not all, examinations. Jewish lawyers are not allowed to represent public and local government organizations. Jewish doctors have lost the right to work for health insurance plans, and have been removed from public hospitals. The exemptions issued to the special category of front-line soldiers and their dependants do not alter the hopeless situation of the future generation of Jewish medical practitioners. Jews are almost everywhere excluded from the corporate structures of the new Reich.

Beyond that, economic activity, even when there are no laws restricting it, is being hampered most severely. Although the activity of Jews in the economic sphere has not been limited by direct legislation, an *anti-Jewish boycott* is being applied throughout Germany. It involves all state, government, municipal, and public

As a result of these legal and actual restrictions, tens of thousands of German Jews have suddenly been deprived of their livelihood. The livelihood of tens of thousands of others has been destroyed as an indirect result.

Beyond that, there is the *defamation* of Jews, whose honour is constantly impugned, the population being incited against them and depriving them of room in which they can live and breathe. In official proclamations, Jews are equated with the coloured races. In schoolbooks Jews, without exception, are depicted as the epitome of evil, and German youth is being taught from the earliest age to hate the Jews. In the press, on the radio, and in speeches, every lapse by a Jewish individual

Orthodox Jewry has no wish to abandon its conviction that the German government does not seek the destruction of German Jewry. Even if some individuals do have this objective, we do not believe that it meets with the approval of the Führer, or of the German government.

But if we are wrong, if you, Herr Reich Chancellor, and the National Government you lead, if the responsible members of the Reich leadership of the NSDAP, should indeed have made it their objective to eradicate German Jewry from the German body politic, then we would rather cease nurturing illusions and learn the bitter truth.

¹ Class dedicated in memory of the 6,000,000 Jews murdered in the Shoah

² <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/wear-it-with-pride>

³ Printed in *Between the Yeshiva and Modern Orthodoxy*, Marc Shapiro, Appendix II

2. *The Great Shofar* (R. AY Kook, 1865-1935, Israel), *Mo'adei haRa'Aya* pgs. 67-70⁴

We say in our daily prayers, "Sound the great shofar for our freedom, and raise the banner to bring our exiles together"... There are three types of shofars that may be blown on Rosh Hashanah. The optimal shofar is the horn of a ram. If a ram's horn is not available, then the horn of any kosher animal other than a cow may be used.

And if a kosher shofar is not available, then one may blow on the horn of any animal, even one which is not kosher. When using a horn from a non-kosher animal, however, no blessing is recited... These three shofars of Rosh Hashanah correspond to three "Shofars of Redemption," three Divine calls summoning the Jewish people to be redeemed and to redeem their land... There is, however, a third type of shofar. (At this point in the sermon, Rav Kook burst out in tears.) The least desirable shofar comes from the horn of an unclean animal. This shofar corresponds to the wake-up call that comes from the persecutions of anti-Semitic nations, warning the Jews to escape while they still can and flee to their own land. Enemies force the Jewish people to be redeemed, blasting the trumpets of war, bombarding them with deafening threats of harassment and torment, giving them no respite. The shofar of unclean beasts is thus transformed into a Shofar of Redemption... Whoever failed to hear the calls of the first two shofars will be forced to listen to the call of this last shofar. Over this shofar, however, no blessing is recited. "One does not recite a blessing over a cup of affliction" (*Berachot* 51b).

3. *Em HaBanim Semeicha* (R. Y.S. Teichtal, Hungary, 1885-1945), p. 23-24

It is clear that he who prepares prior to the Sabbath will eat on the Sabbath (*Avodah Zarah* 3a), and since the Orthodox did not toil, they have absolutely no influence in the Land. Those who toil and build have the influence, and they are the masters of the Land. It is, therefore no wonder that they are in control... Now, what will the Orthodox say? I do not know if they will ever be able to vindicate themselves before the Heavenly Court for not participating in the movement to rebuild the Land...



Had the God-fearing, religious Jews been involved in this undertaking, our Holy Land would have a completely different, more sanctified appearance and form than it has now... who will accept responsibility for the innocent blood that has been spilled in our days? It seems to me that all of the leaders who prevented the people of Israel from joining the builders cannot cleanse their hands and say, "Our hands did not spill this blood!" (*Devarim* 21:7).

4. *Meshech Chochma* (R. M.S. of Dvinsk, Lithuania, 1843-1926), *Vayikra* 26:44



If the Jew thinks that Berlin is Jerusalem ... then a raging storm wind will uproot him by his trunk and subject him before a faraway gentile nation... a tempest will arise and spread its roaring waves, and swallow, and destroy, and flood forth without pity. Therefore, you will not be calm, nor shall there be a resting place for the sole of your foot is a blessing, for as long as the Jewish People are uncomfortable in exile, they will yearn to return to their homeland.

5. *To Flee Or To Stay?* Joe Bobker, *Hakira* p. 83

The previous convention had been held seventeen years earlier in Austria, in 1937, at a time when a huge cloud of anxiety hung over all European Jewry. Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, the rosh yeshivah of Baranowicze, addressed a few hundred distinguished rabbinic personalities and cautioned Torah Jewry against making any major decisions (e.g.: stay or flee) without first seeking rabbinic guidance (da'as Torah) regarding how to respond to the looming threat.

⁴ "Rav Kook delivered this sermon in Jerusalem's Old City on Rosh Hashanah 1933. It was a time of mixed tidings. On the one hand, ominous news of Hitler's reign in Germany became more troubling with each passing day". Adaptation and translation from http://ravkooktorah.org/ROSH_65.htm

6. Selections from *Aish Kodesh* (Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, 1888– Nov. 3, 1943)⁵



Vayesheiv,
1940

However, there are times when the Jewish person sees that, heaven forfend, it is inevitable that a time of trouble come to pass, involving decline, degradation and collapse. He then takes hold of himself, adapting himself to the time of trouble until the storm blows over. He says to himself, "At the present time I am indeed mute [ilem], but even the mute can communicate by signaling in a manner appropriate to his condition. So I too will speak a bit; I will sign from within my muteness."

But when, heaven forfend, Israel's troubles continue to increase, so that each individual feels even more broken and crushed, then a condition is reached... where the state of ilem—muteness—has become still more powerful, so that it is impossible to communicate even as a mute does. What happens then is that "my sheaf/muteness [alimut] rose and stood erect": at first I wanted to succumb and live a life of muteness, but when the muteness threatened to prevail, I could no longer bear it, so I took hold of myself, crying out to God more. And then, "your sheaves/muteness [alimutikhem] turned around."... That is, that you too [emphasis in original] found strength through me...

אבל יש שכשאישי ישראלי רואה שח"ו מוכרחה עת צרה לעבור בקטנות נמילה ושביירה, אז מתחזק ומתאים א"ע לעת צרה עד יעבור ועם, ואומר לעצמו הן אלם אני עתה, אבל גם האלם מדבר מעט לפי אלמותו ברמזות, וגם אני מעט אדבר, ארמזו באלמותי.

אבל כשח"ו מוסיפים הצרות של ישראל להתחזק וכ"א יותר נשבר ורצון, אז הוא בחי' והנה [אנחנו] מאלמים אלומים בתוך השדה, שדה נודע היא הבחי' שכל עבודת ישראל מגיע לה ומתקנה בחי' כריח שדה וכי' שפרשי חקל (שדה) תפוחים, ומחצדי חקלא, מאלמים אלומים בתוך השדה, בתורה ועבודה הבחי' אלם ער נתאלמה יותר, עד שגם כאלם א"א לדבר, אז והנה קמה אלומתי וגם נצבה, מקודם כבר רציתי להטות אש קודש שפירא, קלנימוס קלמיש בן אלימלך עמוד מס 22 הודפס ע"י תכנת אוצר החכמה

This may be one of the reasons the prophet Jeremiah wrote the Book of Lamentations in an anticipatory mode before the destruction of the Temple, as the Rabbis tell us... but after the Destruction, Jeremiah was in such great pain that he could not have uttered Lamentations with the Divine Spirit; this is because even to weep and lament with Divine Spirit is impossible without a bit of joy.

א"א להמשיך ע"ע רוח"ק בשעת צער ויגון ר"ל, בשעה"ק להרחי"ז ז"ל איתא שאחד מתנאי הנביא הי' שגם בשעת יסורים הי' בשמחה, ומ"מ אמר, אלישע קחו לי מנגן, כדי להביא א"ע לשמחה, ומשמע שהגם שהי' בשמחה תמיד, מ"מ פגם הצער את שמחתו שחיתה נחוצה לו להמשיך עליו רוח"ק ובפרט באתדל"ת, ואפשר זהו ג"כ אחד מהענינים שהקדים ירמי' הנביא לכתוב איכה קודם חורבן ביהמ"ק כמו שאחז"ל שזה הי' הספר שכתב ברוך בן נרי' מפי ירמי', להגיל כיון שברוח"ק נאמרה כמו שאמר בפסוק ירמי' ל"ו שד' אמר לו שיכתבנה, ואחר החורבן הי' בצער גדול עד שלא הי' יכול גם לאמור איכה ברוח"ק, כי גם לבכות ולקונן ברוח"ק א"א בלא קצת שמחה, לכן הוצרך להקדימה קודם החורבן.



Matot,
1942

7. *Responsa Mima'akim* (R. Ephraim Oshry, 1914–2003, Lithuania), 1:6, 16, 2:4

שאלה: אחרי שהגרמנים האוררים ימ"ש הוציאו לפועל בימים של ג' וד' ניסן תש"ד את הרצח החמוני על ילדי ישראל שקראו אותו בשם "קינדער אקציען" והשמירו כאלף ומאתים ילדים עוללים ויונקים שנזלו מחיק אמותיהם והכריעו למטה, הרג ושריפה, נשאלתי על ידי ההורים האומללים אם מוטלת עליהם חובת אמירת קדיש על ידיהם הקטנים, ואם לא עד כמה הוא שיעור קטנותם?

שאלה:

ואז במעמד זה ניגש אלי ר' אליהו מווארשא הי"ד, אחד מהפליטים שנמלטו מווארשא לליטא בחפשו מפלט לנפשו, אבל נפל מן הפח אל הפחת, שהרי גם לליטא הגיעה ידם הטמאה של הנאצים שאמרה לכלות את ישראל, ומכיון שהיטב חכיר את דרכם של הרשעים הללו, הוא ידע שחלק גדול מהנצבים על המגרש הזה יספה ולא יוכה לראות את אור החיים עלי אדמות כי מחר למועד הזה יוצאו אלפים לתורג, — הוא שאל אותי מהו נוסח הברכה שעל מקדשי שמו יתברך מוטל לברך, האם עליהם לברך אקב"ו, "על קדוש השם" — לפני מותם, או עליהם לברך אקב"ו, "לקדש את השם", והוא אמר לי, כי הוא רוצה לדעת בעצמו איך לברך, אם ח"ו יגיע לידי כך, ומלבד זאת הוא רוצה לקיים מצוה, אולי האחרונה בימי חייו, והיא, לעבור בין הפקודים למות וללמדם כדת מה לעשות אם תגיע שעתם האחרונה ולזכותם שיכרכו את הברכה כפי הדין.

שאלה: ביום ו' מרחשון שנת תש"ב יומים לפני החורבן הנורא של גיטו קובנה, שעה שלעינינו הוכלו כעשרת אלפים איש, אנשים נשים וטף להכריעם למבח וכל אחד מיושבי הגיטו ציפה לקץ חמר עת שורוע הרשע של הזדים האוררים תונף עליו באכזריות ותכריתו מארץ החיים, אז בשעה טרופה זו בא אלי בעה"ב אחד מנכבדי העיר יגוע באנחתו ודמעתו על לחיו וברוכ שיחו אמר לי כי נפשו היא כשאלתו, כי איככה יוכל לראות ברעה אשר ימצא את משפחתו, אשתו ובניו ובני בניו, שיחכן מאד שיושבחו לנגד עיניו כדי להגדיל את צערו ויסוריו, שהרי חרוצחים הגרמנים מנתנם היה להתענג על היסורים והצער של קרבנותיהם ולכן היו נוהגים לחרוג את הכנים לעיני אבותיהם ואת הנשים לעיני בעליהם ורק אחרי שהיו משביעים את זעפת חמת הרצח שכתוכם שרתחה בקרבם ונפשם התעננה על זעקת המעונים והמופמים, רק אז היו שולחים יד בראשי המשפחה, ולכן מכיון שאין בכחו לעמוד בפני יסורי הנפשות האהובות והיקרות לו מכל יקר, ובלי ספק שלבו יתפלץ בקרבו ונפשו תצא ממנו בראותו זאת, לזאת שאלתו היא אם מותר לו לקרב את קצו ולשלוח יד כנפשו אשר לא כדת וכלכד שלא יראה בעיניו כאכזר בני ביתו. ונוסף לזה הוא עצמו לא יומת במיתה משונה תוך יסורים גדולים על ידי חרוצחים האוררים ימח שםם וגם יוכה לבוא לקבר ישראל בבית הקברות שכניטו קובנה.

⁵ The book, which is a compilation of weekly sermons to his students, contends with complex questions of faith in the face of the mounting suffering of the Jews in the ghetto. When it became apparent to Rabbi Shapira that the end of the ghetto and all its inhabitants was near, he buried the book in a canister. This canister was found by a construction worker after the end of the war. The book was published in Israel in 1960 under the title *Esh Kodesh*.

8. Other Selected Holocaust Responsa

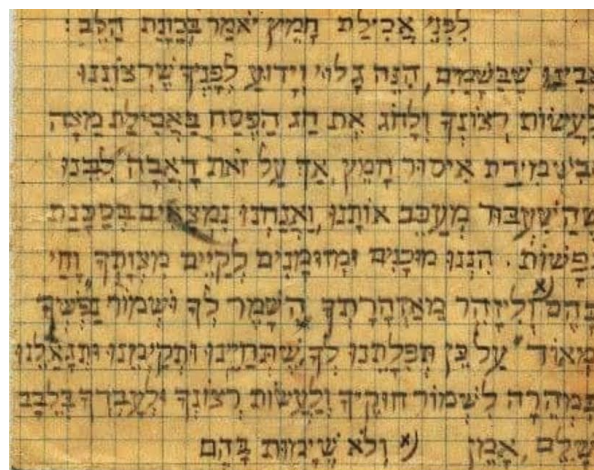
- (January 4, 1939) - After the 1938 *Kristallnacht* pogrom, thousands of Jews were sent to concentration camps. Many of them were killed and cremated. The ashes were sent back to the families for burial. When would the shiva commence and how were the ashes to be ritually buried? (R. MM Kirschboim, Rabbi of Kehila ha-Kelalit in Frankfurt-am-Main)
- (March 28, 1942) - Due to the decree prohibiting Jews from being outside after 6.00PM, it became difficult for women to perform a ritual immersion in the *mikveh* on a Friday night. Would it be permitted for these women to rely on the *heter* of the *Chochmat Adam* to immerse during the day hours of the 7th day? (R. Yitzchak Weiss of Werbau, Hungary)
- (undated) - In the face of government decree requiring Jewish-owned shops to be opened on *shabbat*, can the shops be left open, since the penalty for not doing so was the total shuttering of the stores by the government? (R. Pinchas Tzimetboim of Grossvarden)

9. Passover Haggadah



Handwritten by R. S.R. Kappel in 1941, in France⁶

10. Prayer before consuming Chametz



Written in 1944 by Rabbi Aharon Davids in Bergen-Belsen.

11. Vayael Moshe (R. Yoel Teitelbaum, Hungary, 20th c.), Introduction

And now, in our very generation, we have no need to seek and search in hidden places for the sin that brought this disaster upon us, for it is stated openly and explicitly in the words of our sages. They told us explicitly, based on their understanding of biblical verses, that in response to transgression of the [Jewish people's] oaths "not to ascend the wall" and "not to hurry the end," heaven forefend, [God promises that] "I will abandon your flesh to be like the deer and the gazelles of the field." ... And so it was with this bitter golden calf of creating a [Jewish] commonwealth before the coming of the Messiah, for it is several years since this impure idea was introduced by the Zionists, and intensive activity was undertaken in various forms for the purpose of violating those oaths. And for our many sins, most of the nation, in all its sectors, was party to and aided in this, even the most pure of Israel.



1887-1979

Rabbi of Satmar before and after WWII

⁶ The Germans had already occupied France. See the final line in Yiddish: "Die Haggadah soll sein die letzte in Galus" This Haggadah should be the last in exile. Photo taken from R. Efreim Goldberg's Shabbat HaGadol Derasha <http://pdf.brsnline.org/ShabbosHaGadol2017.pdf> p. 7. Credited to R' Yossi Levine

12. The Book and the Sword (R. David HaLivni Weiss, b. 1927)

Of the four things I have named, let me speak first of one that I reject with derision: the attempt to make theological excuses for the Holocaust. I consider it obscene to assume that the Shoah took place (especially since it came from Germany) as a divine response to the spread of German culture of Haskalah, or secularism, among the Jews. First of all, these apologies are historically absurd: Germany had the most secular Jews, and yet more Jews of other nationalities were exterminated. But, more important, these rationalizations are theologically offensive. The phrase "For our sins, we were exiled..." has a legitimate place in our tradition and liturgy; but dispersion, even with its attendant sufferings, is one thing, and vast annihilation of man, woman, and child is another. To say to people whom we know, "because of our sins" we were sent to Auschwitz - this must be rejected out of hand. There are certain times in history when justification almost smacks of participation.

A justification, by definition, means: it should have happened, it's justice, it is the fitting course of events. People who make such statements suggest, in effect, that had it not happened, they would have worked to bring it about. Even aside from the historical absurdity, sensitive human beings must consider this abominable.



13. Faith After The Holocaust (R. Eliezer Berkovitz, 1908-1992, Israel)

God cannot as a rule intervene whenever man's use of freedom displeases him. It is true, if he did so the perpetration of evil would be rendered impossible, but so would the possibility for good disappear.

Man can be frightened; but he cannot be bludgeoned into goodness. If God did not respect man's freedom to choose his course in personal responsibility, not only would the moral good and evil be abolished from the earth, but man himself would go with them. For freedom and responsibility are the very essence of man. Without them man is not human. If there is to be man, he must be allowed to make his choices in freedom. If he has such freedom, he will use it. Using it, he will often use it wrongly; he will decide for the wrong alternative. As he does so, there will be suffering for the innocent. Yet He is present in history. He reveals his presence in the survival of his people Israel. Therein lies his awesomeness. God renders himself powerless, as it were, through forbearance and long-suffering, yet he guides. How else could his powerless people have survived! He protects, without manifest power. Because of that, Israel could endure God's long silences without denying him. Because of the survival of Israel, the prophets could question God's justice and yet believe in him.



The theology of a God unconvincingly present in history alone might not have sufficed. The dilemma cannot be resolved on the intellectual level alone. And, indeed, neither Jeremiah, nor Habakkuk, nor even Job, were given an intellectually valid answer. The Talmudic conclusion was correctly reached: God was silent. Yet, the dilemma was resolved, not in theory, but, strangely enough, in history itself.

14. Hitva'aduyot (1991), R. MM Schneerson (USA, 20th c.)

ובנדודי: השמדת ששה מליון
יהודים באכזריות הכי גדולה וגוראה –
שואה איומה שלא היתה (ולא תהי')
ר"ל) דוגמתה במשך כל הדורות – לא
יכולה להיות בתור עונש על עונות,
שכן, אפילו השטן עצמו לא יוכל למצוא
חשבון עונות בדור ההוא שיהי' בו כדי
להצדיק ח"ו עונש חמור כזה!

ישנם ענינים בלתי־רצויים שאינם
באים בתור עונש על עונות, כי אם, מפני
שכך גזר הקב"ה, ללא טעם והסברה כלל
בשכל וחכמת התורה. ובלשון חז"ל
(בנוגע להריגתו של רבי עקיבא שסרקן
בשרו במסרקות של ברזל, ועד"ו כל
עשרה הרוגי מלכות) "שתוק כך עלה
במחשבה לפני" ¹⁰, "גזירה היא
מלפני" ¹¹

