

The Millions That Could Have Been Saved

by Rabbi Yerachmiel Yisrael Yitzhak Domb zi" a

Many books have been published, read and forgotten. There is one book, however, which dare not be allowed to share this fate. This is the chronicles of Rabbi Michael Ber Weissmandl zt"l, of the war years, 1942 to 1945, so aptly named "*Min Hametzar*" (From the Depths). published in New York in 1961 in Hebrew. Not enough individuals have read this book. The ghastly facts uncovered in it are not sufficiently well known.

Who can imagine the Hitlerite holocaust? Where is the language to describe it? All the known words of human speech have already been used for conventional occurrences; they have acquired everyday meanings and have been fashioned with an inability to describe the horrors of an Auschwitz or a Treblinka. What can be said to make individuals understand the wild cries of the night, when our brothers and sisters were led to the slaughterhouses? And in what way can one convey the conversion of precious Jews to the status of animals preparatory to being slaughtered?

Skyscraping walls prevented their cries being heard, and in that horrible man-made silence, the most valuable portion of the Jewish people was compressed in the confines of the ghettos in hunger and in thirst, in epidemics and in torture, crying bitterly, only to themselves, until the end of their anguish; when they were loaded into the sealed anguish; when they were loaded in the sealed cattle-wagons for the week-long journeys, when their corpses and the still have-living reached the slaughterhouses and gas chambers. Where can existing words be found to fit this story, and who is there to coin new phrases with meaning enough to tell this tale?

Yet all this was done through a directive from an innocent-looking office, where the S.S. murderers, with the methods of modern civilization gave the orders which, by chain reaction, set in motion all the machinery of death and destruction to which a stop could not be envisaged. One stroke of the pen to extinguish a hundred thousand lives. A few words enough for a million. And these few officers set the wheels turning in Auschwitz, in Treblinka; the Einsatzkomandos; the deep pits on the lonely plains of Europe overflowing with human blood. So much power behind it, such a



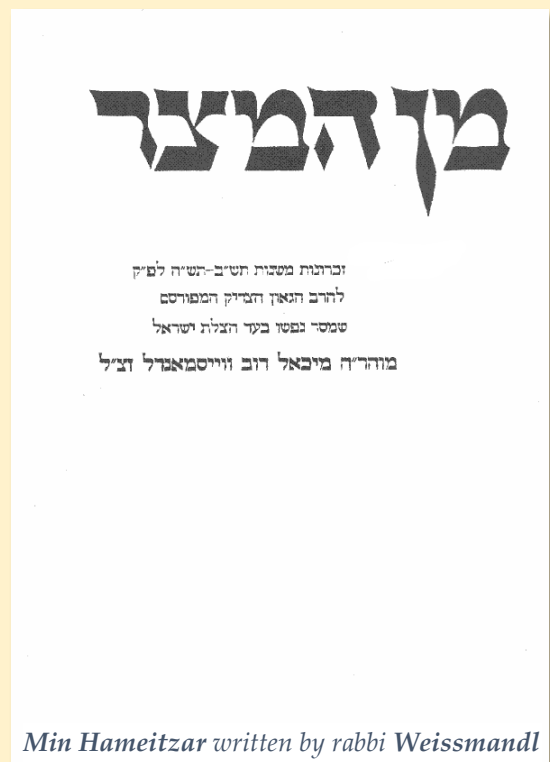
military might enforcing it that only the winning of the World War could interfere with this running horror.

But how astonished was Rabbi Weissmandl to discover that these strokes of the pen could so easily have been erased, that the Jewish tragedy could to a considerable extent, have been alleviated by some simple "old fashioned" methods. How many hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives could have been saved -- perhaps even millions.

Wisliceny was the German henchman for the Jews of Slovakia, Eichmann's representative in that area for establishing the ghettos, destroying their livelihood and finally dispatching to slaughter the hundreds of thousands of Jews in Slovakia and the neighboring countries. He carried out this mission as directed by Eichman and as his own cravings commanded. His was the first country in Europe to be designated for the supply of Jews to the slaughter houses, as it was Slovakia that was first occupied by Hitler--even earlier than Poland. The puppet government of Cardinal Tissu had asked Hitler to "cleanse" its country of Jews. Officially it even paid Germany for transportation, and Wisliceny was the ultimate ruler and organizer. He was nearly always drunk; drunk from spirits and intoxicated with blood -- and seemingly unassailable.

Rabbi Michael Ber Weissmandl, at the end of 1943, when two thirds of the Jews of Slovakia had already been transported for "work" to that far destination, got to know through a certain Hochberg -- an S.S. intriguer, and second in command to Wisliceny, that his chief was also lustful for money and that already on more than one occasion, money had bought relief for some individuals, postponing their deportation. Overwhelmed with joy at this discovery, he consulted his father-in-law, the great and renowned rabbi of Nitra, ztl, who agreed that if this old-fashioned method was effective, there was no reason why it would not be attempted on behalf of the great masses to be saved.

Rabbi Weissmandl writes of this same Hochberg, "I was first there on Friday in the summer of 1942 -- Tammuz, 5702. I was standing in the corridor near to the office of Hochberg and all of the waiting rooms around were crowded with those who had come to Hochberg to beg a postponement of



that ultimate journey for "work in the east," as many still believed. I heard the voice of Hochberg speaking on the phone to his chief, Wisliceny saying, 'Her Hauptstumbandfuehrer, ich melde ghorehsamst, the train has left: Man 727, Women 637, Children 1667: altogether 3,028 Jawohl!' Never will this total leave my memory; 1600 children! No outcry and no tears. No one cares. The whole world is silent. Jawohl, Herr Hauptsturmbanfuehrer.

One of the famous men of Pressberg, Reb Aharon Gruenhut, finally succeeded in gaining confidence by Hochberg in Rabbi Weissmandl, for whom a secret appointment was arranged. On this occasion, the rabbi presented himself as one who had connections with rabbinical circles throughout the world. He showed Hochberg his passport that contained a British visa issued just before the outbreak of war, and told him of his visit to London and of conferences there to impress him with his high standing. He then made it clear that he had come on a secret mission of the highest importance as a representative of Jewry abroad, who had contacted him through the American "Joint" in Switzerland. Their message was that they were prepared to pay in cash for the stopping of all further transports of Jews from Slovakia to the east. The "Joint" was ready to pay the price that his chief, Wisliceny, would name. Rabbi Weissmandl emphasized that neither Hochberg nor Wisliceny should believe that his mission was directed by local Jews.

During this conversation with Hochberg in 1943, when the scales of war were already a little out of balance for Hitler's Germany after the heavy defeats in the east and the support of the allies by American might, Rabbi Weissmandl was able, with American might, Rabbi Weissmandl was able, with careful tact, to introduce doubts into Hochberg's mind about German world conquest, and more specifically about Hochberg's own position after the war. He conveyed to him that it would be very much to his and his chief's advantage to make some provisions for their own safety. In this respect, he was now authorized to offer the promise of World Jewry that if they would stop all further transports, he and Wisliceny would be save.

Hochberg became enraged at such suggestions, but as the conversation progressed, he became much softer and began to listen carefully to what was proposed. He listened and replied, "I must go to see Wisliceny."

He left immediately and Rabbi Weissmandl waited. Every minute seemed like an hour; every hour seemed endless. He sat there exhausted, awaiting the reply fateful for the remaining Jews of Slovakia, with so many hanging in the balance.

He had set there for many hours, when suddenly the door burst open and Hochberg hurried into the room. Speaking rapidly and with great

excitement, he said, "the deal is done. My chief asked for \$50,000 and no further transports will be sent; but he lays down the following terms: Wisliceny will show his goodwill: three transports -- next Tuesday, next Friday, the following Tuesday -- each of about 3000 souls, will be held up, but on Friday after that, the first Installment of \$25,000 must be handed over. After that, there will be no further transports for seven weeks, to enable the second installment of \$25,000 to be obtained and paid, after which there will be a final stopping of all transports. There is one further condition. You must be able to show that the money comes from abroad and not from Slovakian Jews themselves."



The latter was an important point to this S.S. henchman, as a guarantee that it was world Jewry who was behind the deal, and who would finally keep its promise for his safety. In any case, Rabbi Weissmandl did not then think that Slovakian Jews could possibly find such a sum, as by that time they had been stripped of all their possessions. On that other hand, he did not imagine for one moment that the wealthy "Joint" would not provide such a relatively small sum to save literally tens of thousands of lives from total annihilation in the German slaughterhouses.

Rabbi Weissmandl left Hochberg's office with hope and joy. He hurried home to Nitra to inform his father-in-law and to set about getting the deal consummated. The Rabbi of Nitra, in spite of his happiness at the possibility of saving so many lives, expressed some reservation. He felt that from a distance the "Joint" would not see their tragedy, and that the Zionist leaders working together with the "Joint" had a different calculation. But he suggested, representatives from beyond the "Kanzelel" -- the Council of Orthodox Jewish Communities -- should be drawn into this, and even the Zionists and non-Orthodox groups taken into partnership.

The name of Mrs. Gisi Fleischman came to the forefront, as she was of Zionist circles and also the pre-war representative of the "Joint" in Slovakia. Besides her prominence, she was a good-hearted and courageous women and her word would carry weight with the "Joint". It was also decidedly to call on Mr. Fuerst -- known for both his integrity and financial ability.

Among the weapons with which the Zionists have equipped themselves to pierce the walls of resistance to their influence, there is one most predominant. This is "ahavas Yisroel" -- love of the fellow Jew. This slogan and catch-phrase carries extra weight with the religious Jew to whom this concept

has a special attraction. The Zionists have explained that their aim is achieving statehood is to provide a refuge and shelter for much tormented Jewry.

The long, bloody paths of our, till now, 2000 year long exile, with its inquisitions, persecutions, pogroms, slaughter and torture, has always been at the front of every Jew's mind. Seldom was there a place on this earth inhabited by Jews, or a stretch of time, without blood and tears at the hands of our many persecutors of all nations. It was these pogroms that provided, for the short-sighted, the initial conditioning to seek a solution in the outward idea of Zionist achievements.

Possibly the Zionists, themselves, at the first steps of inception, were honestly taken by the idea of that solution; and it was this kernel of compassion that gave to them the power to influence others with this superficial consideration. Zionism has built on the basis that the solution of nationhood applicable to any other nation is in the same way also applicable to Jewry, as they could see no difference between the nations of the world and the Jewish people. As they see it, Jews regulate their fate by the same ways and means as all other peoples. The belief in exile by Heavenly Decree as a punishment for our sins, and the belief in Heavenly Redemption by the Will of the Creator was, to Zionism, non-existent. People's thoughts were not directed to the fundamental, all-embracing heresy upon which Zionism was established, but grasped only the attractive promises that were offered because unfortunately, Zionism arrived in the most feeble and small of all generations, coupled with distressing happenings, which contributed to the closing of people's minds to the truth and to their being led astray by the Zionist Idea.

How much were Rabbi Weissmandl and his colleagues overcome with joy when they succeeded in getting the right people together! How great was their hope! But how much were they overwhelmed by sorrow when they tried to get things in motion, and how great was their frustration when they learned that the Zionists, together with the "Joint", stopped every outside help from reaching them. This was not only when it was a question of saving the remnants of the Jews of Slovakia -- about 40,000 souls -- but also when the possibility of saving what was still left of the Jews of Poland and Hungary was in question; a matter then of millions of souls. Then, too, the Zionists deliberately prevented any help from being extended under various excuses that even a child could see through. This was their policy -- stupid and merciless -- but they perused it relentlessly. In the end, they admitted openly that their policy was not to help fellow Jews, but to let them perish in the tens of thousands and in their millions.

This is forever unforgettable and unforgivable. Zionist "ahavas Yisroel" must be displayed conspicuously and beyond any doubt.

The Friday when the first installment of \$25,000 had to be paid was fast approaching and there was not yet a way how this money could be found for Wisliceny. Mrs. Flesichman was also the representative of the World Jewish Congress and well known to the Jewish Agency. She was, therefore, considered to be the most suitable person to make contact with these organizations. Her words would be listed to...

The pressure became even greater when it was seen the S.S. oligarchy was in earnest. The first transport has been stopped. But how can contact be made with Zurich, with New York and with Jerusalem, the seat of the Jewish Agency, which influenced and coordinated the work of these other two bodies? Slovakia was then a small country sealed off by the German occupation of the surrounding territory. There was no common border with any free country, so how could any message be conveyed to the outside world?



Shloime Stern was instrumental in finding a temporary solution. He obtained a diplomatic courier, who was prepared to take all the important messages to the "Joint" in Zurich. He was also able to borrow money, temporarily, from various sources in Slovakia, putting together the equivalent of the enormous sounding sum of \$25,000. The money obtained was changed on the back market for dollars and handed over to Hochberg for Wisliceny. Hochberg accepted it and came back with the message that there would be no further transports for seven weeks, which time was set for the completion of the deal.

They were all convinced that once the diplomatic courier would get their message to the "Joint" and the Jewish Agency, not \$50,000 but ten times \$50,000 would at once be put at their disposal for this and similar "deals." Surely Jews the world over would dance for joy upon hearing that at last the door was open in the inner circles of the S.S. and a way found to rescue their fellow Jews.

Mrs. Fleischman sat down to write the memorandum to Salli Mayer, the "Joint" representative in Switzerland. She was careful in her every word, explaining the situation of hope that had been ignited. The "Joint" should hasten its help at this last moment and miss the life-saving opportunity that had been so dramatically forced. The memorandum was sent to the "Joint", to the Jewish Agency and to a personal friend of hers, Mr. N. Schwalbe in Zurich. And then they sat down to wait.

Days went by, swallowed by weeks, and of the seven not many were left. The time for the final settlement was fast approaching and a great sum of

money was needed. Many people had managed to escape from the hell of Poland to Slovakia on their way to Hungary and Romania, which were not yet being so intensely processed by the Hitler hordes. They were not a thousandth of a percent of those who were so brutally done to death, but still a number to be supported and a problem of Slovakian Jewry. Money was needed to bribe the Slovakian gendarmerie and police to stop their pressure for the deportations to continue. Money was needed for the labor camps in Sered, Novaki and Wiener in Slovakia.

The Slovakian anti-Semitic government had built these camps for a slave labor before deportation began, and it was put to those Jews still left there that if they, themselves, would build up and increase the capacity of those labor camps, they would absorb more and so relieve the pressure for "deportations." and above all, the money was needed to refund the temporary loans from so many sources that had gone towards the first payment to Wisliceny and to provide the second \$25,000 that would finally seal this blood transaction.

All this money was a matter of life or death for the tens of thousands of Jews in Slovakia and, in the end, for millions still alive throughout Europe. Who could provide and who should provide, if not the "Joint" and the Jewish Agency, who held possession of the vast sums of money given by Jews the world over for the help of their brethren in need? Was there anywhere at all any need that was greater?

The diplomatic courier left for Zurich, holding in his hands the lamentations of the strangling remnants of Jewry; in his hands, their appeal from death.

This courier had to spend some days in Zurich before his return. He was awaited with mounting anxiety, for with his advent were tied up all the hopes of the masses under sentence.

And he returned. But not even a letter was sent with him by those "help organizations" only a verbal message that they had no time to write, and of help there was no mention at all.

Rabbi Weissmandl writes that on hearing this message, they 'felt as though the house had collapsed on them'. It was only Mrs. Fleischman who started to explain matters after this great shock. She said that "uncle" Salli Mayer was a very cautious man and it was necessary to write again. It was also necessary to write to Mr. Silbersten, the Jewish Congress representative. "And who knows, maybe they are doing something great," she added. Maybe for such a big undertaking they had to refer to New York and Jerusalem -- who knows?

Rabbi Weissmandl, himself, followed up with letters to the Agency and the "Joint" in the name of the Rabbis left in Slovakia -- letters of tears and of pleading -- but still there was no reply. Meanwhile, the seven weeks had passed and they had to send to Hochberg, asking him to explain to Wisliceny that the messenger that was to bring the money from Switzerland had met with an accident and was delayed in a hospital there. He would be bringing the money in three or four weeks time. Wisliceny agreed to wait.

In the end, a letter did come from the "Joint"; a letter written by Salli Mayer, which said that \$50,000 was a lot of money for such a small country, and that in the previous year's budget of the "joint", only a few thousand dollars had been allocated for them. The "Joint" had to be run according to their system. The explanation given in the memorandum why they now need all this money and the documentary evidence as to what was happening in Poland, to which country the "deportations" took place, were exaggerated stories. This was the way of Eastern European Jewry, who were always asking for money. In general, he added, it was impossible to send anything at all just then, as the money was coming from America, which had prohibited the sending of funds to enemy countries. What was possible to do was to render some small help, monthly, if the "Joint" in Hungary would agree to do this out of the blocked account that been held since the outbreak of the war.

Rabbi Weissmandl and his colleagues read the letter, but they could not believe it had been written by fellow Jews. Their hearts stopped beating when its contents became clear to them. But this was not the end. There was a further letter. It fully explained the first. But it was more deadly and more devastating. It disclosed the bottomless abyss to which born- Jews can sink -- the responsibility of Zionism.

