

(Matt. 10.37)? In the Midrash Rabba on Lev. 19.3 we read that the fact that the commandment to honour one's father and mother is immediately followed by the words 'You shall keep my sabbaths' indicates that a limit is put to obedience towards parents; that limit is passed when parents teach their children to transgress the *mitzvot*. Moreover the Mishnah teaches that reverence for teachers is of a higher order than that for parents (cf. bMes. II.11). What Jesus says also lies at this level. Like the rabbis he did not want to make the precept of reverence for parents so absolute that there was no longer any room for the child to grow into a responsible person.

Be this as it may – the space and respect for men and women which finds visible expression in the rules of the halakah for play and relationships are an example of the way in which human beings, both men and women, are recognized in their distinctiveness. For it is the mark of Jewish tradition that one may never approach the specific from the general but must approach it from the question of what is distinctive.

It may be said that as a religion focussed on experience Judaism has often been preoccupied with the same questions as Christianity but has arrived at other solutions. At present there is a vigorous investigation into whether Jewish tradition also offers help towards thinking through modern problems relating to the environment and multinational matters. This is the question of the functional value of the basic elements of micro-models for macro-situations.

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These are the last words of the holy teacher of Grodzisk, our teacher Rabbi Israel Shapira.¹ May God avenge his blood! May the memory of this righteous man be a blessing!

When they brought the people from the camp, a community of thousands, into the extermination camp of Treblinka, everyone turned, full of reverence, towards their teacher: 'Our master, what do you say now?' Then our holy master answered them quite gently and said, 'Hear, my brothers and sisters, people of God! It is not for us to criticize God's actions. If he has resolved that at this hour we must be the sacrifice of the messianic woes in this period of redemption and be sacrificed on the altar – blessed are we to be thought worthy of it. Our sages have said, "The Messiah will come, but I am not eager to withstand the messianic woes in order to be able to see him afterwards." So they spoke as long as the time was not yet fulfilled. But we for whom that hour has now come must rejoice because we are counted worthy that our ashes may purify the whole people of Israel.² Therefore it is laid upon us not to be anxious and not to weep if we go into the gas chambers, but to go with joy and sing "I believe!", as once Rabbi Akiba died with the words "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one!", breathing his last breath with the word *one*.

The community acted in accordance with his holy words, and singing the melody of 'I believe' and with the words 'Hear, O Israel' on their lips they hallowed the name of the Most High for all to hear.

May God avenge their blood! May their memory remain a blessing!³

Introduction

Is it right that we should keep remembering the Holocaust?⁴ Would we not do better to keep quiet about it, precisely in the context of an encounter with Judaism? After all, the Jewish tradition forbids greeting those who mourn at the height of their mourning nor may the mourner return a greeting.⁵ Those who mourn are to be left in peace. 'Do not soothe your friend in the hour of his anger; do not comfort him while his dead still lies before him' (Ab. IV.18). The prophet Ezekiel had to groan in silence (Ezek. 24.17). From that the Jew concludes that the grief of the mourner should be respected. He should not be greeted at length and thus in a way that demands his attention.

Many survivors of the Nazi terror feel that 'their dead still lie before them'. They often still find themselves helplessly caught up in hellish visions. They have to watch impotently as that terrible event from the past again passes before their eyes. May we who were not present, or heard of all this only indirectly, at a distance, break such silence, a silence that the tradition prescribes for cases of deep mourning?

We find ourselves in a cruel dilemma! On the one hand is a tendency to be silent – but silence could be a collective excuse. Instead of being a sign of solidarity with the survivors it can become a sign of a lack of solidarity and indifference. In Jerusalem there is the Yad Vashem (Sign and Name) memorial, on which the names of the six million victims live on. Part of this memorial is the Ohel Yizkor, hall of remembrance, where an eternal flame burns and the names of the extermination camps are engraved on the floor. So that we do not forget.

Jewish tradition says that 'one must remember the category of the day by night and the category of the night by day' (bBer. 11b). That is said in a discussion of the morning and evening prayer in connection with Isa. 45.7: 'I make the light and create the darkness, I give peace and create evil.' Light can signify salvation and redemption and freedom; darkness signify disaster, oppression and death.

In the post-Seder of the Passover meal the song *wayehi bahaisi hallaylah*, 'And it happened at midnight', is sung; in the sixth verse there is a quotation from Isa. 21.11f.: 'Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning comes, but also the night.' This

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quotation does not only occur in the Pesach haggadah; a second-century midrash sees this text in connection with the Exodus (Mekilta de Rashbay-par. Ba.12. 42). The watchman is God and the morning is redemption, *ge'ulah*. Rashi says (on bSanh.94a) in connection with Isa. 21.11: 'God who is the watchman – what does he say of the *galuth*, the Diaspora? That it is like the night... The morning comes: the redemption, the *ge'ulah*, it will come. But also the night. First there will be a very long *galuth* (Diaspora).'

The category of the day must be thought of by night and the category of the night by day: when the night is blackest, when the *galuth* reaches its nadir, then it is necessary to think of the *ge'ulah*, redemption. Rabbi Israel Shapira of Grodzisk knew that. For him the sacrifice of the millions was a step on the way to *ge'ulah*, redemption. But if that is the case we may not be silent: we must mention the category of the night by day; we may not forget the Holocaust – above all because countless factors which led to it are still alive among us.

Many victims of this Nazi hell no longer want to talk about their experiences of it. We have to respect that. On the other hand it is clear that in our century two events have intervened in an unimaginable way in the life of the Jewish people – so much so that they have become part of the Jewish identity: the Holocaust and the founding of the state of Israel. If I am to recognize the Jews in their identity I may not be silent and deny either the one or the other. May I behave as though nothing had happened? In that case I must be prepared not only to look at the facts of the Holocaust but also to attempt to understand its significance. What does the Holocaust signify? That is the lesson of the Holocaust. That does the Holocaust the roots of the Holocaust. How could it have come about? What factors, what circumstances made the Holocaust possible? What mechanisms were at work here and may still be at work? Our century is the century of genocide. What is the role of Christianity in all this? How has this Holocaust been assimilated in Jewish circles and what significance is attached to it?

Do not comfort your friend while his dead is still before him

Anyone who wants to understand the full significance of those words of Rabbi Israel Shapira of Grodzisk to his followers in Treblinka

needs to know something about the Jewish customs connected with dying and death.

The believing Jew deeply wants to die in full consciousness with the *shema' yisrael* on his lips: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, he is one' (Deut. 6.4), to hold on to the sound of the last word so that it sounds gently with his last breath. Of course it very seldom happens that a person puts his house in order with full consciousness, gives instructions to make good anything that he has to make good, or to bring about reconciliation with those from whom he has been alienated, says the *viddui*, the confession of guilt on the Great Day of Atonement, and then hands his soul back to its creator. It is regarded as a privilege to be able to pass away like this, though another way of dying, in sleep or in unconsciousness, would not be thought less pleasing to God. But it is in accordance with Jewish life and faith that a person should always be aware of what he is, what he is doing and what is happening to him.⁷

However, before things get that far everything possible has been done to sustain life. For man is made for living and not for dying. If all has proved useless and the moment of death has come, then the body is treated with the utmost reverence. There is an examination to see whether breathing has really ceased. The oldest son or one of the closest relatives closes the dead person's eyes. Those present say *baruk dayan ha'emet*, 'Blessed be the true judge', and then, most particularly the family, together put a white cloth over the face of the departed. Only then do the members of the *hebrah qaddishah*, holy community, enter the house and begin on the prescribed ritual washing of the dead.

The *hebrah qaddishah* is a most distinctive institution. It is a group of leading and highly respected members of the local Jewish community who have made it their task to support the sick and dying and mourning in their sorrow. *bikkur holim*, visiting the sick, was always an act of the utmost piety in Judaism, and a *mizvah* of high moral worth. That is also true of the support of the dying and those who mourn. Therefore associations which have made this their task are also often called *gemiluth hasadim*, *gemiluth hesed* (showing loving-kindness).⁸

The members of the *hebrah qaddishah* often abandon their work to visit the dying person or the family of the deceased. They often also take trouble to see that there is a *minyán*, i.e. a minimum of ten persons, in the dying person's house so that they can say the

proper prayers. In this way they make the house, the deathbed, a house of prayer. The dying person is not left alone in his last hour but taken up into the community of his people. And there are always the prayers and melodies of the '*aseret yeme teshubah*' (ten days of penitence, from the Jewish New Year Festival to the Great Day of Atonement), which are sung gently, almost hummed, at this time.⁹

After the death the *hebrah qaddishah* relieves the mourners of the care of the deceased and the burial. They do the ritual washing and lay out the dead, but not in the way that happens in Christian circles. The dead person's hands are laid at his side and the body is clothed in the simple white garment that he wore on the Great Day of Atonement. If he does not have one, the *hebrah* provides one. So in death all Jews are equal. That follows a ruling made by Rabbai Gamliel II at the end of the first century CE. At that time the funeral ritual had become so complicated and the funeral so expensive that poor people simply abandoned a dead body because they were afraid of its high cost. Since then a Jewish burial has been as simple as possible. The dead person is clothed not only with this garment but with the *tallit* (prayer shawl); first, though, the *tsitsit*, the fringes, are loosened at one of the corners of the *tallit* – an act of respect and a sign that the dead person will not have to pray again. Were he to be wrapped in a *kosher* prayer shawl it would imply that he still had an obligation to pray: that could be humiliating for him. 'One may not put the innocent to shame', whether he is aware of this or not. The body is then laid carefully in a simple coffin, as cheap as possible, with a piece of earth from the Holy Land under his head. Though it has not been granted that he should die and be buried there, at least his head will rest on some of the earth from the '*ereis yisrael*', the land of Israel.¹⁰

That for the Jew the body of a dead person which he treats with so much respect is at the same time unclean to the highest degree is something that is completely incomprehensible to non-Jews. That is because we think of unclean as denoting something like foul, dirty. However, as we have seen, what is *lame*, unclean, is not dirty; the term denotes that it puts anyone who comes into contact with it in a state in which he cannot participate in cultic events.¹¹ This is evidently derived from the fact that Judaism energetically turned its back on any cult of the dead, a cult which was common among other peoples of the Near East, above all the Egyptians. This cult, with

all its reminiscences, was irreconcilable with the service of the God of Israel.¹²

Mourning begins for the family at death, and friends and acquaintances do not offer any word of comfort before the burial. They come simply to give the mourners the feeling, by their presence, of not being alone. 'R. Simeon b. Eleazar said, Do not soothe your friend in the hour of his anger; do not comfort him while his dead still lies before him' (Ab. IV. 18). Only after the funeral may words of comfort be spoken, and then with the utmost restraint, for example: 'The Lord comfort you with all those who mourn for Zion and Jerusalem.' Perhaps the most comforting thing of all is that the mourners immediately join the community and are caught up in its concern with the Torah.

For the first seven days, the so-called *shibah* sitting, the mourner has to remain at home.¹³ Except for the sabbath and on festivals a *minyán* keeps coming to the house to pray and study the Torah there. Because staying at home for seven days may mean a loss of income for the poor, during this period the bereaved are given the opportunity of living on the resources of the brotherhood. In some communities, 'in order not to put the poor to shame', a system has been developed by which a poor man can take money to live on from a box with no check on how much he has taken. Where this happens two boxes are always put in front of the mourner, one open and one closed: he may take from the open box; the closed box is for the financial contribution that anyone who comes to show sympathy may wish to make. For the next mourner the two boxes are exchanged: the second box is now opened and the mourner can take from it at need; the open box, from which money was taken, is now closed.¹⁴

When the seven days of deep mourning are over the mourners return to the synagogue and say Kaddish for the departed, for thirty days in the case of relatives, eleven months for father or mother. The Kaddish is an act of praise to God as the Holy One. In it the survivor praises his beloved dead. This is the spiritual heritage of every Jew. From now on, on the day of his death he will be remembered again each year.

An appropriate element in Jewish mourning customs is concern for mourners. There is no formal funeral meal, but neighbours and friends regard it as their right to provide a simple meal - bread and eggs - on the return from the cemetery. And they also regard it as

a privilege to provide meals for the following seven days of deep mourning. Someone who has suffered a heavy loss often has no mind to care for himself. That is then the duty of neighbours and friends.¹⁵

What strikes a non-Jew is how there is no dwelling on death but how, rather, the mourner is helped, step by step, to find the way back to everyday life. At this point the usual concern with the Torah in Jewish life proves its worth. Above all through the Kaddish prayer in the synagogue - along with other mourners - a person's own suffering is taken into a greater whole. Each person recognizes his own suffering in the suffering of the other and the suffering of others in his own. That gives space and comfort.

The suffering of the righteous

In this respect, too, Judaism is strongly determined by experience and, starting from human experiences, tries to gain insight into the significance of suffering not only for the individual but also for the individual as part of the community.

That means, among other things, that whatever significance is discovered need not be measured by a doctrine established *a priori*, put into a pattern, or be derived from particular philosophical or theological truths and then be made into a more or less obligatory interpretation of human experience in thought and faith. So it is possible to begin with the most basic and uncomplicated experience and use it to understand the various views which render so many experiences in words.

The great American Jewish scholar S. Schechter (1847-1915), one of the first leaders of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, writes:

Simple-minded men - and such the majority of the rabbis were - will never be persuaded into looking with indifference on pain and pleasure; they will be far from thinking that poverty, loss of children, and sickness are no evil, and that a rich harvest, hope of posterity, and good health are not desirable things. It *does* lie in our nature to consider the former as curses and the latter as blessings.¹⁶

As long as a person is not indoctrinated into seeing and interpreting this otherwise, and as long as no other experiences contradict

this, he is inclined to see success as blessing and failure as curse. But this is also where reflection begins, because this particular experience can bring a person into conflict with his feeling for righteousness. Why does God allow the suffering of the innocent if he wants to have anything at all to do with this world?

A primary reaction from Rab Ammi (about 300 CE) was that suffering and death are the consequence of sin and transgression (bShab.55a). And R.Hanina b.Dosa (about 70 CE), a younger contemporary of Jesus, a charismatic healer and miracle worker from Galilee, said that it was not the wild animals that killed, but sin (bBer.33a). But in that case who have sinned? Moses is said to have put this question to God when he got the answer in Ex.34.7: 'He visits the sins of the fathers on the children' (cf. bBer.7a). But such an answer did not satisfy some people and they wondered whether things could be different. No one is utterly bad, through and through. So the evil often already receive a reward in this life for the good that they have done but punishment in the hereafter. By contrast the good are sometimes punished for their transgressions in this life while in the life to come they will be rewarded for their good works (AbRN 40a, 59b, 62b).

Though the Talmudic rabbis tended to see suffering in one way or another as punishment, that did not prevent them from giving sympathy and help to anyone who was afflicted. Leprosy was regarded as a severe punishment. The tradition records that the hasid Abba Tahna (from Galilee) once came back home very late on a Friday afternoon, so late that he could only just get home before the sabbath. A leper asked him, 'Show me righteousness (*tsedaqah* = help for one's fellow man) and bring me into the city.' The rabbi thought: 'If I leave my baggage here, what shall we eat at home? But if I do not do it, I shall be neglecting my duty.' And he took the leper and brought him into the city, although he knew that afterwards it would be too late to get his baggage into the house before the sabbath (KohR. IX.7).

That was the attitude of the Galilean hasidim at the time of Jesus. And the Pharisees of Judah were also strongly of the opinion that one cannot abandon someone in distress.

But that did not mean that people did not feel that blows of fate and distress had no significance for the individual and those around him. They would venture to suggest to themselves and one another: 'If someone sees suffering come upon him he should examine his

actions carefully' (bBer.5a; cf. 7b). And in fact a rabbinic work tells how, when Rabbi Simeon (b. Gamliel?) and Rabbi Yishmael b. Elisha¹⁷ were to be executed by the Romans, in about 135 CE, the former asked whom he had to thank for this. R. Yishmael replied: 'Perhaps you were lax and pronounced judgment for the sake of convenience' (Mekilta de R. Yishmael, Mishpatim 18 on Ex.22.22). The Talmud also contains other narratives which show that such a self-examination was not an idle matter.

At the same time, however, there was an awareness of the possibility that an individual's mistake might eventually rebound on a whole community, like a person who sits with a group of others in a boat and suddenly begins to bore holes where he is sitting. When he is told, 'That will endanger all the passengers', he replies: 'I may do what I like with my own seat' (LevR IV.6 on 4.1; cf. Num.16.22).

On the other hand a person can also suffer for his family, for the community to which he belongs and indeed for the whole world, if his influence extends that far. Moses said to God, 'Will not a time come when the Israelites have neither temple nor sanctuary? What then will be the pledge for them?' And God said: 'Then I shall take one of them, a righteous person, and make him a pledge for them and forgive them all their sins' (ExR XXXV.4 on 26.15).

Of course this is a divine determination and not a free action. But that was the case with Rabbi Simeon b. Yohai, who lived around 130 and had an enormous love for his people. On one particular occasion he cried out: 'May I be the atonement for the people of Israel' (m.Negaim II.1). Here this rabbi takes the suffering upon himself. The tradition that Moses deliberately broke the two tables of stone in order to be punished along with Israel and thus secure divine forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf also belongs in this context (cf. ExR. XLIV on 32.13).

Every Jew has a deep expectation of sharing the suffering of his people. Anyone who dissociates himself from this solidarity in suffering also detaches himself from the community and has no share in its consolation.

This suffering is called *yissurin shel'ahabah*, the suffering of love, in other words solidarity in suffering with Israel. In addition to that, however, there is another 'suffering of love'. On the basis of Isa. 53.10 Rab Huna (c.290 CE) says: 'Whoever God loves, he chastises with suffering' (bBer.5a). Suffering is thus experienced as a sign, a proof of divine love (cf. Prov.3.12.)

Another line of tradition can be seen in which suffering and death are detached from sin and transgression. On the one hand suffering is experienced as something paradoxical, almost an absurdity, and on the other hand God's presence is felt precisely in suffering. God himself is bound and cannot escape certain laws. We can see this theme in the story of a rabbi who lived in great wretchedness and asked God, 'How long?' God replied, 'Do you want me to destroy the world for your sake?', in other words go against the regularities of history and creation (bTa'an.25a).

Hence it became possible that God may suffer out of love with his children, his creatures, when he has to make people and communities suffer. A father suffers most when he sees children suffer and has to hurt them. Their suffering becomes his suffering. Even when a criminal suffers the Shekinah (divine presence, God) laments' (Sanh. VI 5).

So the mystics can say: to sin is to hurt God. And the experience of God's nearness in suffering then becomes the source of deep comfort precisely through its utter irrationality.

A late mystical prayer says, 'O God, bring us redemption soon. Here I am thinking not primarily of myself or what I could gain by it. I am ready to take on myself all the pains of hell if only the Shekinah need not suffer any more.'

So far, broadly speaking, though with some detours, I have been following Solomon Schechter's marvellous study of the doctrine of divine retribution.¹⁸ On this point the rabbinic tradition seems to have a liberating diversity. It reflects a discussion going on over centuries without opting for one standpoint or another. This is because what is experienced as true, existentially true, by one person is not necessarily valid for another. The Jew has the right to rebel against God. There are even stories in the tradition in which man puts God on trial and condemns him to assuage the suffering of his people.

A terrible famine once occurred in the Ukraine and the poor could buy no bread. Ten Rabbinis assembled at the home of the 'Spoler Grandfather'¹⁹ for a session of the Rabbinical Court. The Spoler said to them:

'I have a case in judgment against the Lord. According to Rabbinical law, a master who buys a Jewish serf for a designated time (six years or up to the Jubilee year) must support not only

him but also his family. Now the Lord bought us in Egypt as his serfs, since He says, 'For to Me are the sons of Israel serfs,' and the Prophet Ezekiel declared that even in Exile, Israel is the slave of God. Therefore, O Lord, I ask that Thou abide by the Law and support Thy serfs with their families.'

The ten judges rendered judgment in favour of the Spoler Rabbi. In a few days a large shipment of grain arrived from Siberia, and bread could be bought by the poor.²⁰

On the other hand it is often impossible to ward off suffering and then one must attempt to withstand it.

Rabbi Schmélke and his brother once petitioned their teacher, the *maggid* of Mezeritz, to explain to them the words of the Mishnah: 'A man must bless God for the evil in the same way that he blesses him for the good which befalls' (Ber. IX 5).

The *maggid* replied: 'Go to the House of Study, and you will find there a man smoking. He is Rabbi Sussya, and he will explain this to you.'

When Rabbi Schmélke and his brother placed their question to Rabbi Sussya he laughed and said: 'I am surprised that the Rabbi sent you to me. You must go elsewhere, and make your inquiry from one who has suffered tribulations in his lifetime. As for me, I have never experienced anything but good all my days.'

But Rabbi Schmélke and his brother knew full well that from his earliest hour to the present, he had endured the most grievous sorrow. Thereupon they understood the meaning of the words of the Mishnah, and the reason their Rabbi had sent them to Rabbi Sussya.²¹

Judaism has attempted to put into words the whole breadth of human experience, and until a few decades ago this way of talking about it was enough to interpret the experience of even the worst persecutions of Jews. In our century, in our civilization, on the other hand, things have happened about which one can no longer speak in terms of suffering and death. The Holocaust, the annihilation of six million Jews, i.e. more than three-quarters of all the Jews in Europe, is an event which reduces all human speech to silence. One can only think of it in terms of 'Hell and death, an outbreak of death and annihilation.'

In all these things this last campaign of extermination is different

from all the other murder and bloodshed the memory of which has been handed down through history, like the annihilation of tribes in ancient times or in the African primal forests, the slaughter of conquered people by the Mongols, the crusade of extermination against the Albigenians in the thirteenth century, the terror of the St Bartholomew's Day massacre and the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the Chmielnicki pogroms of 1648, the Peasants' Revolt and its suppression in streams of blood, and even the slaughter of Greeks and Armenians by the Turks at different times, most recently in 1915 and 1920.

The Holocaust which the Jews of our century had to suffer is different from all these massacres because it was planned and worked out deliberately and implemented systematically; there was no emotional element in the remorseless decision that absolutely everyone should be exterminated. There was not even the remotest possibility of the victim being able to escape his fate when his turn came to be liquidated, whether by giving himself up, going over to the enemy or collaborating with him, going over to the religion of the victor or undergoing voluntary humiliation in slavery, just to save his life.²²

The Holocaust

Scholars are quite unanimous in denying that the extermination of European Judaism had been one of the main concerns of Hitler and National Socialism from the beginning.²³ Rather, there was a development:

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler speaks of 'the Jew's life as a parasite in the body of the nation and state.'²⁴ And it is hardly surprising that at the end of his book²⁵ he expresses the view that it would have been better if 'at the beginning of the War and during the War twelve or fifteen thousand of these Hebrew corrupters of the people had been held under poison gas ... twelve thousand scoundrels eliminated in time might have saved the lives of a million real Germans, valuable for the future.'²⁶

Hitler believed that the Jews had had a hand in the defeat of Germany in the First World War, and that they were responsible for Marxism and Bolshevism and all Germany's defeats. Historians have rightly pointed to the role of anxiety in National Socialism.

The fear was utterly unjustified in terms of material or political power. Nothing could be more ridiculous than to imagine that there was any rational foundation for one of the great military powers of history to be afraid of the might of 'world Jewry'. Nothing could be further away from the truth than the mad suspicion of a Jewish conspiracy against Germany. Yet, the fear was real...²⁷

Anxiety was the scarlet thread in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Therefore one can say that the Holocaust was its extreme consequence. Nazi Germany did not wage a war against neighbouring peoples for world domination or sole rule in Europe - it waged war against Judaism. Rubenstein put it like this:

The Nazis often seemed far more intent upon achieving irrational victories over defenceless Jews and Gypsies than a real victory over their military opponents. They won the war that really counted for them, the war against the Jews. Eichmann's alleged statement that, though all else fail, he would go to his grave content in the knowledge that he had helped to kill over five million Jews, is very much to the point.²⁸

But it is difficult to accept that Rubenstein is right when he claims that the National Socialists did in fact win their war against Judaism. The opposite seems to be true. We must accept that the Nazis were so spellbound by their war against the Jews that they also lost their war against the allies. The folly of their hatred of the Jews won out over the cool understanding and bravery of the generals, whose Putsch then failed on 20 July 1944. The programme of extermination undermined all the war efforts.²⁹

However, that does not alter the fact that there was a development between Hitler's *Mein Kampf* of 1924 and Auschwitz in 1944.

Rubenstein says more than he can prove when he observes, 'In our world, where the actual has far outdistanced the fantastic in its gruesomeness, it is far more likely that the "final solution" was really decided upon by Hitler at Landsberg Prison in 1923, if not earlier, rather than at Wansee in 1941.'³⁰ Presser³¹ has the support of detailed investigations when he points out that the expression 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question' 'does not always mean the same thing in the material at our disposal'; only gradually did it come to mean the extermination of the Jews, the extreme

consequence of antisemitism, the central ingredient of Nazi ideology. Presser shows how the final meaning of the term is the result of a lengthy process. There is an increasing 'radicalization within this dynamic', i.e. of hatred of the Jews. One important stimulus to it was the attitude of foreigners, say during the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games.

It can hardly be denied that the Nazis concluded from this that they could adopt the course they planned; it seemed that the worst they had to fear from foreigners was a temporary cautious defence with or without paper protests.³²

Now it is clear that this development was favoured above all by the outbreak of the Second World War, and certainly by the beginning of the war against the Soviet Union, which for Hitler was the land of the supreme product of the Jewish spirit, Bolshevism, and also the land in which as a result of the initial success of his campaign many hundreds of thousands of Jews (including Jews from the East of Poland) came into his hands, in addition to the two million who had fallen on his side of the Polish line of demarcation in autumn 1939. Did not Hitler still have the possibility of 'purging' this German sphere of rule by the compulsory emigration of all Jews? Of course not. People wanted to, had to, get rid of them. Only one course remained: mass extermination. Can it be said with certainty when this idea got fixed in Hitler's mind? Of course not, but I think that we can assume that it is a thought latent in any antisemite.³³

However, a number of circumstances and factors are needed to get such an idea to mature and then turn into action. And even then the implementation of the action itself must gradually be perfected. So words like 'emigration' for compulsory deportation could finally come to mean 'annihilation' in a designation like Central Reich Office for Jewish Emigration. On 31 July 1941, Heydrich, the head of this Reich Central Office, received an order from Himmler containing the word 'evacuation', in the significance attached to it at the time. During his trial Eichmann left no grain of doubt about that: evacuation meant extermination and nothing else. Once set in motion, this of course had to be organized properly; it was developed with German thoroughness.³⁴ A complete, well thought out extermination industry with a complete infrastructure of transport in both directions and processing of 'waste products' was set up.

One only has to think how much work even the removal of the body of an animal makes: it is simplest to bury it. This was the method used by the Einsatzkommandos. They made the victims dig their own mass graves. Five such commandos (each numbering from 500 to 1000) were responsible for the death of a million people.

But where the killing was concentrated in an extermination camp like Auschwitz, other methods had to be sought to 'process' the bodies. Rudolf Hoess, camp commandant of Auschwitz, later estimated the number of those killed in the gas chambers of this camp alone at two and a half million.³⁵ Two-thirds of the extermination programme had been carried out by 1943.³⁶ The gas chambers of Auschwitz were in full use for two years and ten months with a daily peak of 20,000 dead, while the cremation ovens could only cope with 3000-5000 corpses a day. So the corpses were also burned in graves.³⁷

The following eyewitness account of the treatment of Jewish children depicts the reality of Auschwitz in the summer of 1944:

When the Hungarian Jews arrived we arranged a sound corridor with music. At this very moment children were being burned on great piles of wood. The cremation ovens were out of order. So they burnt corpses in the open air on iron grids. Children were among them. They wept helplessly, so the camp commandant ordered an orchestra to be made up of about a hundred inhabitants of the camp which had to play loudly all the time. The programme was made up of pieces like the Blue Danube and Rosamunde, played so loudly that even the inhabitants of the town of Auschwitz could not hear the cries. The orchestra drowned everything. Otherwise one would have been able to hear the cries at a distance of two kilometres. The children were snatched from their parents, and put in section III of the camp - several thousand of them.

And then on a particular day they began to burn them. The gas chambers were out of action at the time, at least one of them was, that next to the ovens. And the three other gas chambers were packed with adults. So the children were not gassed but burnt alive.

If one of the SS had compassion he would take the child and hit its head against a stone, so that it was unconscious before he threw it on the burning wood. But usually the children were thrown fully conscious on to the fire.³⁸

What had happened for men to be able to go so far as to see their daily work as killing people on so large a scale, in a way that one can describe without exaggeration as being industrial? One need only read the administrative correspondence and then consider this well-thought-out organization.

It is not enough to say:

Adolf Hitler was dreaming of a completely new human race, a powerful, heroic, fearless and cruel youth, with the power and beauty of young beasts... Immediately after Hitler took power in 1933 such qualities were intensified among the SS people in the concentration camps. For it was here that the political opponents of the regime and the Jews were. The guarding of these people lay in the hands of an SS élite, the SS Death's Head (at the end of 1938 there were 8500 people guarding concentration camps) under the leadership of Theodor Eicke. The concentration camps of Dachau, Oranienburg and Buchenwald, which were built at a very early stage, served as a training ground in harshness and extermination and thus formed the places where guards were selected and could be trained.

Eicke's evil influence could be clearly traced in every concentration camp among the officers and men in command there for years after he had left his post as inspector of the concentration camps.³⁹

Nor is it enough to note that in the years 1933-40 a whole generation of young Germans was exposed to an ongoing intensive indoctrination in which for them Hitler's will was the only valid norm, and that very many of them were prepared to transpose this into action by active involvement in Hitler's Jewish policy. Nor is it enough to keep asserting that seventeen centuries of antisemitism had eventually to lead to the Holocaust and that they reached their climax here. Antisemitism depended so much on Christian teaching that it can be called a purely Christian phenomenon, even if perhaps it is older than Christianity.

Perhaps all that we can assert here is that many of the mechanisms which made the Holocaust possible are still at work and that Christian theology and catechetics often do little to demolish them.

It would be important if in the future all kinds of disciplines were to accept this more than they do. So that they do not forget. So that this sort of thing does not happen again. Everyone must contribute

to this: teachers and philosophers, psychiatrists and sociologists, psychologists and theologians.

18. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, The Book of Cleanness, Treatise V, ch. II.6, Yale Judaica Series VIII, 1954, 261.
 19. bNaz. 61b; Maimonides, op. cit., Treatise I, Uncleaness from Corpses I, 13.
 20. Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, III.48, London 21904, 372.
 21. A personal interview, recorded on tape specially for inclusion in this chapter. Rabbi Medalie was a skilful halakist and leader of *shomre haddat*, one of the largest communities in Antwerp. Not only was it interesting to hear the voice of a contemporary halakic authority on a halakic question, but it was also evident in many other conversations and interviews that Dr Medalie's views were authoritative and widely noted. Rabbi Medalie died just as the first Dutch edition of this book was being printed.
 22. See above, 159 (quotation from E. Levinas).
 23. See above, 27f.
 24. *Shulchan 'Arukh*, Yore Deah 249,6-13.
 25. Ibid., 251,1-6.
 26. See above, 49f.
 27. *Shibah* = *shebah* = seven: the reference is to the seven days of deep mourning, see 180.
 28. Kadushin, op. cit., 207f.
 29. See above, 41f.
 30. Marina Zuidema-Hazenbergh, *De Open Poort* 11, 1975, 15f.
 31. H. Weiner, *9 1/2 Mystics*, 109.
 32. Cf. E. Fromm, *The Forgotten Language*, 169-98.
10. *Death and Resurrection I: The Holocaust*
1. Rabbi Israel Shapira from Grodzisk/Mazowiecki in Poland, grandson of Rabbi Elimelek from Grodzisk, lived in Warsaw after the First World War and was murdered under the Third Reich.
 2. Reference to the purification ritual with the ashes of the red heifer (Num. 19), but also to those midrashim on the sacrifice of Isaac in which Isaac is burnt, and his ashes are heaped up on the altar to purify all Israel. See Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial, on the Legends and the Lore of the Command to Abraham to offer Isaac as a Sacrifice: The Akedah*, Schocken Books, New York 1969, 37.
 3. *Prozdor*, Tel Aviv 1962/2, 1 (a Hebrew journal).
 4. The word holocaust is of Greek origin, and means 'burnt offering'; in English it has come to mean widespread slaughter. As such it is also used for the genocide of around two million Armenians by Turkey during the First World War (1915). It then became the established international term for the carefully (prepared for? and) executed murder of six million Jews from 1933, the year on which Hitler seized power, onwards (see below 185ff.).
 5. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Rules on Mourning, IV, 20.
 6. See above, 18.
 7. De Vries, *Joodse riten en symbolen*, 260f.; Soetendorp, *Symboliek*, 77f.
 8. Soetendorp, op. cit., 79.
 9. See above, 118.

10. De Vries, op. cit., 265f.; cf. the place of Prov. 17.5 in the process of mourning.
 11. See above, 165.
 12. See above, 163f.
 13. See above, 86, 170.
 14. De Vries, op. cit., 285f.
 15. Ibid., 282f.
 16. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, 108.
 17. Ibid., 113; in my view Schechter is premature in identifying the R. Simeon mentioned in MekEx. with Rabban Simeon b. Gamliel and R. Yishmael with R. Yishmael b. Elisha. Rabban Simeon b. Gamliel certainly died considerably later, around 140 CE. Though other rabbinic sources support this identification (cf. MekEx., ed. Horowitz-Rabin, 313 n.), we should regard this identification as being incorrect, unless the whole story is not historical but has a homiletical character. Be this as it may, what matters is the ethical idea incorporated in it.
 18. Schechter, op. cit., 105-22.
 19. 'Spole Grandfather', the Rabbi of Spola in the Ukraine, the so-called Schpolder Seide (Seide is Yiddish for grandfather, from the Polish *dziad*).
 20. L. I. Newman, *The Hasidic Anthology. Tales and Teachings of the Hasidim*, 56.
 21. Ibid., 125f.
 22. J. Talmon, in *Holocaust and Rebirth*, 12f.
 23. Cf. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, 35.
 24. Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. R. Mannheim, Hutchinson 1969, 277.
 25. Ibid., II, Ch. 15.
 26. Ibid., 620.
 27. Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, 117.
 28. Rubenstein, op. cit., 2.
 29. Feldman, in *Holocaust and Rebirth*, 88.
 30. Rubenstein, op. cit., 33.
 31. Presser, *Ondergang*, Introduction, 4.
 32. Ibid., 6.
 33. Ibid., 6f.
 34. Ibid., 7.
 35. L. Pollakow and J. Wulf, *Das Dritte Reich und die Juden*, 127ff.
 36. Feldman, in *Holocaust and Rebirth*, 87ff.
 37. Ibid.
 38. Greenberg, 'Lessons to be learnt from the Holocaust', 9ff., partly included in *Auschwitz. Beginning of a New Era. Reflections on the Holocaust*, ed. E. Fleischer, New York 1977.
 39. Pollakow, *Auschwitz*, 18f.
11. *Death and Resurrection II: The Holocaust and the Foundation of the State of Israel*
1. Talmon, *Holocaust and Rebirth*, 14.
 2. Ibid., 15.
 3. Ibid., 17.