

# **THE STORY OF MY SURVIVAL**

**by Morris Engelson**



## Transcript of Tisha B'Av Presentation on the Holocaust

*Including supplementary material*

**Presented at Congregation Kesser Israel  
Portland, Oregon  
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## **Introduction**

### **Rabbi Kenneth Brodtkin**

My name is Rabbi Kenneth Brodtkin, and I am the rabbi of Congregation Kesser Israel in Portland, Oregon. On behalf of Kesser Israel, I am proud to present to you “A Story of Survival” with Mr. Morris Engelson.

Appreciation of Jewish history has always been of significance to our community. So, it was natural that we would seek the talents of Mr. Morris Engelson in presenting his family’s story of survival during the years leading up to and during the Holocaust.

I asked Mr. Engelson to speak about his story of survival for two reasons. I realized that having a person with such a powerful story was a great resource that our community must take advantage of. I also knew that he is a phenomenal speaker and storyteller. But, to be really honest, I was not aware of the magnitude of the talk that he would give. I was looking forward to hearing very fascinating details of one family’s story. What we got instead was the story of a generation.

Morris Engelson is not only a survivor or a storyteller. He is a historian par excellence with a profound perspective. In the talk you are about to hear, he synthesizes his story with the backdrop of history and Torah. I believe that the result is a presentation of profound importance for anyone who wants to engage a deep understanding of the event that is known as the Holocaust.

This lecture teaches us about our people—but it also teaches us about G-d. The Torah conveys to us that at times HaShem hides his face, but that even during those times, He is constantly bringing the world and Israel closer to its purpose. As you encounter the miracles of the Engelsons’ survival, you will meet people who knew and experienced G-d even in the terrible darkness of the valley of the shadow of death.

And, this lecture addresses a deep issue—*how* to understand the Holocaust. Sometime in the past sixty-five years, people began to say, “Never again.” In truth, that is a naïve and potentially dangerous statement. And, today, the Jewish people live with new dangers. Who imagined sixty-five years ago that the Holocaust itself would be under attack?

But, in truth, there is a greater danger than Holocaust denial. That danger is that we the Jewish people will misunderstand the event. We will see it as one example in a larger class of generic events. As Mr. Engelson so thoroughly demonstrates in this landmark talk, the Holocaust is anything but a generic event. It is a totally unique event in human history. It cannot be compared or understood within the limitations of “normal” historical events.

Long before the rise of Hitler and the Third Reich, our sages set aside a day for Holocaust remembrance. That day is Tisha B’Av. Tisha B’Av is a day that eternally reminds us that the painful events of Jewish history must be understood in light of the eternal relationship between HaShem and the Jewish people. Although we cannot always penetrate to the depths of history, we must realize that our national experiences—for good or for bad—must lead us to a deeper and more profound appreciation of G-d. That is why we chose to offer the live presentation on the day of Tisha B’Av. And, as we all know, the lessons of that day are relevant to the entire Jewish year.

I am sure that you will listen to this lecture with bated breath. Moreover, I believe that this will help you to appreciate a dimension of the Holocaust which we are in danger of forgetting. It is our hope that just as Kesser Israel aspires to imbue people with a compelling understanding of our peoplehood, this lecture will help you appreciate a compelling and authentic understanding of the Holocaust.

## **Author’s Note**

This is a replication of a talk that I gave at Congregation Kesser Israel in Portland, Oregon, on Tisha B’Av on July 30, 2009, on the topic of my survival during the Shoah. The program was recorded, and unfortunately we found that there was a most annoying and disturbing screech in the background of the recording to the point where it would not be suitable for distribution. So it was decided that I would pretty much duplicate what I said at that presentation. I can do that because I do have the original, and I will play back small portions to ensure that not only the material and phraseology but also the identical wording would be recorded again. Of course, this loses the emotion and the results that you get from speaking before a group and especially during a Fast Day and especially on Tisha B’Av. Nevertheless, we also have something that we gain back. Once the materials for

the program were prepared, I found that it would take close to three hours to present these materials, and we decided that two hours was about the maximum that we could have for a program on Tisha B'Av. People are fasting, after all. Consequently, some materials were abbreviated and some materials were unfortunately eliminated. Now, with this recording, I am able to present this material as well, so that this is both a re-recording, or duplication or replication of my talk on Tisha B'Av, plus some additional materials to extend my presentation.

## **Summary and Sources**

This being Tisha B'Av, we will dispense with greetings and proceed straight to the presentation. If this were one of my technical presentations, I would say that the equation of state for the Holocaust is a nonlinear equation, or I might say that we are dealing with a case of positive feedback. This is simply a fancy way of saying that for the Holocaust the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Presenting only one part without context does not really do the job. So, while the topic of this talk is the story of my survival, and indeed I will present my story, I believe it is necessary to also provide background and context into which to place this story so we can understand it properly. This context requires that we understand some of what the Holocaust is about. Consequently, I will talk both about background and my story and combine both going back and forth.

I will begin with a connection, or an attempted connection, between the Holocaust and Tisha B'Av; today is Tisha B'Av, after all, and I will also show what to me is a surprising connection between the Holocaust and Purim. In the process, we will learn a great deal about the so-called Final Solution, which is a code phrase for the extermination of the Jewish people by way of the extermination camps and gassing. Once we understand all of that, I will be in a position to go into my story. The story, or rather portions of it, will be presented. The whole story is quite long. If you are interested, you can go to the Spielberg Shoah Project, and you can find the interview with me, and many other survivors, of course—about three hours of videotape from my interview. It is a long story. And the background also is a very long background in terms of information on the Holocaust that we need to understand. Of course, this is not a lecture on the Holocaust; a lecture will not really do it. About thirty years ago I gave a class which was ten weeks long, and we had something to talk about every week. And much scholarship has come in during the intervening thirty years. Clearly, it is a very large topic. But I will

provide sufficient background, I think, so that my story can be put into context.

Once we have gotten the basic background on the Final Solution and the connection between the Holocaust and Tisha B'Av, I will begin my story with a small shtetl in Lithuania, not far from Vilna, starting with pre-World War II and going into when Lithuanian Shaulists, a group that was associated with an Einsatzkommando, Einsatzkommando A, came and gathered up the Jews and took them to be killed. Our family escaped, of course, as is obvious because I am here, but this position of the Einsatzkommandos or Einsatzgruppen gives me a reason and an opportunity to explain what the Einsatzgruppen are about. Most people know a great deal about the extermination camps, but not as much about the Einsatzgruppen. In our case, we were running from the Einsatzgruppen and not from the camps. So that needs to be explained. I will explain it, and once we have that information, I will then go back, I will finish my story, and complete with a few comments about the Holocaust in general. This is the intended plan.

One of the documents which we will be discussing and which appears in virtually every book on the Holocaust, and in many books about the Third Reich as well, is the so-called Final Solution document, or memorandum, or authorization—in many cases it is called a letter. The designation “letter” is important to our connection to Purim, as you will see later. This document is almost always described the same way. We are given an explanation of what it is about, we are given a translation into English, we have the date, and various other straightforward things, and pretty much all the history books describe it the same way. But I was looking for a connection between this document and Tisha B'Av, and so I wanted to do some additional research, deeper than the history books could give, to look at the date of this document. The document is dated July 31, 1941, which turns out to be the 7th of Av, not the 9th of Av, but documents frequently are dated a certain day but the recipients receive them some days later. So it would not be unreasonable to expect that Göring would have signed the document on the 7th of Av and the recipient, Reinhard Heydrich, might have received it a few days later, and I decided to investigate it.

The more I investigated it, the more puzzles and mysteries I found about this document, and I started looking deeper and deeper and deeper. I will tell you that for the last six weeks I have been very much immersed—all my time that I had available has been spent looking at fundamental documents, looking at transcripts of Eichmann's trial, looking at transcripts of Göring's trial at Nuremberg, reading

and rereading books that I had previously read and many new items, and it became very strange to me. There is a mystery there. And I finally decided I could not solve it, so I would ask the people that should know. And that is the premier Holocaust historians.

I prepared a query, a detailed analysis of what is bothering me—two single-spaced pages—and I sent it by email to seven major Holocaust historians in the hope that somebody would decide that I was not a crank and that I would get some answers. I did receive answers, in fact, from five of these historians. That is surprising. Two answers were kind of minor and not that much, but three were very significant and in depth. Obviously, these people took their time to respond, and they took their time to read my questions, so I want to publicly acknowledge my debt and thank them. These are Professors Richard Breitman, Yehuda Bauer, and Deborah Lipstadt, each of whom provided some detailed answers, and I will be quoting from Bauer and Lipstadt later in my presentation.

The issue that was and is still bothering me does not have to do with this talk, so it does not matter that it is not solved yet, but I will tell you that in response to one of my questions, Professor Bauer responded in a very short note. I was asking about some documentary procedures in Eichmann's office, and he responded that I need to read the book *Hitler's Bureaucrats* by Yaacov Lozowick, who at the time when he wrote this book and until very recently, in fact, was the head archivist at Yad Vashem. So I needed the book, but time was short—how do I get the book at such a short time? So I checked the local library—the Multnomah County Library in Portland, Oregon—and surprise, they actually had a copy. And I was able to obtain it. I got the copy last Friday—today is Thursday. I read the book. It's a fascinating book. It deals with the minutia, with the fine details of documentary procedures at Eichmann's office, bureaucratic procedures: If you have this salutation, it means this; if you have this cryptic statement or these cryptic numbers on the edge, it means something else—all sorts of procedures, documentary processes. Now, Lozowick comes to a certain conclusion with respect to these procedures, and his conclusion is not really stated as a conclusion but is stated as an opinion, if you will, with respect to what's going on and appears in the preface of his book. The conclusion deals with the proof of this opinion, and it is difficult to understand how somebody looking at raw documents would come to such an understanding, but, having been immersed in this for six weeks, I can see how one can come to it, and of course Dr. Lozowick was immersed in this for years, dealing very carefully with this material. I will note that I did send a

query to Dr. Lozowick with my questions. I am still trying to get an answer. And I did receive an answer yesterday; the answer is, “Sorry, I don’t have an answer.”

Apparently, I am looking for material which is very deeply imbedded someplace in the archives, if it exists at all, and Dr. Lozowick had not been exposed to this material. But he gave me introductions to some major archivists both in Israel and in Germany, and perhaps somebody will be able to help me. In any event, these issues have nothing to do with our presentation, but I wanted to bring this to your attention to indicate that I only now learned about this book, which has been around for several years, but I just didn’t know about it. I just learned about this book recently, less than a week ago that I received a copy. Nevertheless, I would like to start my formal presentation; this has all been by way of introduction, so to speak, from this book because Lozowick says what I wanted to say but much better, more succinctly, and in a more powerful manner.

## **The Holocaust**

So, rather than starting the way I had originally planned to start, I would like to start with a quotation with the very first words from the book *Hitler’s Bureaucrats*. This is from the preface of the book, and it is the first paragraph from the preface. And I quote:

“Evil is powerful, palpable and very real. Rationalism would wish to reduce it to a poetic expression of something else—social, psychological or perhaps economic stresses and currents. In our age of postmodern cacophonies of competing voices, narratives and viewpoints, evil seems a leftover, a relic of an earlier, religious age. Yet for me, the writing of this book has been accompanied by the growing awareness of the aridity of these explanations and, finally, of their futility. Having spent years watching Adolf Eichmann and his colleagues from as close as I dared, I was forced to reevaluate the understanding with which I began my research; eventually, an honest appraisal of what I was finding forced me to recognize the evil in them.”

My friends, we are embarking on a journey to discuss an evil and to learn something of the men who both perpetrated it and lived off it. They created it and

then they fed off their own creation. And this is known as the Holocaust; or, to be more precise, the Jewish Holocaust, because there are other so-called holocausts around, as I will discuss very, very late in my talk, and we need to understand how this works together. People will tell you that the Holocaust constitutes the murder of millions. It is that, for sure, but that is not all it is. People will tell you that the Holocaust constitutes a genocide or attempted genocide of the Jews. Yes, it is that, but that is not its essence. Adolf Hitler did not simply intend to kill, to eliminate, and to exterminate the Jews. The killing of the bodies was not the actual end. The killing of the bodies was a means to a higher end. Hitler was looking to *ausrotten*, to uproot, to extirpate, to destroy, exterminate, eliminate all vestiges of anything Jewish that ever existed in this world and could in the future exist in this world. The bodies being the carriers of this Jewish “bacillus,” as he called it—the disease of being a Jew—these bodies had to be destroyed for the purpose of destroying the virus. The bodies were not destroyed on their own right, but as carriers of something greater called the Jewish virus. Hitler wanted to destroy everything connected with Jews: Jewish literature; Jewish music; Jewish philosophy; Jewish science, which hindered the production or development of the atomic bomb by the Nazis because young Nazis decided that they didn’t want to learn the Jewish science of Albert Einstein. As a consequence, they lacked technicians, so it hurt them in their trying to develop. Above all, Hitler was looking to destroy the essence of what a Jew is—the Jewish soul, which is the Torah.

In 1924, when Hitler was already a confirmed anti-Semite and had already formed his intention to exterminate the Jews—as I will show later—in his book *Mein Kampf*, written in 1924, there are many statements about the Jews. Here is one:

“I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the almighty creator. By defending myself against the Jews I am fighting for the work of the Lord.”

And I assure you that the creator Hitler is talking about is not HaShem. For the Holocaust is something above and beyond in some other dimension than the killing and the murders and the tortures, though it is all of these and much more. As I said at the outset, when you deal with the Holocaust, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

In dealing with the Holocaust, historians have grappled with the question of,

“When did it begin?” What is the beginning of the Holocaust? There are many opinions and many positions, but there are two basic camps. There are some positions that are outside these camps, but there are two basic camps, which have been debating with each other for the last twenty-odd years, since the 1980s. These are the camps of the “intentionalists” and the “functionalists.”

The intentionalists will argue that the Nazi Reich was an autocratic regime. There was a dictator by the name of Adolf Hitler. Not only could nothing happen without his agreement or approval or against his objection, but nothing really happened unless he initiated it and started it and made it happen. Therefore, the Holocaust began when Hitler formed his intention—that’s why they are called intentionalists—when Hitler formed his intention to destroy, to *ausrotten der Juden*, to destroy the Jews. Totally eliminate anything Jewish from this world. When did this happen? We know it happened prior to 1924, when *Mein Kampf* was written, because he talks about it in this book. Clearly it happened before. Historians—not all, but many historians—who deal with this will tell you that the date is shortly after World War I, most likely in 1919. We don’t need to go into the details. So that’s when this monster baby called “eliminate, extirpate, *ausrotten der Juden*” was born. This baby grew to adulthood some twenty years later and started acting out its intentions, and we have the Holocaust. But the beginning of babies is not the birth; the beginning of babies is the conception. So we ask when was this conception? And everybody will tell you—again, we don’t have time to go into the stream of inferences—but the conception, which was born after World War I, the conception was the beginning of World War I, the start of World War I. That is what led to it. World War I began when the German Kaiser declared war on Czarist Russia, and this was on the 1st of August 1914. The 1st of August 1914 is Tisha B’Av. The beginning of the Holocaust, if we follow the intentionalists’ position, would then be on Tisha B’Av; the beginning of World War I.

The functionalists take a different position. They say that the Nazi Reich was polycratic rather than autocratic, meaning there are several areas, several centers of influence and control, usually given as four centers. And these competed with each other. Certainly, Hitler was the major force, and nothing could have happened if he objected to it, but many things happened without him getting directly involved. Various centers competed with each other, and when conditions were ripe, various positions coalesced together and things happened then. What we need to look at is the functions, the operational procedures and the

documentation, the functional documentation that led to the Holocaust. What, then, is the documentation? The first item that says, “Yes, we will exterminate the Jews.” Everybody agrees that this is a memorandum from Hermann Göring to Reinhard Heydrich, which is known as the “Final Solution Document,” and this document has several clauses—it’s a very short document. Short—a few paragraphs and one piece of paper. The document basically says that Heydrich is charged with investigating what the Final Solution procedures, what we should do, and to go ahead and do things, make things happen, and Heydrich is authorized to make it happen. And there is a paragraph that states all other governmental agencies are to cooperate with Heydrich. The final result was, of course, the construction and the use of the extermination camps, and this is the Final Solution. Even though millions, certainly more than one million, likely two million or even more millions of Jews had already been killed. So it isn’t as if the Final Solution is the genocide or the murder of Jews. We’re talking about mega-murders before this time of the Final Solution. We are talking about something greater, as I said before.

In any event, we have this document, and one of the questions is, why did Heydrich need it? For this we need to understand something: We need to understand the hierarchy. We have Himmler, who is the head of the SS. He reports to Hitler. The SS is a party; it is not a governmental office. And as difficult as it may be for people to understand and believe, the Nazis were sticklers for protocol and for the law. They followed the law. Everything they did had to have a legal justification and a legal reason, and there had to be a law to do it. There was nothing illegal about killing the Jews and murdering the Jews; it was in the statutes. That was what you were supposed to do, and this is one of the defenses that we heard at Nuremberg—higher orders. This was the law. I was just following the law.

Now, the head of the SD—the *Sicherheitsdienst*, which is the security services of the SS—is an individual by the name of Reinhard Heydrich. He reported to Himmler. Himmler, in addition to being the head of the *Schutzstaffel*, the SS, was also the head of various police forces. This gave him some control or operational positions within the government itself. Heydrich also had these. Nevertheless, these would be insufficient for carrying out the Final Solution because the Final Solution had to go across many, many governmental agencies. You had to deal, for example, with the foreign department, with the diplomatic corps, because the Jews lived across various borders. You had to deal with the department of the

economy because they had to take away their property, confiscating their property, and do various things with it. You had to deal with the military because the Jews were behind the military battle lines and you had to deal with the battle lines. You had to deal with every possible aspect of the central government, to which Heydrich had no control. He had no control and he had no authority. He needed authority from a higher-level source. That source was Göring. It could have been Hitler, but Hitler was very frugal in writing things down. He handed things over. There is a memorandum in 1938, I would have to look it up, where Hitler gave the authority to Göring to go and proceed with the Final Solution of the Jewish question. Which, by the way, the Jewish question appears everywhere, including in *Mein Kampf* in 1924.

So this is not something new. Göring had this authority for two reasons: He was the Deputy Fuhrer, the *Reichsmarschall*, which means second in command to Hitler. He would take over if something happened to Hitler. He was also the head of the four-year plan which gave him control of all economic aspects of Germany, or all the areas that Germany controlled. Consequently, a directive from Göring to go and do it, and a statement that everybody is to cooperate, gave Heydrich the authority to do all these things. Heydrich had previously—well before—established an office for Jewish affairs, and this office was under the control—management, if you will, but actually you could say command because these were all military ranks—command of Adolf Eichmann. So, one of twelve officers in the SS was Heydrich, was Heydrich's office. Heydrich had six different offices, and they were identified by Roman numerals, Roman numerals I, II, III, IV, V, VI. Roman numeral IV is an office that everybody's familiar with: the *Geheime Staatspolizei*, better known as the Gestapo, under the control of Heinrich Müller. And, by the way, everybody knows about the Gestapo and how terrible they were and how terrible Müller was. I will tell you that compared to Heydrich, Müller was a wonderful, friendly, helpful person. Heydrich was a horrible individual. Everybody feared him, everybody hated him, even the confirmed Nazis couldn't stand Heydrich. Here is a photo, which I'm passing around so you can see the face of Heydrich, so you can see the face of evil.

So, within Müller's Gestapo there were various levels or layers. They were identified by letters—uppercase letters A, B, C, D, E. Within layer B there were four departments; Department 4 is the Jewish Affairs Department of Eichmann. It sounds like a very low-level position, going through various levels, but in fact Eichmann was only parked there. The department had very high abilities in terms

of reaching people. He almost always reported directly to Müller or to Heydrich, and frequently even to higher authorities. So, that was the office and that was the document that started the Final Solution on the way, as you will see in a moment. The document is dated July 31, 1941, as I told you, and that is the 7th of Av, so I was looking to find out when did Heydrich receive this document. Possibly Göring signed it on the 7th and it took a couple of days to get to Heydrich, which would not be unusual. But the more I looked, the more complicated it became. We have a number of interesting factors connected to this document. First of all, there is strong evidence that it is likely that Heydrich obtained this document directly himself from Göring—he just got it directly. For sure it was not mailed in the mail. For example, in my query on this matter, Professor Lipstadt makes the following statement in an email, and I quote:

“You can pretty much assume that a letter such as this would not have been posted via the mail.”

So, either it came by a messenger or Heydrich picked it up himself. The fact of a messenger is important; the fact that she called it a “letter” is important, as you will see, in connection to Purim. I then have a different answer, or a different insight from Professor Bauer, which really surprised me. He says that he believes that the date is correct, that it truly is July 31. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that this letter was predated by several days. I couldn’t understand why it would be predated until I read Lozowick’s book, and then it made perfect sense why it possibly could be predated. So the best information that we have today, after an exhaustive—I won’t say exhaustive because you can spend more than six weeks, certainly—but after a very thorough search and after checking with major historians, the date of this document getting into Heydrich’s hands or the actual date goes like this. From the 7th of Av until the 10th of Av, depending on when the messenger might have delivered this, whether Heydrich would have picked it up himself, or whether the letter was predated. And, by the way, if Heydrich did pick it up, it would be late in the afternoon, so it’s almost the 8th of Av when he picked it up. So we have these dates.

Now we have an interesting coincidence here. Of course, if you believe in the Torah, coincidences don’t mean coincidences. Nevertheless, speaking scientifically, we have a coincidence here that Tisha B’Av that year, 1941, was on Shabbat. So the observance would be on Sunday, the 10th of Av. In fact, when I say Tisha B’Av, it really means two different things. When people say Tisha

B'Av, it means a different thing. It means the 9th of Av, which is a specific date, but it also means the date when we observe this special time in our calendar. So sometimes we observe Tisha B'Av on the 10th of Av, when the 9th of Av is on Shabbat. And that's perfectly legitimate. We know that the Beit HaMikdash in fact burned on the 10th of Av, just as much as on the 9th of Av—maybe even more, either day. And then we have an interesting deal—there is a *Baraisa* about it, but you can look it up in II Kings, *Melachim beis*, Chapter 25; you will find that we are told that Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem to destroy the Beit HaMikdash. And when did he come? He came on the 7th of Av, he made preparations on the 7th and 8th, and they started the destruction on the 9th, the fire was on the 9th, but the preparation, which means the beginning of the destruction, was really on the 7th. So any time from the 7th of Av through the 10th of Av is a perfectly legitimate connection, and we can say that this document is certainly connected to Tisha B'Av—not necessarily the 9th of Av, but Tisha B'Av as a statement of an observance of afflictions and terrible things that happened to the Jews. So we have this connection directly within the functionalist type of position. We can go further and say, all right, when did the extermination camps start to operate, and is there some connection here to Tisha B'Av? Yes, there is, but statistically and mathematically there are problems. I acknowledged that in the beginning, but let me go through it anyway.

The issue is that something happens all the time. Every day something happens, so something happened on the 9th of Av as well. So picking out something and saying this happened on the 9th of Av is not significant; it has no statistical meaning. Because something always happens, other days would also have statistical meaning. Nevertheless, let's take a look at the issues of the extermination camps and what they were about. As soon as we received the documentation from Göring to Heydrich to start doing something, Heydrich started doing something, and the preparations or the investigation for the Final Solution began immediately. Here are two quotes from Lozowick's book, because he deals with documentation—these are on pages 80 and 81 of this book. One quote deals with this document, and the other one deals with how fast preparations began.

“The turning point came in the summer of 1941—but because of its significance and the horrible innovation it involved, no public announcement was made. The ‘research team’ armed itself with an authorization for its work—Göring’s letter—but took care, for the

time being, to work quietly.”

So, Göring’s letter initiated the research team to go out and to start researching what to do about the Final Solution. Several paragraphs later, Lozowick says:

“In IV B 4 [that’s Eichmann’s department], preparations for the Final Solution began in August 1941 at the latest.”

Preparations began immediately. Preparations were of many kinds and many different areas of preparation. Not only were preparations begun in Eichmann’s department and in Heydrich’s department, but also Heinrich Himmler himself wanted to have a hand in doing this. This is such an honorable undertaking, after all; the greatest thing in the world to destroy the Jews and eliminate this great menace from the world. So he authorized, or rather instructed, an individual by the name of Odilo Globocnik to start immediately to investigate the construction of the extermination camps. The fact that the Final Solution would be by means of gassing the Jews was a given. The given came about from experience that the Nazis had from several years previously, starting in 1939, from a program known as the T4 Program. T4 stands for an address, No. 4 Tiergartenstrasse, which was ostensibly a medical building, a medical office, but the doctors in this medical office had only one primary job, which was to create death certificates, imaginary death certificates: Hans died from an embolism, or Gerta died from blood poisoning, or whatever you want.

The T4 Program was a program of eugenics because the great Aryan race could not possibly have people that had some deficiencies. Deficiencies of a physical kind were bad, but for some reason the Nazis considered the deficiencies of a mental kind were even worse, and so the T4 Program murdered between 80,000 and 100,000 German mental patients. They were gassed using compressed carbon monoxide gas. They were gassed in small gas chambers. Their bodies were cremated, and then a death certificate would be sent out that your son, your daughter, your sister, whoever, died from heart failure, or whatever the case may be. Eventually, word got out—people found out. There was a great outcry, and the program was stopped in 1941, but the experience showed that this was the way to kill people. The experience from the Einsatzgruppen, as I will tell you later, was that you could not kill enough people this way; it was just too difficult. So the idea of the investigation was not how are we going to kill them, but what are the specifics.

So Globocnik went out, and he started investigating where would he put these extermination camps. Location is important. They had to be on a railroad track because he had to move the victims in by rail. They had to be in a remote area. You wouldn't put this place in the middle of a city with all the killings and the burning of the bodies. You wanted it close to a center of heavy Jewish concentration so you wouldn't have to move the victims a great distance—and many, many things of that nature. He started investigating, and he started building some places, and he started investigating procedures for gassing. They investigated many things—for example, in one area they tried mobile, sealed hermetic vans. The idea was that the van would come into the camp where the Jews were concentrated. The Jews would be told we are moving you someplace else and get them to the truck. They get into the truck, the door is closed, the truck is hermetically sealed, and the exhaust is piped back into the truck. Half an hour later, they get to wherever the bodies needed to be disposed of, and the people in the truck are already dead. They take them out and they dispose of the bodies. That was one way.

Another way was with gassing in stationary facilities. They tried little gas chambers and big gas chambers. And they tried different ways of moving the people through the gas chambers. How do they get their clothing off? How do they get the gold from their teeth off? And all of these kinds of things. They tried different means of killing them. They tried different engines. Let's say, diesel submarine engines, and all sorts of stuff like that. So there was a lot of experimentation, and extermination started in late 1941. Eventually, Globocnik's operation was taken over by Heydrich—Himmler started it—and it became known as Operation Reinhard, which is the first name of Heydrich—Reinhard Heydrich. Globocnik eventually was responsible for five camps: Sobibor, Chelmno, Majdanek, Belzec and Treblinka. All these camps, except for Treblinka, went through heavy experimental stages. They killed a lot of people. So we have Globocnik going around experimenting and killing Jews, starting in late 1941. Greater numbers started to be killed in 1942, with some significant numbers in March and even greater numbers in May. But throughout we have sort of a strange amalgam—it's very difficult to tell when something started on a real basis because they kept experimenting and adjusting things. Globocnik was never happy with the results until he combined information from the different camps and experience and built Treblinka.

Treblinka was a most unusual camp. It was a fairly small camp, and it was represented to the victims as a way station. Treblinka was chosen for its location because it was close to Warsaw, and there were many Jews in Warsaw. So the victims would be brought in, they would be told this is just a station on the way to wherever you are going. There was a railroad there; there was a station with all kinds of signs—this sign goes to here, this sign goes to there; and this is where you buy tickets to here and to there—it looked like a real station. There were a few small buildings; you don't need big buildings because you are not going to stay here. You are going to have a rest here. So get out of the cars and have a shower, and all this kind of stuff, and of course they were killed. Treblinka was small. It was also low-tech. It didn't have any fancy machinery. The bodies were burned in ditches. There was a very heavy reliance on the Jewish Sonderkommando, which was the people that treat and deal with the bodies. In spite of all of this, Treblinka was in existence for a short time—a little bit over a year from July 23, 1942, through August 3, 1943. Yet, the documentation proved a minimum of 700,000 dead. Most historians state it was at least 800,000, some even as high as 1.4 million, but quite a few people killed in that small time frame. The interesting part, or the part that is important to us, is that Treblinka had a very definite beginning time. They tested it out, they combined experience from the other camps, and finally Globocnik brought in the experts from the T4 program. He decided to use the same procedure, the carbon monoxide gas. In fact, some of the installations from the T4 were dismantled and brought to Treblinka, and Treblinka became operational on July 23, 1942, when the very first transport of Jews from Warsaw were brought in and killed, and of course you can see where I am going: July 23, 1942, is Tisha B'Av. That's when Treblinka became operational.

The reason Treblinka stopped its operations just a year later is because of a successful rebellion in Treblinka. There were revolts and rebellions in all the camps and in the ghettos. Of course, the best known is the rebellion in the Warsaw Ghetto. There was a major rebellion also in Auschwitz, which I will tell you about in a moment. But the one at Treblinka was probably the most successful if we choose success as achieving its original objective. Maybe the Warsaw Ghetto also fits those criteria because the people who fought in the Warsaw Ghetto didn't expect to succeed. They just wanted to show the world that Jews could fight, so they succeeded in that as well. There was a rebellion in Auschwitz, which was not successful in achieving its objective. The objective in Auschwitz and the objective in Treblinka both were to destroy the facilities so

they could not be used further. The one in Auschwitz did not succeed because the facilities were very massive and extremely well built, and that was not the case in Treblinka. The Sonderkommando obtained a quantity of gasoline, which they sprinkled or poured into various strategic places. They also obtained several hand grenades, which were used as incendiary devices. They lit the gasoline on fire with these grenades, and a great fire went up and Treblinka basically burned down to the ground. The Nazis kept the camp open for about a month after that to see if they could rebuild it. They decided they couldn't, so it was closed completely. So we have one camp with a very specific beginning and ending, and the specific beginning is on Tisha B'Av.

Auschwitz is in a different category. Auschwitz is not part of Globocnik's camps. The SS started it personally. It was a camp where the commandant of Auschwitz, by the name of Hoess, was approached to see if a major camp could be made there. The reason Auschwitz is so well known is because it was several camps: Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II and Auschwitz III. Auschwitz was really a slave labor camp, which you might call a death camp because people didn't survive there for very long at all. There were tens of thousands of people in Auschwitz, and they worked for the I. G. Farben program, a chemical organization. One of their main products was artificial rubber, Buna rubber works. Himmler was interested in using slave labor for that as well as for extermination. So he told Hoess to build an extermination camp close by, which came to be known as Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Himmler had all the money he wanted, and he wanted only the best, so he initiated a very high-tech facility. Auschwitz was built with reinforced concrete walls, multiple walls with very large gas chambers, huge gas chambers, with mechanical handlers for the bodies with very large crematoria built by Topf & Son; they were also involved in building some of the gas chambers; many mechanical aspects in Auschwitz. They started killing people experimentally with Zyklon-B, which was a prussic acid. Early in September 1941 they killed 600 Soviet prisoners with Zyklon-B in Auschwitz I. This is not the real extermination camp; that wasn't built until later. Heinrich Himmler came for multiple inspections because this was his big thing, and Hoess was very happy because he was working for Himmler himself. But the real stuff, the major, major effort didn't start until January 1943, where serious deportations came to Auschwitz, and the big killing actually didn't come until 1944, when 585,000 Jews between April 1944 and November 1944 were sent to Auschwitz. This would involve the Hungarian Jews and others.

So Auschwitz was a minor camp in terms of killing through the time when Treblinka was operating because of difficulties in making all the high-tech stuff work. Eventually, when everything was working the way it was intended, this was a very powerful camp. But things were not handed over until very late. For example, March 22, 1943, Crematorium 4 is handed over as a workable operation. April 1, 1943, we have another one; April 4 was Krema 5; June 24, 1943, Krema 3, and so on and so forth, all through late 1942 and 1943. The big push was in 1944, when Auschwitz could handle its full capacity of 12,000 dead a day. Treblinka could only handle a maximum capacity of 5,000 a day. Nevertheless, they operated at a steady, steady rate, and they were killing roughly 3,000 a day for over a year, and their total rate of killing is not that far below Auschwitz, which is given at 1.1 million minimum and 2 million likely, whereas Treblinka is 700,000 minimum and maybe as much as 1.4 million.

There is some interesting testimony where the commandant of Treblinka, Hoess, testifies at his trial at Nuremberg. And he tells what he did and how he did it. And he says that, "I visited Treblinka to find out how they carried out their extermination." He says that the commandant of Treblinka, and I quote again: "He used monoxide gas. I did not think that his methods were very efficient. So when I set up the extermination building at Auschwitz, I used Zyklon-B, which was a crystalline prussic acid that was dropped into the death chamber through a small opening. It took from three to fifteen minutes to kill the people in the death chamber, depending upon climatic conditions. We knew when the people were dead because the screaming stopped." That's how they knew they were dead. Then he goes on to explain how the gold was extracted from the corpses, and so on and so forth. And then he is boasting about another improvement that he made. He says, "Another improvement we made over Treblinka was that we built our gas chambers to accommodate two thousand at one time, whereas at Treblinka their ten gas chambers accommodated two hundred people each." So that's the difference between Treblinka and Auschwitz.

We don't know which camp and which killing can constitute "the beginning of those killings," and of course we don't need it for a connection to Tisha B'Av because we have the documentation. But it is to be noted that the only camp that managed to have a specific date is Treblinka, and it started precisely at Tisha B'Av. I should also tell you about the revolt in Auschwitz, which I said I would. I think it was Sonderkommando No. 12 in Auschwitz that initiated the attack. They were able to obtain some explosives, and of course they knew they would all

be killed. Nevertheless, they wanted to destroy the operational procedures there. They managed to blow up Crematorium No. 4, but it really didn't do that much because Auschwitz was built in such a sturdy manner and there were so many facilities and Kremas. The Sonderkommando members were killed, but I think one or two actually survived because some of them tried to escape, and so we have the evidence of what happened. But the real heroes of that attack are actually four women, or young girls. They worked in the munitions factory, and they managed to supply the explosives. Later on, the investigation showed that that's how it happened. They were tortured to get them to reveal who did the smuggling, but none of them revealed anything, even though being tortured by the experts, and they died. So that was Auschwitz. They tried to destroy the camp, but they did not succeed. Of course, had the railroad lines been bombed or the camp been bombed, there would be a different story. As a consequence, a huge number were murdered; over a million were murdered after this case. Most actually were killed in Auschwitz in 1944.

I would now like to discuss the Wannsee Conference, which is not part of the original lecture on Tisha B'Av. This was left out for time. Heydrich received his instructions and authorization from Göring dated July 31, 1941, but he appeared to do nothing for a long time. Of course, that is not true. The procedures to establish how to carry out the Final Solution proceeded immediately. But Heydrich needed the cooperation of various governmental departments, and he had to get together with these people and their representatives to ensure that this would happen. Eventually, he called for a meeting. The letter for the meeting is dated November 29, 1941, which is quite a long time after he received his document from Göring, but it may well be that the reason he did it this way is so that he would have tangible information to give to the participants. The meeting was ostensibly called for the purpose of consultation and agreement on procedures. But Heydrich didn't really want consultation. What he wanted is agreement that he is in charge and all will cooperate. So he needed things to happen. The letter went out. It was supposed to take place on December 9 in the International Police Station at No. 56-58 in the Grossen Wannsee, a suburb of Berlin, and that is why this is called the Wannsee Conference, but the meeting had to be postponed at the very last moment because of two world events. One was a major Russian offensive on December 5th that had everybody occupied, and the other, of course, is the attack by Japan on the United States on December 7, 1941. So we have the Russian attack in December 5th and the Japanese attack on December 7th. People could not leave to come to this big meeting, and, in fact, Germany declared war on the

United States on December 11. So, many things happened. The conference did take place on January 20th, and we know a great deal about it because of Eichmann's testimony. Eichmann was there. He helped prepare the documentation for the conference, and he prepared the minutes from the conference. This was one of his great triumphs because everything went perfectly, nobody complained, nobody objected; they were just all happy and eager to exterminate the Jews, and they promised to cooperate fully with Heydrich. Heydrich was very happy with how it went, and afterwards he sat down and had a drink with Eichmann, which had never happened before, apparently. So Eichmann felt very pleased with the results. This was the meeting.

Now, there are some interesting things connected with this date of November. Several things happened in November. One thing was the fact of this meeting; another thing is a meeting that Adolf Hitler had on November 28th, one day before Heydrich sent out the letter. Apparently, there were enough results from the field operations for the Final Solution by November, and people felt a need to extend the "people in the know"—the group of people who know—and they started talking about it. So Heydrich sent out the letter to discuss the matter with various functionaries from other departments. There were fifteen individuals at this meeting in Wannsee. And, on November 28th—it may be a coincidence—the day before Heydrich sent out his letter, or dated his letter, Adolf Hitler met with the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini. Hitler informed the Mufti that Germany intended to, and would very soon, conquer the areas that the Mufti was interested in—the areas of the Middle East. Then Hitler made the following statement:

“Germany's objective would then be solely the destruction of the Jewish element residing in the Arab sphere under the protection of British power.”

And Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, was very happy to pledge his cooperation and that he would work with the Germans to exterminate the Jews. In fact, there was a sixth Einsatzgruppe organized. You'll see later when I talk about the Einsatzgruppen. They were supposed to go in and do this job, and, presumably, the Arab followers of the Mufti would be involved in helping him do it. We also have a briefing to the news media in Germany by Alfred Rosenberg, also in November, that I will discuss later, when I talk about the Einsatzgruppen. But all of these things seem to coalesce where things are happening in November.

Now, there is a connection between the Holocaust and Purim. There are several connections, but there are two connections I want to bring out. I have already indicated that this decree, or instruction, or authorization from Göring to Heydrich is frequently identified as a letter. It was identified as a letter in the quote I gave you from Lozowick. It was identified as a letter in the quote I gave you from Lipstadt. It was identified as a letter in the trial proceedings of Adolf Eichmann. I will read to you from a section of the judgment of Adolf Eichmann. The first page of the judgment says:

“In the District Court of Jerusalem, Criminal Case No. 40/60, the Accused, Adolf, son of Karl Adolf Eichmann.”

On page 118 (it is a long judgment), Section 81 of the Judgment reads as follows (I should note that document T/179 is this letter from Göring to Heydrich—that’s the documentary numbering in the files of the Eichmann trial):

“We have stressed the connection between the cessation of emigration and the extermination order because this is important for the understanding of document T/179, which is one of the basic documents in the history of the extermination. This is Heydrich’s letter of appointment from Göring.”

*Letter.* Everybody, well, not everybody, but it is very frequently called a letter. The letter was not sent by the mail. That is for sure. It was either sent by messenger or picked up by Heydrich himself, so he acted as his own messenger. This letter was instructions to kill, to destroy, to exterminate all the Jews, young and old, men and women, and to take their possessions. They certainly took their possessions; they took their property, they took their clothing, they took the gold out of their teeth. In many cases, the women were shaved in the extermination camp because hair had important chemical properties. This was a time before the artificial fibers that we have today, so hair was an important war material, and the women were shaved. They plundered everything that they had.

Now, I read from Megillat Esther, Chapter 3:13, and I will read the English directly. This is the ArtScroll translation.

“Letters were sent by courier to all the provinces of the king, to

destroy, to slay and to exterminate all the Jews, from young to old, children and women, in one day, the 13th of the 12th month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions.”

This is identical to the Final Solution document except for one difference. The difference is the date. The document of Purim is in the month of Adar; the document of the Holocaust is in the month of Av. It's beyond my level and certainly outside of the scope of this discussion to examine why one decree was rescinded and reversed and one was left to stay. But it's remarkable how these two decrees are similar, almost identical, except for this question of the dating of the decrees.

Another connection between the Holocaust and Purim is for those who survived. I want to call your attention to it as we examine my story, which I am about to go into. Purim seems to be a collection of coincidences. Things happened for no apparent reason. Things happened without any explanation of what they mean or without any immediate understanding of what they mean. Things just kind of happened. It was just coincidences. Yet, by the time we are done, all these coincidences add up to something monumental to the survival of the Jewish people. All the stories from survivors of the Holocaust are stories that differ from each other. My story is different from somebody else's story, obviously; the details are different. But the structure is the same. All the stories will have a structure where things happened by apparent coincidence. This happens and that happens. And that happens and that happens. And then something happens which is very, very bad. It is terrible. It's not something that you want. But you go forward a number of days, a month or, in one case for me, twenty years, and that which was so very, very bad turns out to be the difference between death and life.

So, as I tell you my story, you need to look at these coincidences and ponder what they mean.

Before I go into it, there is one other thing I want to say, which I neglected to say, and I think I should say. I'm speaking today not as a historian, though I have gone through a lot of historical material, and I will go through some more when I talk about the Einsatzgruppen. I'm speaking today as a survivor. I am a witness. I was there. And I can say the words, “My eyes have seen the affliction.” This last statement, of course, is not mine. It is borrowed, paraphrased, if you will, from a statement of the prophet Jeremiah, the prophet of Tisha B'Av, the prophet of

Eichah that we read last night as we sat on the floor. He said the same thing: “My eyes have seen the affliction.” It is remarkable that I and other survivors can say something today that was said 2,600 years ago, and all the generations in between, because we’ve had many afflictions, and there are many eyes who have seen it, and there are many eyes who died in these afflictions. And they are all connected together. The Shoah is absolutely part and parcel of Tisha B’Av.

## **My Story Begins**

And now, I will begin my personal story.

I was born in 1935 in the shtetl of Podbrodz (Podbrodzie in Polish, Pabrade in Lithuanian). About 50 kilometers—that’s 30 miles—east of the great city of Vilna, a great city of Jewish learning and culture known as the Jerusalem of Lithuania. Podbrodz had 1,000 Jews—996, according to the census before World War II, in an area of some 5,000 to 6,000 people, so it’s about 15 to 20 percent Jewish. The area of Vilna is disputed between Poland and Lithuania. There were many wars between Poland and Lithuania; the area changed hands a number of times. It is generally considered to be historically Lithuanian, but at different times it was controlled by Poland. Indeed, after World War I it was handed over to Poland, so when I was born there, it was Poland. The shtetl—a thousand Jews is a big shtetl, it is not a little thing. Many shtetlach were 100 Jews or something. And it was completely self-sufficient, or as much as you can say that. Everything was there. There was a Jewish doctor there. We had a major Jewish library. There was a Jewish volunteer fire department, very important because the houses were of wood and the roofs were straw. We had a city, or shtetl, rabbi; this is Rav Moshe Persky, z”l. There was everything you needed to lead a Jewish life. There were two synagogues; the old one across the river, that was the major one. For some reason the Jews migrated to a different part of town, and another synagogue was built because of the convenience, so there were two shuls.

The town is on the confluence of two rivers: the Shimyana and the Dubinka, and also a railroad track going in the other direction. The railroad is very important. The railroad went into Vilna and all the way into Russia. A beautiful, beautiful area surrounded by woods with many vacation homes. People from Vilna would come there on vacation. The place was very primitive by our standards. There was no indoor plumbing. There was no indoor water. Water was brought in from

the well. I remember the well, a round well, where you brought the water up in a bucket, and that is how it was, and nobody thought it was anything peculiar. If people are essentially old enough to remember a time without cell phones, you certainly didn't think it was peculiar then. Some people today are still surprised that they don't have a cell phone or they don't have texting or a Blackberry, or whatever the case may be. But it is what it is, and everything was perfectly normal. Of course, going out in the winter to get water was treacherous because the water would spill and it would freeze and it would be slippery. But this is how the town was. There was one very rich person in town, and he was a great Ba'al Tzedaka; almost all of the poor of the town depended on him. There were maybe half a dozen relatively rich people, maybe 50 or 100 families of middle class and in decent shape. My grandfather was one of those. You'll see in a moment why that was important. And then very, very poor people. Very, very poor, surviving as best they could; some just living off what they got from the tourists during the summer months, and then they had to survive on that the whole year. It was a tough place to be. But, it was a normal shtetl, and that's how life was.

The area was considered a part of historical Lithuania, even though it was officially part of Poland at the time, and it came under Russian control in the arrangement that the Communists and the Nazis made when they signed a non-aggression pact. When Germany came into Poland, the Russians came into the Baltic States, including the area around Vilna. So in 1939, we became part of Russia, or under the control of Russia. Russia immediately handed the area over to Lithuania, and the Lithuanians, who were so ecstatic and such great lovers of the Communists, immediately petitioned to become part of the USSR, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and it became part of the Republics, so it was part of Russia now. And there were not that many changes. The Russians did look out for people who they considered being anti-Communist, and they deported them to Siberia. There was a Jewish druggist, who they considered as one of the rich people, and they sent him to Siberia, which saved his life because he survived the war.

It turns out that in this shtetl there was a certain Pole (the people were divided between Poles and Lithuanians, and they didn't have such great relations because of the wars between Poland and Lithuania, but they got along, with a smattering of some other people in between). There was a Pole there who was a Polish patriot, and he was a loudmouthed Polish patriot. He let people know what he thought; Poland was for the Polish. Poland was for the Poles; not for the Lithuanians, not

for Communist Russia, which periodically invaded the area. He wasn't a great friend of Jews, either, because, after all, Jews are not Poles, but he didn't mind if Jews lived there as long as they knew who was in charge, who was the boss. So he was on the list as being anti-Russian or anti-Communist. When they made the list of people to be deported to Siberia, they decided that he was going to be deported. I don't know how he found out, but he found out, and he ran to a Jew. I can't believe that he was a friend because he was not exactly friendly to Jews, but they got along well. I don't know how they knew each other; maybe some work or business. And he asked the Jew to hide him. And the Jew agreed to it; he let him stay in his house for a few weeks, and the Russians did their stuff, they sent people to Siberia and they went on to the next thing, and they forgot all about him. That's how it was. So, after a month he was out again and laid low, and nobody bothered him.

Now, Germany invades the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. They come in immediately; the Russians just disappear, and the Germans come right away. Behind the armed forces are the Einsatzgruppen; the Baltic areas, including the Vilna area, is under Einsatzgruppe A, under the command of Dr. Franz Walter Stahlecker, the bloodiest Einsatzgruppe of all four Einsatzgruppen. And the Jews are put into a ghetto, which is a few streets, basically a family to a room. There is no wall around the ghetto, presumably because they knew it wouldn't be around that long. But of course we had to stay in the ghetto. If you went outside, the penalty was to be shot. We had to wear a yellow star. We had very primitive yellow stars, homemade, nothing fancy like you see later, and I have one of the fancy ones, which I will show later, that comes from another place. We were there. People had to work, and it was very difficult, of course. There was no food. But it didn't last that long. Because on September 26, 1941, which is a Friday, a group of Lithuanians that is a detachment of what is known as Shaulists, which as I understand it means "riflemen" in Lithuanian (I don't speak Lithuanian, so I cannot vouch for this translation, but that's what it says in the books), came, surrounded the ghetto, and started taking the Jews away. The Shaulists were there, working on behalf of Einsatzgruppe A. Why this Einsatzgruppe used local people, local helpers, will become clear later, and this saved our lives because the organization of these people, including some people from Podbrodz, was made known to the functionary.

Now, when the Germans came in, they looked at the lists that the Russians had made, and they saw that this particular individual that I discussed before, this Pole,

was on the list to be deported to Russia. On the theory that the “enemy of my enemy is my friend,” they decided that this guy is so anti-Communist and hates the Russians so much that he was going to be deported to Siberia, then surely he can be one of our people, and they gave him a job; he was a minor functionary of some sort. He heard in this job that something is going on—the Lithuanians are organizing to come into the ghetto and take away the Jews. He wasn’t sure what it was, but he came to this person who hid him and said, “I owe you. Here’s what’s going to happen. This is very secret information. Don’t tell it to anybody.” And he left. Of course, the Jew told it to everybody that he could. As a consequence, many, many Jews escaped; most of them were caught. You’ll see how and why in a moment, at least some of it, so not that many survived. Nevertheless, the survival rate from Podbrodz was much higher than the general area of Vilna, where the survival rate was 4 percent; 96 percent of the Jews of the area were killed. And of these there were very, very few children because children were very difficult to hide. So, I am an anomaly, a very small percentage of a very small percentage. And why this happened will become clear a little bit later.

So, anyway, the word came out that something was about to happen. This was Friday, September 26. The next day is Shabbat—a special Shabbat, Shabbat Shuva. Shabbat between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. I remember my mother was cooking some food for Shabbat, and a decision was made between my parents. A decision was made between my parents; I’m not sure my mother was happy with the decision. But anyway, the decision was that my mother and my older brother, who was almost twelve, who was basically twelve years, and I would get out of the ghetto and go to a certain farmhouse where we knew the people and the people knew us, and she would ask to stay there overnight. My father would see what is going on. The concern that many Jews had was that there were several false alarms before, created by looters, and then they would come in and loot whatever little bit of possessions the Jews still had. So he wanted to stick around. He felt confident that he could get out. He was a very confident person and physically very active. You will see why a little later. And he thought that even if the Lithuanians came and surrounded the ghetto, he knew all kinds of little alleyways and whatever that they didn’t know, and he would get out. So he sent us away. So we walked out of the ghetto. We got into the main street, basically the main road, unpaved highway, so to speak, that goes into Vilna. And we’re walking right in the middle of the highway. German cars and soldiers are passing by. They didn’t care. They didn’t pay any attention. We had taken off our yellow stars, which is a shooting offense, of course. But nobody bothered us. There was

nobody there yet. We just kept walking. About an hour later, we get to the farmhouse. There is a woman and a boy, a teenage boy, maybe fifteen to sixteen years old. There was no man. There is a difference of opinion between my brother and myself. Neither one of us really knew where the man was. I somehow had the impression from my parents that there was no man, that she was a widow. My brother thinks that is not true, but the farmer was away. In any event, all there was at the farm was the woman and the young boy. My mother asked to stay there over the night. The woman wasn't happy about it; she was afraid. But she was a good person, so she said all right. "Go into the barn and I don't want to know anything about it." So we go into the barn. It's not a good evening; it's not a good night. My father didn't come. We hear some shots, things are happening; it's not good. It looks like Father is dead because he didn't get out.

In the morning there are cracks in the walls of this barn. We see somebody approaching, an armed individual—he has a gun. He is not a German. It turned out to be one of the Lithuanians. The woman saw him coming over. She comes out into the courtyard. She greets him. We found out later something of the conversation. This is a reconstruction; obviously I did not hear the real conversation. But it went something like this:

He said, "Are there any Jews here?"

And she said, "What do I want with these accursed Jews? Who cares about the Jews?"

He said, "I've been running around all night chasing Jews. They've been running, escaping, and I have to find them, and it's hard work, but I have to find the Jews. Have you seen any Jews?"

She says, "No, I have nothing to do with Jews."

He says, "Well, how about your buildings? How about your barn? Is it locked?"

She says, "No, we don't lock our barn."

He says, "Well, then, let me take a look because maybe the Jews sneaked in, even if you didn't know."

She says, "Well, you can look anyplace you want, but you look very tired. You've been working hard."

He says, "Yes, I've been going at it all night."

She says, "Well, in that case, come into the house. I'll give you some breakfast,

you'll feel stronger, and then you can go look for Jews."

He thought it was a good idea. He goes into the house, he sits down at the table, his back is to the window. The woman goes over to her son. She says, "Get them out of the barn, get them in the rowboat and across the river." The farm was right next to a river, next to one of these rivers. The boy comes in, he tells us what happened, we go out of the barn, we go across the clearing, and we see him through the window. He is sitting there eating. But his back is to the window. We get into the rowboat, and this kid is rowing. He is trying to get us across the river. For reasons we don't know, this Lithuanian gets up to stretch or whatever, he looks through the window, and he sees us on the river. He runs out and starts shouting at the boy, "You've got to come back; you've got to come back." The boy is brave; we're almost at the other side. He rows a little more, maybe thirty seconds. We get out of the rowboat and start running as fast as we can. A woman and two children. The rowboat now comes back. The boy isn't so brave any more. The Lithuanian gets in, they go across the river, and the Lithuanian starts chasing after us. But before he catches us, we get into the woods there. We start running into the woods. He comes into the woods and starts shooting. We can hear the shots. I don't know if he saw us and he missed or if he was just shooting blind. Whatever the case may be, he started shooting. We keep running. We're running, running, running. It's hard to run. So, we're in the woods, we're running, we've lost the Lithuanian who was chasing us, but we're also lost in the woods. We don't know where we are. We don't know what to do. Of course, when I say "we," I had nothing to do with it. I was a little boy, and my mother was the one who had to make these decisions. She was not a person that was used to running around in the woods, and she surely didn't know where she was or what to do. We're lost in the woods, but at least the Lithuanian did not find us.

Going back to my father now. He is in the ghetto, and he sees that suddenly there are a lot of Lithuanians going around taking the Jews away. It's the real thing, just as he was told. He needs to get out. So he tries. But all his ingenuity is to no avail. He cannot get out. All the alleyways, all the little places that he thought he could crawl through—they are all blocked. They are blocked because there are so many of them. There are many, many Lithuanians. It's not like Einsatzkommandos that had few people. These people were many, and they just surrounded everything. He could not get out. So now his job is not to get out but to evade these people. He has to try to escape. He is trying, but they are everywhere. He goes here, they go here. He goes there, they go there. He's just

one step ahead of them all the time, and they keep chasing him. Finally, he runs into an outhouse. There were a number of these around. Remember, no indoor plumbing. So he stays there for a number of hours, and it looks like it might be safe. They're not coming in. Some Lithuanian comes over and starts—he wants to get in. So my father holds the door. I will explain later why my father had such tremendous upper-body strength. He was a short man, about five foot, five inches, but with tremendously strong upper arms and shoulders. He could have done very well as a professional weightlifter. And he held the door with such tremendous strength that the Lithuanian concluded that the door is really jammed, it's not somebody from the inside holding it. And he went away. I don't know why; possibly he actually needed to use the facilities. So he wasn't going to stand around. But in any event he went away, and eventually the place quieted down, and towards the end of Shabbat, late in the afternoon, all the Jews had been taken away, and there were no more Lithuanians. The Jews were taken away along with Jews from other shtetlach in the area. They were brought to an old military training camp called Poligony, and some 800 Jews from Podbrodz and some 2,000 from other areas; over 3,000 Jews total, according to the history books, were killed in Poligony. The history books claim that it all happened on September 26th. I say that that is wrong because I know for a fact that many of the Jews were not picked up until the next day. Many of the Jews were held overnight and brought that next day, so in my estimation the primary killing was on Shabbos Shuva on September 27th. In any event, that is what happened to the Jews of Podbrodz.

The coast seems clear that there are not that many of them around any more. My father sneaks out, and he goes through back ways and alleyways. He does know his way around. He obviously does not go through the main road that we went through, so he sneaks around. He eventually comes to the farmhouse. The woman and her teenage son are there. This was good news later on for us and for me because I understood the implications. Because it means that the Lithuanian did not come and harm them. I don't know why not. Maybe he himself got lost in the woods and ended up someplace else, and he wasn't going to run to find this farmhouse because he was tired. But whatever the reason, they were not harmed for helping us. So my father comes to the woman, and he asks her, "Were my wife and children here?" And she says, "Yes, they came here." He asks, "Where are they?" She says, "I'm sorry to tell you they are dead." He says, "What do you mean they are dead? How are they dead?" She says, "The Lithuanian came and he shot them." He says, "He shot them? Where are they? Where are their bodies? What happened?" She says, "I don't know where are their bodies. They

were shot over there in the woods across the river.” He says, “In the woods? But you can’t see in the woods. How do you know that they were shot?” She says, “Of course they were shot. A woman with little kids, one little young child, and he ran after them in the woods and I heard the shot. He killed them. I heard multiple shots. They’re dead.”

My father can’t do anything about it. He says thank you to the woman. And he starts a long trek of twenty miles to the farmhouse of Adam Sienkiewicz. Adam Sienkiewicz is somebody that you will meet in a little bit, and you will understand what the connection was. My father arrives there at night; it’s late at night. There are dogs on the farm, but the dogs don’t bark—they don’t make a noise because they know my father. It will become clear later why the dogs know my father. It will become clear later why the Sienkiewiczes took my father in and helped him. It will become clear later why my father was so strong with upper-body strength. It will become clear later why my father hid in open sight. He took on a different name so the children wouldn’t give him away. He pretended to be somebody that came from another village that was destroyed in the war and he just worked there as a farmhand. And he knew his way around the farm; he could work there. And it will become clear later why this also happened. So my father is at the farm.

We’re in the woods. We don’t know what to do. We are escaping from the Einsatzgruppen and their Lithuanian helpers who are trying to kill us. My father thinks we are dead, or at least he was told we are dead. He doesn’t accept it. As you will see later, he did not accept it, and he eventually found us. We don’t know whether father is dead. Again, hard to accept, but he should be because he did not get out of the ghetto. And so we are totally separated. And the people, the issue that is involved here is the Einsatzgruppen. So I will take a digression. I’ll go on a side road for a while to explain something about the Einsatzgruppen, and I will then go back and finish my story so that it will have more context, as you will see what it is that we were facing and what the Einsatzgruppen were about.

## **The Einsatzgruppen**

Einsatzgruppen means special action squad, and there are four such squads. In fact, six were organized on paper. The fifth one was to go into England when England was invaded, but of course Germany never invaded England, so that one never came to be. The sixth one was to go into the Middle East—presumably

those were the people who would be helped by the Mufti, as I discussed before, and they were supposed to kill the Jews in the Yishuv; they were supposed to kill the Jews in Palestine. That did not happen because Rommel was stopped at El Alamein. Had he not been stopped at El Alamein, it would have been very bad. So that is an important victory at El Alamein. At about the same time as El Alamein was also the Russian victory at Stalingrad, which was very important for our survival, as you will see later.

So only four Einsatzgruppen were formed. The Einsatzgruppen had a mission to go behind the German soldiers and kill the enemies of the Reich. Now, there were Einsatzgruppen sent into Poland in 1939; these killed many Jews, but their mission was somewhat different. They primarily were to destroy the Polish state, the Polish leaders, and they killed many, many Poles. And they killed Jews along the way, too, many thousands, because, you know, if you find a Jew, a good Jew is a dead Jew, so you might as well kill them. But this was not the main thing.

These Einsatzgruppen that came after the Russians had a slightly different mission. They were to kill the enemies of the Reich, as I said—Communists; all Communist functionaries; saboteurs, of course; partisans, of course; all sorts of undesirable people. They killed people in mental asylums; they just didn't like people in mental asylums. And the Jews, which were equated with Communists. Jews were just enemies of the Reich, as you will see in a little bit when I tell you more and provide some evidence, some of the testimony at the Nuremberg trials of the Einsatzgruppen commanders.

There are four groups; each group was divided into four sections. The sections were two Sonderkommandos and two Einsatzkommandos. We won't go into the details of the technical difference between a Sonderkommando and an Einstzkommando; they had different functions and different relationships with the troops, but for the Jews it made no difference. They just went around killing the Jews. So there was a main commander and four sub-commanders, and there were four of those, which makes twenty commanders. In reality, there were twenty-one commanders because a special Einsatzkommando was organized to go into Moscow. That one didn't have much work to do. They didn't kill that many people because Moscow was never captured. In fact, the commander of this group, by the name of Dr. Six (Six is his name, not the number), got a fairly light sentence—I can't recall what it is—at Nuremberg because they didn't kill that many people and didn't do that much damage. They only killed some number of

thousands, not hundreds of thousands. Now, out of these twenty-one people, we had eleven doctoral degrees. Half of these people have PhDs. Imagine this, at a time when the majority of Germans, and other people as well, I think, did not finish high school, to get a doctoral degree was a very, very major—I mean, this was an unusual thing. Half of the people had doctoral degrees, and most of them had gone to university and had other degrees. I think there were just two who did not go to university, maybe three. The reason is that they were chosen specifically by Himmler and Heydrich to head these groups because they had organized something specific and it had to be done just right; they had to do it in a way which was exemplary and for the right reasons.

We have an explanation of the kind of people that they chose. We know that on November 15, Heinrich Himmler and Alfred Rosenberg met and had a long discussion. Himmler apparently briefed Rosenberg on what was going on, and three days later, November 18, Rosenberg held a major briefing for journalists. You remember, I told you before that there were a number of meetings or briefings in November because things were happening now in the experimental efforts on the Final Solution, and things were coming to a head, so people had to be briefed. Well, Rosenberg gave a briefing to the journalists. I will read from two parts of this briefing; one had to do with what was to be accomplished, and the other had to do with the kind of people that would accomplish this.

“At the same time, this Eastern territory is called upon to solve a question which is close to the people of Europe. That is the Jewish question. In the east some 6 million Jews still live, and this question can only be solved in a biological eradication of the entire Jewry of Europe.”

And if you think that this quotation, which I am taking, by the way, from Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution*, page 404, if you think that this is a mistranslation, I also have the German here:

“... *diese Frage kann nur geloest warden in eine biologischen Ausmerzung des gesamten Judentums in Europa...*”

To continue in another part: “You can imagine that for the implementation of these measures only those men are assigned who can conceive of the question as a historical fact, who do not act out of personal hatred but rather out of this very

mature, political and historical perspective.” And so, Heydrich and Himmler picked the very best, the most competent, the most energetic, the most knowledgeable, the most educated, the most proficient people to run these Einsatzgruppen, so as to kill as many as possible. The records show that these four Einsatzgruppen, for the two years of their existence, killed a little over a million people. Over 90 percent of these are Jews. That’s the exact record. No doubt some killings took place that were not on the records, and there were other supplementary police units that were sent in by Himmler which killed another half a million or more people. So we’re talking about 1.5 million or so killed by the Einsatzgruppen and their supplements. And there were four gruppen. Group A was the largest, with 900 people. Group D was the smallest, with 500, and the other two 700 people each. Roughly 3,000 people in these Einsatzgruppen; that’s all there were. They were mobile killing squads that went around all over the countryside, killing as many Jews and others as they could find. But the vast majority of the killings were Jews.

The most murderous was Group A because they were the largest, because they had the most Jews in their territory, and because their leader, Stahlecker, used local auxiliaries to help him. This was frowned upon by others. The leader of Einsatzgruppe D, Otto Ohlendorf, of whom you will learn a great deal later, was not happy with that. He felt that this was not honorable because the people didn’t have the right attitude. They were not properly educated as to why the killings should take place, and they were also sloppy. They missed sometimes and created wounded people, which created a lot of difficulties. Ohlendorf was “an honorable man.” He believed that what he did was right and proper and necessary and lawful. He was one of twenty-three Einsatzgruppe commanders who were put on trial in Nuremberg after World War II before a three-judge tribunal. The presiding judge was Justice Michael Musmanno. Justice Musmanno wrote a book about this trial. It’s called *The Eichmann Kommandos*. And I will quote to you some matters from this book. As I noted previously, Einsatzgruppe A was the most murderous in that they killed the most people. We are told that through October 15, 1941, from its beginning, which would be June 22, 1941, when the Germans invaded Russia, Einsatzgruppe A killed a total of 135,567 people, according to their records. Records were kept and sent to Eichmann’s office, where they were compiled and distributed to other places. After World War II, the records in Eichmann’s office disappeared, but a full set of records was found in the Diplomatic Corps files, and these records were used at the trial. Among this 135,567 people, the vast majority were Jews. We are told where they were killed:

Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, White Russia, and so forth. We are told what kind of people were killed; there were all sorts of people, and among these is a statement that 748 lunatics were executed. That's the term that they used for people in mental asylums. So they killed all sorts of enemies of the Reich, people in mental asylums. They also killed orphans in orphanages. Children were enemies, or they just didn't want to have to feed them, and so forth.

By contrast, Otto Ohlendorf, the commander of Einsatzgruppe D, the kommando killed only 90,000 people during the nine months that Ohlendorf was in command. So, big difference. Of course, Ohlendorf did it "honorably." He wouldn't use local auxiliaries. He also was not in a location that had such a high concentration of Jews, and his kommando was much smaller—500 people versus 900 people for Stahlecker's Kommando Group A, which is the group that was involved in the killing of the Jews of Podbrodz.

After World War II, twenty-three of these Einsatzgruppen commanders of various ranks were apprehended and put on trial, as I just told you, the presiding judge, Michael Musmanno, who wrote the book about it, *The Eichmann Kommandos*. I will discuss two individuals who were on trial. They are very interesting in a horrible sort of way. One is Otto Ohlendorf and one is Paul Blobel. Ohlendorf was interesting to Musmanno because he was the only one of the defendants that Musmanno found to be, as he called it, mathematically correct or mathematically accurate. He admitted to whatever he was asked. He didn't seem to hide anything, though in the last ten years we found that he did lie about some things. Historians found some records that show that he did try to somehow make it easier on himself so he would not be hanged. But he was eventually. But on the whole he was mathematically correct. When he was asked how many people his Einsatzkommando had killed, he said 90,000. The actual number, according to the records, is 91,000 plus. Whatever it is; I'm not going to go look for it right now. He was an amazing person in many ways. He was very assured, he was very cool under fire, he did not shirk answering questions. He gave as good as he got from the prosecution. He would debate; he would argue. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of history. He went through history of hundreds of years, explaining why the Jews were the enemies of civilization and especially of the German civilization. He was highly educated with a doctorate, with degrees in law and in economics. Herr Doctor, Professor, Brigadier General Otto Ohlendorf, and here is how Judge Musmanno describes Ohlendorf in his book, *The Eichmann Kommandos*. And I quote:

“On September 15, 1947, the day of arraignment, one of the most remarkable persons ever to appear before the public gaze stepped into the Nuremberg courtroom. Handsome, poised, suave and polite, he carried himself with the bearing of a person endowed with natural dignity and intellect. In the course of his testimony, he was to display the narrative talents of a professional raconteur. Forty years of age, slender and with delicate features and neatly combed dark brown hair, he looked out at the world with penetrating blue-gray eyes. His voice was excellently modulated, his hands well shaped and carefully groomed, and he moved gracefully and self-confidently. The only blemish in the perfection of his personality was that he had killed 90,000 people.”

Later on we are told (and I quote):

“Otto Ohlendorf stood out as the most compelling personality of all of the defendants. He achieved the highest IQ rating among the Nuremberg prisoners. The electric sensation of absolute authority which accompanied military rank never deserted the young major general. Thus even in the courtroom, Ohlendorf wore, and undoubtedly would carry to his grave, the invisible epaulets before which so much of the world had once bowed and scraped in deference, homage and fear.”

Now, why do I want to specifically talk about Ohlendorf, even though he was such an interesting personality? That is not sufficient. My interest in Ohlendorf is his testimony. There is a certain set of testimony that he gave about the need to kill Jewish children, which appears in many books on the Holocaust. It is telling as to what went on and why this was intended to happen. So we need to look at the testimony of Ohlendorf and see what went on here.

Ohlendorf is being examined by a prosecuting attorney by the name of Heath. Here is how Judge Musmanno describes what went on:

“What was the real purpose behind the killing of Jews and Gypsies?”

[I will interpolate to say by Gypsies because Gypsies were killed in family units

just like Jews, and the children were also killed. Hence, Gypsies are involved in this particular question, which eventually gets to the killing of children.]

I go back to my quote:

“‘What was the real purpose behind the killing of Jews and Gypsies?’ Ohlendorf was almost annoyed at questions of this character. Why, it was a measure of self-defense, he explained, in the tone of one who is wasting time explaining that the Earth is round. The Jews posed a continuing danger for the German occupation troops. Moreover, they could someday attack Germany proper and self-preservation dictated their destruction before they began an aggressive march on Berlin.

“Heath was not impressed with this argument. ‘Assume that the Jews of the Besarabia, the Crimea, and the Ukraine could one day shoulder guns against the Germans,’ he said. ‘Assume that their wives should help them. But what about the Jewish children? What about the Gypsy children?’ He fired his question to Ohlendorf.

“Ohlendorf imperturbably replied, ‘According to orders they were to be killed just like their parents.’

“Heath walked away from the witness stand to control his anger at the casualness at which Ohlendorf had made this shocking revelation. Then, turning swiftly on his heel, he fired again at the defendant, ‘Will you explain to this tribunal what conceivable threat to the security of the Wehrmacht, to the Armed Forces, a child constituted in your judgment?’

“Ohlendorf answered in staccato accents, amazed that Heath should still linger on the subject. ‘I believe I cannot add anything to your previous question. I did not have to determine the danger but the order contained that all Jews, including the children, were considered to constitute a danger for the security of this area.’

“But Heath did not let up. ‘Will you agree that there was absolutely no rational basis for killing children except genocide and the killing

of races?’ The atmosphere in the courtroom filled with electric tension. Many spectators lifted their hands to their headsets, pressing on the ear pads as if to increase the volume of sound so as not to lose a word of the reply, which they anticipated would be momentous. Their nervous expectations were fulfilled as Ohlendorf delivered the answer, which set off a murmur of horror.

“I believe that this is very simple to explain if one starts with the fact that this order did not only try to achieve a temporary security but also a permanent security. It was toward that reason the children were people who would grow up and surely being the children of parents who had been killed they would constitute a danger no smaller than that of their parents.’”

So now you know why the Jewish children had to be killed from Brigadier General, Doctor, Professor Otto Ohlendorf, a son to presumably two human parents, a brother to two brothers and one sister, a husband to his wife, and a father to five children. This is what the true believers believed, and this is what they did willingly because, after all, the children were a great danger to the German Reich.

The next individual that I would like to introduce to you is one Paul Blobel. Paul Blobel was not Otto Ohlendorf. He was not mathematically correct. He denied everything. He didn't kill anybody. The reports are all false and wrong, and he wasn't there when various things happened. And the few people he killed, that was necessary and legal because they had trials and tribunals and they were condemned to death and they were just carrying out the execution. Nothing he did was ever a problem, and he didn't kill anybody.

There were records! In the records we find that Blobel was responsible for Babi Yar, a ravine near Kiev, where almost 34,000 Jews were killed in two days of shooting, a record not even equaled by Auschwitz, which had a maximum capacity of 12,000 a day. Blobel was an architect in real life, and he did not have a high command. He did not run a whole Einsatzgruppe. He was in charge of a Sonderkommando 4a attached to Einsatzgruppe C. He appears in many history books, primarily because of his involvement with Babi Yar. Here is how Judge Musmanno describes the Babi Yar massacre. He says:

"Blobel was the evil genius of the notorious Kiev massacre. Sometime in September 1941, the Jews of that city were instructed to appear in the public square on the 29th day of that month with all their belongings since they were to be resettled. They responded in multitudes, eager to rid themselves of a city bewildered and reeling under the battering fist of war. A long procession of trucks rolled up to haul them to their resettlement area where they were immediately taken before the execution rifles. Never had Blobel as an architect planned and executed a building project so efficiently as he did this razing of human life. The victims were spared long delays, the anguish of doubt, the inconveniences of lack of shelter and food, and worry as to what might happen to their property and valuables. So expertly did the ex-builder organize the truck service, the firing squads and the burial pits that at the end of the second day, 33,771 persons had been killed and then entombed. In the meantime, every item of the resettled people's property had been gathered and cataloged not only with governmental survey efficiency, but with the supreme virtue of charity dominating all. And the official report states that money and valuables, underwear and clothing were secured and placed at the disposal of various German organizations meant for charity."

Blobel is described in the book as follows:

"Next to Ohlendorf, Paul Blobel was perhaps the defendant who excited the most notice among the visitors. While Ohlendorf arrested attention because of his good looks, Blobel drew awed glances for the opposite reason. As he sat in the front row of the defendants' dock, his square red beard jutting out ahead like the prow of a piratical ship commanded by himself, his eyes glared with a penetrating intensity of a wild animal at bay. It was hard to believe that this ferocious looking creature was once an architect handling weapons no more lethal than a sliding rule and colored pencils."

Blobel is interesting to us not only because of Babi Yar but because of his testimony. Just as the special testimony that is interesting or important to us from Ohlendorf, so also Blobel. Blobel's testimony dealt with the behavior of the victims. How did they behave during the killings? To understand this matter, we

need to go to an actual killing and see how it transpired, and then we will understand what Blobel is talking about. We don't know if this was Blobel's command, but it was in Einsatzgruppe C because of the location in Ukraine, and who knows, but Blobel's description of what went on is very similar. This is an important testimony which appears in many books. The testimony is quite long; some books have one section, some books have another section. I will stop short of the graphic details where the witness looks at the actual shootings. This is testimony that is important because it is not testimony from one of the killers, and it is not testimony from one of the victims. It is neutral testimony from an outside observer. It turns out that two individuals, two German engineers, one by the name of Hermann Friedrich Graebe and the other only identified by the name of Moennikes, were sent to the Ukraine. They decided to go do some sightseeing. They came earlier, or whatever. They heard something was going on out of town. They went out to investigate, and they came upon an Einsatzkommando killing. Contrary to orders, they were permitted to stay. The orders were to not permit any outsiders to observe or to stay, but they were not bothered at all. We don't know why. And so, they were able to see things, and Graebe testified at Nuremberg. This is part of his testimony:

"Moennikes and I went directly to the pits. Nobody bothered us. Now I heard rifle shots in quick succession. From behind one of the earth mounds, the people who had gotten off the truck, men, women and children of all ages, had to undress upon the orders of an SS man who carried a riding or dog whip. They had to put down their clothes in fixed places, sorted according to shoes, top clothing and under linen. I saw a heap of shoes, about 800 to 1,000 pairs, great piles of underwear and clothing. Without screaming or weeping these people undressed, stood around in family groups, kissed each other, said farewells, and waited for signs from another SS man who stood near the pit also with a whip in his hand. During the fifteen minutes that I stood near the pit, I heard no complaint or plea for mercy. I watched a family of about eight persons, a man and woman, both about 50, with their children of about one, eight and ten, and two grown-up daughters who were about 20 and 24. An old woman, with snow-white hair, was holding the one-year-old child in her arms and singing to it and tickling it. The child was cooing with delight. The couple were looking on with tears in their eyes. The father was holding the hand of the boy, about 10 years old, and

speaking to him softly. The boy was fighting his tears. The father pointed toward the sky and stroked his head and seemed to explain something to him. At that moment, the SS man near the pit shouted something to his comrade. The latter counted off some 20 persons and instructed them to go behind the earth mound. The family I have described was among them. I well remember a girl, slim and with black hair, when she passed me, pointed to herself and said, 'twenty-three years old.'"

I'll stop here. The rest is very bad.

So Bobel was asked about the behavior of the people that they killed. I quote from Judge Musmanno's book:

"How did the people destined to die react to their fate once they became aware of its irrevocable finality? According to defendant Paul Blobel, most of them were silent. Some of the prisoners who were to be shot in the back turned around at that last moment and bravely faced the riflemen. But still they said nothing. The executioners could not understand this muteness."

Then he goes on and he notes that:

"When Blobel commented rather disparagingly on this silence I asked him [the Judge is now asking the question], 'You mean they resigned themselves easily to what was awaiting them?' He replied, 'Yes, that was the case. That was the case with these people. Human life was not as valuable as it was with us. They did not care so much. They did not know their own human value.'

"I winced at this self-satisfied and grim comparison of life values. In other words, they went to their death quite happily.

"I would not say that they were happy. They knew what was going to happen to them. Of course, they were told what was going to happen to them. And they were resigned to their fate. And that is the strange thing about these people in the East.

“And did that make the job easier for you, the fact that they did not resist?”

“In any case, the guards never met any resistance. Everything went very quietly. It took time of course and I must say that our men who took part in these executions suffered more from nervous exhaustion than those who had to be shot. In other words, your pity was more for the men who had to shoot than for the victims. Our men had to be cared for and you felt sorry for them then. Yet these people, the riflemen experienced a lot psychologically.”

That is the testimony of Paul Blobel.

Chazal tell us that there are people who are alive even when their bodies are dead. And there are people who are dead even when their bodies are alive. We know which of these people were the ones I discuss here. And I will tell you that for both Blobel and Ohlendorf, their bodies joined their dead souls three years later, when the verdict of “guilty and sentenced to hang” was carried out three years later, after judicial review and appeals. This is how it was done. This is how the Jews were killed. And this is how they went to Kiddush HaShem.

## **My Story Concludes**

We will now continue with my story, now that we understand what we were facing had we not run away.

So there we are, my mother, my brother, and I in the woods. We had eluded the Lithuanian who was coming after us and shooting at us. We were in these dense woods and we are lost. We're not outdoors, woods-type people who know how to find our way. The woods are thick, they are dense, we can't see anything, and we are just walking. We are not running anymore. We're just walking. But we don't know where we are walking, or at least my mother doesn't know where she is walking. I was just following. Suddenly, way, way in the distance, there is a spire—there is a very tall building, and the tip of the building can just be seen between the trees. It turned out that this spire was the top of a church. My mother followed the direction of this building that we could see, and after a while we came out in a clearing. There was a village there, and in the village there is a

church with a very tall spire or steeple, or whatever you want to call it.

In the vast majority of the churches in the area, the priests preached what you might call a theological anti-Semitism. They didn't necessarily say go kill the Jews, but they preached that the Jews were guilty of killing their deity, and therefore the Jews are guilty of crimes and you could do various things to Jews. However, there was one priest very well known in the area to be a friend of the Jews. I don't know why. I don't know how it came about, but this particular priest did not preach anti-Semitism. On the contrary, he argued the Jews were the original people that started "the Bible," the Bible comes from the Jews and the Jews are connected to their religion, and one needs to be friendly toward the Jews. Now, what are the odds that we would accidentally come upon that church? This happened to be that church with that priest. Had the Lithuanian with the gun not chased us into the forest, we would not have gone in that direction.

So there you have a situation where something that was clearly not desirable, nobody would choose to be chased by a man with a gun shooting at you, yet that particular happening caused us to go into the forest, caused us to run in a certain direction, caused us to see the church, and there we were, at the only place in the whole area where somebody would have a disinterested desire to help us. Of course, we didn't know any of that. My mother just came to the church and knocked on the door. She had no choice. A woman came out. She was the housekeeper. She explained that the priest was not there. He had heard that the Jews were being killed, and he went in to see if he could help in some way. I doubt that he could help, but anyway he went. But he had given her instructions what to do if Jews should happen to show up, if Jews had escaped and they happened to come to the church. And she said what we needed to do was go to a certain place, to a certain house, to a certain individual, tell him that the priest had sent us, and he would help us. So that's about all she said. And she gave instructions, she gave directions to my mother where in the village to go and find this person.

So we went. We got to this house, and the individual happened to be in. He came out. My mother explained that the priest said that he could help us, and he said yes he could. Where did we want to go?

What do you mean where do we want to go?

Where do you want to go? I'll get you there. Where do you want to go?

It turns out that he was one of a whole range of individuals that were part of a smuggler gang, or a smuggler group. Apparently, there were multiple smuggler groups in the area. This was a common thing to do because the area was right on the border, and it was very lucrative to get goods across the porous border between Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus to take advantage of differences in the rate of governmental excise taxes and duties on various items. Saccharin was a common thing to smuggle. It was relatively small, and it was valuable because sugar was virtually impossible to obtain. Cigarettes were a very common thing to smuggle; tobacco products, relatively not heavy, small, and very high taxes. So there were many smugglers, and this individual was part of it. It was apparently a kind of honorable profession. The priest knew who he was and everything was just fine. It was OK to do it, apparently. And this fellow was called an honorable smuggler. He was not out to kill the Jews or anything else. He could have gotten a good bounty by handing us over.

He wanted to know where we wanted to go, and he would help us, but of course you had to pay him. There was a price. He wasn't going to risk his life and spend his time just for nothing, but my mother had taken all her jewelry with her. So, some item of jewelry was handed over, and he said, "Fine, I'll take you. You will have to wait for the night." So, he put us in a place. We hid for the day, and we started to walk at night. It was a difficult walk because it's dark and there are ditches, there are fences, there are obstacles in the road, and he would say, "Be careful here. There is a hole in the ground. There's a ditch here. There's a fence there. You'll have to go across." But he knew all the places. We walked, and walked, and walked.

Eventually we came someplace else. He handed us over to another member of this party. This was apparently how it was done. They didn't just go all the way. There was a whole group, and they would hand the people over, one to the other. In this way, we made our way a couple of weeks—yes, that's how long the trip took. It was a long distance. We have to walk. We couldn't walk all the time. And each time a little piece of jewelry just went, and pretty soon there was practically nothing left. But eventually we ended up in Belarus, in the town or a small city. It wasn't a shtetl, it was bigger than a shtetl, called Soly. Soly had a fairly substantial Jewish population. I don't know how large, but bigger than Podbrodz, and by that time it already had a real ghetto with walls and with guards

and with gates, and the Jews were all registered, and it was a real substantial place, a real ghetto, set up for a longer duration than Podbrodz, which had no walls and no guards and no anything because I guess they knew that the Jews of Podbrodz would not be around that long and it wasn't worth going to all that trouble.

The reason my mother chose to go to this place was that she had a sister there, and so she felt we could get some help. We went into the ghetto. There was no restriction to go in. The restriction was to get out. She tracked down her sister, and my mother went to the Judenrat, to the Jewish council, to tell them who we were and we wanted to join the ghetto. Now, this was illegal. We had done something illegal. We ran away. We escaped. It's not legal to escape. The penalty was death if you disobeyed orders and escaped. Of course, we were escaping from being killed, so now we would be killed for escaping from being killed. The Judenrat was obliged to hand us over. They were not permitted to just accept new visitors to the ghetto. This was not proper. Nevertheless, they registered us, gave us papers, and we became members of the ghetto. I want to emphasize this, and it will happen again a little later when I will say it again.

There are many stories about members of Judenrat in various history books, and almost invariably the stories are not complimentary. The stories are about people who took advantage of their position. They helped themselves, they helped their relatives, they got the better jobs. They were nasty to other Jews. There are all sorts of stories. Some cases were individuals whose character was not the greatest to start with who aspired to these positions of authority. In some cases decent people got into these positions, and pretty soon they became corrupted or they lost their bearings because of personal desires and needs and wanting to help the relatives, and they made preferential arrangements. Whatever the case may be, there are these stories. I want to note that I don't know if these are the exceptions or the rule. I have not made a study, but certainly there were many, many places—I don't know how many villages and towns like this particular town of Soly—in which Jews were forced into untenable, horrible positions of having to be in charge, and they did what they could do to help their fellow Jews. These people didn't ask any questions, and they didn't complain; they just registered us, and we became members of the ghetto, even though it was illegal for them to do so.

My brother registered as fourteen years of age, even though he was just twelve and a half, because at fourteen years you were permitted to work, which means he had

papers, which means he had a work permit, which means he had a ration card and he could get food, and it was much safer to be a registered worker than to be a child. So my mother and my brother became workers. He went to work in a factory. She had an excellent job, and I'm not joking here. It was really the best job she could get, anybody to get, which is to clean the quarters for German officers. It meant light housework. Of course, there is always a danger wherever you worked if the officer became unhappy and didn't like how you did something; he could just do whatever he wanted, including to kill the person. Nevertheless, this was a much better job than working in a factory, where the overseers were not exactly the nicest people. So, they went to work and I went to school. There were all sorts of things that happened in the ghetto. There were selections periodically, and there were hiding places for the children when the selections came. One time I didn't make it to one of the hiding places, and I was present at the selection. It was not for children. The German officer I remember, not the facial appearance, but I remember his general appearance, with a uniform and the kind of hat he was wearing, a special kind of hat that you see with these concave round hats, and he was going around with a truncheon, hitting people over the head, blood all over. I don't know what he was after, but he was very angry about something. He didn't bother the children. So there were selections, and many other things happened in the ghetto, which I don't need to go through. But we lived there, and my brother and mother were working, and we were in the ghetto. We don't know about Father, we think Father is probably dead; after all, he didn't get out of Podbrodz.

Now, let's backtrack and talk about my father. My father escaped after the fact. As I explained before, he waited until the Lithuanians left, and then he got out. He checked on us. He was told that we were dead, that we were shot. And he went to the farm of an individual by the name of Adam Senkiewicz. Adam Senkiewicz had a brother by the name of Bronislaw, and they had farms adjacent to each other, which they had inherited from their father, who had died fairly recently. I don't know exactly when. The father had a very large farm, and they inherited the land, and so they lived close to each other. Now, how is it that my father knew the Senkiewiczzes? For this we need to go back about twenty years to my *zayde*, my father's father, and what happened to him and his experiences.

My grandfather was a Podbrodzer; he had lived in Podbrodz all his life. He was a merchant in grain. He would buy grain from the local farmers. He would repackage it in various ways. He had customers in all sorts of places in Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, the Ukraine, even in Russia, and he was able to ship his grain

because we were right on the railroad. We had a railroad station, and the railroad went straight all the way into Russia. He made a decent living from it; he was middle class, I would say upper middle class. Not one of the very rich people or particularly rich people of Podbrodz, but he was in good shape financially. Buying grain from the local farmers was not an easy or pleasant experience because the vast majority, virtually all local farmers, did not own their farms. Poland was a highly feudal society at that time—or Lithuania—or the combination of Lithuania and Poland was a feudal society. The lands, the farms, the forests were all owned by the rich feudal lord—in Yiddish it would be called a *poletz*. These farmers were kind of sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and they rented the place or they got a little piece of the results of the income, and they were very, very poor. They worked very hard, and it was a complicated process to get the grains from them. They had to be involved, the local overseer had to be involved, there were all kinds of registrations they had to go through in the local authorities. And these authorities were corrupt; they wanted payoffs. It was complicated and not exactly easy. Therefore, my grandfather preferred to buy as much as he could from one particular farmer, whose name was Wincenty Senkiewicz, the father of these two people that I just discussed previously, because Wincenty owned his own farm. It was an anomaly; very strange that this individual owned his own farm. I don't know how he got to own the farm. It was a very substantial farm, quite big. It had many crops and a lot of grain, and this was much easier because you dealt with one person who knew exactly what he was doing. He made a deal that was a deal, and you didn't have to go to all kinds of other people to find out what was going on.

So my grandfather would buy his crops from Wincenty as much as he could and augment whatever he needed from other places. Everything was fine. Over a period of years the relationship became closer and closer. They got to trust each other more and more until they came to a point where there was no written contract between them. I never found out why this was, and that's because I wasn't smart enough to ask my father when I had the chance to think about. So my grandfather would buy grain from Wincenty and it was done eventually without any written contract. I don't know why, but I am guessing that it was in order to avoid the bureaucracy, which was corrupt, and they did it that way for a number of years. Everything went fine. Both adhered scrupulously to their agreement. If the crop was good that year and prices went down, my grandfather still paid whatever he had agreed to. If the crop was bad and prices went up, he still got the crop for the price that they had agreed to—both kept to their

agreement; all it took was a handshake.

Now, Podbrodz was on the confluence of two rivers, as I said. There were mills, flour mills, on these rivers. I think there were three mills, and they operated by waterpower. They had paddles that ran the mill. One day one of these mills became available for sale, and my grandfather decided that he would buy the mill. It was a good business proposition. It would mean that he was able to turn grain into flour. Flour was a higher-level product. It had more value per unit weight than grain. Because he was able to get good grains, he had contacts, he felt that he could do a lot more business this way, and in fact he would probably get rich. The only problem was he didn't have enough money to buy the mill and buy all the grain he would need for the mill and all the grain he would need for his regular business, and so on and so forth. So he went to Wincenty, and he explained what was going on, and he made a proposition. He would take his entire crop, or most of his crop. It would all be on credit because he would not be able to pay him anything, since he needed the money to make the down payment on the mill and also get silos in which to store the grain, and so on and so forth. But it wouldn't take long. When the product would be sold, that would introduce profits, and he would pay him back. I don't know what kind of a deal they made. I'm sure there was more to be paid than just for the grain because of the credit. But, anyway, they made an agreement, they trusted each other and everything was fine. The grain comes in, the silos are filled with grain, everything is all set, and then it is Shabbos. And somebody comes to my grandfather and he tells him, "Everything you have, your silos, your grain, it's all on fire." All of these things were on the river. There were no people living there, and my grandfather knew that, and his response was, "It's Shabbos. There's nothing I can do about it. Leave it alone. It's Shabbos."

So, everything was left alone. After Shabbos he went to check; it was all gone. Everything was burned to the ground, nothing to be salvaged. Now he didn't have the grain, he didn't have the silos, he didn't have the mill, he didn't have anything. All he had was one giant debt to Wincenty Senkiewicz, and he was completely financially destroyed. The next Monday is the market day. He came to the market where he expected Mr. Senkiewicz to be, and he was, since most of the farmers came to the market. He came to him and he said, "You've heard what happened?" And Wincenty said something to the effect, "Yes, we've had a very big loss." My grandfather responded, "We did not have a big loss. I had a big loss. We'll have to renegotiate our agreement. I can't pay you back within months, as I expected.

It will take a long time, probably years, but everything I owe will be repaid. Let's make a new repayment schedule and a new agreement, and I will have to meet this new schedule." They came to an agreement, whatever it was. As I understand, it took ten, or maybe fifteen years before the debt was fully repaid. It was a long time, and my grandfather, who was pretty well off, he was upper middle class, now joined the ranks of the poor, not the extremely poor, not totally indigent. He didn't depend on *tzedaka*, but he didn't have much because whatever profits he obtained, everything went to repay his debt. Nothing was kept back because the debt had to be repaid.

And because his debt was so big and the problems were so pressing, my father, who was still a bachelor (he was younger), my grandfather asked my father to get involved in their relationship and the business with the Senkiewiczzes. He would send him to the farm to work side by side with the sons of Wincenty Senkiewicz, these two sons, one of whom is named Adam, as you know, and to help them and to prepare the grain and to look out for my grandfather's interests to make sure he got the best grains and he knew what was going on at the farm so he could pick the best things. And they worked together. As a consequence, my father learned farming, and he became a pretty decent farmhand; he knew how to operate on the farm. In this relationship he got to know Adam Senkiewicz very well. The Senkiewiczzes were kind of a strange family. Not only did they have their own farm, but also they were educated people. This was unusual. Most of the farmers were total ignoramuses. Most couldn't sign their own name. But these people were relatively well educated, and they were not particularly anti-Semitic. They didn't hate the Jews.

So they got along to the degree that the Jew and the Polish farmer could get along, of course. My father worked pretty much side by side with Adam Senkiewicz. Adam Senkiewicz respected my father because my father was willing to do difficult, unpleasant jobs. He would be given these jobs because, after all, he was the new guy on the farm, so to speak. He was willing to take them on, and in particular he was impressed that my father was willing to do hard physical labor. He didn't expect that a Jew would be willing to do that. My father was very strong physically in his upper arms, and working on this farm really strengthened his arms because the grain came in sacks of 50 or more kilos each, well over 100 pounds. I remember from way back when my father would pick up one of these sacks and just throw it on top of a wagon as if it was a one-pound bag of beans or something. There was nothing to it; he had extremely strong arms from all this

work. That's how he got to be so strong. That's how he got to know how to farm. That's how he got to know Adam Senkiwicz, and that's why he went to the Senkewiczses after he escaped. And that's why the Senkiewiczses were willing to take him on. Adam felt that this was a person who he should help, and they knew each other well. They respected each other, and Senkiewicz was not all that concerned because he felt my father could get away with pretending to be a farmhand because he knew how to deal with it, and hiding in the open like this was fairly safe, and he thought that he could manage it. And he did.

So my father was there for little over a year while we are in the Ghetto in Soly for all this time. But my father can't get it out of his mind that maybe we are not dead. The woman didn't see us get killed; she just saw the Lithuanian run into the woods. She heard him shoot, but who says that we were killed. So he is constantly trying to convince Adam to go and search for us. Adam isn't all that anxious to do so. It's a very dangerous job to run around without proper authorization or papers. The Germans are not all that friendly to the Poles. They were much more friendly to the Lithuanians. And the Poles were slated for extinction when they took over Poland. They decided to eliminate the country. There was not going to be any independent Poland under German control. They left a little piece of France, for example—Vichy, France—but no independent Poland. In fact, the very first Einsatzgruppen that went into Poland in 1939, their primary job was to kill off all the Polish intelligentsia, the Polish leaders, and so forth, so that there would be no resurgence of a Poland. So the Germans were not particularly nice to the Poles, and the Poles had to be careful about it. Nevertheless, my father kept working and trying to convince Adam to go and search for us. And Adam actually wanted to do it because it turned out that when he was a bachelor, way back when, he was a member of one of the smuggling rings, and he thought it was fun. It was an adventure. He was a young kid. He ran around and around the borders, and he liked it. He enjoyed the adventure. So this was an excuse to go do something similar.

Finally, he decided, OK, I'll do it. I'll do it for you. So my father drew up a list of places where we might be, and he started checking up on these things. Of course, he couldn't do it on a continuous basis. It took time. He had to be careful. He had to go slowly. He had to walk. Sometimes he drove. But it took days for each of these trips, and he couldn't do it on a continual basis, and it took a long time. He would go out. He would search. He would find some Jews. He would investigate if we were there. If he would find that we were not, he would come

back and give the bad news to my father. OK, cross this one out. And go to the next place. And he kept doing it until almost a year later he comes to Soly.

Soly is a long distance away. That's one of the later ones on the list because it's a long distance. Why Soly? Because my father knew that my mother had a sister in Soly and possibly she went there. So he finds some Jews outside the ghetto. He was able to do these things. Adam was a resourceful individual. He asked them about the sister, not about us, about the sister. And yes, they know this woman. Does she have any other people around? They say yes, there is this woman with two children. Well, that sounds like us. But he has to make sure, plus he has to make contact. So this guy—I don't understand where he got his courage, but he just went right into the ghetto. Getting into the ghetto is not that difficult, but getting out is very, very tough. You have to get through a hole in the wall someplace, and it's dangerous. But he got into the ghetto. He tracked us down. He found Mother. Mother recognized him immediately. He recognized Mother, and it was clear Father was alive, we were alive, everything is good now. They agreed that he would see about getting us out later, or he would get the message to my father to see what could be done. He got out of the ghetto somehow. There were holes in the walls in various places, but it was dangerous. If you are caught, it was a deadly offense. He got out. He came back to Father. He told him, yes, he found us. Good news. We are alive. We are in the ghetto in Soly. So now, my father tries to convince him he has to get us out. Well, that's not so easy. And now he is going to take a woman and two children, and we have to go by wagon somehow. We are not going to walk the distance back, and then we have to hide. This was not an easy deal, and besides, the roads were very bad. It was getting to be autumn, it was getting late in the year. The roads became muddy and virtually impassable. You couldn't go on wheels because the wheels would get bogged down, and then there was the snow, and then you really get into trouble. And at the same time you couldn't go by sled because there wasn't enough snow, so they waited. And they waited and waited. And suddenly my father hears a rumor that the ghettos in Belarus are being liquidated. And he may have waited too long. We were probably dead.

It's terrible news, but he won't give up. Now he's desperate, so he convinces Adam, and Adam's brother sort of followed him. I don't understand why. I think Adam was older, but maybe not. But Adam was the leader, so to speak. And his brother could be convinced to do what Adam wanted to do. So, it was agreed that both brothers would go out. They would go by sled. There was a little bit of

snow. Sledding was not good, but that was the only choice because wagon wheels would certainly not do it. They would try to get there by sled and see about getting us out. So they get into the sleds and they start driving. A day later, just a day later, there is a tremendous snowstorm. There is snow everywhere; sledding is perfect. The horses almost glide over the snow, the sleds just move so easily. There's hardly any weight. The horses don't have any problem moving. They get to Soly, and, I don't know how exactly, word gets to my mother that they are here to take us and to get us out. Soly had not yet been liquidated. Several ghettos in the area had been, but Soly was still around. So my mother now knows she needs to get us out of the ghetto. She and my brother can get out. They have work papers, and they are working outside of the ghetto, so they have the right to come and go. I don't have anything. She goes to the Judenrat again. I told you about the Judenrat before; I'll tell you again. This time it's not a minor offense. This is a very, very serious offense to create papers, forge papers, in effect, for somebody to get out of the ghetto. It is a capital offense. You get shot for it, and your family gets killed for it. This is very, very serious. Nevertheless, these people in the Judenrat—and I have to say it and emphasize it several times because of *hakaras hatov* (to publicize the debt to these people), these people totally risked their lives. They didn't ask any questions. They didn't say, "Why do you want to get out of the ghetto? What's this about?" Nothing. You want to get out. This is serious for you. You need the papers. You have a little boy. He doesn't have any documentation. Here is some paper. I don't know what they invented for the reason, but here is the paper that should permit the guards to let him out.

And it was done. So we get to the gate and there are two gates. There is a small gate for people and there is a large gate for automobile traffic. We get to the small gate and there is a guard at the gate. He looks at the papers. The papers seem all right. He opens the gate and we walk out. We are walking on the road for about five minutes, perhaps, not very long. The gate was still in easy sight; we weren't that far away. There are some cars driving into the ghetto. There is an automobile with some people, German officers or whatever. Germans are sitting in there. And there are a couple of trucks, I think. Maybe two trucks behind them. And they come to the big gate, the big gate opens up, they get in, and the big gate closes, and so forth. And we keep walking. Later, we found out this was a children's *Aktion*. They came to take the children away. Maybe five minutes, certainly not longer than half an hour after we left, but most likely within minutes, the officers, or whoever was in charge in that car, initiated proceedings that the ghetto was locked tight, no one was to get out, everything was closed. We could

never have gotten out under these conditions. So we made it with maybe minutes to spare, not much more than half an hour, possibly five or ten minutes at most, or I could not have gotten out. In fact, it could have been much worse because I would not have had a chance to hide in one of the hiding places. There were many hiding places in the ghetto for children, specifically for kinder *Aktion*, because periodically they would come and take away the children, and everybody understood what that meant. But if we were at the gate, then I would have been taken immediately. And that would have been the end.

So we got out. We got into these sleds. It's a long story. It took a few days to get back because we could only go at certain times. We had to hide at other times because of the roads, but sledding was beautiful. My brother was disguised as a woman, sitting on one sled, my mother was sitting on the other sled, and there were two peasants driving sleds with hay and other products on the sled. I was hiding underneath the products there, and we go back to Father. We go back to Father; now we need a place to hide. Adam was adventurous and friendly and really a nice person who did everything strictly as friend and as a savior, and he really was a good, decent person. In fact, he was eventually inducted into the Roll of the Righteous, and my brother went back to Vilna about twenty years ago to participate in the ceremony where this individual, Adam Senkiewicz, was posthumously (he was already dead) inducted into the Rolls of the Righteous, and my brother participated in the ceremony with his children, the ones we knew as little kids. So that was an emotional ceremony, and this man deserved it. Nevertheless, you can be great and righteous all you want, but if Jews were caught hiding in your place, everybody was killed, including the family, and that's not something you can easily ask of somebody. They said, "Look, we got them out, but there's a limit to what we can do. We just can't do it. We can't hide the children." Adults can do all sorts of things. They spoke the language well, they could pretend to be Polish, and you could fake it. But little kids, especially myself, I didn't speak any Polish. I hadn't gone to school, and all I knew was Yiddish. There was no way to pretend. So it was extremely dangerous, and they really didn't want to do it.

Finally, my father has an idea. He says, "Look. You know who I am. You know the size of the family. I had brothers, I had sisters, and I had parents. They are all dead. They were all taken away and they were killed. They're all dead. This war will not go on forever. The Germans will not win the war; you know it can't go on like this. You know it will turn around. Eventually there will be liberation,

and when this happens, I will be the only heir. I will inherit everything that's left over; the houses, and whatever is left, I will get it. I will inherit it and it will be yours. I know it is very dangerous, but there is a lot of compensation.”

Now, these were decent people. I don't think the idea of getting all this property would have changed their mind, but they were looking for some excuse, for some reason to overcome their natural reluctance to take this terrible risk. So my father made this offer, and the brothers went and talked it over, and they came back and said, “All right. We'll do it. Twenty years ago your father made a promise to our father, and he kept it. He kept his promise, and it took him years to pay back. So your word is just as good as your father's word. Your father kept his promise. We know you will keep your promise, and we'll accept your suggestion. We will hide you.” So, I'm alive today because my *zayde* would not bring *chillul Shabbos*, and he let the fire burn. Twenty years later. Who could predict such things? Who can know what is for good and what is for bad? So they hid us.

But then something happened. A farmer in some adjacent hamlet was caught harboring Jews, and everybody was shot. Everybody was killed. And they became very frightened, and they decided maybe they couldn't do it after all. We had to find something else. They were very reluctant, and just as this discussion is going on, there is a swarm of Russian airplanes. A huge number of airplanes, and they're not dropping bombs. They are dropping leaflets. The leaflets show photographs of huge columns of Germans walking as prisoners of war. What had happened? Stalingrad had happened. The Germans had surrendered in Stalingrad, and this was now February 1943. The Germans surrendered at Stalingrad at the end of January or early February. It looked like an enormous victory, which it was. It was a turning point in the war in Russia. At about the same time there was the victory of Montgomery in El Alamein against Rommel, which was the turning point in North Africa, and it saved the Jews in the Yishuv from the 6th Einsatzgruppe. And this victory in Stalingrad also saved my life in a certain sense. I doubt if they would have thrown us out, but it was very difficult. But they said, “Ah, amazing. Six months, that's all it will take. The Russians are now moving forward, the Germans are defeated, look at these hundreds of thousands of Germans that have been destroyed.” They didn't understand what this meant and how long the war would still go on—another year and a half—but they thought it would be months. So they said, “OK, we'll take the chance. You can continue.”

There were many things that happened in between, of course. Many adventures.

We were almost caught a number of times. People saw us. We had to run away. We had to live in the woods because we were afraid that the people who saw us would talk about it. I became very ill one time. There were many things. For example, in the ghetto in Soly, I was running around; little kids run around. I ripped my thigh open with some barbed wire, and it became infected. That's how people died. Of course, I survived the infection. Many, many things happened under these conditions. We were ill. The food was very bad. There were a tremendous amount of various illnesses due to hygienic issues. We survived it. That's basically the story in terms of its major components. As I said, if you are interested in all the details, you can track it down in the Spielberg Archives. They have it, and it is supposed to be available to the public. And there are three hours of videotapes with direct questions and answers and very fine details in that story.

But the point of the whole thing is you never know what anything means. The Lithuanian was chasing us, and that was bad. But we got to this church, the only church where the priest was not anti-Semitic and was willing to help, and that was good. My grandfather let things burn twenty years ago; that's very bad, terrible. But that saved our lives. Many things happen all the time. As I said, it's sort of like Purim. Many things happen. You don't know why. You don't understand, but there is a purpose to everything. It was a case of "*gam zu l'tovah*." This was for good, after all. And we survived it. So here we are, and that is the story.

## **Conclusion and Assault on Holocaust**

I would like to complete my talk with a few comments about the Holocaust.

What is the Holocaust? What is it about? And, especially, how does it connect to Jews, because there are many issues on that. I will discuss some ideas about the implication of my grandfather and the Holocaust. There is also the story about Rav Moshe Feinstein and the Holocaust which I would like to tell you, and I did tell these two items in the original talk on Tisha B'Av. As you know, this is a replication, but now that we have time I would like to fill in some central portion with some other matters relating to the Holocaust, which was not part of the original discussion on Tisha B'Av because of time constraints.

So let me now say some words about my grandfather. These are my own ideas; I have no Torah basis for this, they are just my ideas. And, since I am telling my

story, my feelings on what certain things mean, I think, are part of the story. It's like this. I am not disparaging my grandfather if I tell you that he was an ordinary Jew. There were two known *Talmidei chachamim* in Podbrodz; one was the Rav, and one was another individual, and neither one was my grandfather. He obviously was learned. He knew *halachah*, he knew Torah, he knew you don't put out a fire on Shabbos if there is no danger to humans, and so forth. But he was not a great scholar, and he was not great in other areas that I know of. He was an ordinary person, just a plain, ordinary Jew, which sounds like I am disparaging him in some way. But that is not the case, because of the question of what is an ordinary Jew.

I would like to quote some things from the book *Responsa from the Holocaust* by Rabbi Ephraim Oshry on the question of ordinary Jews. Rav Oshry survived the Kovno Ghetto. He was a rav there, and people came and asked him questions. Asked *sheilos*, questions to be asked. These are not the ordinary *sheilos* that I am used to asking. You know, a big deal if some milk fell into the *fleishig* spoon, the meat spoon, or something, and, well, what do you have to do with it. Important questions in the life that we live today, but utterly ridiculous in the major issues that we faced in the ghettos. And Rav Oshry describes some of these questions. He wrote down little notes on some of these questions and answers. He put them into cans, which he buried. When he survived, he came back, and he was able to find these cans. He then wrote a number of volumes in Hebrew, either four or five volumes.

So Rav Oshry hid these questions and answers in cans. He unearthed them after the Holocaust, after he came back. He wrote a number of volumes in Hebrew. The English version is a summary of some of these materials. The questions that were asked and the answers that were given involved horrible, horrible questions and answers. These are issues that are very difficult to deal with. One of the issues that Rav Oshry discusses in the quote that I want to give has to do with the question of what is the *bracha* if you are about to be killed because you are a Jew. Because if you are to be killed because you are a Jew, that is the case of *kiddush HaShem*. *Kiddush HaShem* is a mitzvah, and you are supposed to say a *bracha*, you are supposed to say a blessing when you have a mitzvah. So you have to say a blessing if you are about to be shot because you are a Jew. Those are the kinds of questions that Rav Oshry was dealing with, and here is how he puts it:

“The inquiries in Jewish law and practice to which I had to respond

were neither academic questions posed to scholars nor scenarios posed by eccentrics playing the theoretical games of 'what if.' They were made by ordinary Jews who refused to be turned into animals and they asked these very difficult questions.”

He said:

“What do you say to a Jew who is a Jew unto death? Can the modern Jew fathom it? Can the world fathom it? Can the Germans fathom it? Does one laugh perplexed? Does one gasp amazed, because it is amazing. At the same time it is a very basic question that requires an answer. What blessing do you recite when you are about to be martyred? It is so elementary that tears are not enough.”

Then he goes on to discuss or describe what kind of people asked these questions. And he says:

“I’m not speaking of wonder working rabbis or of grocers who secretly and humbly had mastered the Talmud and Kabbalah, but simple Jews whose faith in the Almighty was the core of their being. Such a Jew simply follows the dictates of the Torah as he knows best.”

I think that my *zayde*, my grandfather, was a simple Jew in the same vein that Rav Oshry is talking about. He followed the Torah as he knew best, and he knew that you don’t put out the fire. I don’t think that I am very much estranged from being a Jew. I think I live a fairly committed Jewish life. At a minimum, I think I am an ordinary Jew. Maybe even a little more, possibly, but certainly not much less than ordinary. And my grandfather was an ordinary Jew.

So I think, what would I do if I put myself in his place? I have this big fire. Do I just say, “But it’s Shabbos, leave it alone”? I don’t think I would do that. I have to admit it. It’s true. I would try to find a way to put out the fire. At a minimum, I would run to the rav and say, Rabbi, there’s this fire, is there a *heter*, is there this, is there that, can you help me? I wouldn’t give up so easily. For those who know the teachings of Rav Dessler, it seems to me the teachings on the *bechira* point, on how decisions are made and what is a real decision, it seems to me that the measure of the fire was beyond the decision point, the *bechira* point of my

grandfather. He didn't really make a decision. It was obvious to him that there was absolutely nothing he could do, there is nothing to discuss, there is nothing to deal with.

In my case, it's at a lower level. There is no question. I would agonize over it. I would have an internal battle over it. It is at my *bechira* point. So we're not the same. So he is an ordinary Jew and I am an ordinary Jew, but we are not the same. This reminds me of Parshas Noah. We are told in the Torah that Noah was a *tzadik*. He was a righteous person. And he was righteous in his generations. Strange wording in there. And the commentaries deal with this matter. What does it mean, "in his generations?" Different people give different answers. One understanding among these is that Noah was a righteous person in his generation, but perhaps he wouldn't be considered so righteous in some other generation, let's say the generation of Avraham Avinu. So it seems to me that the same applies to my *zayde*. And he is a sample, it doesn't mean himself; he is a prototype of his generation. It seems to me that he was an ordinary Jew in his generation. But how ordinary would he be in our generation?

People talk what was lost in the Holocaust. There are lists and lists and lists of everything we lost, and it's all true. We lost six million people, we lost one-third of our people, we lost thousands of communities, and we lost so many things. I would like to suggest that perhaps the greatest thing and most important thing, the most precious thing that we lost that we have not recovered, is a generation of ordinary Jews who really were extraordinary, and how do we get those generations back? I don't know.

So that's a lesson from my grandfather about the Holocaust. But whatever we lost, it seems obvious to me and to those who look at it deeply that there is a major Jewish component to the Holocaust. It is not a simple thing. Yes, there were genocides and murders and many things that, as I said at the outset, what Hitler wanted to do was not just to kill the Jewish bodies. He wanted to kill the Jewish soul. And that cannot be replicated or assigned to anybody else. It was uniquely Jewish, and there is this very, very personal and Jewish component to what we call the Holocaust.

But the Holocaust as an entity on its own or as a specifically Jewish entity is under tremendous assault today. First we have the Holocaust deniers. They are strong, and there are many of them, as I discovered when I did my research on the Internet

on various things, and they are very clever. And they will tell you it never happened. There was no such thing. Yes, many Jews died in the war. Many people died in the war. What's the big deal?

OK, the other assaults deal with the Jewish character of the Holocaust. There are many different types of people who were targeted for destruction or targeted for death by the Nazis. There were Gypsies, Roma and Sinti Gypsies were killed, and they were killed in whole families, with children, just like the Jews. That is certainly a case of genocide or attempted genocide. Many, many types of people were on the list, mental patients, homosexuals, and communists certainly. Many millions of people were killed by the Nazis. So the question arises, why is the Holocaust a Jewish item? Why are there memorials to Jews? Not to everybody else. And memorials generally do mention other peoples, but they tend to be specifically for Jews. Right now, there is a dispute—right now, this moment as we speak in mid-2009, is a political dispute between two local candidates for office, one arguing for and one arguing against, and it has become nasty. And it may have already or it's being threatened to go into court. There is a Holocaust memorial in Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn. I don't know exactly what the memorial says. I have not seen the material. But I understand that the memorial deals primarily with Jews, but it mentions various other peoples and groups that were targeted for death. There is a threat of a lawsuit that not enough space or enough information is given about the killing of homosexuals. Homosexuals were certainly targeted by the Nazis, and they were certainly victims. But the idea is that it should not be all that much Jewish but general.

There is currently a discussion in the European Parliament. Some individuals in the Parliament have brought a bill before the Parliament. It's very doubtful that it will go anywhere, but it's a beginning, and maybe five years from now it will get somewhere. The idea is to change the Holocaust Remembrance Day from what it's intended to be and also to change the date. The date of the Holocaust Remembrance Day is set in accordance with the Warsaw Ghetto Rebellion. The idea is that there were many atrocities, and many people were victims of totalitarian regimes, and there were two: One was Hitler's Nazi Germany, and the other was Stalin's Communist Russia. And both were multi-mega killers. They both killed tens of millions of people. In fact, the records show that probably Stalin killed more people than Hitler. There were victims all around, so we need to have a remembrance day that remembers all of these atrocities. So we will combine both of these. We'll change the date from the date of a specifically

Jewish remembrance to a general remembrance, which would be the date that the Russians and Germans signed a non-aggression treaty, and we'll have a general commemoration of these atrocities. That would be more proper than having something that is specifically Jewish, because the date is set to coincide with the Warsaw Ghetto Rebellion. If that happens, then Holocaust Remembrance Day is gone from Europe.

We also have numerous discussions in Holocaust remembrance speeches here in the United States where it has become very common—in fact, it has become almost a necessity—that someone will talk about general man's destructive impulse, and this speaker will argue in favor of whatever happens to be their particular hot topic for the destructiveness of man, whatever that may be. Maybe it's the destruction of the rain forest in Brazil or maybe global warming and the destruction of the environment, or whatever the case may be. And some of these items, I think, are just ludicrous and totally silly, if not insulting. And some are very serious and very important and we need to deal with them, but I don't understand what these have to do with the Holocaust. And the Holocaust is brought in as an example of the pinnacle of man's destructiveness, and it is kind of a slippery slope argument. If you don't take care of the rain forest in Brazil or you don't take care of carbon emissions that may be causing global warming, whatever you believe—that's immaterial to this discussion—then you end up with a holocaust of people.

And so the word *holocaust* is starting to acquire a generic meaning, meaning any destructiveness of human beings, to the point where I get concerned, or I'm not sure what people mean when they say a holocaust. I have to ask questions because possibly they mean something else than I understand, which is the Holocaust of the Jews, and possibly one day we'll have to start using the word *shoah*. As you know, previously, in 1944, the word "genocide" was coined, which was intended to speak about the Jews. That has now certainly acquired a generic meaning to any kind of killing of people on account of their race or other characteristics, killing people because they are part of a certain group. We certainly don't use the word *genocide* to represent the Holocaust, even though genocide was part of the Holocaust. I expect within ten years those of us who want to keep a remembrance of something called a "Jewish" Holocaust, and not by any way to exclude the destruction and genocides of other peoples, but some issue that relates specifically to Jews, then we will have to start talking about the "Jewish" Holocaust, or perhaps we'll switch and start using the word *shoah*. It's a Hebrew word. I hope

that it will not become a generic word in the future as well.

So we have all of these understandings of the Holocaust when the Holocaust is under assault. If it's so under assault and if there is some Jewish component to it, what is this Jewish component? How can we characterize it? And it's a difficult thing to do. Certainly in a few minutes, but something happened.

I read an article just two months ago that deals with Rav Moshe Feinstein that I think explains something of what I am talking about. The article appears in the June 2009 issue of a publication called *Together*. It's a publication about and primarily for Holocaust survivors. It comes out a few times a year, and the June 2009 issue is the latest issue. The author is Dr. Isaac Steven Herschkopf. He is a psychiatrist, and he tells us the following story. I think that the climax of the story happens around the later 1960s, maybe 1970s; he doesn't give dates, but that's my best reconstruction. Rav Moshe died in 1986 at the age of 91, so that would make him about in his seventies when this story happens.

So we're told that this individual was the son of Holocaust survivors. Both his mother and father had numbers tattooed on their arms, and he also had an aunt with numbers on her arm. And they live in an area someplace in New York where there are many such people, many survivors. So he's a little boy, and he is used to seeing adults with numbers on their arms. And, when he is a little kid, maybe four years old or so, he thinks he's figured out what the numbers are about. It's an adult thing, and when you get older you get this number. So he comes to his mother and he says something like, "Mommy, I'm a big boy now. Can I get my number?" And he doesn't understand why his mother bursts out crying when he says that.

Eventually, he gets older, and he understands what the numbers are about, and he gets old enough to go to high school. The high school happens to be Yeshiva High School in New York. Rav Moshe Feinstein is a *gadol hador*, the greatest sage of his generation; everybody defers to him, everybody holds him in great honor and awe, and nobody even thinks of disputing any of his rulings because this is the greatest Torah scholar of his time and of many other times. The respect that people give to Rav Moshe is just enormous. So Rav Moshe is kind of a hero in this high school.

The boy's aunt has medical training; she works as a nurse. He tells about how she

saved people in the camps because of her medical training; we won't go into all of these details. They go to the mountains, the Catskill Mountains, as Jews from New York tend to do, and he discovers that his aunt works in a doctor's office. Rav Moshe is coming to the mountain, and, guess what, he is a patient of this doctor, and he has an appointment in a day or two with this doctor. So this young boy, he is fourteen, maybe sixteen years old; he's in high school, early high school, he thinks he has an opportunity to meet Rav Moshe, which would be a wonderful thing. So he dresses up in his best clothes. He spends time rehearsing some phrases in Yiddish; he knows a little Yiddish from his parents. He knows that Rav Moshe prefers to speak in Yiddish, so he decides what he is going to say to Rav Moshe, and he rehearses these things and he gets ready, he dresses up in his best clothes, he comes to the doctor's office an hour early, and he is waiting.

Rav Moshe shows up with a couple of other people that are working with him or attending him, but he gets so confused, he's so in awe that he forgets his phrases. He even forgets, he's glued to his seat, he doesn't even get up in honor of Rav Moshe, which you are supposed to do for a great Torah scholar; you've got to get up. And he's just sitting there. His aunt comes out, and she says, "Oh, Rabbi Feinstein, it's so nice to see you." And she starts talking to him in plain, ordinary, common phrases, not with any respect at all. This is not how you talk to a *gadol hador*, and she's making jokes, and what's worse is that Rav Moshe takes it calmly, and he responds to having a conversation! And this is horrible! How do you talk to Rav Moshe in this way?

This time the boy loses his paralysis. He jumps up, he runs over, he says, and I quote from the story: "I wanted to die. In a panic, I walked over to him and started to apologize profusely. 'Rabbi Feinstein,' I apologize, 'my aunt, she isn't *frum*, she is not religious, she doesn't understand.' He immediately placed his fingers on my lips to stop me from talking. He then softly spoke two sentences in Yiddish that I will remember to my dying day. 'She has numbers on her arm. She is holier than me.' Rav Moshe had understood what I had not. Our holiest generation was defined by the numbers on their arms."

I would disagree with the author on one point. Our holiest generation is not defined by the numbers on their arms; our holiest generation is defined by those who didn't live long enough to get numbers on their arms. If Rav Moshe thought, and he certainly did—this is a true story—that the woman with numbers on her arm is holier than he, what would he say to the twenty-three-year-old who left us

this amazing message over space and time. Her dignity, her courage, her understanding, and her ability to think just minutes, absolutely minutes, before she knew she was going to be shot, to give us this message, just a few words, “twenty three.” How holy would she be according to Rav Moshe?

It is no accident that when we speak in Yiddish and we speak about the dead of the Holocaust, we call them *Kiddushim*, holy individuals. And taking Rav Moshe at his word, based on what he did, this is not just an expression; it is a fact. Indeed, we are told that those who die in *Kiddush HaShem* and are killed because you are a Jew, that is *Kiddush HaShem*. Many came and asked what is a *bracha* before you die, as discussed by Rav Oshry. How holy are these people? What did we lose? We lost a generation of ordinary Jews, as I already discussed. We lost a holy generation, just as we lost our holy place in Jerusalem called the *Beit HaMikdash*, and that is what we mourn on Tisha B’Av. So is it also with the Holocaust, where we lost a holy generation, and we mourn them as well.

And this mourning will continue until that time *bimhara b’yameinu*, when we will have our redemption, and the day Tisha B’Av of mourning will become a day of rejoicing.

## **Afterword**

The foregoing material is a transcript of a CD recording of my talk on Tisha B’Av, July 30, 2009. I spoke extemporaneously on that date and also when the talk was rerecorded. This accounts for a few misstatements, which I have corrected in an errata sheet enclosed with the CD. Now that we have a written version, I have the opportunity to expand on some of these corrections and to deal with other errors as well as more subtle deficiencies in my talk.

One confusing factor is the inevitable tension between memory and history. As I tried to make clear in my talk, I am not speaking as a historian but as a survivor of the Holocaust. I am, at best, an amateur historian in this field; nevertheless, it is important that the historical record be faithfully presented, even in a personal memoir. Only truth, to the best of our knowledge, has the power to fight the deniers and distorters of the Holocaust. This can be difficult when blending personal memories with historical fact. Memory is emotional, while fact is

supposed to be dispassionate. Also, memory is fallible, especially sixty-five years after the event. For example, I “remember” that my father first went to the farm of Adam Senkiewicz, and I vaguely remember his children. But my older brother has told me that Bronislaw was the older brother and was married, while Adam was still a bachelor. The children that I “remember” are Bronislaw’s, and Adam’s son, who represented the father at the induction as a righteous gentile, was born later. These are minor inaccuracies that do not affect the general thrust of my talk. But other imprecise statements that I made are more significant in how one understands the history of the Holocaust. Below are explanations and additions to some of the historical matters that I did not clearly explain in my talk.

### Errata

Below are the corrections that were included with the CD, with additional information relevant to these errata.

*The following are corrections to misstatements in the CD; I apologize for the errors. —Morris Engelson*

- Heydrich’s first name is Reinhard, not Reinholt.
- Höss was commandant of Auschwitz, not Treblinka.
- Mr. Senkiewicz is inscribed in “The Book of the Righteous” of Vilnius, not Yad Vashem, as one might think.
- Professor Bauer said that “The Final Solution Document” might have been postdated or predated; I mentioned only that it may have been predated.
- Neither Heydrich nor his successor, Kaltenbrunner, was involved in the daily operations of the extermination camps, as implied in the talk. Rather, Heydrich integrated the extermination camps within the global framework of “The Final Solution.” The designation “Operation Reinhard” was applied after Heydrich was assassinated and not in his lifetime, as may have been implied. In addition, there is some confusion because of variant spellings: Reinhard, Reinhardt, Reinhart.

I would like to further clarify two of the above items.

- Professor Bauer argues that likely the document was signed and Heydrich received it on the same day, 7 Av. This is in line with the usual position that Heydrich brought a draft of the document with him to a one-hour appointment with Göring on the evening of July 31, 1941 (late 7 Av and near beginning of 8 Av) and took the document back with him after signature during the meeting. Nevertheless, Professor Bauer says the document might have been post- or pre-dated. We can arrive at these possibilities by supposing Heydrich sent the draft to Göring some days prior to the meeting and then picked it up at the meeting, or perhaps the document was discussed at the meeting, left with Göring for signature, and delivered to Heydrich after the meeting. In all cases, my analysis, based on timing for getting the signed document to Heydrich between 7 and 10 Av, remains undisturbed. But my failure to state that Professor Bauer thought that postdating is also a possibility is a serious omission, as it misstates the position that I reference for the professor.

While on the topic of the date 7 Av, I should clarify the matter of Nebuchadnezzar. I said that the king came to Jerusalem on this date and that the matter is discussed in the Talmud, without saying where. The details are in Taanis 29a, where we note that the Babylonian army, commanded by Nebuzaradan, and not the king himself, desecrated the sanctuary on 7 and 8 Av, and on the evening of the ninth they set the edifice on fire.

- It appears that Heydrich was not fully informed by Himmler that he had instructed the SS police chief in the Lublin district, Globocnik, to start work on the extermination camps. Eichmann recalls that in the fall of 1941 he was told by Heydrich, “The Führer has ordered the physical destruction of the Jews. Globocnik has received his relevant instructions from the Reichsführer (Himmler)...I want to know what he is doing and how far he has come.” [See Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution*.] Eichmann went out to investigate, and he met Christian Wirth, formerly of the T4 euthanasia program and hence experienced in gas chambers, who had now been assigned to help Globocnik develop the procedures for killing the Jews. Thus, Heydrich was able to integrate the extermination camps and killing in gas chambers into his Wannsee meeting program and authorization. We should note that the official minutes do not explicitly

mention killing of the Jews because, as Eichmann, who prepared the minutes, explains, Heydrich had him remove this part of the discussion from the published statement.

One can only speculate as to how deeply the ruthlessly ambitious Heydrich would have been able to insert himself into the extermination camps proper had he not been assassinated at the end of May 1942. We know that the Jewish affairs office of Eichmann was deeply involved in “the final solution” in its role to organize and coordinate the transport of Jews to the extermination camps, and Eichmann visited the camps and participated in meetings. But Heydrich’s successor, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, was not granted the sweeping powers that Heydrich had. Himmler took on some of Heydrich’s duties for himself, and especially as it came to operations in Auschwitz.

Sometime in late June or early July 1942, after Heydrich’s death, the three Globocnik extermination camps—Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka—came to be known as Operation Reinhard. These camps were unique in that they had no holding or punitive or work contingent. All transported, except the few selected to work in the killing operations of the camp, such as burning the bodies or extracting gold tooth fillings, were immediately sent to the gas chambers. For years there was some question as to whom the name was meant to honor. This is because the central documentation for Operation Reinhard was destroyed by Globocnik on orders from Himmler. All we have left are some peripheral documents from outlying offices, and these show three variant spellings: Reinhard, Reinhardt, and Reinhart. Some have argued that the designation is intended to be identified with Fritz Reinhardt, State Secretary of Finance. This designation would indicate that the financial aspect was more important than the homicidal intent. However, the debate is now settled by Peter Witte and Stephen Tyas in their paper *A New Document on the Deportation and Murder of Jews during “Einsatz Reinhard,”* *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 15 #3, Winter 2001. They show that the designation Einsatz Reinhard came into use before Fritz Reinhardt was appointed to his position. Hence, the name must be in honor of the slain Heydrich, and is intended to emphasize the homicidal rather than the economic aspects of the extermination of the Jews.

### Additional Matters

There are a number of additional items in my talk that can benefit from clarification and explanation.

#### *I prepared a query...and sent it by email to seven major Holocaust historians . . .*

This is a simplification of what happened. I was preparing a probability analysis respecting Tisha B'Av and the Holocaust for a magazine column and wondered whether to include the “final solution” memorandum in my listing of events, as some do, given that the date is 7 Av and not 9 Av. I thought that possibly Heydrich received this memorandum some days later, even though Göring signed it on 7 Av. Not finding any information on this, I sent a query to Professor Lipstadt, who clarified matters for me in an exchange of emails. Later, I was asked to give a talk on Tisha B'Av, and I decided to investigate the matter further, resulting in additional inquiries to other historians. Thus, there were two queries—first to Professor Lipstadt and later to other historians.

#### *All agree . . .*

I use this phrase twice, once connecting Hitler's position on the Jews to World War I and once respecting the importance of the “final solution” memorandum. “All” is too strong for my scientific education; surely one might find someone who disagrees if we look hard enough.

Certainly not all agree that 1919 is the crucial year, as I make clear. But of those who pick 1919, and indeed also those who identify 1908 as the critical year, the vast majority connects Hitler's murderous hatred of the Jews to World War I. Here is how Dr. Peter Longerich explained it as he testified on this matter in the Irving Holocaust denial trial: “Respecting Hitler's ‘radical anti-Semitism,’ which means that he wants to basically remove the Jews from, let us say, German soil, I think this is a product of the First World War and appears immediately after the First World War. Other historians would argue that actually he learnt this in Vienna. . . .” Hitler himself provides the dates of 1908 and 1919. Thus he notes in *Mein Kampf* that in Vienna, starting in 1908 (soon after the death of his mother), “was the time in which the greatest change I was ever to experience took place in me. From a feeble cosmopolite I had turned into a fanatical anti-Semite.”

1919 is also noted in *Mein Kampf* as a turning point at the start of his political career, soon after he experienced a “supernatural vision” while recovering from allegedly hysterical blindness. The vision urged him to fulfill his mission, and he then proceeded to Munich, where he began his political career. “In the days that followed [the vision], my own fate became known to me. . . . There is no making pacts with Jews; there can only be the hard: either–or. I, for my part, decided to go into politics.” And his political mission, as he wrote in a letter to one Adolf Gemlich on September 16, 1919, was to engage in “ruthless intervention [towards] removal of Jews from Europe.” I will note that it is conjectured that the “vision” is based on a hypnotic suggestion by the hospital psychiatrist that Hitler must start seeing again in order to fulfill his future mission. Unfortunately, the hypnosis worked, and Hitler regained his sight.

The debate, then, is whether to pick the unfocused hatred of 1908 or the political program of 1919 to act upon that hatred. The bridge between these two is World War I.

Likewise, not all will agree that the “final solution” memorandum is of “smoking gun” significance. But virtually all will agree that this memorandum is extremely important. For example, Professor Richard Britman notes in an email response to my questions that “I have always believed—and continue to believe—that the Eichmann/Heydrich/Göring document was an important signpost of the transition, not, however, the crucial authorization some believe.” The judgment for the Eichmann trial states, “We have stressed the connection between the cessation of emigration and the extermination order, because this is important for the understanding of document T/179, which is one of the basic documents in the history of extermination. This is Heydrich’s letter of appointment from Göring.” Whether a “crucial authorization” or “an important signpost,” the “final solution” letter is clearly important to our dating of the Holocaust.

*Millions were killed by the time the Holocaust began.*

This statement I have made needs two clarifications. Certainly millions of Jews had not been killed by the end of July 1941, when the “final solution” memorandum was issued. But more than a million, and possibly more than two million, had been killed by the Einsatzgruppen, and in other ways, when the extermination camps became operational. We also have a difference of opinion as to when the Holocaust proper began. Two million, or more, dead qualifies for the

designation of Holocaust. Hence many historians claim that the Holocaust began prior to the construction of the extermination camps. I follow the alternate position that a genocidal ethnic cleansing preceded the Holocaust proper, which involved a comprehensive, total, and “final solution” to the Jewish question and was implemented via the extermination camps. This difference of opinion, however, is more in appearance than in substance. At one point I argue that the Holocaust began at the start of World War I, and no Jews had yet been killed. Indeed, I accept that the Holocaust began early, but its full operational implementation was, in my opinion, signaled by the decision for a systematic eradication of Jewry across all geographical sections via the extermination camps.

*It was legal to kill the Jews; it was in the statutes.*

Well, there are statutes and there are statutes; not all statutes are of the same pedigree. Various anti-Jewish laws, such as the Nuremberg decrees, were passed and announced through the normal courts. But the homicidal “laws” were not made public, and the most drastic ones came in through the parallel path of the Party system of justice rather than through the normal State system. Sometimes laws or justifications were put in place on a retroactive basis to legalize what had already been done. The T4 euthanasia program that killed many thousands of “defective” Germans was initiated before there was a law for it, which Hitler signed after the fact, and the law was not made public. “Laws” were passed after the Kristallnacht rampage to excuse or exonerate all crimes against the Jews, including murder. Only two individuals were prosecuted. They were prosecuted for rape, not on account of what was done to the women, but rather for a violation of the Nuremberg laws that forbade “race defilement” with Jews. Finally, we should note that any order issued by Hitler or his direct subordinates automatically had the force of “law.”

*Experiment or experimental, which I used in discussing the extermination camps*

This word, experimental, is used by Holocaust deniers as they argue that perhaps a few thousand or, at most, a few hundred thousand Jews were killed in “experimental” gas chambers, which were primarily intended for fumigation purposes. But I mean *experiment* in the scientific sense of learning from results and making improvements. With their constant changes and improvements up to the very end, Auschwitz was constantly experimenting and learning how to be more efficient. And this “experiment” killed well over a million Jews. Professor

Christopher Browning does not use the word “experiment” in his testimony at the Irving trial, but his description fits what I mean when I use this word: “I think we can find a kind of chronological sequence. They start with shooting. The next thing implemented is gas vans at Chelmno and Semlin. Then they move to the fairly primitive gas chambers, which is the gas chambers that Operation Reinhard and the converted peasant bunkers at Auschwitz. Then they move to the design construction. Once they have experience, one can go back and say, how would you do this if you were creating something modern? So I do not find anything haphazard and confusing. I find it quite a logical sequence in which they add new methods of killing at the same time as the old methods continue.”

*I emphasize that Treblinka was a small camp.*

The other Reinhard camps were also small because these camps had no holding function; essentially, all who arrived were immediately killed.

*Carbon monoxide gas in Treblinka*

Carbon monoxide is correct, but they quickly proceeded to the exhaust from engines because bottled gas was too costly and involved logistical complications. An engine does not cost much, and there is nothing of a special nature to purchase or bring in. The fact that bottled pure carbon monoxide provided an easier death than carbon monoxide from engine exhaust was, of course, not a factor of interest, just as in Auschwitz the use of cyanide, which is a very painful way to die, was likewise not of concern. As Höss has testified about Auschwitz, “We knew they were dead when the screaming stopped.”

*There were revolts...in all the camps...But the one at Treblinka was probably the most successful...*

This does not give proper credit to the revolt at Sobibor. Quoting Yuri Suhl in *They Fought Back*:

“Of the six death camps the Nazis set up in Poland, Sobibor is perhaps the least known, but it was the scene of one of the most dramatic revolts in the annals of Jewish resistance and, by and large, the most successful in its objective...In addition to the large number of SS men and Ukrainian auxiliary police guarding the camp from the inside, Sobibor was

surrounded by four rows of barbed wire fences over ten feet high, a ravine filled with water and a mine field.”

Nevertheless, on October 14, 1943 a revolt, that killed about a dozen guards, established a path out of the camp whereby almost all of the 600 prisoners made a break to freedom. Most were shot as they ran or perished in the mine fields. Others were killed or captured by the thousands of troops supported by aircraft that were brought in. But some including the leader of the revolt, Alexander Pechersky, survived the war. Himmler was so shaken by this event that he ordered the complete dismantling of the camp. Thus, Sobibor like Treblinka, ceased operations due to a revolt.

*I said that many of the slave laborers in Auschwitz worked in the IG Farben synthetic rubber facility.*

They did not work in the facility; rather, they worked to build the place. This labor was so demanding, living conditions were so poor, and food was so scarce that the first contingent of 10,000 Russian prisoners of war quickly died, and were replaced by Jews when the military declined to supply the remainder of 100,000 prisoners originally promised to Himmler. The Jews also died on the job, but Himmler had a steady supply of replacements. One of their jobs was to make bricks with which to build the buildings. And, as for Pharaoh, they had no straw and also no food. This sprawling manufacturing plant formed the third part of the Auschwitz complex: The original camp was Auschwitz I, the huge slave labor and extermination site at nearby Birkenau was Auschwitz II, and the IGF plant at nearby Monowitz was Auschwitz III. The complex of all three sites is generally known as Auschwitz.

*I state that a million more died in Auschwitz after the unsuccessful attempt to destroy the facilities.*

I realize now that this is not possible because the revolt was in late 1944, shortly before the camp was destroyed by the Nazis as the Russian army was approaching. The killing pace was very busy at that time, so many died after the revolt, but my initial estimate is much too high.

*I indicate that Himmler had all the money he needed to build advanced killing facilities in Auschwitz.*

The story is more complicated. Indeed, the SS was getting rich from their various slave-labor operated “businesses,” but they also had very large expenses. Furthermore, there was great wartime scarcity of material. Even an automobile trip of a few hundred kilometers called for special permission on account of gasoline rationing. So having money was not enough; one also had to have authorization to buy something for the money. This is where the IG Farben (IGF) synthetic rubber plant comes in. Not only did Himmler expect to get rich from providing a supply of cheap slave labor, but the IGF plant had the highest wartime priority rating for scarce goods. Still, Himmler, or rather Rudolf Höss, commandant of Auschwitz, had to contend with an entrenched bureaucracy that insisted on their prerogatives, even when dealing with the SS. Consequently, much of the building at Auschwitz was done from locally produced materials, such as bricks, which were made by Russian prisoners of war and later by Jews. Many thousands died in this enterprise. To understand what this is about we need to examine the peculiar position of Auschwitz in the overall scheme of things.

Auschwitz was incorporated into the expanded territory of the Reich, unlike the Globocnik camps in the Lublin district of unincorporated Poland. Not only that, but Auschwitz had a German origin going back to the initial settlement in 1270 by the ostensibly purebred ancestors of modern Germany. Of course, the racial characteristics became corrupted as the place traded hands between the Germans and the Poles. Inter-marriage and cultural contamination made some of the presumably German inhabitants of questionable pedigree. But the land was pure and sacred to the cause. Himmler believed in the doctrine of the sacred connection between German blood and soil, and the Auschwitz area was initially slated for transformation into a German farm area. Many of the definitely Polish local farmers were given a few hours to pack a suitcase, and they were expelled from their farms. And the place had better be clean and the dishes washed before they left, or there would be consequences. Soon, sometimes within hours, new German “owners” were brought in. But the transfer of populations was much more difficult than expected, and the farming enterprise foundered. One problem was opposition from the army, who argued for soldiers rather than farmers. Enter IGF with a top priority to build a synthetic rubber production complex. Auschwitz was perfect, with plenty of raw materials and an abundance of water and cheap labor. But the town of Auschwitz, where the chemists and administrators would have to live, was totally inadequate. It was dingy and squalid and Polish-looking. So Himmler undertook to rebuild the place with German schools and housing and cultural centers. But building German edifices in Germany (Auschwitz was now

incorporated into the Reich) required meeting strict building codes, and even Himmler could not get around that. So it is that Himmler was plagued with building code issues even as he built his extermination facilities. Breakdowns in the newly designed high-tech systems, material scarcity, and construction code obligations delayed the full operation of the extermination complex. But the killing continued, even as they worked to solve the technical problems. And, unlike the Action Reinhard camps, which were in the unincorporated parts of Poland, Auschwitz—the town and IGF plant and even the killing facilities—were built to the solid standards of German construction.

The crowded conditions were conducive to typhoid, which does not differentiate between Jews and Germans. It was one thing to starve and work the Jews to death, that was part of the plan, but typhoid could not be permitted. Consequently, more delousing chambers using the cyanide fumigant known as Zyklon-B were constructed. Then it was decided that not just the men but also Jewish women and children were to be exterminated—it was the “final solution.” Auschwitz was perfect for this. All they had to do was construct a few more gas chambers and use the same Zyklon-B. Killing people, in fact, was simpler than killing lice, as it took less cyanide to destroy the lungs of a person than to kill the hardy louse. And the camp was perfect in another way. Whole families could be transported with the able-bodied selected for the labor camp, where they would survive the hard labor for a few months, while all others were sent directly to the gas chambers. The farming effort failed. The rubber plant was under construction, not yet operational. But the killing process was a success in spite of the technical problems and delays. The transports arrived. The able-bodied worked for a while at great financial profit, and soon these, along with those who could not work, were reduced to ashes. According to *Auschwitz*, a book by Dwork and Van Pelt, in 1943 the Auschwitz slave labor businesses were bringing in 2 million marks per month, as they rented out the workers at 3 to 6 marks per day, while the total maintenance cost was 1.34 marks per day.

It is uncertain precisely when Himmler decided to assign a homicidal function to Auschwitz. Rudolf Höss, the commandant of the camp, has given contradictory statements with respect to the date, which varies from mid-1941 and into 1942. Possibly there were several instructions involving different levels of killing, and there was also the difference between killing Russian war prisoners and the killing of Jews. It is known that the early “tests” of the killing facilities involved Russian war prisoners. Thus, Höss said after the test killing of 900 Russian war prisoners,

“I really didn’t waste any thoughts about the killing of the Russian POWs. It was ordered; I had to carry it out. But I must admit openly that the gassing had a calming effect on me, since in the near future the mass annihilation of the Jews was to begin.” The following quotations regarding the homicidal function of Auschwitz are taken from the book *Auschwitz* by Dwork and Van Pelt.

“Immediately after Göring signed Heydrich’s letter, which confirmed Himmler’s ultimate executive authority for the solution of the Jewish Question, the Einsatzgruppen began to massacre Jewish men, women, and children indiscriminately.” Soon after that, according to Höss, “In the summer of 1941, Himmler called for me and explained that the Führer has ordered the final solution of the Jewish question—and we have to carry out this task. For reasons of transport and isolation, I have chosen Auschwitz for this.” “As we know, at the end of August Eichmann visited Auschwitz ... Eichmann discussed the design of an extermination facility with Höss, and they decided on the use of gas. They also agreed that the carbon monoxide chambers used in the T4 program would not do: the piping was too complex and the bottled gas too expensive.” “The final transformation of Auschwitz into a killing site for Jews was confirmed on 26 September 1942, when Höss received explicit instructions from Berlin” to send the property of the victims to various places. “So long as Auschwitz was a ‘normal’ concentration camp, it operated under the fiction that, in principle, all prisoners could be released, and therefore their belongings were labeled and stored...” Now Berlin officially recognized that there were no prisoners to be released because they were all dead. The amount of goods was substantial even with the little that the victims could take with them. A report to Himmler, dated February 6, 1943 reports 824 boxcars of goods shipped from Auschwitz.”

*I state that Einsatzgruppe killings were over 90% Jews.*

Here is an example. This is a report presented to Hitler on 29 December, 1942, for the period August to November, 1942, in the Ukraine and selected areas of Russia.

Bandits in combat.....	1,337
Prisoners immediately executed.....	.737

Prisoners executed after interrogation.....	7,828
Suspects.....	14,257
Jews.....	363,211

*I say that the killing rate of almost 17,000 per day at Babi Yar exceeded even the maximum capacity of Auschwitz of 12,000 per day.*

There are some statements of such a peak killing rate at Auschwitz (for example, Gilbert, *The Holocaust*, page 675), but I have not seen any direct documentary evidence for this. The definitive work by Dwork and Van Pelt notes for the crematoria an “official daily incineration capacity of 4,756 corpses.” Of course, they had other ways for disposing of the bodies, including burning pits and burial. The average killing rate at Auschwitz was about 33,000 per month, but during the Hungarian action it hit a sustained rate of about 200,000 per month, or nearly 7,000 per day. Possibly there were some peak days at 12,000, but this was not a sustainable rate. This makes the Babi Yar massacre of nearly 34,000 in two days all the more remarkable.

*I state at the outset that Hitler aimed to exterminate all that was Jewish; to eradicate the essence of what the Jew is, which is the Torah.*

Many historians would take issue with this position. Certainly the identification of the essence of the Jew with the Torah is not within the sphere of historical analysis. I am relating to this as a Torah-observant Jew and not as a historian. Nevertheless, one can point to the “religious” component of Hitler’s war against the Jews and also his implied intention to replace Christianity, which he considered an offshoot of Judaism. He did not use the word *Torah* or *religion* when it comes to Jews. Jews are a race and not a religion, according to Hitler. But Jews also represent a belief and a philosophy, and that is what must be destroyed—not only the Jews themselves, but this Jewish form of belief, which has to be *ausgerottet* (extirpated) from the fabric of civilization. Thus, from the second volume of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler talks about the need to tear down the existing edifice in order to build up the new, just as Christianity once did. “Christianity could not content itself with building up its own altar, it was absolutely forced to undertake the destruction of the heathen altars. Only from this fanatical intolerance...” could Christianity arise. And where did the Church learn this mode of thought? This “intolerance and fanaticism positively embodies the Jewish nature.” But he, Hitler, is out to remedy this. “A philosophy filled

with infernal intolerance will only be broken by the same mighty will, and at the same time pure and absolutely genuine in itself.” He seemed to genuinely believe that he had prophetic powers and even that he was an embodiment and replacement of the Christian messiah. He liked to introduce messianic language into his speeches, especially as it came to Jews, as in the well-known address on January 30, 1939: “In the course of my life I have often been a prophet. ... Today I will once more be a prophet...[if war were to arise the result will be] the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.”

The above might indicate that Hitler was not a Christian. But of course he was. Hitler was a Catholic who never renounced his religion, and neither did his Church renounce him; he was not formally criticized, let alone excommunicated. Indeed, some align Hitler’s hatred of the Jews with the historical, theological anti-Semitism of the Church. Furthermore, there are pronouncements that show that Hitler was impressed by and favored the Church, especially the hierarchical structure. At the same time he talked about his infallibility and the need, indeed the intent, to build a new version “Church” around himself as the new messiah. Whatever the case, whether as a modification to existing Christianity or as a totally new replacement, Hitler intended to eliminate all vestiges of what he considered the Jewish religious or philosophical influence upon the world.

No one knows, or claims to know or understand, what Hitler’s innermost secret aim for the Jews really was. All we know is that he had a visceral hatred, fear, and loathing for Jews, who, at a minimum, were to be removed and separated from all that was German, and who, at a maximum, were all to be killed. We know that it started with a “legal” separation, as in the Nuremberg laws, and escalated to physical separation by immigration, followed by expulsion, and finally we have the ultimate separation by extermination. Was extermination the real intent from the outset, and the other measures simply pragmatic steps toward extermination, or was the real goal separation, which became extermination when no other means were found to be practicable? Possibly it was one or the other or both. Historians differ on these matters, and I have no special insights to offer except to identify my position with the belief that the killing of the bodies was not the essence of Hitler’s aim, but rather a means to achieve a higher aim.

*Assault on the Holocaust*

I have a few explanatory comments about the assault on the Holocaust. I say that genocide was coined...to speak about the Jews. Raphael Lemkin, who introduced this word, was a Polish Jew who managed to escape after being wounded as a soldier fighting in Warsaw. He eventually reached the United States, where he achieved prominence as an attorney fighting all manner of injustice and was an advisor to the American team at the Nuremberg war crimes trials. Clearly, though the word was introduced in response to what happened to the Jews, Lemkin also intended a more general meaning.

*Some items are just ludicrous and totally silly, if not insulting*

This statement does not provide much detail. The reader will find such material in the writings of Dr. Manfred Gerstenfeld, much of which is available on the Internet in the essay on *Holocaust Trivialization*. Quoting from this article, “Those abusing Holocaust comparisons for their own ideological purposes want to exaggerate the evil nature of a phenomenon they condemn. With the Holocaust symbolizing absolute evil for many, they use it as an instrument for their purposes.”

There is also another dimension to *silly and insulting* where the juxtaposition is appropriate. This dimension is very much dependent on purpose and context. To equate killings for “crimes” of behavior to the killing of Jews for the “crime” of being alive, or destruction of the environment to any type of genocide is, in my opinion, a gross distortion and misrepresentation. It takes skill to do it, but the Holocaust can properly be combined is a lesson on critical thinking and with injustice in general. Here the “comparison” is not trivial or insulting because there actually is no comparison made. A good example of how to do it is the book *Why Should I Care: Lessons from the Holocaust* by Friedman and Gold. The clue is in the subtitle—“Lessons” is, yes, while equivalence and conflating is no.

*I mention in the introduction to my talk a fascination with a mystery respecting the “final solution” letter*

However, I don’t explain what that is about. I will conclude this Afterword with an explanation.

I begin with the text of the document, or authorization or letter signed by Göring and addressed to Heydrich. There are various translations, all different in subtle ways. The translation below is my best understanding of the content of this document.

*SS-Gruppenführer Heydrich:*

*Supplementing the task that was assigned to you on 24 January 1939, to solve the Jewish problem through emigration and evacuation in the best way possible, I hereby charge you to carry out all necessary preparations in regard to organizational, financial and material matters for bringing about a complete solution [Gesamtlösung] of the Jewish question in all the territories of Europe under German influence.*

*Where other governmental agencies are involved, these are to cooperate with you.*

*I charge you further to send to me, as soon as possible, a general plan concerning the administrative, material and financial measures necessary for the accomplishment of the desired final solution [Endlösung] of the Jewish question.*

*Göring*

I should note that while this document is generally identified by *Endlösung*, translated as “final solution,” many historians point to the significance of *Gesamtlösung*, “complete” or “comprehensive” solution. This is usually taken as a reference to all geographical areas, not just Russia, where killing by the Einsatzgruppen was already in force, and as a reference to all Jews, including women and children. This is the basis for my statement that this document can be taken as the start of the Holocaust proper, even though major killing was already proceeding.

There are a number of peculiar factors connected to this document. I have structured my comments below in formal format, including footnotes and references.

# **Anomalies in the “Final Solution” Document**

**Morris Engelson**

## Introduction

While there is debate<sup>1,2</sup> as to the meaning and implication of the phrasing and timing of the so-called “final solution” document of July 31, 1941, signed by Göring and addressed to Heydrich, there is virtually unanimous agreement as to its origin—namely, that it was prepared by Eichmann/Heydrich and brought to Göring for signature by Heydrich personally.<sup>3,4,5,6</sup> A number of anomalies, such as a missing date and lack of formal letterhead stationery, are explained by and support the suggestion that the document was not drafted or typed at Göring’s office. These explanations, while somewhat contradicted by other evidence, carry much logical credibility, to the point that any evidence to the contrary is discounted and ignored. I argue that there is no need to hypothesize possibilities as a documentary analysis using modern physical document comparison means can settle some of the questions definitively. Likely the result will be in full agreement with the current consensus position by Holocaust historians. But possibly something new and unexpected might be found. And even if we find no surprises, it is always better to know with certainty than from inference, no matter how solid the logic.

Anomalies associated with this document, investigative research possibilities, and the possibility of gaining new insights from results are presented below.

## Anomalies

The following, sometimes conflicting, anomalies and questions attach to the “final solution” document.

1. A copy of this document, in German, is available at the Wannsee House Conference website at [www.ghwk.de/deut/Göring.htm](http://www.ghwk.de/deut/Göring.htm). This document is dated “Berlin, den 7.1941.” The day of the month, 31, is missing, but space is left for it. This copy includes numbers 18, 82 (crossed out), and 164 written in by hand. This same version without the date, and also

without the handwritten numbers, is located in file TR.3/461 at Yad Vashem.<sup>7</sup> I would assume that this is the version used at Eichmann's trial because section 81 of the Judgment (page 118 of the English version) states that: "We have stressed the connection between the cessation of emigration and the extermination order, because this is important for the understanding of document T/179, which is one of the basic documents in the history of the extermination. This is Heydrich's letter of appointment from Göring. In the copy submitted to us, the letter is dated July 1941, without specifying the day, but it is clear from other documents (T/180, T181) that the date of appointment was 31 July, 1941."

2. The date of July 31, 1941 is established from T/180, which is the invitation letter to the Wannsee conference. Thus: "Am 31.7.1941 beauftragte mich der Reichsmarschall..." This letter, typed on Heydrich's letterhead ("Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD") and signed by him, was drafted by Eichmann as indicated by the side reference to IV B 4. This practice, whereby letters were signed by one person and drafted by someone else, was apparently quite common, as explained by Lozowick.<sup>8</sup> This lends credence to the thinking that Göring's letter to Heydrich was not written by Göring.
3. The document is typed on plain paper without a formal letterhead. This supports the suggestion that the document was not prepared at Göring's office.<sup>9</sup>
4. We have a posting of an English translation of our document on the website of the Truman Library and Museum, in the Nuremberg trial section. The date is translated as "Berlin, 31 July, 1941." The day of the month, 31, appears on the translation. Furthermore, the date is given in the European sequence of day, month, and year, rather than the American sequence of month, day and year. The document is identified as a "translation of document No. NG-2586-(E) office of chief of counsel for war crimes."
5. There is a long section in the Eichmann trial testimony<sup>10</sup> where he is questioned about our document, and he consistently and vehemently denies having anything to do with it. At one point Eichmann suggests that "it could very easily be verified whether this document was written in my Section or not...[because]... an expert who is a specialist in typewriters and

identifying type faces...[could establish whether the document was] typed on the typewriter in my Section.” The response (apparently from Hausner or possibly a judge) is that: “You know just as well as I do that there are at least three or four copies of this document typed on different typewriters. We shall, therefore, proceed to the next question.” Where are these other copies? And would these not be identified as “*abschrift*,” namely, retyped copies, which proves nothing about the source of the original?

6. Hausner concluded that Eichmann drafted the document based on his exchange with Sassen, which Hausner quotes:<sup>11</sup> “Doesn’t it bear the initials of my department?...I had dictated it. These are my words. We had prepared the letter and submitted it to Göring for signature.” The copy that we have does not bear any marks from IV B 4.

7. Testimony of Göring at the Nuremberg trial:

Mr. Justice Jackson: Then, it was you, was it not, who signed, on the 31st day of July 1941, a decree asking Himmler, and the Chief of Security Police and SS GruppenFuehrer Heydrich to make plans for the complete solution of the Jewish question?

Göring: No, that is not correct. I know that decree very well.

Mr. Justice Jackson: 710-PS, that document is signed by you, is it not?

Göring: That is correct.

Göring then goes on to provide a spurious translation, where he, especially, avoids the phrase “final solution.” Eventually, he explains why he sent this document.

Göring: The reason I sent this letter to him was that, by the decree of January 24 1939 Heydrich, or it may have been Himmler, had been given the task of dealing with the emigration of the Jews. Therefore this was the government department concerned, and it was to this department which had been given the task that I had to apply concerning all material and economic matters there from.

By the time he is done, Göring has Jackson thoroughly confused, and he shows a high level of familiarity with this document.<sup>12</sup>

### The Conventional Explanation

The standard position integrates and is justified by the major points made above, and can be made consistent with the few points to the contrary.

Heydrich, likely at the instigation of Himmler, but certainly with his consultation and agreement, found a need to expand his powers respecting the Jewish question beyond those granted in the January 24, 1939 memorandum from Göring. Heydrich charged Eichmann with the task of drafting such an order, somewhat modeled after the memorandum of 1939 and using the usual ambiguous wording and phrases. This memorandum, drafted by Eichmann/Heydrich and vetted by Himmler, was then presented by Heydrich to Göring for his signature at a meeting in Göring's office on the evening of July 31, 1941. We do not know, nor care, how Göring was persuaded to sign this memorandum that he did not initiate or draft. Presumably, Göring knew something of this matter prior to the meeting, but he was not much involved beyond giving his approval via his signature. This was not really much of an innovation, given that Eichmann's Jewish affairs office was the logical repository for matters connected to the Jewish question, and Heydrich/Himmler were already involved in a murderous solution by way of the Einsatzgruppen.

We explain the seven points in the previous section to fit this scenario as follows.

1. The document was expected to be signed in July, but it has no day-of-the-month date because it was not known in advance when Heydrich would have an opportunity to meet with Göring to obtain his signature. Apparently, the meeting happened at the last possible moment, in the evening of the last day of July. But it would not matter if the date were not exact, as Lozowick has shown that dates of documents were frequently off by a few days from when they were signed.<sup>13</sup> Professor Yehuda Bauer believes that the document was “signed on the 31st, or perhaps fore-dated or backdated by a few days. I do not think that matters a great deal.”<sup>14</sup>

2. Of course, Heydrich would know when he obtained the document, and the date fits an appointment that he had with Göring. The same people, Eichmann/Heydrich, prepared both the “final solution” document and the invitation to Wannsee meeting document. The dates and the people go together.
3. Eichmann did not have Göring’s stationery when the document was prepared; hence it was typed on ordinary paper.
4. It is puzzling that the translation has the full date. Possibly the prosecutor told the translator to enter the full date, possibly another version exists from Göring’s office, possibly the translation comes from a copy where the date had been entered manually.
5. We know from other sources that there are multiple copies of this document. For example, the conference invitation letter references the attachment of this document. Additional documents do not change the history of the original.
6. Eichmann was a notorious liar and would say anything that he thought to be in his favor. Assuming that he told Sassen the truth, we can assume that an early draft of the document had Eichmann’s markings. But these would be removed from the final version brought to Göring, as it would be an insult to ask Göring to take ownership of a document that is publicly identified as having been prepared by such a low-ranking individual.
7. Göring knew the content of the document. Why not? He did sign it, after all. Göring got the better of Justice Jackson. What does that prove about the origin of this document? It only shows that Göring was better prepared, or more capable, than Jackson.

### An Alternate Explanation

The conventional explanation has overwhelming logical and documentary support for it. Were it not for the possibility of obtaining new evidence, speculation on alternatives would be a waste of effort. But new or additional information is

possible, as discussed further below. Hence, it is worthwhile to consider alternate scenarios, no matter how low their probability, as long as these are not impossible.

One can construct a wide range of alternate possibilities, ranging from minor adjustments to the conventional position to the most drastic differences. Below I present such a hypothesis.

We start with what Browning calls the “euphoria of victory.” Thus, commenting<sup>15</sup> on Hitler’s speech of July 16, 1941: “The euphoria of victory had elicited from Hitler both a utopian vision of a future Garden of Eden as well as the shrillest exhortations for intensified bloodletting. His subordinates were eager not to disappoint.” The conventional position is that the “subordinate” most eager to respond is Himmler, and that this led to the drafting of the memorandum by Heydrich/Eichmann. But what if Göring responded directly? Or, even better, what if Hitler made it known to Göring, consistent with his assignment of the Jewish problem on November 12, 1938, that it was time to take more drastic measures? Göring would have then acted precisely as he claims at his Nuremberg trial, that he provided the document because “Heydrich, or it may have been Himmler, had been given the task...” Except that “the task” was not emigration, as he claimed, but something much more sinister. This explains why Göring tried to confuse Justice Jackson.

A speech on July 16 is late for purposes of drafting and signing a decree on July 31. But Hitler could have let his intentions be known to Göring a few days or a week sooner, and this would give us sufficient time. There are two possibilities to this scenario. Göring is reluctant in both cases, as he would have preferred to work the Jews to death by way of war production. But he is not going to dispute the will of Hitler. So he lets Himmler know that he is ready to provide authorization for his Jewish department to cross government departmental lines, and he will sign a document to that effect. Eichmann/Heydrich then produce the memorandum, and we are back to the conventional explanation, as there is no way to establish who initiated the process. But Göring could have proceeded without help. The fact that Eichmann told Sassen that he did it is immaterial. Eichmann loved to boast and puff up his importance. We don’t know, of course, but he could have told the truth at his trial when he denied involvement in producing this document. The primary obstacles to this scenario are the missing date and, especially, the lack of proper letterhead stationery.

We postulate that Göring dictated the memorandum to his secretary and she prepared a draft version. This was typed on plain paper and with an incomplete date. The expectation was that the draft would be retyped for the final version. But time was short, and Heydrich showed up for a meeting late in the day on July 31, when the secretary was not available to retype the document. This was Thursday, and Göring was not available on Friday, or possibly he was not available the following week as well. So Heydrich accepted the signed draft copy. Later, the official copy, with full date and with proper letterhead, was produced for Göring's office. This is the source of the additional copies typed on a different typewriter and also the source for the translation in the Truman Library. A copy with the date on Göring's letterhead and without the designation "*abschrift*" would bolster this position.

### Problems with Both Scenarios

We have provided answers to the anomalies for both scenarios, but some of the answers are not very credible. Here are some factors that argue against both of the suggested scenarios.

1. Why is the date incomplete? Clearly, the explanation provided for the alternate scenario leaves much to be desired, and there is no need to belabor the point. The answer for the conventional explanation seems credible on the surface; they did not know when the document would be signed, so the date was left blank. But it is not that simple, because they did know when the document would be signed; this would be at the meeting that Heydrich had scheduled with Göring, which we find on Göring's appointment calendar. Now, we argue that this was a last-minute appointment and there was not much time. But how much time does it take to add the number 31 to a document? Finally, we note that the date could have been added after the signature was obtained.

This was a significant document in both importance and level of distribution. Himmler surely knew about it, and most likely Hitler as well. Copies were attached to the Wannsee Conference invitation; hence pretty much all governmental agencies had a copy. We know from Lozowick<sup>16</sup> how careful these bureaucrats were with the fine details and minutia in the structure and marking of their documents.

How is it that Eichmann and Heydrich would not be embarrassed to distribute a deficient document that lacks a date when it was so easy to add the date? So we ask again why the date is incomplete. The answer is that we don't know.

2. There is no concern with the identification of the date on the invitation letter. Such a reference would be appropriate with or without a full date on the original.
3. The lack of letterhead is extremely difficult to explain for the alternative hypothesis and reasonable for the conventional position. However, one could wonder why some of Göring's stationery could not have been obtained so that the document would be typed with the proper letterhead. As it is, it would be apparent to all that the document was not prepared at Göring's office. Heydrich was nervous about resistance to his authority from other governmental agencies and expressed great satisfaction, per Eichmann's testimony, when the Wannsee Conference was concluded smoothly. Heydrich needed Göring's letter to strengthen his authority, so why let people know that it was he, in fact, who composed this letter?
4. Informal consultation with people familiar with translations for legal procedures yield astonishment that anything whatsoever would be included in a translation that is not part of the original. Hence it is most difficult to explain why the English version in the Truman library includes the full date, and structure in the German rather than American format. The only logical explanation is that the translation is from a German version that includes the whole date. Where did this German "original" originate?
5. Both scenarios permit additional copies of this document. But the source and content and structures of these documents indicate different conclusions as to the history of this document. Surely, the Eichmann court could not be mistaken on such an important matter, that there are different versions (that is, from different typewriters) of this document? Where are these different versions, and how do they differ? Furthermore, the version that we have appears to be a direct copy of the original, as a retyped copy would be identified as

an “*abschrift*.” Hence it seems that the full date was, indeed, missing on the original.

6. Eichmann presumably showed Sassen a version that includes the IV B 4 notation. But this version apparently no longer exists. How do we explain the source of this document according to either scenario?
7. Göring’s familiarity and concern about this document is perfectly logical within the alternative scenario but difficult to understand according to the standard version. Why did Göring go to the trouble to confuse Jackson when all he had to do was to claim that the document was not prepared by him, unless it was, in fact, prepared by him?

#### A Need for Information

The alternate scenario is speculative and not very credible because of the date and letterhead problems. But the conventional explanation also suffers from credibility issues. Indeed, several of the “anomalies” work against each other, as noted in the “problems” section. We need more information to sort out these matters. There are several ways in which further investigation can be approached. What follows is simply an example of what might be done.

1. Check the literature for references to anomalies respecting this document. This would include the seven items in this paper, but there might be other items that this author does not know about.
2. Search for, and hopefully find, the document versions indicated by item 1.
3. Establish a need for further detective work or propose an explanation(s) for those cases where the sought document versions are not found.
4. Compare the content, wording, and structure of the document versions that are found and establish identities and differences.

5. Propose origination scenarios for the various versions of this document.
6. Test the origination scenarios by forensic typeface signature comparisons against documents whose source is well established to determine which typewriters and in which offices these documents were produced.
7. Establish the most likely source of this document by combining the new evidence with that already known.
8. One might also go beyond the physical forensic examination by proceeding with a style of document analysis to check on structural and favorite phrase frequency among the several likely authors (Eichmann, Heydrich, Göring), to gauge which possible author is the most statistically likely.

#### END NOTES

1. Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution* (University of Nebraska Press and Yad Vashem, 2004), 315. “The question, then, is did Heydrich at this point still understand the Final Solution as the mass expulsion... or was ‘the Final Solution’ a term now freighted with a new and even more fateful meaning?”
2. Professor Richard Breitman in email message to author on 18 July 2009: “I have always believed –and continue to believe—that the Eichmann/Heydrich/Göring document was an important signpost of transition, not, however the crucial authorization some believe.”
3. Ibid 1, 315. “On July 31 Heydrich visited Göring and obtained his signature on a deceptively simple document...”
4. Ibid 2: “”Eichmann at times said he dictated the memo, and there is no reason to disbelieve him.”
5. Gideon Hausner, *Justice in Jerusalem* (Schocken Books, 1968), 87. “It was Eichmann who drafted Göring’s historic directive.”
6. Eichmann, *Ich Adolf Eichmann, Ein historischer Zugenbereich*, 479.
7. Communication from Yad Vashem archivist Shaul Ferrero.
8. Yaacov Lozowick, *Hitler’s Bureaucrats* (Continuum, 2002).
9. Ibid 1, 517, n34 referencing Eberhard Jäkel.

10. *The Nizkor Project*, Shofar FTP Archive File: people/e/eichmann.adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-092-03.
11. Ibid 5.
12. Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution*, 2nd ed. (Thomas Yoseloff, 1961), 85, discusses this testimony.
13. Ibid 8.
14. Professor Yehuda Bauer in email to author on 11 July 2009.
15. Ibid 1, 310.
16. Ibid 8.

