

Have “Many Lies Accumulated in History Books”? -

## The Holocaust in Ashkenazi *Haredi* Historical Consciousness in Israel<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

At a conference of an association called “Judaism from a Different Angle,” Rabbi Mordechai Neugershal, of the “Lithuanian” Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) camp, said in a lecture he gave on the Holocaust:

After one of the newspapers ran an article about the Holocaust in the fashion of the remarks to be made here, a Holocaust survivor approached the author of the article, trembling from head to toe, and said, “How can you people speak? Who has the right to speak? How can these events be discussed at all?” The author of the article replied, “You’re right. The natural response after the Holocaust should be like that of Aaron [the Biblical High Priest]: ‘And Aaron was silent.’ [We should] sit on the ground, cry, rend our clothing, and be silent. But as long as there are people who will talk and attempt to explain that the events of the Holocaust contradict the faith and the Bible—we’ll speak out, too. And when we’ll speak, we’ll have what to say.”<sup>2</sup>

In recent decades, *Haredi* society has been dealing with the Holocaust at length – even though this development is not self-evident. Although several leading “Lithuanian” rabbis object to this confrontation—as we shall see

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<sup>1</sup> The quotation in the title is from *Sefer Hazon Ish, Faith and Trust [in God]* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: published by Rabbi Shmuel Greiniman, 1984). This article is part of a comprehensive study on popular religion and culture in Israeli Haredi society. The study was supported by a post-doctoral fellowship from the Yitzhak Rabin Center for Israel Studies, 1999–2001, and a research stipend from the International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem, 2000. I thank the staff of the Yad Vashem Archives and Library, Ms. Safira Rapoport, and the staff of the Pedagogic and Resource Center (PRC) of the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem, for their courteous assistance. Remarks and criticism by Yehuda Bauer, Hava Ben-Sasson, Amos Goldberg, David Silberklang, Dan Michman, Emmanuel Sivan, and Richelle Budd Caplan on previous drafts of this article spared me numerous errors and inaccuracies.

<sup>2</sup> Mordechai Neugershal, “*The Holocaust, Judaism from a Different Angle*,” Jerusalem, undated. Videocassette, PRC, VT 439. On silence as the preferred option, see Haim Yisrael Zimmerman, Tamim Po’alo: *Responsa Concerning the Horrific Annihilation of the Six Million Jews, May God Avenge Their Blood* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: n.p., 1947), pp. 5–11.

below—the young generation of rabbis, preachers, and lecturers in this camp, including Rabbi Neugershal, have discussed the topic on many occasions.

This article discusses several aspects of contemporary Israeli Ashkenazi *Haredi* historiography on the Holocaust.<sup>3</sup> Alongside *Haredi* historiography that does not come into direct and open contact with that of the academic world, there is a large and diverse historiography that maintains a very complex relationship with academic writing. The current article focuses on the latter.

Most *Haredi* historiography on the Holocaust is aimed at the general public, as opposed to elite groups, and is meant to help shape the public's historical perception and consciousness. To assess the nature of this historiography, we must examine its manifestations in a wide variety of sources. Only in this fashion can the complementary and contradictory premises, attitudes, and tactics—overt and covert—of the various writers and speakers be fathomed. Since this is a popular phenomenon, it should be viewed in a broader context, which includes sources that present historical reflections and images even though they are not pronouncedly historiographical, such as textbooks and teaching materials.

This approach helps us trace the various phases in the development of *Haredi* Holocaust historiography and thus creates a test case for understanding additional historical topics discussed in *Haredi* society. This examination also provides a unique perspective on some of the changes in *Haredi* society in the past generation, how it addresses its identity as a minority in Israel and the Jewish world, its internal and external boundaries, and its complex and tense relations with modernity, Jewish history, the Zionist enterprise, and the State of Israel.

The immense quantity and diversity of Holocaust-related material in *Haredi* society require extensive and detailed research that is beyond the scope of this article. What follows is an initial, partial discussion that examines the sources from a different context than is usual. Thus, its purpose is to

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<sup>3</sup>Two remarks on the parameters of this study: (1) The attitude of contemporary Sephardi Haredim toward the Holocaust requires a discussion that is beyond the scope of this article. (2) It is important to compare the remarks cited here with the copious Holocaust-related material published over the past generation in American *Haredi* circles, especially in light of the widely held *Haredi* view, that the messages of Orthodoxy are unaffected by geographical and other variables.

suggest possible directions in which research may head; it does not purport to offer summations, answers, or explanations.

### *Haredi* Society and Orthodox Historiography

*Haredi* society is a product of Orthodox Judaism. Its formation is most closely identified with the persona of Rabbi Moses Sofer, the Hatam Sofer (1762–1839) of Hungary.<sup>4</sup> While this society regards itself as the natural, authentic, and legitimate continuation of traditional Judaism, scholars have defined it as a modern phenomenon in which the dissimilarities from traditional Judaism outweigh the similarities. According to this approach, Orthodoxy came into being in response to the decline of traditional Jewish society and the ascendancy of various movements and approaches—such as the Haskala, Reform Judaism, and, later, Zionism and Conservative Judaism—that, each in its own way, laid claim to religious truth and the requisite platform on which to tackle the challenges of modernity.<sup>5</sup>

*Haredi* society is a mosaic of dozens of groups and subgroups representing diverse currents, approaches, theological and ideological attitudes, and ways of life. These groups maintain complex and tense love-hate relations, proximity and distance, and accord and discord. *Haredi* society, like any minority society that considers itself a subculture or counterculture to the majority society, is constantly in a state of tension between the wish to be seen outwardly as unified and cohesive and an awareness of the decisive importance of expressing its variance and its numerous complexions.<sup>6</sup> The internal fragmentation that typifies this society fundamentally affects any

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<sup>4</sup>On Sofer, see Jacob Katz, *Divine Law in Human Hands: Case Studies in Halakhic Flexibility* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1998), pp. 403-444.

<sup>5</sup>See, inter alia, Jacob Katz, *Halacha in Straits: Obstacles to Orthodoxy at its Inception* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992); Jacob Katz, "Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective" *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, 2 (1986), pp. 3–17; Moshe Samet, "The Beginnings of Orthodoxy," *Modern Judaism*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1988), pp. 249–270.

<sup>6</sup>Various studies on *Haredi* society explore these aspects directly or indirectly. See, for example, Tamar Elor, *Educated and Ignorant: Ultraorthodox Jewish Women and Their World* (Boulder, CO: L. Rienner, 1994); Menachem Friedman, *The Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Society: Sources, Trends, and Processes* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1991); Samuel C. Heilman, *Defenders of the Faith: Inside Ultra-Orthodox Jewry* (New York: Schocken, 1992); Samuel C. Heilman and Menachem Friedman, "Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of the Haredim," Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 197–265.

attempt to probe its nature and its way of meeting challenges. This also applies to certain aspects of *Haredi* historiography on the Holocaust.

Religious historiography, in its broad sense, has two main attributes:

1. It is predicated with the view that all occurrences are controlled by God and are part of a carefully designed weave encompassing the world and humankind.
2. Religious historiography often presents, from its perspective, the other side of the coin, a counter-history. This counter-history is not always written in direct or conscious response to history produced by academia. Instead, it is produced for other reasons, including a social need to devise a structured and clear past.

These aspects of nineteenth-century Orthodox historiography have attracted much attention in recent years, as has the extent of its authors' exposure to history written by researchers or various "others" and the way they cope with it. These important studies have created the infrastructure for an understanding of the internal role of this historiography in shaping and preserving Orthodoxy.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, since the *Haredi* historiography of the past fifty years has not received due attention, even initial research on this extensive and ramified phenomenon – not to mention research on the themes it discusses and how it discusses them – is lacking.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the influence of this society's many constituent groups on the types of historiography that have taken shape has not been discussed.<sup>9</sup> For example, the sources of authority of mitnaggedic rabbis and Hasidic *rebbe*s, the different types of charisma they exude, and the social structure of these

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<sup>7</sup>See, for example, David Assaf, *The Regal Way: The Life and Times of R. Israel of Ruzhin* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1997), pp. 24–33; Jacob Barnai, "The Relationship of Jewish Orthodox Historiography to Sabbatianism," (Hebrew), *Contemporary Jewry*, 9 (1995), pp. 19–42; Ada Rapoport-Albert, "Hagiography with Footnotes: Edifying Tales and the Writing of History in Hasidism," *History and Theory* 27 (1988), pp. 119–159; Israel Bartal, "True Knowledge and Wisdom: On Orthodox Historiography," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 10 (1994), pp. 178–192.

<sup>8</sup>For a few references, see David Assaf, "Yesod Ha-Ma'ala: A New Chapter in the Historiography of Hasidism in Eretz Israel" (Hebrew), *Cathedra*, 68 (1993), pp. 57–66; Kimmy Caplan, "Haredi Society in Israel and Its Attitude Toward the Holocaust—A Re-Reading" (Hebrew), *Alpayim* 17 (1999), pp. 176–208.

<sup>9</sup>For a general remark on this matter, see Assaf, *The Regal Way*, p. 25, note 22. On the importance of internal tensions in relations among the various groups' approaches to Zionism and their response to the Holocaust, see Dina Porat, "'Amalek's Accomplices', Blaming Zionism for the Holocaust: Anti-Zionist Ultra-Orthodoxy in Israel during the 1980s," *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 27, no. 4 (1992), pp. 695–735.

subsocieties are quite disparate and have a crucial effect on the historiography that they turn out.

### *Haredi* Holocaust Historiography

Since World War II, especially after the magnitude of the mass murder of European Jews became known, there has been a diverse outpouring of *Haredi* publications on the Holocaust. According to Menachem Friedman, they point to an “almost obsessive” preoccupation with the topic.<sup>10</sup> It seems that the volume of publications on this topic has continued to grow in the past two decades, and they reach all segments of *Haredi* society—men and women, adults and children, Hasidim and Mitnaggedim, and Sephardim. This literature is disseminated in books of scholastic or popular nature, fiction,<sup>11</sup> memoirs, articles in the *Haredi* press, sermons, lectures, weekly Torah-portion pamphlets that are distributed in synagogues, and children’s literature.<sup>12</sup> The extent and nature of the phenomenon indicate that this material is meant mainly for the public at large; for this reason, it is a striking manifestation of popular religion and culture in *Haredi* society.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, many of these sources treat the Holocaust in a way that aims to acquaint the reader with historical outlooks, directly or indirectly. In other words, notwithstanding the wide variance in contents and delivery, the sources collectively should be considered part of a historiographic whole.

If any field in *Haredi* historiography has attracted research attention, it is its treatment of the Holocaust. Studies by Menachem Friedman and Dina Porat discuss how *Haredim* in Israel have coped with the Holocaust. Although Friedman and Porat differ in their conclusions, both emphasize the clear

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<sup>10</sup>Menachem Friedman, “The Haredim and the Holocaust,” *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, 53 (1990), p. 86.

<sup>11</sup>Examples are Yechiel Granatstein’s numerous and widely distributed books. They include *Lights from the Gloom* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1959); *Grandeur and Heroism: The Radoszicer Rebbe in Piotrków, the Martyr Rabbi Isaac Samuel Elijah Finkler* (Jerusalem: Zekher Naftali Institute, 1987); and *Contact with the Soul* (Jerusalem: Pe’er, 1994) (all in Hebrew).

<sup>12</sup>For discussion of the characteristics of *Haredi* children’s literature, see Yossi Villian, “Main Motives in Children’s Stories in the *Haredi* World,” *Ma’agaley Qeriya*, 22 (1994), pp. 43–68; and Leah Hovav, “*Haredi* Children’s Literature—Realistic or Didactic?” *Children’s and Youth Literature*, 20 (3-4) (1994), pp. 20–35 (both in Hebrew).

<sup>13</sup>For a comprehensive methodological discussion on exploring popular religion and beliefs, see David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 3–21.

*Haredi* tendency to blame Zionism, the Zionist movement, and the Zionist leadership of the Yishuv for everything that befell *Haredim* in the Holocaust.<sup>14</sup> The studies of Haim Nirel and Meir Sompolinsky elicit a similar portrayal.<sup>15</sup> Notably, however, since scholars focus on the attitude toward Zionism and the State of Israel, *Haredi* survivors who appreciated and basically thought well of the symbols of the state and Zionism – either because they interpreted their arrival in Israel as divine providence, or because they saw nothing illegitimate in some commemorative methods that the state had adopted – have not received the attention they deserve. One example is Rabbi Solomon J. Kahaneman (1886–1969), head of the Ponevezh *Yeshivah* in Lithuania from 1919 on and a member of the Lithuanian Sejm in 1923–1925, who left Lithuania at the beginning of the war and came to Palestine. In 1943, Kahaneman re-established the Ponevezh *Yeshivah* in Bene Beraq. On Israel's Independence Day, Kahaneman would hoist the Israeli flag on the *yeshivah* roof; in later years, his students would take it down.<sup>16</sup>

The very preoccupation with the Holocaust in *Haredi* society has also attracted attention and should not be taken for granted. For example, Rabbi Isaac Hutner (1907–1980), one of the most important leaders in American mitnaggedic Orthodoxy, maintained that the Holocaust is not a unique event but one more link in the lengthy chain of strictures, destructions, and persecutions that the Jews have experienced. For this reason, Hutner

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<sup>14</sup>See Caplan, “*Haredi Society in Israel and Its Attitude Toward the Holocaust*,” pp. 179–181. For an expanded discussion, see Porat, “Amalek’s Accomplices,” and Friedman, “The Haredim and the Holocaust,” pp. 86–105. For a discussion of Haredi literature since the 1980s that makes “no reference to Zionism,” see Judith Tydor-Baumel, “Responses to the Uprising in the Haredi World,” (Hebrew), *Dapim le-Heker Tekufat ha-Shoah* 12 (1995), p. 307.

<sup>15</sup>See Haim Nirel, *The Haredim and the Holocaust: Ultra-Orthodox Accusations of Zionist Responsibility for the Holocaust* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Carmel, 1997), pp. 72–108; Meir Sompolinsky, “Jewish Institutions in the World and the Yishuv as Reflected in the Holocaust Historiography of the Ultra-Orthodox,” Yisrael Gutman and Gideon Grief, eds., *The Historiography of the Holocaust Period: Proceedings of the Fifth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1988), pp. 609–631. In contrast, Amos Goldberg, “The Holocaust in the Ultra Orthodox Press” (Hebrew), *Contemporary Jewry* 11–12 (1998), pp. 182–194, found that blaming Zionism is not always at the forefront of the discussion.

<sup>16</sup>To the best of my knowledge, Kahaneman has been overlooked in scholarly research. For a Haredi three-volume book about him, see Aharon Sorasky, *The Rabbi from Ponevezh: Chapters in the Life and Endeavors of Rabbi Joseph Kahaneman* (Hebrew) (Bene Beraq: Lithuanian Jewry Historical Institute, 1999).

objected to the use of the term “Shoah,” thereby indicating, as it were, that the conceptual framework has long existed and new categories are not needed.<sup>17</sup>

Hutner was not the only “Lithuanian” leader who objected to marking the Holocaust as a special event in Jewish history. He was preceded by Rabbi Abraham I. Karelitz, the “Hazon Ish” (1878–1953), probably the most important and influential *Haredi* rabbi and leader in the Yishuv/Israel from the early 1930s until his death.<sup>18</sup> Shortly after the end of World War II, Karelitz explained his opposition to the creation of special memorial days for the Holocaust victims, similarly adding that no contemporary has the authority to stipulate permanent days of fasting.<sup>19</sup>

Rabbi Eliezer Menachem Shakh (1898- ), head of the Ponevezh *Yeshivah* in Bene Beraq and the leading authority in the Israeli “Lithuanian” *Haredi* camp in recent decades, expressed a similar stance, although from a totally different direction. In a talk on Jewish ethics that he delivered at the *yeshivah* at the beginning of the Jewish year 5751 (1990), he commented:

“I ask how and what a Jew should think in view of such a terrible Holocaust. Surely there is a reckoning for all of this; after all, nothing

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<sup>17</sup>For a discussion of Hutner’s approach, see Yaffa Eliach, “The Holocaust - A Response to Catastrophe Within a Traditional Jewish Framework,” Gutman and Greif, eds., *The Historiography of the Holocaust Period*, pp. 722-726; Dan Michman, “The Impact of the Holocaust on Religious Jewry,” Yisrael Gutman, ed., *Major Changes within the Jewish People in the Wake of the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1996), pp. 699-701. See also Goldberg, “The Holocaust in the Ultra Orthodox Press,” pp. 163–167, 196–198; Mendel Piekartz, *Ideological Trends of Hasidism in Poland During the Interwar Period and the Holocaust* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1990), pp. 349–353; and David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 261.

<sup>18</sup>To the best of my knowledge, there is no comprehensive biographical study of this man and his endeavors. For several important aspects, see Heilman and Friedman, “*Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews*,” pp. 229–233; Lawrence Kaplan, “Hazon Ish: Critic of Traditional Orthodoxy” Jack Wertheimer, ed., *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era* (New York and Jerusalem: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), pp. 145–174. In contrast, the Haredim have produced ramified literature on the Hazon Ish, which requires a separate discussion.

<sup>19</sup>See Collection of Letters from Our Master, the Late Author of Hazon Ish, of Sainted and Holy Memory (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: published by Rabbi Shmuel Greiniman, 1955), Letter 97, pp. 113–114; Shlomo Cohen (chairman of the editorial board), *Pe’er Hador: Chapters in the Life-Work and Endeavors of the Master of Our Generation, Our Master, Rabbi Abraham Isaiah Karelitz of Sainted Memory, Author of Hazon Ish* (Hebrew) (Bene Beraq: n.p., 1967–1974), vol. 3, pp. 123–127. Haredi references to the Holocaust and its commemoration often cite this letter. For a different rationale for the opposition to stipulating a day of remembrance, see Yaakov Avigdor, *Jacob’s Portion* (Hebrew) (New York: n.p., 1950), Introduction, pp. VII–VIII.

comparable to this horrific Holocaust has occurred in centuries. Obviously the answer is very clear. God exacted a one-on-one reckoning, a lengthy reckoning that spanned centuries until it added up to six million Jews, and that is how the Holocaust happened. This is what a Jew should believe, and if a Jew is not at peace with this belief, he is a heretic....”<sup>20</sup>

In other words, if reward and punishment is the only legitimate frame of reference for the Holocaust, then it is unreasonable, unjustified, and unimportant to discuss the Holocaust in any way other than that in which any other calamity in Jewish history should be discussed.<sup>21</sup> Rabbi Shakh probably aimed his remarks mainly at Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994), the seventh Lubavitcher *Rebbe*, whom he regarded as a highly dangerous enemy of Jewry and Judaism. In the early 1990s, Rabbi Schneerson argued vehemently against referring to the Holocaust in terms of reward and punishment:

The destruction of six million Jews with incomparable cruelty—a terrible holocaust, the likes of which had never occurred before (and may it never recur, please God)—cannot be a punishment for sins since even Satan himself could not do a reckoning of that generation’s iniquities that would suffice, heaven forefend, to justify so grave a punishment [emphasis in the original].<sup>22</sup>

If so, we have a salient example of an internal *Haredi* dispute about the legitimacy of confronting the Holocaust and about the nature of this

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<sup>20</sup>See *A Whirling Storm—Lecture on Ethics by Our Master, Rabbi Eliezer Menachem Shach*, (Hebrew) PRC\_170-XXXII-58. The lecture was published in the weekend supplement of *Yated Ne’eman*, December 26, 1990, pp. 4–6. See also Michman, “The Impact of the Holocaust on Religious Jewry,” p. 685, note 62; Aharon Yeshaya Roter, *Sha’arey Aharon—The Concealed and the Revealed: A Personal Diary from the Holocaust Era About the Extermination Camps in Transnistria* (Hebrew) (Bene Beraq, published by the author, 1998), pp. 171–172. Rabbi

Shakh is another personality about whom no study exists.

<sup>21</sup>Notably, this outlook leads to many attempts to diagnose and define the sins for which this punishment was exacted, on the basis of the rule *mida ke-neged mida* (“punishment befitting the sin”). Some blame the Haskalah, the Jewish Reform movement in Germany, Zionism (see below), or various other misdeeds. This, however, is a topic for another article.

<sup>22</sup>See A. Newman, *On Torah and on Change* (London: Anthony Rowe Ltd., 1992), pp. 69–70. These and similar remarks appear in both Chabad sources and those of Chabad’s opponents.



endeavor—a dispute that has nothing to do with, and makes no reference to, written remarks on the topic in academic or other non-*Haredi* sources.

In view of the clearly expressed attitudes of these important rabbis, one might presume that mitnaggedic “Lithuanian” Jewry would desist from dealing with the Holocaust. However, these rabbis’ remarks had scanty influence, if any, on their disciples – and their disciples’ disciples – who continue to write about and grapple with the Holocaust, much like their colleagues in various Hasidic circles.

Nevertheless, “Lithuanian” rabbis, preachers, and educators, born during and after the 1940s, are evidently discomfited by the disparity between their leaders’ statements about the Holocaust and their own preoccupation with it – and, indeed, their very use of the term “Shoah.” Their need to explain it, directly or indirectly, indicates as much. This is evident, for example, in Rabbi Neugershal’s remarks (at the beginning of this article), in a discussion by Rabbis Yoel Schwartz and Yitzhak Goldstein,<sup>23</sup> and the fact that the writing of books about the Holocaust, or chapters in books, is sometimes justified on the grounds of the proliferation of newly-Orthodox people – who ostensibly need explanations—even though, practically speaking, most readers of this literature are *Haredi*.<sup>24</sup>

At times, this literature even contains statements that clash with the above “Lithuanian” authorities views without any evidence of apologetics. For example, Ruth Lichtenstein, of the Gerrer Hasidic court, explains in the introduction to a book discussed at greater length below her motives in writing on the subject. After noting the importance of the commandment of remembrance, especially in view of the “steady disappearance” of Holocaust survivors and the ascendancy of “Holocaust denial,” the author writes the following:

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<sup>23</sup>See Yoel Schwartz and Yitshak Goldstein, *Shoah: A Jewish Perspective on Tragedy in the Context of the Holocaust* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1990), pp. 16–17.

<sup>24</sup>See, for example, Roni Rafael Arikha, *The Riddle of Life: Inquiries in Matters of Faith and the Most Exalted Issues in a Language and Style Suitable for Our Contemporaries* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Kest-Leibovich Library, 1977), pp. 82–89; Schwartz and Goldstein, *Shoah*, pp. 34–38; and Moshe Sternbuch, *Know How to Respond: A Collection of Discussions on Issues of Faith, Outlook, Ethics, Education of the Young, and Other Matters* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem and Johannesburg: Vilna Gaon Torah Center Community, 1997), pp. 34–43.

If this is the state of affairs today, when witnesses to the horror are still living with us, one can only imagine what will happen in another generation or two, when the story of the destruction of European Jewry will be taught no longer from personal testimony but from written sources. There is reason for the grave concern that the entire matter will fade into the distance and become a chapter in Jewish history [and will be contemplated] just as we contemplate bitter periods in Jewish history such as the Chmielnicki massacres or the Crusades.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, in utter contrast to the wishes of Rabbis Hutner, Karelitz, and Shach, the author warns that the Holocaust may penetrate *Haredi* consciousness as just another historical episode and not as something unique.

### *Haredi* Historiography as Counterhistory

The basic premise of *Haredi* authors is that people who write history from a non-religious point of view or who base themselves on research tools and critical criteria have a structural bias in that they disregard God's role in turning the wheels of history. This approach, in their opinion, leads inevitably to misrepresentation of the past, either in its overall context or in details presented erroneously or belittled in terms of their value and importance. This premise is widespread in *Haredi* historiography—though often implicit or taken as self-evident—and so are its effects. Therefore, many *Haredi* writers set out to correct the accepted historical portrayal of the past with a conscious sense of mission. This is especially evident among *Haredi* historians who write about processes,<sup>26</sup> and it is reflected in *Haredi* attempts to “return” Holocaust-era sources to the *Haredi* camp. Rabbi Yissakhar Teichtal's son, for example,

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<sup>25</sup>See Ruth Lichtenstein, *Testimony: The Destruction of European Jewry* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Rabbi Isaac Meir Levin Institute, 2000), Introduction, p. 14. See also Roter, *Sha'arey Aharon*, Introduction, pp. 2, 163.

<sup>26</sup>See, for example, Meir Shcharansky, *The Israeli Past: Jewish History from the Return to Zion and the Building of Jerusalem to the Present Day* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Beit Yaakov, 1946–1972), eight volumes, and especially the introduction to the first volume.

attempted to separate *Haredism* from Zionism in his father's persona and argued that his father was "far from Zionism."<sup>27</sup>

The preoccupation with the Holocaust in *Haredi* counter-historiography, focuses, as Menachem Friedman and Dina Porat have shown, in noting the negative attitude of Zionist and Yishuv leaders toward Orthodox and, especially, *Haredi* Jews in Europe and the consequent influence of this attitude on efforts to rescue them. A succession of studies has shown that, indeed, some Zionist leaders were unfavorably disposed toward these Jews, but, in fact, that there was little they could do.<sup>28</sup>

The *Haredi* counter-history, basing itself foremost on these views and on Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel's (1903–1956) famous book *Min ha-Metsar* ("From the Straits"), alleges that these leaders did not want *Haredim* to reach Palestine and, therefore, did nothing to rescue them knowing the horrific fate they faced.<sup>29</sup> Some attribute this to a ramified, preconceived plot including the Jewish press in Palestine and the United States, among others to whitewash testimonies about the massive, systematic killing of Jews.<sup>30</sup> They put forward this accusation in the context of additional problematic rescue attempts that, in most cases, failed; for example, the initiatives of the Vaad ha-Hatzala, Joel Brand, and Rudolf Kasztner. From there, it is relatively easy to accuse researchers of "belonging to Zionist circles" and, consequently, to allege that

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<sup>27</sup> Rivka Shatz, "Confession on the Threshold of the Crematoria and an 'Afterward'" (Hebrew), *Kivunim*, 23 (1984), pp. 49–63, esp. pp. 61–62.

<sup>28</sup> For recent summations of studies on this issue, see Dalia Ofer, "Fifty Years After: The Yishuv, Zionism, and the Holocaust, 1933–1948," Gutman, ed., *Major Changes*, pp. 463–496; Anita Shapira, "The History of Mythology—Outlines of Historiography on Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust" (Hebrew), *Alpayim*, 18 (1999), pp. 24–53.

<sup>29</sup> See for example, Yosef Avraham Wolf, *The Era and Its Problems* (Hebrew), vol. 2 (Bene Beraq: Rabbi Y. A. Wolf Memorial Publishing House, 1982), p. 13; Aharon Rosenberg, *The Shepherds' Tents: Great Anthology of the Great Jewish Rabbis/Shepherds in Regard to Zionists, Zionism, Agudath [Israel], Their State, Hebrew, Elections, Separatism, Acceptance of Funds, Etc., and Our Duty* (Hebrew), 2 (New York: n.p., 1985), pp. 802–820; and, in a different tenor, Abraham Fuchs, *The Unheeded Cry: The Gripping Story of Rabbi Weissmandl, the Valiant Holocaust Leader who Battled both Allied Indifference and Nazi Hatred* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1984). See also Michman, "The Impact of the Holocaust on Religious Jewry" p. 701.

<sup>30</sup> For several accusations, see M. Waselman, *The Mark of Cain: Remarks on the Affair of Failed Rescues, Helplessness, and Obtuse Indifference of the World Zionist Leadership and the Jewish Agency During the Years of Holocaust and Devastation, 1939–1945* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: n.p., 1989), pp. 17–62; Roter, Sha'arey Aharon, p. 198.

their studies suffer from ideological biases of which their authors are consciously aware.<sup>31</sup>

*Haredi* authors often base themselves on “objective studies that are not suspected of being ‘anti-Zionist,’” foremost those of Shabtai Beit-Zvi and Tom Segev.<sup>32</sup> Thus, for example, Lichtenstein writes en passant in one of her footnotes:

This is the place to note commendably Tom Segev’s historically reliable work in his book [The Seventh Million], in which he ripped the veil from the faces of the Jewish Agency people in regard to their behavior in the Holocaust. Segev, by the way, was not the first. Shabtai Beit-Zvi preceded him by many years in his book, *Post-Ugandan Zionism in the Crucible of the Holocaust*. This is a very obscure book but a very important one for anyone who deals in Holocaust research.<sup>33</sup>

In this context, a distinction should be made between *Haredi* counter-historiography between the 1950s and the 1970s and that published in recent years. The books of Yechiel Granatstein, Moshe Prager, and Moshe Schoenfeld, all widely distributed in all sectors of Haredi society, offer a counter-history composed of *Haredi* manifestations of heroism. This is their alternative to the heroics stressed by Israeli society regarding the actions of the Yishuv and Zionist movement leadership. While these works hardly make

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<sup>31</sup>See, for example, Shaul Gur-Arieh, *The House of the Righteous Will Endure: Story of the Rescue of the Sainly Brothers, the Holy Rebbe Aharon of Belz and the Holy Sage Rebbe Mordechai of Bilgoraj May Their Merit Protect Us, from the Talons of the Nazi Beast* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Or ha-Tsafon, 1980), p. 11.

<sup>32</sup>Shabtai B. Beit-Zvi, *Post-Ugandan Zionism in the Crucible of the Holocaust: A Study of the Causes of the Zionist Movement’s Errors in 1938–1945* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Bronfman, 1977); Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993). Beit-Zvi contributed some of his remarks to Haredi publications. See his article, “Sin and Its Punishment,” *Zakhor: Collection of Documentation on Utmost Devotion in the Vale of Killing* (Hebrew) (Bene Beraq: n.p., 1981), pp. 158–161. In regard to these sources, see Ofer, “Fifty Years After,” pp. 470–471. Popular Haredi literature often cites the Hebrew edition of *Ben Hecht, Perfidy* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Defus Yisrael, 1970) —a matter that requires separate discussion.

<sup>33</sup>Lichtenstein, *Testimony*, p. 420, chapter on “Rescue,” note 11. See also Schwartz and Goldstein, *Shoah*, pp. 248–251; S. Salmon, *The Crimes of Zionism in the Destruction of the Diaspora* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: published by the author, 1990), pp. 4, 45, 54, 125.

direct reference to academic sources, they are clearly responding to them.<sup>34</sup> Granatstein and Prager represent the *Haredi* pattern of the 1950s and the 1960s, which was less opposed to general society and interacted with it at various levels. The authors of the 1980s and 1990s, in contrast, cite these sources extensively – albeit frequently out of context. For example, the “(Partial) Source List and Bibliography” in Waselman’s book polemically cites studies by Yehuda Bauer, Yisrael Gutman, Leni Yahil, Dina Porat, and others.<sup>35</sup> Schwartz and Goldstein’s books are replete with quotations from studies of these and other scholars,<sup>36</sup> as are the books of Lichtenstein and Salmon.<sup>37</sup> Finally, the way academic studies are used and the extent of reliance on them also vary. Therefore, there is no dichotomy between those who use such studies and those who disregard them, but rather a multifaceted continuum.

The use of and reference to academic sources, albeit mainly for polemic, rejectionist, or negational reasons, have left their imprint on the nature of *Haredi* historiography with regard to the Holocaust. Paradoxically, since *Haredi* historiography, by its very nature, is a response to academic or other historiography, the dominant themes are often determined by academic scholars.<sup>38</sup>

A pronounced example of this is the structure of Lichtenstein’s book, the most up-to-date and complete *Haredi* historiography and textbook. This book contains letters of approbation from (in order of their receipt) Rabbis Eliyahu Fischer, Chaim P. Schoenberg, Avraham Atlas, Matityahu C. Solomon, and

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<sup>34</sup>Yechiel Granatstein, *The Other Heroism: The Religious Jew in Struggle of Heroism and Uprising Against the Nazis’ Decrees During the Holocaust Years* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Zekher Naftali Institute, 1988); Moshe Prager, *Those Who Never Yielded: The History of the Chassidic Rebel Movement in the Ghettos of German Occupied Poland* (Brooklyn: Lightbooks, 1980); Idem, *Sparks of Glory: Inspiring Episodes of Jewish Spiritual Resistance* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1985); Moshe Schoenfeld, *The Crematoria Victims Accuse: Documents, Papers, and Testimonies About Jewish Holocaust Criminals* (Hebrew) (Bene Beraq: Agudath Israel Youth, 1975, second edition; further editions: 1976, 1978). Importantly, the quantity of historical studies on the Holocaust in the 1960s was very small; the momentum to produce such publications did not begin until the 1970s.

<sup>35</sup>Waselman, *Mark of Cain*.  
<sup>36</sup>See Caplan, “Haredi Society in Israel and Its Attitude Toward the Holocaust,” pp. 187–188.

<sup>37</sup>Salmon, *Crimes of Zionism* (Hebrew).  
<sup>38</sup>For example, the episodes discussed in Waselman’s book, *Mark of Cain*, correspond partly to those discussed in Yehuda Bauer’s *Jews for Sale?: Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933–1945* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), which is based partly on articles published in the 1970s.

Yaakov Perlow (the Novominsker Rebbe), attesting its broad legitimacy. This is corroborated by the very large circulation it achieved shortly after it was published and by the plan to translate it into English. Various chapters of the book have been published in recent years in both the Hebrew and English editions of the newspaper *Hamodia*.<sup>39</sup> The author is the daughter of Rabbi Yehuda L. Hachohen Levin, the first editor of this newspaper and founder of the Rabbi Isaac Meir Levin Institute. She works for the English edition of *Hamodia*, published in New York. Her being part of the American *Haredi* community affects certain aspects of her book, such as her pointed remarks in the chapter on “The United States and the Holocaust of European Jewry.”<sup>40</sup>

Nearly all of the book is structured chronologically, beginning with the situation in Germany at the end of World War I and ending with the Holocaust survivors; it also calls attention to the vast differences in the progression of the war in different European countries.<sup>41</sup> Like Holocaust curricula in other education systems, the book has a chapter that presents a concise dateline of the main events in 1933–1945. “General Events in the World and the Third Reich” are listed on the right-hand side of each page, and the main developments “In the Jewish World” are recorded on the left-hand side.<sup>42</sup> This chapter and several appendices at the end of the book attest to the author’s acknowledgement of the importance and, perhaps, the necessity of historical context in understanding the Holocaust.<sup>43</sup> Lichtenstein’s appendix seems to have been inspired by the glossary in the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*. At times, however, she changes the phrasing slightly in order to attach value judgments to the concepts.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Examples of English installments: “Holland,” *Hamodia*, December 4, 1998; “The Yishuv’s Reaction to the Holocaust,” *ibid.*, October 22, 1999 (continued on October 29 and November 5); and “Salonika: Jerusalem of the Balkans,” *ibid.*, June 25, 1999 (continued on July 2 and July 9).

<sup>40</sup>Lichtenstein, *Testimony*, pp. 309–321. Although Lichtenstein is American-Haredi, her book should be discussed here because it was written in Hebrew and is aimed mainly at Haredim in Israel. When the American Haredi mainstream publishes such literature, as well as children’s and worldview literature, it usually does so in English.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, Parts A–B.

<sup>42</sup>“Remember the Days of Old,” *ibid.*, pp. 120–139.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 411–417.

<sup>44</sup>Yisrael Gutman, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990), vol. 4, pp. 1751–1758. The *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, for example, describes the Bund as a “Jewish socialist, non-Zionist organization,” whereas Lichtenstein (p. 411) depicts it as an “assimilationist socialist Jewish organization.” For a rare case of a Haredi memoir that explains concepts, see Arye Yehuda Merlich, *Havdala Candle: Biography from*

The “indexes” at the end of the book are unique in popular *Haredi* literature and require special attention. At the beginning of the names and places indexes, the author takes the trouble to apologize “for the absence of titles of esteemed personalities who appear in the book” and explains that this is due to “technical difficulties, and since the purpose of an index is not to judge the titles or exaltedness [of the people listed] but to inform the reader of their whereabouts.”<sup>45</sup> The very need to express these matters illustrates the rarity of indexes in *Haredi* literature of this kind. The index of names is especially interesting because it is divided into two parts, “so that murderers and their victims do not appear in one list.” Further perusal, however, shows that “Index of Names B,” devoted to the murderers expands the category tremendously, by including several personalities who have only a slight connection, if any, with murders, e.g., Pope Pius XII (1876–1958), General Erwin Rommel (1891–1944), and German Finance Minister Hjalmar H. Schacht (1877–1970). In contrast, one might expect several people on the list of “victims,” such as Itzhak Gruenbaum (1879–1970), a member of the General Zionist Party and the Jewish Agency Executive, and chairman of the Jewish Agency Rescue Committee; and Saly Mayer (1882–1950), a leading figure in Swiss Jewry, to appear in Index B, since post-Holocaust *Haredi* historiography takes such a strongly negative view of them.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, while the maps (twenty-nine, of various kinds), diverse photocopied documents, hundreds of pictures, and superb printing are not widespread in *Haredi* historiographical writings, they are common in nonfiction and textbooks published by Chabad and the *Haredi* publishing house Artscroll, which is headquartered in America.

The clear influence of academic historiography on the structure and layout of this book does not imply that its contents are totally faithful to the details, processes, and interpretations that it culls from academic studies. This may be demonstrated in various ways. For example, Lichtenstein starts her historical discussion with the situation and status of Germany at the end of

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*the Years of Terror in the Vale of Tears* (Hebrew) (Ra'anana, Israel: privately published, 2000), pp. 222–233.

<sup>45</sup>Lichtenstein, *Testimony*, p. 422.

<sup>46</sup>Interestingly, Rashid Ali el-Kilani, the revolutionary leader of Iraq after April 1, 1941, appears in both indexes.

World War I, using this as a point of departure for a painstaking discussion of processes in the Weimar Republic, the Nazi accession to power, and the years building up to World War II (1933–1939). Although many important details are not discussed, the reader obtains a lucid picture of a protracted, albeit complex, developmental process.<sup>47</sup> The author's point of departure, the end of World War I, strongly differs from the process as it is usually presented in academic studies in that it almost totally disregards the racist anti-Semitism that took shape in the nineteenth century. The author evidently found it difficult to relate to an anti-Semitism that was not animated by religious considerations.

Furthermore, whereas the history of Germany and changes in its attitude toward the Jews in the 1920s and 1930s are described as a process in which most phases are interrelated, these matters are radically absent in the discussion of the war and the annihilation of European Jewry. The reader is provided with much detail that, although chronologically and geographically integrated, is not presented as part of the context of war developments. Finally, the author (deliberately or inadvertently) marginalizes her discussion of the Judenräte, a central topic in Holocaust research. Nevertheless, she does discuss the unique status and situation of Lithuania in 1939–1941, apparently because the rescue of the yeshivas and their students is central to the contemporary *Haredi* consciousness.<sup>48</sup>

In general, concerns of the present override allegiance to the historical context of the Holocaust era. Thus, at times the author accompanies historical facts with her own side remarks. One example is the cooperation among members of the “Working Group” in Slovakia. Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel's cooperation in this group with his Zionist relative, Gisi

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<sup>47</sup>The general picture is compatible with that in Units 3 (Yehiam Weitz) and 5 (Dan Michman) of the course “In the Days of Holocaust and Punishment” (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: The Open University of Israel, 1984), but overlooks Unit 2 (Dan Michman), even though this unit was presumably available to the author.

<sup>48</sup>See Lichtenstein, *Testimony*, pp. 216–232; and Dina Spiegel, *The Destruction of European Jewry: Comprehensive Historical Survey and Worldview Articles* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Neve Yerushalayim Girls' Seminary, 1999 [expanded second edition. First edition: 1988]), pp. 100–107. For a discussion on the behavior of the rescue committee of the Agudat Ha-rabanim of the United States and Canada, see Efraim Zuroff, *The Response of Orthodox Jewry in the United States to the Holocaust: The Activities of the Vaad ha-Hatzala Rescue Committee, 1939-1945* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1999).



Fleischmann (1897–1944), and other Zionist and Jewish personalities undoubtedly traces to the vicissitudes of the time.

Many *Haredi* sources clearly tend to soft-pedal and even disregard this collaborative activity and many other actions that took place in the ghettos and camps, including the Sonderkommando uprising in Auschwitz<sup>49</sup> and various instances of cooperation with Zionists to rescue rabbis, *yeshivah* heads, and Hasidic *rebbe*s. Lichtenstein's approach is different regarding the "Working Group," on which she writes: "Although the [Working Group] was made up of *Haredim*, Zionists, and Neologues who collaborated to meet immediate needs—[its] accomplishments trace to its internal unity and not to reckonings about whom to rescue."<sup>50</sup> Thus, she both notes the collaboration and deliberately uses mitigating expressions such as "although" and "not to reckonings." In contrast, in her account of the Belzer *rebbe*'s escape, she does not even hint that the Palestine immigration certificates that the *rebbe* and his associates received came from the Zionists.<sup>51</sup>

Lichtenstein's book clearly reflects the academic studies' imprint on *Haredi* historiography, in the latter's tendency to accept the factual framework provided by scholars while focusing on alternative interpretations.<sup>52</sup> In other words, *Haredi* historiography has consciously or unconsciously internalized the complexity of the historical reality, both geographically and experientially. Thus, the unfolding of the Holocaust was different in Budapest than in Berlin, and survivors' memoirs do not always provide a full picture of the fate of the larger community in each location.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Nathan Cohen, "Diaries of the Sonderkommandos in Auschwitz: Coping with Fate and Reality" *Yad Vashem Studies*, 20 (1990), pp. 273–312.

<sup>50</sup>Lichtenstein, *Testimony*, p. 301. For one of many manifestations of this cooperation, see Emanuel Frieder, *To Save Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi During the Holocaust* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1986).

<sup>51</sup>Lichtenstein, *Testimony*, pp. 331–336, especially p. 334.

<sup>52</sup>See, for example, Schwartz and Goldstein, *Shoah*.

<sup>53</sup>See, for example, Bina Greenwald, *Lights from Darkness* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: privately published, 1998), and the two appendices on "Hungarian Jewry" and "Remarks on Information in Hungary During the Years of World War II." For a different approach, see Roter, Sha'arey Aharon. The nature of memoirs of *Haredi* Jews, which have been published at an increasing pace in recent years, is exceedingly diverse and requires specific research. See, inter alia, Yitshak Hadar, *The People Escaped from the Sword* (Jerusalem: n.p., 1990); and Yosef Yehuda Levy, *That You May Recount It-to a Future Age* (Bene Beraq, privately published, 1996) (both in Hebrew).

This internalization seems to provide an additional and important dimension in explaining the difference between the sweeping and aggressive nature of the accusations against the Zionist movement and its leadership in *Haredi* sources in the 1950s and the 1960s, as published by writers affiliated with both moderate and extremist groups, and the relatively moderate tone in some later sources. For example, Waselman writes the following the beginning of his book:

“Here we do not point a accusing finger at these leaders in the absolute sense, on the grounds that they could have saved everyone, as it were, because the results of the military campaigns in Europe are known.... The *j'accuse* that our study expresses is that even in places and cases where it was possible to remove and rescue individuals or groups in conventional ways from the cycle of annihilation and despair and to help them survive we still find indifference, inaction, equanimity, and disregard instead of initiative and ability.”<sup>54</sup>

This statement is probably the result of retrospective thinking following the internalization of the complexity of the historical reality. However, the exposure to academic research sometimes radicalizes and intensifies the charges against the Zionist movement and its leadership. This is the case, for example, in Salmon’s aforementioned booklet, *The Crimes of Zionism in the Destruction of the Diaspora*.<sup>55</sup>

We should bear in mind that alongside this historiography, there are many *Haredi* publications that concentrate on documenting the great losses and damage inflicted on *Haredi* Jewry during the Holocaust and include manifestations of sanctification of life, martyrdom, and self-scrifice by observant Jews. These sources focus on memorializing rabbis, Hasidic *rebbe*s, and *Haredi* leaders, and on recounting the actions of these personalities as well as of ordinary Jews. Such sources tend to refrain from using academic research. Furthermore, they tend to accept the veracity of

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<sup>54</sup>Waselman, Mark of Cain, Introduction.

<sup>55</sup>See also Elazar Halevi Shulsinger’s sweeping and acrid rhetoric in, *In the Shepherds’ Tents* (Hebrew) (Bene Beraq: privately published, 1988), pp. 84, 149–155.

stories and testimonies without checking their credibility and historical context.<sup>56</sup>

This category of sources includes, for example, the seven-volume work *These Will I Remember*, published from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s;<sup>57</sup> Abraham M. Alter's *Poland's Roads Are in Mourning*, composed of notes taken during a journey among towns, destroyed communities, Jewish cemeteries, ghettos, and extermination camps, focusing on stories about the destroyed world;<sup>58</sup> and the encyclopedia *Shema Yisrael*, which has begun to appear in recent years at the initiative of the Kaliver Rebbe, himself a Holocaust survivor.<sup>59</sup>

This approach also prevails in several weekly Torah-portion pamphlets available in synagogues countrywide—foremost *Sihat ha-Shavu'a*, published by Chabad, and *Toda'a*, published by affiliates to the *Haredi* mitnaggedic stream. A preliminary study indicates that the usual method in *Sihat ha-Shavu'a* is to present a Holocaust-related story that contains a miraculous component in which, or as a result of which, the Jewish “spark” is revealed.<sup>60</sup> *Toda'a*, in contrast, usually illuminates rabbinical personalities who were killed in the Holocaust or survived. A capsule biography several lines long (“Who Is

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<sup>56</sup>For several examples, see Yehoshua Uziel Zilberberg, *The Kingdom of the House of David* (on the Sochaczower Rebbe) (Bene Beraq: privately published, 1991); Menashe Miller, *Alive and Blessed, in the Vale of Tears* (on the Vizhnitser Rebbe) (Haifa: Mekor ha-Beracha Institute, 1993); Aharon Sorasky, *The Flaming Torch* (on the Klausenberger Rebbe) (Bene Beraq: Yeheskel Shraga Frankel, 1997) (all in Hebrew).

<sup>57</sup>*These Will I Remember: Historical Anthology on the Martyrs of 1939–1945* (Hebrew) (New York: Institute for Study of the Problems of Haredi Jewry, 1956–1972).

<sup>58</sup>Abraham Mordechai Alter, *Poland's Roads are in Mourning, The Story of Destroyed Polish Jewry* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Zekher Naftali Institute, 1987), 2 parts. This book, evidently meant for Haredi people who visit in Europe, is devoid of any historical context or discussion of the Holocaust, except for a few notes in the chapters on the ghettos and the camps. According to the president of the Institute, A. C. Carlebach, in the introduction, the purpose of the book is to give “living testimony and remembrance and [create a] legacy that will last a thousand years for the rebbes, tsadikim, towering religious scholars, and a myriad of Jewish brethren who were ensnared in the Nazi trap and destroyed from under God's firmament, may God avenge their blood.”

<sup>59</sup>*Encyclopedia Shema Yisrael: To Document and Commemorate Acts of Utmost Devotion in the Years of Rage, 1939–1945, in the Ghettos, Labor Camps, Concentration Camps, and Extermination Camps* (Hebrew), vol. 1 (Bene Beraq: Shema Yisrael Institute, 1997). For more on methods of memorializing the destroyed Haredi world, see Sarah Kaplan, “Haredi Remembrance” (Hebrew) (Graduate Seminar Paper, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1998). I thank Kaplan for her permission to use her work.

<sup>60</sup>See, for example, “Candles in the Ghetto,” *Sihat Ha-shavu'a*, 362, weekly portion Mi-qets, December 10, 1993; and “Only Mine,” *ibid.*, 364, weekly portion Va-yehi, December 24, 1993, among many others.

This Man?") and several stories about the man describe his saintly traits ("The History of Tsadikim," "He Used to Say. . .").<sup>61</sup>

It should be noted that this miraculous and ahistorical method of describing certain events and tales does not necessarily mean they are not true. The complexity of the historical reality indicates that strange events did occur and were to the advantage of those involved in them. The problematic element revolves around placing them at the forefront of the account.

The sources that document the destroyed world and describe the behavior of observant Jews in the Holocaust point to the proliferation of shades of *Haredi* Holocaust historiography; this might even occur within the same camp. For example, the picture one gets from *Toda'a* is totally different from that presented in several of the aforementioned books that originate in the Mitnaggedic camp. This can be partially traced to different types of sources, target audiences, and authors' goals. A weekly Torah-portion pamphlet cannot be likened to a book written by a person of stature, and a book meant for teachers in religious girls' schools cannot be likened to one written for the public at large. Thus, although the various types of *Haredi* writing on the Holocaust should be assessed as a whole—since all are on the level of popular literature—we cannot accomplish this until we obtain a comprehensive picture of the main types of popular *Haredi* literature on the Holocaust and their major characteristics.

### *Haredi* Self-Blame

It stands to reason that the acrid *Haredi* accusations against the Zionist movement, the Yishuv, and their leaders, first voiced in the 1940s, were in part a release of the pain, anger, despair, and frustration that accompanied knowledge of the magnitude and systematic nature of the annihilation. They also probably provided that generation of *Haredim* with a theological explanation for what had happened. This is undoubtedly an important component in understanding the centrality of these charges. However, Dina Porat argues that the *Haredi* assaults on Zionism in later years reflect

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<sup>61</sup>See, for example, "Rabbi Yosef Asher Polak," *Toda'a*, 149, weekly portion Toledot, 1993; "Rabbi Shmuel Pondiler," *ibid.*, 153, weekly portion Mi-qets, 1993; among many others.

additional motives that explain their centrality in *Haredi* literature on the Holocaust since the 1980s.<sup>62</sup>

Another reason for these accusations and attacks that should be considered was their own heavy sense of guilt for not having done enough, themselves, to rescue their brethren. A penetrating reflection of this feeling is found in an article by Binyamin Minz (1903–1961), a leading figure in Poalei Agudat Israel from 1946 until his death, a member of Knesset from the first Knesset until his death, and a minister in the Israeli government. In a February 1944 issue of the newspaper *She'arim*, under the headline “The Cry into the Void,”<sup>63</sup> Minz describes the void created by the annihilation of European Jewry and the void that he found among the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine. “[They haven’t] got a trace of love for relatives, for friends, for the people, for the Jews at large.” He notes that: “Emissaries from the Diaspora visited us several weeks ago... with one word in their mouths: ‘Rescue!’” This is why he wrote the article.<sup>64</sup>

The writer describes in sarcastic and cynical terms various organizational actions designed to rescue the remaining European Jews and rejects the idea of accusing the “democratic peoples” on the grounds that one must inspect one’s own nest first.

“If we ourselves are free of all sin and iniquity for indifference at the sight of compatriots’ and brethren’s blood ... if we ourselves remembered our tortured, butchered brethren in our lying down, our rising up, and our walking by the way, in our regular daily routine, which did not change in the slightest as our nation was being cremated horrifically.”<sup>65</sup>

Farther on, the author discusses actions taken by the Yishuv and notes that, “The Yishuv did something. The Hebrew Yishuv in Palestine took more action to rescue [Jewish] brethren than any other Jewish community.... But

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<sup>62</sup>Notably, however, the preoccupation with Zionism, the Yishuv, and the “lambs to the slaughter” issue has diminished perceptibly, corresponding to the presentation of alternative heroism accounts in some Haredi literature published in recent years. Lichtenstein, for example, devotes only about ten pages to these matters (Testimony, pp. 293–301, 306–309), whereas in Spiegel, The Destruction of European Jewry, there are only four pages (pp. 183–187). Roter, too, in Sha’arey Aharon, devotes only a few pages to this topic.

<sup>63</sup>See *Binyamin Minz, Selected Writings* (Hebrew), Gershon Harpenes, ed., A (Tel Aviv: Poalei Agudat Israel, 1977), pp. 300–308.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 300.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 302. Part of Minz’s comment is a paraphrase of the Shema Yisrael (Hear O Israel) prayer.

even the Yishuv was inattentive for more than two years [1940–1942],” until it established the Rescue Committee, which also did “ridiculously” little.<sup>66</sup> After his scathing reckoning with the Rescue Committee, Minz devotes the last part of his article to very severe self-criticism of the *Haredi* community in Palestine, which, he asserts, “did not do its duty, did not discharge its function ... either in rescue or in relief”:<sup>67</sup>

“Only a few of us invested time and energy in rescue. A few. But they were alone, unassisted, unsupported. They were like a sagebrush in the desert. They crumpled under the weight of the burden and there was no one to help them. They stumbled under the weight of the terrible reports, under the weight of the agony in the complacency around them—and no one gave them relief. A few—and what about the others? They did not change their ways in view of the disaster. The same pettiness, the same disputes, the same brawls, the same frictions, the same ways, the same thoughts. As if nothing had happened.”<sup>68</sup>

Minz stresses that his remarks are aimed at the “spiritual leaders” and that “it is time for action - action to rescue Jews. With body and money, with thought and decision-making.” He concludes by acknowledging “the audacity in writing this,” in that “Honor is not granted in a situation where one can rescue even one Jew...Only out of respect do I speak in general and not of individuals.”<sup>69</sup>

In light of these remarks, one should examine the extent to which *Haredi* authors’ accusations against Zionism might be a refuge from a painful introspection and a reflection of guilt feelings, even if these are hardly ever expressed in so many words. This resembles the self-accusatory statements of many other Jewish groups after the catastrophic results of the Holocaust became known and contrasts with the common sense that the *Haredim* blame only others and acknowledge no responsibility of their own.

## *Haredi* Holocaust Education

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., pp. 305–306.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 306. Concerning Prager’s doubts about “the credibility of the first reports from Europe,” see Goldberg, “The Holocaust in the Ultra Orthodox Press,” p. 190.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 307.

Historiography is not the only way that historical perspectives are imparted to the public at large. Pedagogy does the same thing, and it may be examined from several vantage points, such as curricular materials on the Holocaust. The question is what are the historical approaches and outlooks in the materials available to *Haredi* teachers. True, we have no clear sense of what teachers say in class, which is a major component of the learning experience in any educational institution. However, a perusal of books for teachers, as well as written curricula, with carefully chosen contents culled from a larger corpus of material, illuminates the principles and guidelines that are communicated to teachers and pupils alike.

As is known, the *Haredi* yeshiva world is devoted to the study of the traditional Jewish texts—the Babylonian Talmud and its commentaries—and much less to literature in rabbinical law, ethics, and matters of faith. *Haredi* yeshivas deliberately and consistently avoid the introduction of any secular studies into the *yeshiva* setting, including Jewish history. In contrast, the Beit Yaakov Seminary, established in Krakow in the 1920s, was meant to offer Jewish girls a sheltered Jewish setting as opposed to the general public-school system where they had been studying. The development of the Beit Yaakov Seminary in Palestine and the ramified school system that evolved on its basis, starting in the 1930s, symbolizes above all the birth of the *Haredi* “society of learners.” The girls who attend the seminary study a set of general and Jewish subjects in order to teach the next generation after their own graduation.<sup>70</sup>

These general remarks pertain to the present discussion in one crucial point: teaching the Holocaust in *Haredi* society focuses mainly on women’s schools. The question of how to teach it, therefore, is a matter for the world of *Haredi* women to determine, and most curricula and pedagogical books are written by women.

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<sup>70</sup>For various accounts on the history of this seminary and its influence on the image of the *Haredi* woman, see Deborah Weissman, “*The Education of Religious Girls in Jerusalem during the Period of British Rule*” (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1993); Menachem Friedman, *The Haredi Woman* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1988); Friedman, “The Ultra-Orthodox Woman,” Yael Azmon, ed., *A View into the Lives of Women in Jewish Societies: Collected Essays* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1995), pp. 276-287 (all in Hebrew).

In recent years, certain segments of *Haredi* society have given much thought to how the *Haredi* teacher should teach the Holocaust. The issue attracted special attention in the Beit Yaakov Teachers' Seminary and the Jerusalem College for Girls, also known simply as Mikhlala ("The College"). The Beit Yaakov Seminary is undoubtedly the central teacher-training institution in the *Haredi* world, but Mikhlala has been on the ascent in various segments of this society in recent years. Therefore, publications originating in these institutions are reliable markers for changes in *Haredi* society in teaching the Holocaust and the historical outlooks on which this teaching is based. These should be viewed against the background of the many changes underway in all subjects being taught and in the teaching methods employed at the Beit Yaakov Seminary and other institutions—from the humanities, such as history and literature, up to the natural and physical sciences. This, however, cannot obscure the singular sensitivity of this society's confrontation with the Holocaust.<sup>71</sup>

Dina Spiegel's book, *The Destruction of European Jewry*, was first published in 1988.<sup>72</sup> The author taught history for years at the Beit Yaakov high school in Haifa, and *Haredi* teachers have used her book extensively. The author's first name does not appear in the book, and her acknowledgments are signed, "Spiegel Family, Haifa." The book begins with a letter of approbation from Rabbi Shlomo Volbe, a student at Mir *Yeshivah* and a German subject who was expelled from Poland in 1938, and went to Stockholm. Volbe, whom *Haredi* society considers a last remnant of the generation of spiritual supervisors at the "Lithuanian" *Musar* yeshivas, is a central educational personality in the *Haredi* education system and the *teshuvah* (repentance) movement.<sup>73</sup> He writes, "I believe no other book brings together all authentic facts about the Holocaust with aspects based on a

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<sup>71</sup>To the best of my knowledge, no study has been conducted on the many changes that have occurred in the teaching of history at the Beit Yaakov Seminary. For example, Shcharansky, *The Israeli Past*, deserves painstaking research. The author was the principal of the Beit Yaakov Girls' School and Teachers' Seminary in Tel Aviv. Volume 8 of Shcharansky's opus ends with the unification of Germany in 1871. The author intended to write two additional volumes on the period from the late nineteenth century up to "The State of Israel and Its Problems in Our Time," but died in 1973.

<sup>72</sup> Spiegel, *The Destruction of European Jewry*.

<sup>73</sup>His letters of approbation appear rather frequently in popular *Haredi* literature. For some details about him, see Esther Farbstein, "Letters from Vilna on Matters of Rescue" (Hebrew), *Mikhlol: Studies in Judaism, Education, and Science*, 9 (1995), pp. 75–96.



Torah perspective.” The author’s son-in-law, Rabbi Schlanger, who helped edit and publish the book, writes in his preface to the expanded second edition:

“An attempt was made to impart both sections [of the commandment expressed in Deuteronomy 32:7] to the students: “*zakhor*”—by describing and analyzing the historical processes before the Nazis’ rule, in the extermination actions, and up to the defeat of Germany in the war, and “*binu*”—by presenting worldview remarks from the greatest rabbinical authorities.”<sup>74</sup>

According to the editor, the second edition was published because the first edition had become accepted as “basic study material on the Holocaust years,” as other *Haredi* sources confirm. The second edition contains a new nine-page chapter on “Processes of the Second World War,” and the chapter on “Stages of Occupation and Extermination” was modified considerably and augmented with a new appendix.<sup>75</sup> Chapter 12, “Worldview Remarks,” was also extensively revised and given an appendix titled “*A Torah Response—A Jewish Perspective on the History of Going to the Slaughter*”(emphasis in the original).<sup>76</sup> Thus, the goal is clear: to enable the reader

“...to delve into the painful parts of our people’s history from a Jewish perspective and to emerge with knowledge of them—with clear faith and an awakening of repentance to our Father in Heaven, without swerving from the eternal exaltedness of Israel and in expectation of salvation, may it come speedily in our days.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Deuteronomy 32:7—“Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past; ask your father, he will inform you, your elders, they will tell you” —is a key verse in any Jewish religious approach to pre-planned historical consciousness.

<sup>75</sup>The chapter on “*Stages of Occupation and Extermination*” is twenty-two pages long (pp. 70–92); the expanded Appendix takes forty-six pages (pp. 137–183).

<sup>76</sup>In comparison with Lichtenstein, who devoted most of the introduction to her book to this topic, see “*The Destruction of European Jewry through the Prism of Torah*” Testimony, pp. 22–48, to which sixteen unnumbered pages were added with photographs of rabbis, Hasidic rebbes, leading rabbinical authorities, and leaders from Europe, some of whom were killed and some who survived.

<sup>77</sup>“Editor’s Introduction,” Spiegel, *The Destruction of European Jewry*, p. 6.

A look at the historical chapters in this book shows that its author availed herself of additional external studies and sources, but with much less breadth and depth than Lichtenstein. This is evident in the book's structure: it has maps<sup>78</sup> but no photographs; it has neither a bibliography nor indexes and makes only a few references to scholarly studies. It has one page of "Holocaust Terms," with a sentence or two about seventeen terms,<sup>79</sup> in contrast to dozens of concepts that Lichtenstein explains in her book. Unlike Lichtenstein, who adds value-judgment remarks in every field, Spiegel tends to augment her explanations of terms and concepts, if at all, only by adding comments that magnify the evil and brutality.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, it is difficult to know in each part of the book exactly what Spiegel has in mind. For example, the chapter on "Palestine in World War II" gives no evidence of scholarly studies. Like Lichtenstein, Spiegel devotes barely a page to the Judenräte,<sup>81</sup> while expanding on the rescue of Lithuanian yeshivas and their students.<sup>82</sup> Unlike Lichtenstein, however, Spiegel makes no reference to the issue of the United States and the Holocaust and, in fact, disregards the category of "bystanders" altogether. Finally, when she gets to the war and the mass murder, Spiegel basically adopts an approach similar to Lichtenstein's, using a geographical key to retell the story. Thus, the developmental approach that is evident in the chapters on the pre-war era is absent. However, whereas Lichtenstein's geography looks at individual countries, Spiegel's geographic taxonomy is mainly regional: the Baltic countries, the northern countries, the Low Countries, the Balkans, and North Africa.<sup>83</sup> Consequently, Spiegel devotes very few pages to each country, e.g., three pages on Poland, as against dozens of pages in Lichtenstein's book. Evidently, then, Spiegel prefers an exceedingly terse and telegraphic account of the crucial phases in most European countries, whereas Lichtenstein

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<sup>78</sup>This book, which has about half as many pages as Lichtenstein's, has nine maps; see *ibid.*, pp. 2, 27, 39, 62, 139, 157, 169, 180, 182.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>80</sup>She explains the term Aktion, for example, by defining it as a "cruel action," and refers to *Der Stürmer* as the organ that published "the horrifying anti-Jewish propaganda."

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 58–59.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 100–107. The second half of the chapter, "Examples of Rescue from the Destruction," describes additional Haredi rescue operations only.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 70–92.

focuses on six countries that she apparently considers representative of the others.<sup>84</sup>

Spiegel presents sweeping unequivocal conclusions in categories of “good” and “evil” that do not familiarize the reader with the historical complexity. In regard to the Jewish police, for example, the author asserts that, “most of their people were from the dregs of society (in Warsaw, for example, many were apostate Jews). Some earned money on the side in mean ways.”<sup>85</sup> She categorically remarks on “the participation of Nazi people of science and culture in the mass-murder period”, that “scientists were active participants in mass murder and abuse.... It is hard to find famous scientists in Germany who did not play an overt role in mass murder.”<sup>86</sup>

These differences between Spiegel’s and Lichtenstein’s books probably trace, *inter alia*, to their authors’ different statuses, target audiences, and goals. One author is a veteran teacher who is writing a reference book for teachers; the other is a senior journalist who wishes to present *Haredi* readers of all kinds with “reliable evidence about the era as a whole.” Each work also reflects a different *Haredi* sociogeographic context—the American *Haredi* community on the one hand, and the Israeli milieu on the other. Both, however, acknowledge the need to understand the Holocaust in historical and geographical contexts.

Several years after Spiegel’s book appeared, two daughters of Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of Israel and a Holocaust

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<sup>84</sup>Ibid., pp. 72–74. Compare with Lichtenstein, *Testimony*, pp. 174–216. Similarly, Spiegel devotes about one page (82–83) to Greece, as compared to Lichtenstein’s seventeen pages (260–277). Spiegel gives the Netherlands one page (78–79); Lichtenstein thirteen pages (232–245).

<sup>85</sup>Spiegel, *The Destruction of European Jewry*, p. 59. See also Schwartz and Goldstein, *Shoah*, pp. 178–186. Cf. Aharon Weiss, *The Jewish Police in the “General Gouvernement” and Upper Silesia during the Holocaust* (Hebrew), Ph.D. Dissertation (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1973), pp. 281–291, 362–374. It is worth noting the assertion in certain extreme *Haredi* sources that some kapos, who, they allege, were lapsed observant Jews, subsequently became Jewish Agency officials in Israel. See Abraham Eliyahu Stranger, *From the Nazis to Jewish Agency Officials* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: n.p., 1993).

<sup>86</sup>Spiegel, *The Destruction of European Jewry*, p. 56. Studies on scientists elicit a much more complex picture. See, for example, Benno Müller-Hill, *Murderous Science: Elimination by Scientific Selection of Jews, Gypsies, and Others, Germany 1933-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

survivor, published a pamphlet.<sup>87</sup> The “Introductory Remarks,” signed by “Masoret Institute, Jerusalem,” note that the authors engage in “education and teaching” and their purpose in writing the pamphlet is “to remind and commemorate.” In their introduction, they explain that “The pamphlet is meant for literature classes.” This pamphlet, which seems to be much less popular than Spiegel’s book, is made up largely of excerpts from testimonies, poems, stories, and statements by various rabbis, presented without historical or geographical context. It has only one map (p. 34), a “Glossary of Terms and Concepts” (p. 35) similar in size to Spiegel’s, and a very general two-page historical chronicle—it, too, beginning with World War I.<sup>88</sup> The pamphlet makes no mention of scholarly books or articles; the only such source is the map, which was photocopied from the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*. The pamphlet begins with a chapter on life in Eastern Europe—also lacking historical context—and, unlike most of the aforementioned literature, it contains a chapter on boys and girls in the Holocaust.<sup>89</sup> Questions for discussion at the end of each chapter illuminate the didactic nature of the entire book, although this is not stated explicitly.

When we examine the educational endeavors of Esther Farbstein in teaching the Holocaust in *Haredi* society, we encounter a model different from Spiegel’s in many ways and emphasizing other points than those that appear in the *Haredi* historiography discussed above. Farbstein comes from the elite family of the Gerrer Hasidic court and her husband is a leading rabbi at the mitnaggedic Hebron *Yeshivah*. This gives her a special status in both the Hasidic and the mitnaggedic worlds. She teaches and coordinates Holocaust education at the Mikhlala and is associated with Holocaust studies at Beit Yaakov and other *Haredi* settings.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>T. Kahan and R. Schoenfeld, “Remember the Years of Ages Past”: *The Destruction of European Jewry* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Masoret Institute, 1995).

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 33–35.  
<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 58–79. This may be due to the authors’ reliance on literary sources and the fact that their father experienced the Holocaust as a child and strongly emphasizes his childhood experience when he speaks about that era.

<sup>90</sup> These details are important in understanding her status in *Haredi* society and in the other realms with which she interacts. They are not meant to express praise or criticism of her studies or her educational endeavors, but rather to attempt to gauge the nature of a process in which, to the best of my understanding, she is a leading figure, and to assess several of its aspects. Diverse information from *Haredi* sources points to the importance of this enterprise and the inroads it has made, in various ways, in broad *Haredi* educational circles.

Farbstein studied at the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and wrote a master's thesis under the guidance of Professor Yehuda Bauer.<sup>91</sup> She has published several articles in academic,<sup>92</sup> semi-academic,<sup>93</sup> and religious forums.<sup>94</sup> She encourages her students to avail themselves of materials at the Pedagogic and Resource Center of the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem, thus exposing them to scholarly materials on the Holocaust. This connection with Yad Vashem is not acceptable to all of mainstream *Haredi* society. For example, an anonymous woman published an article in the newspaper *Hamodia* after the Minister of Interior and Religious Affairs, Eli Suissa (Shas), visited Yad Vashem in 1997. According to the author of the article, Suissa said in the course of his that *Haredi* schools should conduct more visits to Yad Vashem and that *Haredi* teachers should take part in Yad Vashem's in-service training. In contrast to the nature of commemoration at Yad Vashem, which is "aflush with workers from the Meretz movement who date from the term in office of [Education and Culture] Minister [Shulamit] Aloni":

"... Our commemoration is totally different from theirs. We commemorate [the Holocaust] by learning Mishna, reciting *Kaddish*, and recalling the good deeds of the giants of Israel whom we lost in that terrible affliction. Surely one cannot learn any of this in the in-service training at Yad Vashem, especially from

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<sup>91</sup>Esther Farbstein, *The Rescue of Hasidic Leaders in the Holocaust Era* (Hebrew) (Masters Thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1984). In the cassette "Hasidut ba-Shoah" ("Hasidism in the Holocaust"), Farbstein explains her guidelines in writing the thesis and stresses the clash between her approach and that of "Dr. Piekarz's book *On Hasidism in the Holocaust*, which you may have heard of, [which] examines matters from the outside ... from a different stance [and] from different sources." In her opinion, "there is objectivity in history; evidently [Piekarz] is not objective and neither am I, but each one tries his own way."

<sup>92</sup>See Esther Farbstein, "On Diaries and Memoirs as a Historical Source: The Diary and Memoir of a Rabbi at the 'Konin House of Bondage'," *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998), pp. 87-128.

<sup>93</sup>See "*The Four Cubits of Halakha—In the Company of Writings of a Community Rabbi in the Holocaust Era: Rabbinical Rulings and Halakha in the Writings of Rabbi Aronson*" (Hebrew), *Sinai*, 117 (1996), pp. 235–260 (second part: *ibid.*, 118 [1996], pp. 43–70).

<sup>94</sup>See, for example, "Some Remarks on the Rescue of the Belzer Rebbe" (Hebrew), *Bi-sede hemed*, 41 (3) (1998), pp. 41–50; "Letters from Vilna"; "It is for Your Sake that We Are Slain"—Intention in the Act of Martyrdom in the Holocaust" (Hebrew), *Mikhlol: Studies in Judaism, Education, and Science*, 16 (1998), pp. 42–81.

people, who, unfortunately, are far from the worldview of a Jew who observes Torah and the commandments.”<sup>95</sup>

From a study of several pamphlets, curricular units, and didactic suggestions written by Farbstein, most of which deal with “religious steadfastness during the Holocaust,”<sup>96</sup> and on information culled from diverse Haredi sources, several conclusions arise with regard to their contents. However, since there is no inclusive book or study, the conclusions are necessarily preliminary. Some of their shortcomings in respect to the aforementioned include:

1. These materials, unlike those of Spiegel and Lichtenstein, are not presented in a broad historical or geographical context of any kind; instead, they focus on the depiction of a distinct and specific reality.
2. These materials do not deal with Zionism and the Yishuv in any way, let alone polemically.
3. They make no reference to the departure or rescue of rabbis, *yeshiva* heads, and Hasidic *rebbe*s.
4. They do not include theological discussions.
5. They make no use of Hasidic and other tales of a pronouncedly miraculous nature that remain highly problematic because their historical veracity has not been proved.

Several of these findings and additional components of her religious outlook on the Holocaust were elucidated in a lecture by Farbstein at a teachers’ seminar at Yad Vashem in 1992.<sup>97</sup> In the spirit of Rabbi Hutner’s remarks and other statements mentioned above, Farbstein stated that, “For a believing Jew generally, the Holocaust fits into the continuum of history.

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<sup>95</sup>H. B., “Listen to Me, Daughter. Don’t Go to Glean in Another Field” [cf. Ruth 2:8] (Hebrew), *Hamodia*, January 24, 1997, p. 7. In the past few years, members of the Yad Vashem staff have been invited to lecture to Haredi women teachers within the framework of in-service training sponsored by the Haredi Education Division of the Municipality of Jerusalem.

<sup>96</sup>“Religious steadfastness during the Holocaust: Didactic Suggestions—Sources for Workshop,” December 1996, PRC 50-XXXII-170; “Religious Steadfastness during the Holocaust: Documentation, Testimonies and Memoirs, and Articles,” material for bibliographic test as part of course on “Ghettos—Comparative Study,” The Center for Holocaust Research and Teaching, Mikhlalah, 1996. This publication includes three parts: “Materials that Survived from the Holocaust Era,” “Collections of Testimonies,” and “Articles.”

<sup>97</sup>Farbstein, “Hasidism in the Holocaust.”

Deliberately it has no place above or below Jewish history but rather is part of that history.” Furthermore, basing herself on Hutner, she explains that:

“One reason for credic difficulties in the Holocaust is that our education skipped over portions that teach about [Divine] reproach. In fact, if from the outset we taught about the possibility that such a thing could occur, we would view [the Holocaust] as a disaster but not one that oversteps the limits of faith or of history.”

Thus, the Holocaust is not substantively new theologically but rather quantitatively. Therefore, “In Hasidism the questions are perceived as a continuum of questions about evil in the world, about the righteous who are visited by evil, but not as questions that are novel to this period of time.” According to Farbstein, “Even men like the *Rebbe* of Piaseczno, who wrote that the Jewish people had never experienced disasters on such a scale, speak about a quantitative difference but not about a new value phenomenon or a new credic issue.” Thus, the Holocaust is merely an additional facet in the problem of divine recompense and, as a result, does not necessitate a special theological discussion.

Moreover, Farbstein does not accept the predominant view in popular *Haredi* literature, that the sayings and writings of rabbis, Hasidic *rebbe*s, and leaders in the decades preceding the Holocaust constitute a prophecy about what was to occur. She says unequivocally that “No one considers a Hasidic leader a prophet. They did not predict the Holocaust, period ... they were not prophets, they were not considered prophets, and they did not foresee [the Holocaust].”

Although the sources examined make no clear statement about Farbstein’s educational goals, the material on which she bases her curricular units seems to express a clear message. These are mainly rabbinical sources from the Holocaust era that focus, for the most part, on the daily dilemmas of rabbinic law and the Jewish way of life that Jews encountered in the ghettos and the labor, concentration, and extermination camps. Examples are *Responsa from the Holocaust* by Rabbi Ephraim Oshry; *Esh Kodesh* by Rabbi

Klonymus Kalman Shapira, the *Rebbe* of Piaseczno; *Aley Merorot—The Writings of Rabbi Jehoshua M. Aronson*; *Kiddush Hashem* by Rabbi Simon Huberband; and *Em-Habanim Semeha*, by Rabbi Yissakhar Shlomo Teichtal. Notably, Rabbi Teichtal’s book is not widely used in *Haredi* circles because his attitude toward Zionism underwent a favorable transformation. These sources are accompanied by several sentences that place them in historical context and explain a few basic concepts.<sup>98</sup>

For example, the first appendix of sources for a workshop is based on excerpts from Rabbi Aronson’s book. Each segment of the rabbi’s remarks comes with “explanatory notes” and “historical background.” The notes focus on terms and considerations in rabbinic law; the historical background places each issue in its historical context and describes living conditions and related matters. It also explains certain terms and concepts that Aronson uses, such as the question of whether “one should recite a blessing regularly over forbidden foods that one eats in order to stay alive.” Thus, he notes, “I would recite a blessing over some permitted ingredient in the food or over water, and I intended in so doing to state that everything (*shehakol*)—everything that happened to us, even our being forced to eat non-kosher food in order to stay alive—came about by [God’s] word and with God’s will.” In other words, his solution was to expand the intention of the blessing over non-kosher food. In her historical-background remarks, Farbstein explains *inter alia* that, “The question was asked in March 1942, several days after they reached the Konin camp. They were days of getting organized, days of encounter with the grim living conditions, lack of water, paucity of food, and grueling manual labor.” She also cites an excerpt from Aronson’s memoirs dealing with this matter. In the notes, she takes up a series of issues, including “the emotional distress” that accompanied the question in *halakhah* (rabbinical law), since the problem recurred with daily regularity; the issue of consuming forbidden food at a time of danger; and the conceptual significance and possible sources of his interpretation of the blessing.

Farbstein evidently considers it the teacher’s duty to place Rabbi Aronson’s remarks in their historical context, for otherwise they cannot be

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<sup>98</sup> The second part of her lecture, “Hasidism in the Holocaust,” is structured similarly.



accurately understood. One example comes up in her notes on questions that were asked in response to the Nazis' demands "that [the Jews] give them a certain number of people to be sent to a labor camp." She relates to the dilemma of handing over people and setting priorities in selecting them. "It is important to note that these questions do not concern transports to death," she says. Therefore, the rule that "one does not reject one soul in favor of another" does not apply. Sometimes the historical context prompts the author to correct misstatements in Rabbi Aronson's remarks. One text, for example, refers to a *sukkah* (festival tabernacle) "that we made in Auschwitz-Buna with supreme devotion" in 1942. She begins her historical background remarks by commenting: "Here, the year 1942 was written erroneously. In fact, the rabbi did not reach Buna until September at the end of the [Jewish] year 5703 [1943]." Therefore, the tabernacle was erected for the festival of Sukkot in 5704-1943.

*Haredi* sources of all kinds seldom mention the historical context of halakhic discussion, and sources dealing with the Holocaust are not exceptions. Similarly, errors in historical detail, such as the year in which a given source was written, are rarely corrected, as, in principle, it was usually believed that historical details are not important for understanding the contents of the response.<sup>99</sup> Farbstein is apparently sending *Haredi* teachers of the Holocaust a clear message: to understand fully the sources at issue and to fathom their meaning with respect to the maintenance of the religious way of life under the exceedingly harsh conditions of the ghettos and the camps; yet also to place these matters in their historical context.<sup>100</sup>

Farbstein cites the testimonies of well-known *Haredi* personalities, including Yechiel Granatstein, Abraham Fuchs, Moshe Prager, and Elchanan Person. She also avails herself of remarks by the semi-Haredi Yehoshua

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<sup>99</sup> On the methodological problems in using responsa as historical sources and the importance of sociohistorical context in understanding them, see Haym Soloveitchik, *The Use of Responsa as Historical Source: A Methodological Introduction* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1990).

<sup>100</sup> However, she does not call attention to the complicated methodological problems that arise in the use of these sources, such as the authenticity of the material, the extent of its credibility, and its provenance in time. For a discussion of these matters, see Meir Eyali, "Responsa Literature from the Holocaust Era" (Hebrew), *Bitzaron*, 11[49-51, new series] (1992), pp. 131-142; Alexander Guttman, "*Humane Insights of the Rabbis Particularly with Respect to the Holocaust: A Chapter in the History of the Halakhah*" Hebrew Union College Annual 46 (1975), pp. 433-457.

Eibeschitz<sup>101</sup> and of Dr. Marc Dworzecki, a non-observant Jew. The abundant use of *Haredi* testimonies is not coincidental, even though these people were more receptive to a critical-historical approach than the average *Haredim* of their time. All those mentioned loved Judaism dearly—especially in its Haredi manifestations—and expressed little criticism of observant Jews. Here, however, issues are presented without any context or historical background, even though textual comparison of some of these testimonies, submitted at various periods of the witnesses’ lives, including that of Dworzecki, shows that they underwent editing for various reasons, including tailoring history to the needs of the present.<sup>102</sup>

The third part of the collection of sources includes six articles on the religious way of life during the Holocaust and complements the intensive preoccupation with the rabbinical-law sources from the Holocaust era. Two of the articles are by Farbstein herself; the others are by Yaffa Eliach, Dan Michman, Penina Feig, and Gershon Kitzis. Eliach’s and Michman’s articles were published in academic forums;<sup>103</sup> the others appeared in semi-academic or pronouncedly religious ones.<sup>104</sup> Since research on Holocaust-era religious life, dilemmas, and solutions is still in its beginnings—as Michman has noted in several articles—more remains unknown than is known.<sup>105</sup> Thus, what is available on this important subject focuses on definitions, defining topics for discussion, and gathering testimonies about the vacillations and religious behavior of observant Jews in various situations, with emphasis on their devotion to the halakhic way of life. Lacking, however, is a comprehensive

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<sup>101</sup>In regard to his religious identity, see Goldberg, “The Holocaust in the Ultra Orthodox Press,” p. 169, note 31.

<sup>102</sup>See Mendel Piekarz, “Remarks on Testimony Literature as a Historical Source on the Decrees of the ‘Final Solution’” (Hebrew), *Kivunim*, 20 (1983), pp. 129–158. Piekarz points to a similar phenomenon in the writings of Chaika Grosman and Tuvia Bozikowski. Farbstein, in “Diaries and Memoirs as a Historical Source,” argues against the implications of this attitude toward the status of testimonies and memoirs.

<sup>103</sup>Yaffa Eliach, “Jewish Tradition in the Life of the Concentration Camp Inmate,” Yisrael Gutman and Avital Saf, eds., *The Nazi Concentration Camps: Proceedings of the Fourth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1984), pp. 195–207; Dan Michman, *The Holocaust and Holocaust Research: Conceptualization, Terminology and Basic Issues* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Moreshet, Ghetto Fighters’ House, and Yad Vashem, 1998), pp. 211–224.

<sup>104</sup>Farbstein, “Letters from Vilna”; “The Four Cubits of Rabbinical Law”; Penina Feig, “Rabbinical Rulings on Selections During the Holocaust,” *Shana be-Shana* (Hebrew) (1991), pp. 321–340; Gershon Kitzis, “*Rabbi Klonymus of Piaseczno Converses with His Maker*” (Hebrew), *Mahanaim* 8 (1995), pp. 132–140.

<sup>105</sup>See, for example, Michman, *The Holocaust and Holocaust Research*, pp. 193–224.

picture with which we may estimate whether and, to what extent, these testimonies are representative of the behavior of observant Jewry at large.

Be this as it may, Farbstein's portrayal of daily religious life during the Holocaust, through her sources, leaves the reader with a clear sense that observant Jews, despite the horrific conditions in the ghettos and camps, continued to observe the commandments as best as they could, even risking their lives to do so.<sup>106</sup> Since many *Haredi* sources stress only this aspect, this should come as no surprise. However, in contrast to the impression that emerges from these sources, from the historical standpoint the circumstances were such that many Jews could not meet the requirements of *halakhah*. The reality in all respects of the behavior of observant Jews was much more complex and varied than the reader may think from reading the material in question.<sup>107</sup> If this is true, then alongside the historical-context approach—an exceptional matter with regard to rabbinical texts in *Haredi* society—a selective worldview is presented in a matter that lies at the forefront of concern in *Haredi* education: the level and extent of commitment to the religious way of life during the Holocaust.

The complexity of the reality with regard to religious faith in such grim situations, as reflected in various contemporary Holocaust sources, seems to be absent in the sources under discussion and in other contemporary *Haredi* sources. Observant Jews seem to have had severe vacillations in credic matters; some adhered to their faith and others abandoned it.<sup>108</sup> This emerges, for example, from the diary of Moshe Flinker, born in 1926, in the Netherlands and raised there. In 1942, following German arrests of Dutch Jews, he and his family fled to Belgium. On the eve of Passover in 1944, the

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<sup>106</sup>In addition to the aforementioned sources, see Jehoshua Eibeschutz, In Sanctity and in Heroism: "The Interpersonal Commandments"—Accounts of Martyrdom and Self-Sacrifice" (Tel Aviv: n.p., 1979); Yehuda Melrich, *The Best-Kept Matza* (Jerusalem: n.p., 1998) (both in Hebrew).

<sup>107</sup>This conclusion is based on the assumption that the teaching materials discussed here were produced after examining many sources and selecting those found suitable, as occurs in any curriculum. Yehuda Bauer, *Jewish Reactions to the Holocaust: Rescue Attempts, Unarmed and Armed Resistance* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1983), pp. 164–165, notes in a different context that the behavior of a minority "is more important than the majority phenomena" in some situations. Unlike Farbstein, however, Bauer stresses that this is the behavior of a minority.

<sup>108</sup>For a *Haredi* author who mentions the abandonment of observance and problems of faith, see Yeheskel Harpenes, *In the Hollow of the Sling: Diary from the Extermination Camps* (Hebrew) (Bene Beraq: n.p. 1980), for example pp. 25-26.

family was arrested as a result of a denunciation and was sent to Auschwitz.<sup>109</sup>

On November 26, 1942, shortly after Flinker began to keep his diary, the adolescent wrote that he rejects both the view of the events as divine punishment and the contention that God does not exist:

“Our sufferings have by far exceeded our wrongdoings. What other purpose could the Lord have in allowing such things to befall us? I feel certain that further troubles will not bring any Jew back to the paths of righteousness; on the contrary, I think that upon experiencing such great anguish they will think that there is no God at all in the universe... I have heard this said many times already.”<sup>110</sup>

Although Flinker’s credic doubts affected his way of life as a religious person—the tenor of his remarks became more acrid as time passed<sup>111</sup>—he definitely remained a believing Jew until his diary ended late in the summer of 1943. In Lichtenstein’s book, Finkler is portrayed differently. Before she quotes from his diary, she writes: “The lines cited here were written by him verbatim and have not been changed or edited in any way. It is amazing to discover the depth of faith and understanding that a Jewish boy in hiding can display.”<sup>112</sup>

As a rule, it stands to reason that the extent, intensity, and nature of a believer’s doubts correspond directly to the nature of his or her experiences, hardships, afflictions, and difficulties, and the information available to him or her about what was occurring.<sup>113</sup> In any event, it is a complex picture, strewn

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<sup>109</sup>Concerning Flinker, see Shaul Esh, “Introduction,” *Young Moshe’s Diary: The Spiritual Torment of a Jewish Boy in Nazi Europe* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1965), pp. 5-11.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 25-26. For his remarks on the difference between the Holocaust and previous troubles, see pp. 26–29.

<sup>111</sup>See, for example, *ibid.*, pp. 62, 67-68, 73, 77, 103.

<sup>112</sup>Lichtenstein, *Testimony*, p. 240. See also Kahan and Schoenfeld, “Remember the Years,” p. 81.

<sup>113</sup>See, for example, Cohen, “Diaries of the Sonderkommandos in Auschwitz,” pp. 295-296, 307-308; Mendel Piekarz, *The Last Hasidic Literary Document on Polish Soil: Writings of the Rebbe of Piaseczno in the Warsaw Ghetto* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979). The selective and tendentious use of the Piaseczno rebbe’s writings in Haredi and religious-Zionist circles requires further research.

with internal contradictions, whose complexity is not reflected in *Haredi* sources, neither explicitly or implicitly.

## Between Halakhic Rulings and Halakhic Intuition

One of the most crucial issues in understanding the behavior of observant Jews in the Holocaust is whether rabbis of the time defined the Holocaust as a time of *shemad* (religious persecution). This distinction has many implications for all areas of life of the observant Jew. In a time of *shemad*, a Jew must forfeit his life “even over the way he laces his shoes.” If it is not a time of *shemad*, then a Jew must forfeit his life only to refrain from perpetrating three offenses: idolatry, incest, and murder. In contrast, individuals are equally required to avoid performing any other commandment or commit any other transgression as is necessary to save their lives.

The research thus far has shown that, in most cases, rabbis did not define the Holocaust as a time of *shemad*. There was a good reason for this: since the Nazis defined the Jews as a race and not as a religion, they did not wish to induce the Jews to convert.<sup>114</sup> It follows that the situation did not require Jews to forfeit their lives. Yet the question of whether a time of *shemad* had come was debated in some situations, e.g., when Nazi Germany outlawed ritual slaughter in 1933; then, too, there was no consensus. Even in the war years, the inclination to argue that it was a time of *shemad* seems to have surfaced infrequently, for the most part, in Eastern Europe.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless,

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<sup>114</sup>See Eliezer Berkovits, *With God in Hell: Judaism in the Ghettos and Deathcamps* (New York and London: Sanhedrin Press, 1979), pp. 28-29, 37-38; Joseph Walk, “The Religious Leadership During the Holocaust,” (Hebrew) Yisrael Gutman and Cynthia J. Haft, eds., *Patterns of Jewish Leadership in Nazi Europe 1933-1945* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), pp. 383-387; Yaakov Zur, “Orthodox Jewry in Germany During the Nazi Regime,” (Hebrew), Abraham Margalit and Yehoyakim Cochavi, eds., *History of the Holocaust: Germany* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1998), vol. 2, p. 852; Dan Michman, “Understanding the Jewish Dimension of the Holocaust,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 13 (1997), p. 234. Lichtenstein (Testimony, p. 84) expresses a familiar Haredi view: the Germans persecuted the religion. See also Moshe Prager, *For A Sign And A Memorial: Commemorative Record of Cemeteries Destroyed and Desecrated in The Holocaust Years* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Gemilut Hesed Shel Emet, 1973), pp. 37–58.

<sup>115</sup>See Michman, *The Holocaust and Holocaust Research*, pp. 214–215, note 9; Zur, “Orthodox Jewry in Germany,” pp. 860-864; Hirsch J. Zimmels, *The Echo of the Nazi Holocaust in Rabbinic Literature* (New York:Ktav, 1977). Notably, the contemporary Haredi historiography that we examined also refrains from defining the Holocaust as a time of *shemad*.

the Nazis “had a special interest in assailing the Jewish religion and its institutions, customs, and adherents.”<sup>116</sup>

If this was indeed the situation, it stands to reason that rabbinical rulings pertaining to daily life largely remained faithful to the axiom that saving lives overrides all precepts save the three aforementioned transgressions. The rabbis also demonstrated this approach in their personal behavior. The September 1942 ruling by the rabbis in the Vilna ghetto, ordering all Jews to work on Yom Kippur that year, is one example.<sup>117</sup> A similar approach can be seen in the war memoirs of Rabbi Isaac J. Weiss (?–1989), written in the immediate postwar years and printed in the first volume of his book, *Responsa Minhag Yitzhak*, published in 1955.<sup>118</sup> Weiss served as rabbi and head of the rabbinical court in Grosswardein (Oradea Mare, in northern Transylvania) before and during the war.<sup>119</sup> He fled to Romania in 1944 and returned to Grosswardein after the war. In around 1949, he emigrated to Manchester, England, and shortly afterward was appointed rabbi and rabbinical judge for the *Haredi* community in that city. Apparently, he settled in Jerusalem in the early or mid-1970s, and served as a judge in the Eda Haredit rabbinical court. In 1979, he was named president of the rabbinical court after the death of the Satmar *rebbe*, Joel Teitelbaum (1888–1979).<sup>120</sup> The numerous reprintings of Weiss’s books of responsa attest to their importance and popularity in *Haredi* society.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>Leni Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry, 1932–1945* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 554.

<sup>117</sup>See Hermann Kruk, *Togbukh fun vilner geto* (Yiddish) (New York: YIVO, 1961), pp. 350–351. For other sources that exhibit similar problems, see, for example, Leib Garfunkel, *Jewish Kovno in Its Destruction* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1959), pp. 256–257; and Mordechai Wilozny, *Religious Life in Jewish Warsaw* (September 1939–April 1943) (Hebrew), (Master’s Thesis, Bar-Ilan University, 1977), pp. 35–36, 46–61, 65–81; Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 194–195.

<sup>118</sup>See Isaac Jacob Weiss, “Pirsumey nisa” (Hebrew), *Responsa Minhag Yitzhak*, vol. 1 (London: Defus ha-Hinukh, 1955), pp. 265–274. The text was printed after the responsa and before the indexes. The remarks below are based on the version in the 1989 edition, vol. 1, pp. 265–274, which is identical to the original.

<sup>119</sup>Grosswardein belonged to Hungary until 1918. It was transferred to Romania in 1918, and reverted to Hungarian rule in 1940–1944. For general remarks on this town and its Jewish community, see Jean Ancel and Theodor Lavie, eds., *Pinkas Hakehillot: Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities, Rumania*, vol. 2 (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1980), pp. 61–75.

<sup>120</sup>The exact years vary in the sources and require further examination.

<sup>121</sup>They include London: Defus ha-Hinukh, 1955–1983 (eight parts); *Minhat Yitzhak* (Jerusalem: 1989–1990, ten parts), and *Minhat Yitzhak* (Jerusalem: 1993, ten parts). The

Rabbi Weiss's memoirs begin in the summer of 1941, "when Hungary entered the war on the Germans' side," with a description of transports of Jews to Poland and his escape, along with his family, to Budapest. He attests that, "We had already heard rumors about the decision to kill and exterminate all Jews in the neighboring countries," as well as testimonies of refugees from Poland.<sup>122</sup> From this point of departure, he retells the successive hardships that he and his family experienced for about one year; from the winter of 1943/44 to their escape trek to Bucharest, via Arad, and the death of his wife from a protracted illness in the winter of 1944/1945.

This memoir illuminates various aspects of religious life during the Holocaust. One of them is Rabbi Weiss's and other rabbis' fundamental and consistent understanding of the protracted state of potential mortal danger as the most important consideration in their decision-making. For example, as they approached the Romanian border, they vacillated about whether to cross into Romania but decided to do this "as promptly as possible, even though we knew that the way was very difficult and hazardous." The author relates:

"On Friday, we made all necessary preparations to set out on Saturday night, but that evening the innkeeper intervened with the border guides to move us across immediately, because she, too, wished to be rid of us—even though she was the finest of Gentiles. On Friday night, after *kiddush*, the Gentile woman came and told us that the propitious time to leave had arrived. We got up in the middle of the Sabbath meal and went. There was no question about whether to desecrate the Sabbath in order to spare ourselves from death."<sup>123</sup>

Rabbi Weiss similarly describes the circumstances under which he, along the Vizhnitser *rebbe* and several other rabbis, had been taken to the forest to cut timber. As the Sabbath approached, they did not know what to do and prepared for the holy day as best they could. "That morning [of the Sabbath day], we discovered that we would be taken to the forest for work. We tried to

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most recent printings are photo offsets of the original that contain nothing additional to or different from the first printing.

<sup>122</sup>Weiss, "Pirsumey nisa," p. 265.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., p. 271.

avoid going to work on the Sabbath, said brief prayers at dawn, and sat down on trees and stones for a meal.” This makes it clear that they regarded themselves as being in mortal danger, from which they would not be spared until they endured a series of humiliations and beatings. On Saturday afternoon, they returned to the ghetto, where they discovered that the Vishnitzer *rebbe* had fled and crossed the border into Romania. Thus he, too, had desecrated the Sabbath in order to survive.<sup>124</sup>

As these examples show, the situation generally was defined not as a time of *shemad*, but, rather, as one in which the value of saving life took precedence over the large majority of commandments. How can we reconcile such remarks with the positive and sympathetic accounts of dangers that Jews willingly incurred in order to observe commandments, the accounts of supreme devotion that are widespread in *Haredi* sources on diverse matters related to the religious way of life, or the image that emerges from many sources of similar tenor? Ostensibly, these behaviors are inconsistent with the actions and directives of many rabbis in those situations.<sup>125</sup>

The explanation for the seeming discrepancy lies in the values and needs of *Haredi* society in Israel in recent decades. One of the most important values of this society is the commitment to rabbis, *yeshiva* heads, and rabbinical views, and one of its main manifestations is the formation and coalescence of the *Haredi* “society of learners.” Furthermore, there are clear indications that Ashkenazi *Haredi* society has revised the erstwhile relationship between the written word and intergenerationally transmitted oral tradition. In essence, the written word is now given much greater weight than traditions and customs that are passed down from generation to generation. Thus, the society at issue has fashioned a religious identity decisively

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<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 266. Cf. Hasidic historiography on the Vizhnitzer rebbe, Nosson Eliahu Roth, Meir ha-Hayim: Biography of the Saintly Pillar of the World, the Glory and Splendor of the Generation, Lover of Jews, His Esteemed Holiness, and Our Master, Teacher, and Rabbi, and the late R. Hayyim Meir of Vizhnits, Author of the Holy Work “*Imrey Hayyim*” (Hebrew) vol. 1 (Bene Beraq: Nahalat Tsvi Institute, 1996), especially pp. 302–382. Although this book presents dubious miracle tales, the basic facts checked, including dates, are accurate. For a discussion of Sabbath desecration in various phases of the rescue of the Belzer rebbe, see Moshe Yehezkeili, *Rescue of the Belzer Rebbe from the Vale of Killing in Poland* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Jeshurun, 1962).

<sup>125</sup>See, for example, Harpenes, *In the Hollow of the Sling*, pp. 52–53; Wilozny, *Religious Life in Jewish Warsaw*, p. 36; Yahil, *The Holocaust*, p. 556: “In no few cases the Jews did not ask for rulings but did as they thought best”; Merlich, *Havdala Candle*, pp. 33–34.



predicated on written texts.<sup>126</sup> Many halakhic sources that contemporary *Haredi* society uses to teach the Holocaust, as well as popular writings on the subject, reinforce this relationship by asserting the centrality of rabbinic authority and of the written word in even the most extreme situations.

These developments make it difficult for *Haredi* society to accept the idea that there is – and has always been – a basic tension between halakhic rulings and the senses and halakhic intuitions of ordinary people. This society tends keep the two from colliding. Ordinary people may often have acted in contradiction to *halakhah* and rabbinic rulings for various reasons, such as their religious instincts, customs, or traditions; the wish to demonstrate principled resistance to their persecutor; or the feeling that it was a time of *shemad*—as they construed the specific reality that they faced. Thus, it is clear why a society that wishes to reinforce the status of its religious leadership and to close the gap between normative halakhic rulings and the behavior of the public at large finds it very difficult to accept this historic reality as self-evident. One way to bridge this gap is to define it in the positive terms of self-sacrifice and martyrdom—terms used in the Holocaust era as well—and thereby avoid discussion of the aforementioned tension. This possible explanation is based on the preferential status that contemporary *Haredi* society attributes to normative and written *halakhah*. Furthermore, this process does not seem to be conscious, as evidenced by the natural way in which it is occurring. Finally, this avoidance of discussion of the *halakhah*-behavior tension may help explain the widespread use of the term “martyrdom” in *Haredi* writings on the Holocaust generally and the copious children’s literature on this topic in particular.

## Conclusion

The copious, diverse *Haredi* historiography on the Holocaust paints a complex and intricate picture, parts of which have been discussed in this article. The material examined, most of which was published in the last two decades of

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<sup>126</sup>Menachem Friedman, “Life Tradition and Book Tradition in the Development of Ultraorthodox Judaism,” Harvey Ellis Goldberg, ed., *Judaism Viewed From Within and From Without: Anthropological Studies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 235–256; Haym Soloveitchik, “Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy,” *Tradition*, vol. 28, no.4 (1994), pp. 64–130.

the twentieth century, indicates the existence of several foci. Confrontation with the Zionist enterprise is only one of these, and it is sometimes relegated to the margins of the debate. Contemporary *Haredi* historiography has undergone many changes in its way of referring to the Zionist enterprise. These conclusions present a different picture from that portrayed by Dina Porat and Menachem Friedman. Thus, *Haredi* society exhibits several types, subtypes, and strata of historiography and historical consciousness that co-exist in complex relations of tension, contrast, contradiction, and complement.

As we have seen, there are both a *Haredi* historiography uninfluenced by academic research, and one that willingly exposes itself to academic research and is influenced by it, or at least by its image in the author's consciousness even if by negation. This influence is most clearly evident in the similarity of structure and content in the agendas of the *Haredi* and the academic debates. Most *Haredi* historiography examined here tends to refer to personalities, events, or episodes pertaining to religious Jewry in the Holocaust that have attracted research attention and to cull chronological and historical frameworks and geographic distinctions from the research. It should be noted, however, that the discussion of religious life or thought during the Holocaust need not be identical to the socio-historical discussion, since the important developments in each do not overlap entirely.

If gradual rapprochement with academic research is a major characteristic of *Haredi* historiography on the Holocaust, this rapprochement's various manifestations yield a complex and multifaceted picture. For example, those who reject the progression of events expressed in research do not resemble those who accept it and focus on alternative interpretations. Furthermore, it is not surprising to find an ahistorical approach among those who are not exposed to critical history and see it as unnecessary in any way for an understanding of religious texts. In contrast, the development of an historical approach or message concurrent with the use of a pronouncedly historical approach, for educational or other purposes, is very interesting. In any event, it should be borne in mind that this rapprochement with academic research, now considerably internalized, is taking place in regard to one of the most

sensitive issues in *Haredi* society generally and in its attitude toward research particularly – the Holocaust.

This internalization seems to have affected the issues discussed or downplayed in contemporary *Haredi* writing on the Holocaust. For example, there appears to be a relationship between acknowledgment of the multifaceted complexity of the historical reality and the unfolding of events at different times and in different places, and the decline in theological preoccupation with the Holocaust in terms of reward and punishment. Acknowledging complexity makes it very difficult to offer an overall explanation for the Holocaust in reward-and-punishment terms, since one must refer to innumerable contrasting situations, good and bad, that sometimes coexisted in a given location. This is especially so in popular writing.

In contrast, some conclusions that arise from the complexity of the Holocaust reality have not yet infiltrated *Haredi* writing. For example, the historical sources clearly convey the sense that religious Jews engaged in multifaceted coping during the Holocaust, at both the abstract theological level and in tangible daily life situations. The *Haredi* sources examined in this article portray a picture (or unconsciously give the impression) in which people only reacted to extreme circumstances with supreme devotion and martyrdom or similarly extreme behavior. Lost are the complexity of the unbearably difficult daily life and the continually changing ways in which people coped with it. A partial explanation for this lies in the severe educational dilemmas that such a revelation would create for *Haredi* teachers or students in evaluating the various behaviors.

*Haredim* who ponder these theological issues are no different from Jews of any other Jewish religious stream or from any other component of Israeli society. Although the frameworks of the debate are very different, they share the confrontation with the irresolvable tensions between historical reality and contemporary values. Moreover, in contrast to the heightened consciousness of these tensions in much of the Jewish world, *Haredi* writing on the Holocaust usually addresses them inadvertently and does not depict them as conscious. This may be demonstrated in a series of issues, of which we will note several

as examples: Did God make Himself evident in the Holocaust? Was His presence perceptible, or was it “concealed” (as in a state of *hester panim*)? How should one understand the miracle of the rescue of rabbis and Hasidic leaders in contrast to the death of their followers—could God not have expanded the miracle slightly? Can one discuss the Holocaust in terms of reward and punishment, or is this of no real consequence and might even cause damage? How should one relate to the complexity of the reality in terms of the Jewish religious response? *Haredi* confrontations with these and other issues require further examination.

Moreover, we still lack accurate information on the extent to which the *Haredi* reader accepts the historiography under discussion. The extent and the manner of distribution of various books provide a partial answer. Cross-referencing a set of incomplete data and impressions, such as those of bookstore owners in *Haredi* neighborhoods, shows that the book by Rabbis Schwartz and Goldstein was very popular in 1987–1997, in almost all segments of *Haredi* society. Ruth Lichtenstein’s new book also seems to be very widely distributed. It is not clear whether these have supplanted Prager’s and Schoenfeld’s canon opuses. Evidently, Dina Spiegel’s book is widely distributed among students and alumnae of the Beit Yaakov Seminary and is much more widely used than Kahan’s and Schoenfeld’s pamphlet. Esther Farbstein’s curricular units and educational approach also influence a wide array of *Haredi* education. It stands to reason that the most widely distributed and quoted publications, which are read by *Haredim* from various groups and courts, are more important in evaluating developments in *Haredi* Holocaust historiography than books read mainly in their authors’ natural surroundings.

Another point to bear in mind is that books are written for readers. Nothing is known about popular reading culture in *Haredi* society and the relationship between it and the publication and sale of books in this society. For example, popular literature and bestsellers have different histories, and there is no direct connection between the diminishing cost of printing books and the flourishing of popular literature. In contrast, it seems that a book’s circulation stability over time may teach us more about the popular reading culture. Similarly, there is no direct correlation between the popularity or low price of a

book and its readership, which may be diverse. Only a comprehensive examination of the nature of *Haredi* popular reading culture can illuminate an important aspect of the prevalent historical consciousnesses in this society and elucidate the society's relationship with its historiography.

Finally, there seems to be a connection between the *Haredi* exposure to academic historiography and the diverse relations that *Haredi* society is forming with Yad Vashem. Examples include the rising numbers of *Haredi* visitors at the Yad Vashem Museum, foremost on the intermediate days of Pessah and Sukkot and during the summer *yeshivah* recess; official and semi-official visits by leading *Haredi* educators and politicians to Yad Vashem; unofficial working relations between certain departments at Yad Vashem and *Haredi* educators; the steady increase in the number of *yeshivah* students and Ashkenazi *Haredi* women teachers who visit and use the Pedagogic and Resource Center at the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem and this school's hiring of *Haredi* staff members; the increasing use of the library and archives by *Haredi* survivors who are writing their memoirs; and, as noted above, invitations to Yad Vashem staff members to lecture to *Haredi* teachers. In recent years, some segments of *Haredi* society have definitely become more aware that this institution may be used for various purposes and can be trusted to provide information, service, and assistance for a wide and diverse public without dictating attendant values.

The existence of this relationship aptly underscores the love-hate relationship between *Haredi* society and Yad Vashem. It suffices to mention that, in early 1995, a very acrid public debate erupted after *Haredi* politicians, headed by Rabbi Haim Miller, demanded the removal of photographs from the Yad Vashem Museum that show naked Jewish women being led to the slaughter. Moreover, several of these politicians broached the idea of establishing an "alternative *Haredi* Yad Vashem"—a proposal that has not been implemented to date. Another aggregation of fierce *Haredi* statements about Yad Vashem was expressed after an incident on June 1, 1998, in which an I.D.F. soldier beat up a young *Haredi* near the Yad Vashem Museum after an exchange of words. The next day, for example, at the end of an interview with this young man on the *Haredi* Kol Hai radio station, the interviewer, Rabbi

Yisrael Eichler, said *inter alia*, “For now, I can advise anyone who’s listening to us not to visit Yad Vashem because that doesn’t seem like a place where a Jew can identify with what happened, since he may get beaten up for what’s happening today.” Exploration of the complex and contrast-riddled relationship between the *Haredim* and Yad Vashem could certainly be revealing regarding how *Haredi* society copes with the Holocaust.

The issues discussed in this article, taken as a whole, point to several major changes in the attitude of Israeli *Haredi* society toward the Holocaust and to the variety of *Haredi* approaches to dealing with this topic. Together, they provide credible evidence of additional changes that this society has been undergoing in recent decades—changes that clash with the prevailing image of this society in Israeli public life.

Translated from the Hebrew by Nafatali Greenwood

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The Holocaust in Ashkenazi Haredi Historical Consciousness in Israel," *Yad Vashem Studies* 29 (2001): 321-378. Because most of these books are unavailable to the general public, the Center for Holocaust Research and Education at the Michlalah "Jerusalem College initiated a project in which over 150 such writings were located within prefaces to religious books published between 1945 and 2006. Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Meisels writes: When we were in Auschwitz "the Jews were beaten and oppressed and many fell into the depths of despair"; When we returned each day from 17 Kimmy Caplan, "Have 'Many Lies Accumulated in History Books'? The Holocaust in Ashkenazi Haredi Historical Consciousness in Israel." When *A History of the World* came out five years later, critics suggested that it should be treated as a collection of short stories since each chapter has a different narrator and a different setting (Guignery 61). Unrecoverable truth, relative perspectives, historical fabrications What happened to the truth is not recorded. Flaubert's Parrot. One of the key issues raised by Flaubert's Parrot and *A History of the World* is the possibility or otherwise of discovering the truth about the past. Contemporary haredi spirituality is thus examined in relation to earlier forms of Jewish mysticism. By way of conclusion, recent developments are positioned in the context of intergenerational processes in the haredi history of the last decades. Do you want to read the rest of this article? " Towards the Study of the Spiritual-Mystical Renaissance in the Contemporary Ashkenazi Haredi World in Israel. " *Kabbalah and Contemporary Spiritual Revival*. Ed. This book examines the history, teachings, and practices of a school of kabbalists who have flourished in the Middle East for the last two and a half centuries. The Beit El kabbalists center their practice around the teachings of Shalom Sharabi, an 18th century Yemenite kabbalist who came to prominence in Jerusalem.

Considered the leading Haredi scholar of the Holocaust, she focuses on the spiritual responses of Jews to Nazi persecution, she has introduced new sources for academic research on the Holocaust and has also shepherded the incorporation of Holocaust education in Haredi girls schools. In 1994, she founded and became head of the Center for Holocaust Studies at Michlalahâ€“Jerusalem College in Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem, she is the author of numerous books, articles, and monographs in Hebrew and English. Contents. 1 Early life and education. 2 Holocaust scholarship.Â  "Have 'Many Lies Accumulated in History Books'? â€” The Holocaust in Ashkenazi Haredi Historical Consciousness in Israel". Yad Vashem Studies. Yad Vashem.