

A Positive Jewish Identity

Category: Shemos, Yisro

How to wake the Jews up: the Chabad way.

Who Buried the Holocaust

Good Shabbos!

If you ask your average American Jewish senior when they first heard about the horror of the Holocaust, they will generally tell you that it was only after World War II that the stories of what happened in Europe started going around. But during the five-six years of the war itself, they knew that there was a war and that Jews were generally suffering, but not much more than that.

In 2006, a book came out entitled “Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America’s Most Important Paper.” The book, by veteran journalist and journalism professor Laurel Leff, researched the behavior of American newspapers in the Holocaust era. The author decided to focus on the most prominent paper of the day in the U.S., *The New York Times*, to determine if it had reported the truth of the Holocaust at the time.

Professor Leff discovered that throughout the six years of the war, the subject of the Holocaust was mentioned close to 1,200 times by the *Times*—including letters detailing exactly how many Jews were being murdered and in how many locations. So the obvious question was, and is: How could it be that publicizing the Holocaust in the press did not arouse public awareness?

The answer is simple and painful: The *Times* did indeed publish articles on the Holocaust—but buried them on back pages. In short articles that sometimes didn’t even have headlines, out of the 1,200 articles during those six years, only 26 of them made it onto the front page of the *New York Times* (and that wasn’t because they usually had more important news to print).

The researcher discovered that it was an intentional decision on the part of the owner of the *Times*, who, sadly, was Jewish. His name was Arthur Sulzberger. He was an assimilated Jew who believed that Judaism was a religion, not a nation or a

family. The idea that “all Jews are brothers” was foreign to him. He rejected the concept of mutual responsibility, and so he had no sense of emotional connection or responsibility towards the Jews who were getting killed and murdered in Europe.

What’s more, he was afraid that his paper would be stigmatized as a “Jewish paper” if he reported too much on the Jewish problem—that the paper would lose its objectivity. Since he was the publisher and all his employees under him knew that he was very sensitive about the issue, the writers and editors tried to bury the whole story of the Holocaust.

And since *The New York Times* was the “leading” paper in the United States, and was the one that was supposed to publish all the international news, all the other papers followed its lead.

The Shofar Awakenings

That’s the true and painful explanation. But we still need to try to understand how it happened that the entire Jewish world didn’t step out of its comfort zone so as to do something during the Holocaust.

And that brings us to this week’s Torah portion.

This Shabbos, we read the Parshah of Yisro, in which we read about Matan Torah, the Giving of the Torah. When G-d came down on Mt. Sinai to give Moshe the Ten Commandments, the Torah tells us: “And the sound of the shofar was very strong, and the entire nation in the camp shook” (Shmos 19:19).

Why specifically is the blowing of the shofar a preparation for Matan Torah? The Prophet Amos explains that the goal of the shofar-blowing was: “Shall a shofar be blown in the city and the nation not tremble?” (Amos 3:6). The goal of the shofar in a person’s life, the Rebbe says, is to cause an awakening and a strong shakeup. G-d wanted to wake up and shake up the Jewish Nation at Matan Torah.

The Rebbe continues, saying that even before the coming of Moshiach, it is written that there will be a blowing of the shofar, and not just one time but twice, as mentioned in the Prophets. The Prophet Zecharya says, “And G-d shall blow the shofar and go forth in eastern storm winds,” and the Prophet Yeshaya says, “And

it shall be on that day that the great shofar shall be blown.”

The Rebbe explains that the verses don't mean it literally—that we'll literally hear a shofar blowing. Rather, it will happen through shaking events that will shake the world in general and the Jewish Nation in particular. It is this shaking that is the “blowing of the shofar.”

The Two Modern Blasts

The Rebbe spoke along these lines right after the Six-Day War, saying that in our generation there were “two shofar blasts” that shook the Jewish Nation. The first event was the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the second shofar blast was the Six-Day War.

The Holocaust was a trembling and frightful shofar blast. It reminded every Jew that they were Jewish. Even for those who wanted to run away and deny their Jewishness, there came along others who made sure to remind them that they were still Jewish, indeed. This is what the Prophet Zecharya was prophesizing about when he said, “and G-d shall blow the shofar and go forth in eastern storm winds”—he was referring to World War II, which brought a storm to the world.

The second shofar blast, of course, was the Six-Day War, which likewise shook every Jew everywhere.

The Rebbe says that with the first shofar blast, that of the Holocaust, despite the terrible decrees and exterminations, did not actually succeed in really shaking Jews elsewhere in the world who had not suffered from the Holocaust. They wrote checks, made donations and may have even recited a chapter or two of Tehilim (Psalms) for the martyrs of the Holocaust, but they continued their regular lives.

That was not the case with the Six-Day War, which woke Jews up all over the world, wherever they lived. From the strongest democracy in the world, the United States, to the most severe dictatorship, the Soviet Union, and everything in between, the Jews everywhere stood with a mighty awakening and were ready to do everything to help the Jews in the Holy Land. Whether donating money, volunteering to physically defend the land with their bodies or even learning more Torah or doing more mitzvos, everyone was ready to defend the land. (Bereishis 5728, Toras Menachem Vol. 51, pg. 210, et al.)

What Turns Jews On?

Why was the “second shofar blast” of the Six-Day War more effective than the “first shofar blast” of the Second World War?

Perhaps we can say that with the Holocaust, what you had was physical annihilation and anguish; not only did that not succeed in awakening Jews, but on the contrary, it depressed them and drove them from wanting to be Jews. That was not the case with the Six Day War, in which you saw open miracles in how the little Israeli army succeeded in defeating three strong Arab armies. Not only that, but this same Israeli army also succeeded in liberating the Biblical Land of Israel—Jerusalem, Judah, the Shomron, etc.

These victories raised Jewish morale and created massive Jewish pride. Jews all over the world got their Jewish pride back, feeling that it was an honor to be part of the Jewish Nation. It triggered a huge positive awakening.

Even today, there are two ways of awakening Jews to do something for the Jewish Nation.

There are those who preach doom and gloom about the Jewish community in the United States. They wail about the Pew study which revealed that there is a 78-percent assimilation rate, and they frighten everyone with dire warnings of a spiritual Holocaust—and so, they say, we must do something for the Jewish Nation. But in actuality, it is not this that moves the Jewish public.

The second way, and this is the Chabad way, is the positive way—to emphasize the primacy of Jewish education in the United States. Today, there are many more Jewish kids in Jewish schools in the United States than there ever were. Thousands of Jewish kids go every summer to Jewish summer camps. There are thousands of Jews who now eat kosher, and millions of Jews who are proud of their Jewishness.

We can safely declare that the Jewish Nation does indeed have a strong and secure future—and that it’s worth it for everyone to take an active and positive part in it.

Good Shabbos!