REVERENCE,
RIGHTOUSNESS,
AND RAHAMANUT

Essays in Memory of Rabbi Dr. Leo Jung

Edited by Jacob J. Schacter

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The Ninety-three Bais Yaakov Girls of Cracow: History or Typology?

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Jewish martyrdom during the Holocaust is a tragic and emotionally charged issue for anyone examining Jewish life under Nazi rule. During the past generation, a number of accounts of both physical and spiritual martyrdom have metamorphosed into much more than stories of bravery in the face of adversity. With the passage of time, the historical events have become symbolic parables woven into the tapestry of Jewish heroism and have taken their place in the historical/legendary chronicles of the Jewish people. One such episode is that of the alleged martyrdom of 93 young women, students of the Bais Yaakov school for girls in Cracow during the summer of 1942. Few precise historical facts are known about this incident; yet, within months of its alleged occurrence, it became a prime example of exalted and laudable Jewish behavior in the face of Nazi persecution.

The place: the Cracow ghetto in western Galicia. The time: summer 1942. From April 1941 until June 1942, the Cracow ghetto had been under the authority of the general Nazi administration. In early June 1942, the first of a series of events occurred which would eventually lead to the ghetto's liquidation in March 1943—authority for the ghetto of Cracow was handed over to the security police, the S.S. and the police of the General Government. The transfer of authority was characterized by two phenomena: the heightened presence of Germans in the ghetto from that date onward and the deportations from the Cracow ghetto which began that

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month.¹ The protagonists: teachers and students in the Cracow Bais Yaakov seminary for girls. In 1917, the first of a series of religious/vocational institutions for Jewish girls called Bais Yaakov was founded in Cracow by Sarah Schenirer (1883-1935), a former seamstress. Eight years later, she founded a teachers' seminary, also in Cracow. Between the two world wars, hundreds of girls had studied at the high school, seminary, or one of the school's extensions.² With the outbreak of war, the young students from other cities studying in Cracow had been cut off from their families, but within a short time, many had managed to be reunited with them in various locations throughout Poland. When all Jewish schools were closed by decree of the German army in 1939, the seminary was forced underground. For close to three years, clandestine lessons on various aspects of Bible, Jewish law and Jewish thought were taught to the students who had remained in Cracow.³

According to two sources described below, the following event took place.⁴ On July 27, 1942, the ninety-three students studying together in the Bais Yaakov school in Cracow were discovered by the Nazis. The girls, ranging in age from fourteen to twenty-two, were transferred by their captors to another building, apparently within the ghetto. Little is known about the physical conditions in which the girls were held. For close to two weeks they were kept in a dark room or in several dark rooms, totally unaware of what the future was to hold in store for them. On the 9th of August, the girls were permitted to bathe with warm water for the first time since their capture. The following day they were taken to a large building with well-lit rooms and beautiful beds. The girls were ordered to bathe again, their clothes were taken away and they were given nightgowns to wear.

²For other information about Cracow Jewry before and after the ghetto was established, see Binyamin Mintz and Israel Klausner, ed., Sefer ha-Zevuot (Jerusalem, 1945), 127-33, 157-62, 258-61. For the boundaries of the ghetto, ibid., 255-59; ha-Yehudim bi-Krakow, ibid., end.
⁴Moshe Mark, "93," ha-Derekh (April 1, 1943), 2; Hannah Weiss, "Kiddush Hashem," Sefer ha-Yovel as-25, ibid., 20-21. For evidence about underground religious instruction in Cracow's ghetto during this time, see Aryeh Bauminger, Lohamei Geto Krakow (Tel Aviv, 1967), 28, based on testimony given at the Eichmann trial.
⁵This description is based on Hannah Weiss, ibid., 18-19, and the letter written by Chaya Feldman, cited below.
This letter is one of two documents that describe the incident. The second is a letter by Hannah Weiss written in 1947. Weiss was a student at the Bais Yaakov school in Cracow and was the 94th girl who had been called away to care for a sick aunt before the group was captured. After her classmates and teachers were taken away, the elderly charwoman of the seminary came to her and described their capture and transfer. Hannah's attempt to join her schoolmates was unsuccessful; however, she did manage to hide in the yard outside the building and claims to have heard in great detail what was taking place within. In her essay she records verbatim much of the last words of encouragement given the girls by their teacher, describes how she burst into hysterical tears after hearing the girls' decision to commit suicide, and how she was chased away by one of the soldiers guarding the building's entrance.

In September 1942, Hannah Weiss escaped from the ghetto disguised as a Gentile and eventually made her way to relatives in Bogota, Columbia. In 1947 she sent her essay describing the final hours of the 93 young women with a cover letter to a brother of one of her former Bais Yaakov teachers, then living in Palestine. The letter and essay were published in the 1961 Jubilee book of Bais Yaakov. 14

Chaya Feldman's letter reached Schenkelowski in early January 1943. Deeply moved by its contents, he immediately left his office to meet with Mr. Jacob Rosenheim, president of the World Agudath Israel movement. Rosenheim asked Schenkelowski to deliver the letter to Dr. Isaac Lewin, the son of Rabbi Aaron Lewin of Rzeszow, another Agudath Israel activist, then living in New York. He also mailed a copy of it to Rabbi Leo Jung, the young rabbi of The Jewish Center in Manhattan and Chairman of the American Beth Jacob Committee. Jung's abridged translation of the letter appeared in The New York Times of January 8, 1943; however his accompanying explanation placed the story in Warsaw and not Cracow. 15 Lewin also made reference to this story in an essay he wrote at that time.

introduction to the letter erroneously states that it was sent to Rabbi Dr. Isaac Lewin in New York (and not to Mr. Schenkelowski).

For a partially incorrect Yiddish translation, see S. Niger, "Vegen dem Kiddush Hashem fun di Bnos Yaakov: Legende oder Fakt?", Der Tag (New York; August 21, 1948), 6. After citing his own as well as Yitzhak Rivkind's doubts about the historical veracity of the story (see below, n. 38), Niger printed what he claimed to be a copy of Chaya Feldman's letter (to her uncle in New York?) which he received from S. Kristalka in Montreal and requested that those whose names are mentioned in the letter (i.e., Schenkelowski, Rosenheim, Goodman and Sholeman) please come forward and verify its accuracy. In fact, his text is not the original letter but a Yiddish translation of it, which, in addition, is incorrect in a few places.

14 See Hannah Weiss, op. cit. (n. 3), 18-19. It would appear that the longer essay by Weiss (ibid., 20-24) is only a fictional description of the event. It would have been impossible for her to accurately hear every word of the conversations going on inside the building from her vantage point outside in the yard.

15 Correspondence (Tdyor Baumel) with Schenkelowski and interview with him. Telephone interviews (Tdyor Baumel) with Rabbi Dr. Isaac Lewin and Rabbi Leo Jung, New York, July 9, 1985; letter from Rosenheim to Jung, January 5, 1943 (printed in Appendix II of this essay); "93 Choose Suicide Before Nazi Shame," The New York Times (January 8, 1943), 8.

Rabbi Jung reprinted the letter in his Panorama of Judaism (London and New York, 1974),
However, he erred in several details: he identified Chaya Feldman as a teacher and the city where the story took place as Warsaw.16 The article in The New York Times was not the letter's first public appearance. Already several days earlier, on January 5th, the letter had been read to the participants of a Vaad ha-Hatzalah meeting of Orthodox rabbis which had taken place in New York City. Here, too, the listeners were greatly shocked by the story.17 World reaction was soon to follow. Already during the early months of 1943 the girls' bravery was cited as a classic example of kiddush Hashem. Two otherwise very different groups in the United States reacted to the letter almost immediately: the Orthodox and the Reconstructionists. At closed meetings of the Vaad Hatzalah the story of the 93 girls was cited as an example of the daily danger to which European Jewry was exposed. In the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, a stronghold of Agudath Israel and the home of many leaders of the Vaad ha-Hatzalah, this story was constantly repeated from every pulpit in every shul and shitebel and had a powerful and traumatic impact on the entire community.18 A woman remembering home from high school during this period and finding her grandmother crying bitterly over the news of such an event which she had just received in a handwritten Yiddish letter. She made her granddaughter promise to light a Yahrzeit candle, say Yizkor regularly and recite kiddush on Yom Kippur for as long as she lived in memory of these girls. Realizing that the young girl's parents were still alive, she composed a special document which she had them sign that evening stating that they gave her special permission to do so. This woman abided by her grandmother's wishes for close to fifty years, referring to these girls as "my hundred little sisters."19

The Reconstructionists' reaction was a literary one. During the first week of March 1943, the Reconstructionist journal published a description of the Bais Yaakov seminary in Cracow during the pre-war period. It also published an English translation of a Hebrew poem by the writer Hillel Bavel about the ninety-three girls which had first appeared in ha-Doar, a Hebrew paper published in the United States, on January 22, 1943.20 Two weeks later, Mrs. Bertha Bad-Strauss, who translated the poem, suggested in a letter to the editor of The Reconstructionist that it be read aloud prior to kaddish during memorial services for victims of the Holocaust.21 Other American Jewish publications also featured this story in different ways: as the subject of an editorial in Congress Weekly, published by the American Jewish Congress; a poem in The Jewish Forum; and a short story based upon it in Opinion, a monthly edited by Stephen S. Wise, all within the first half of 1943.22

Postal delays caused the letter to arrive in Eretz Yisrael only in mid-February 1943. There too its contents touched off a wave of reactions which encompassed the entire political spectrum. Immediately following the letter's arrival, articles dealing with the incident began to appear in the local press. The first to react was the ultra-Orthodox (Edah Haredit) Kol Yisrael, which summarized the letter's contents. A week later the same paper printed a description of the incident and stated that it took place in Warsaw. The author was apparently basing his information upon the translation of the letter as it appeared in The New York Times. Mention was also made of a first practical step taken to commemorate the tragic episode. Keren ha-Torah, a charitable organization connected with Agudath Israel, stated that the 26th of Adar, Sarah Schenirer's eighth yahrzeit, had been designated as a day of commemoration in all Bais Yaakov schools for the girls who had died martyrs' deaths.23 On March 25, 1943, a partial and imprecise translation of the letter appeared in Kol Yisrael with the erroneous comment that the letter had been sent to Rabbi Dr. Isaac Levin (and not to Meir Schenkelowski). Along with the letter, two short stories, "The Jar of Poison" and "Stars in the Night," were devoted to the girls' final moments.24

Additional ultra-orthodox reactions appeared in the newspaper ha-Derekh which printed the same incorrect information as to the city in which the event took place, originally appearing in Kol Yisrael. Here, for the first time, readers received some information about the Cracow seminary during the war years. One article in particular, written by Moshe Mark, raised several pertinent questions which later would be discussed by historians: How was it possible for the Nazis to catch a group that large in Cracow at a time when Jews made an effort to avoid congregating even in much smaller groups? Where did the girls obtain the poison? Most important, how did they manage to smuggle Chaya Feldman's letter out of the ghetto to the free world? In response, Mark stated that the seminary continued to function clandestinely during the war years and that the entire student body was caught during one of the lessons. As for the other questions, the author noted that: "three years of underground work, near . . . the gestapo center in Cracow, was excellent training for smuggling." This may support Hannah Weiss' claim that the headmistress had hidden the poison on her body, as did members of the underground.25

In addition to the aforementioned articles, stories about the 93 girls appeared in various newspapers—ha-Tzofeh of the Mizrahi party, Davar of the Labor party,

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2The essay was reprinted in I. Lewin, mi-Boker la-Erev (Jerusalem, 1981), 223-25. It is dated Tever, 5703.
3For a description of the reaction to the letter at that meeting, see ha-Pandes 16:10 (January 1943) 5-6.
4Interview (Schacter) with Mr. Abraham Bayer, May 9, 1990.
5Telephone interview (Schacter) with Mrs. Arlene Stempler, April 18, 1990. Her grandmother was Mrs. Esther Rachel Schrader, wife of Rabbi Zalman Reuven Schrader, a hasidic rebbie in Williamsburg. The problem with this evidence is that Mrs. Stempler recalls this event taking place in September-October of 1942. Did her grandmother get information about this event before anyone else or, perhaps, is it a reference to another similar incident? In all likelihood, this simply reflects a confusion about the exact date of an occurrence that took place fifty years earlier.
9Kol Yisrael (February 12, 1943), 1; (February 18, 1943), 1.
10Ibid., (March 25, 1943), 1-2.
11ha-Derekh (February 25, 1943), 3; (April 1, 1943), 2-3, 7.
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Also, in a letter written in New York on May 10, 1946, Rabbi Leo Jung indicated that a Bais Yaakov building in then Palestine was "to be dedicated to the ninety-three martyrs who glorified Jewish history in our own day." Several letters were also written on the story of "The 93" would again receive formal or institutional expression. Although it appeared in poems such as that by David Shimon entitled "The 93," it was first given liturgical expression as part of the Yom Kippur service in the High Holiday prayerbook edited by Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser in 1959. It was featured as well in the order of High Holiday services edited by Rabbi Jules Harlow in 1972. In both prayerbooks the incident's location is given as Warsaw and both reproduce Hillel Bavl's poem about the event written in January 1943, cited earlier.

None of the sources cited until this point, with the exception of the article by Moshe Mark mentioned above, raises any doubts about the historicity of the incident. However, in the early 1950s questions regarding the incident were raised in historical circles.

The first historian to question publicly the episode's veracity was Joseph Wolff, a Jewish researcher from Cracow, who stated that it was a total fabrication. Wolff claimed that the conditions in the Cracow ghetto would not have permitted such an incident to occur. Furthermore, the fact that there were no witnesses to the

Yakov leadership there urging that these young women be remembered. The circular was reproduced in Eliezer Gad-Oz, Ish Hayyil (Tel Aviv, 1971), 196-97. In a letter to Schacter dated November 28, 1990, R. Pinkusowitz of Antwerp, a former student of Sarah Schenier, wrote that she first heard of this story right after the liberation in Bergen Belsen where Chaya Feldman's letter made "an enormous impression (a gevaldigen roysen)."


David Shimon, "Ha-Tishim ve-Shalosh," Hevel Shel Mashiah (Tel Aviv, 1952), 5; reprinted in S. Ashkenazi, Giborot bi-Yisrael, op. cit. (n. 31), 261. See also Avraham Broides, "Ha-Tishim ve-Shalosh," me-Adam le-Adam (Jerusalem, 1947), 154; Moshe Tabenkin, "Fefer Shirim (Tel Aviv, 1966), 184-85.

Ben Zion Bokser, ed., The High Holiday Prayer Book (New York, 1959), 434-36. Bokser erroneously dates the letter on "Rosh Hodesh Elul, 5704." In fact, it was written on 28 Av 5702.


For other references to the story, see Aharon Suraski, op. cit. (n. 2), 445 (see n. 21 where he states that the letter reporting this incident was received by Rabbi Dr. Isaac Lewin); Amnon Rubinstein, Kan, Atah (Tel Aviv, 1969), 156; Dov Rosen, Shema Yisrael, trans. into English by L. Ozchry (Jerusalem, 1972), 524-25.

A quote from Wolff's article appears in a letter sent by Dr. Joseph Kermish, Director of the Yad Vashem Archives, to Dr. Jacob Robinson, September 18, 1975. The letter is included in an unnumbered file containing correspondence about the "93" in the Yad Vashem Archives.

Already in an article written at the end of September 1945, Yitzhak Rivkind simply assumed that the story was a legend, and was prepared to accept that it may even have been consciously fabricated in order to underscore the tremendous premium placed upon modesty by Jewish women throughout the ages. He does not explain, however, why he did not accept the story as having occurred in fact. See Y. Rivkind, "Kiddush Hashem fun Froyen," Kiddush Hashem, ed. by S. Niger (New York, 1948), 1036. His conclusion was cited by S. Niger, op. cit. (n. 13) who also had his doubts about the historical veracity of this story.
incident among the Cracow survivors militated against the incident ever having taken place. Another well-known historian, Philip Friedman, supported Wolf's contention and wrote the following:

There is an extensive literature on the subject of the 93 pupils of Beit Ya'akov, but all the authors involved have based their descriptions on one letter which was received by a Jewish institution abroad during the war. The letter said that the Germans had tried to force 93 girls of Beit Ya'akov into a soldiers' brothel, but the girls had all preferred death and had committed suicide before the Germans were able to carry out their plan. Later research and examination revealed that the letter was a complete forgery and that the story is without any foundation.\(^{39}\)

In his compilation of sources pertaining to religious life during the Holocaust, Mordechai Eliav also questions the historicity of this incident. After citing Chaya Feldman's letter, Eliav states the following:

The incident related here was well publicized throughout the world. Lately, however, there were those who raised doubts about the incident's veracity and the letter's credibility. Nevertheless, it is difficult to come to any final conclusion regarding the matter.\(^{40}\)

The Yad Vashem Archives contain a large folder about the episode of "the 93," primarily containing correspondence with various individuals and organizations who were seeking information about the incident. Quoting both Wolff and Friedman, the responses from Yad Vashem generally state that the incident did not occur. A letter in the folder from 1977 reads as follows: "During the first years after the liberation the letter was examined in great detail in Poland and no facts were uncovered which would corroborate such a story."\(^{41}\) We have been unable to unearth any additional details regarding the "detailed examination" mentioned here and in Friedman's article. It appears that both refer to Joseph Wolff's arguments cited above.

Several of the letters in the folder were addressed to Yad Vashem as a result of a strange article appearing in the Hebrew newspaper Maariv on March 25, 1975. The article stated:

The last will and testament of ninety-three Jewish girls who committed suicide rather than fall into Nazi hands has been found. The document, written in Yiddish, was recently found in Poland and was sent to the United States where it was read to former members of the Radom community in a ceremony which took place in New York in March.\(^{42}\)

According to the article, the document is that of a 17-year-old girl named Chaya Friedman which describes the fate of ninety-three Bais Yaakov students in Warsaw and which was sent from the United States to Tuvia Friedman, the Haifa-based Nazi hunter. There are clearly several inaccuracies in this account: Chaya Feldman's last name which appears here as Friedman, her age during the episode, the "recent" discovery of the letter in Poland and, most importantly, the fact that the girls were told that German soldiers and S.S. officers would visit them in the evening. This final inaccuracy, concerning the identity of the soldiers who were supposed to "visit" the girls, is the one most frequently cited by contemporary educators and journalists describing the incident. It continues to be the version presented when the incident is cited in "mussar" lessons given in ultra-Orthodox schools and gatherings.

When approached about the article, Tuvia Friedman stated that he had no recollection of the letter and that the state of his archive did not allow access to the document if, indeed, it was there.\(^{43}\) However, a conversation with Mr. Aryeh Reichman of the Radom landmantschaft shed more light on the matter. It appears that the document in question was indeed the letter written by Chaya Feldman as it appeared in the previously mentioned Ofj Der Frei, edited by Mr. Reichman and his friends. A commentary on the incident, written by the Bergen Belscher Bais Yaakov Central Committee, appeared alongside the article. It stated that the letter had been found sometime in 1942 by a Jew working in the ghetto police and that its date was Rosh Hodesh Elul, 5742 (or August 13 or 14, 1942). Thus, another "addition" to the original story of "the 93" was born.\(^{44}\)

To date, virtually all scholars are convinced that the incident never occurred. In a book published in 1976, Lucy S. Dawidowicz, the noted Holocaust historian, wrote as follows:

A less pernicious form of historical falsification is the myth pretending to documentary veracity. In Holocaust history, myths are especially abundant about the behavior of pious Jews in circumstances of extreme crisis; this is in fact a genre with many precedents in Jewish history. The most widespread
such story is probably that of the ninety-three (more or less) devout girls of a Beth Jacob school in the Cracow ghetto who chose mass suicide over the degradation of a German brothel. It is a fanciful and moving tale of sacrificial piety, a lesson in religious morality, fashioned by people who knew nothing of the Nuremberg Laws which made sexual relations between Germans and Jews illegal, criminal, and subject to severe punishment.45

In 1983, Professor Yisrael Gutman of Yad Vashem used the same argument in a letter:

One should note that we have no document or testimony of witnesses which corroborate the incident. This raises doubts in view of the racial laws which prohibited sexual relations between Jews and Aryans. It therefore seems impossible that this was planned in an official manner.46

Furthermore, doubts about the incident even surfaced in Agudath Israel circles. When asked about the story, the headmistress of the Bais Yaakov seminary in Bnai Brak, herself a Holocaust survivor, stated the following:

We heard about the incident through America only after the war and not during the war itself. It seems possible that something like this could have happened, but with a few girls or with one, in secret, but not with ninety-three. I don't deal with the episode. We have a garden in memory of the ninety-three, streets named after them, but I don't teach the story.47

Mr. Joseph Friedenson, prominent survivor, Yiddish writer and editor of Dos Yiddishe Vort, the Yiddish language monthly of Agudath Israel in America, also expressed doubts about the historical veracity of this story. He too noted that it was strange that no one in the camps or ghettos ever heard about it. He would have expected that something as striking as this would have been transmitted through the unofficial network that existed during that time. Furthermore, he noted that the language of Chaya Feldman's alleged letter was German-Hungarian Yiddish as opposed to the type of Polish Yiddish one would have expected in Cracow.48

Another prominent survivor and Yiddish writer, Dr. Hillel Seidman, also wrote that the story was false and even stated, "I am familiar with who fabricated the 'story' about the 93 and when, here in New York."49

46Letter from Professor Gutman to Dr. Judith Tydor Baumel, July 5, 1983.
48Telephone interview (Schacter) with Mr. Friedenson in New York City, February 19, 1990. In the part of his essay, cited above (n. 2), dealing with the heroism of Bais Yaakov girls during the Holocaust (pp. 79-82), Friedenson makes no mention of this story. See also Nisson Wolpin, ed., The Torah World (New York, 1982), 172-73.
49See H. Seidman, "Vyetnam Heynkum un der Musir Haskiel," Der Tag (Friday, March 9, 1973). In an interview (Schacter) on December 19, 1990, Dr. Seidman stated: "There was never such a student in the [Cracow] seminary named Chaya Feldman. I had a sister there... I know personally and exactly that it is a lie. It could not have happened... I know who invented it."

In light of this, there clearly is no basis for Menachem Friedman's recent assertion that Seidman was the first to publicize this story. See his "The Haredim and the Holocaust," The Jerusalem Quarterly 53 (Winter 1990/91): 100. "Subsequently it emerged that the story of the ninety-three girls was apocryphal."

50See ha-lr (June 27, 1986), 52. On June 25, 1942, the size of the Cracow ghetto was restricted for the second time. For the exact area included in the ghetto at that date, which was about one-third of a square mile, see Jacob Appenzelik, The Black Book of Polish Jewry (1943), 84.
did take place, and, in fact, have serious doubts about it, it is possible to address and refute some of the points raised in an attempt to disprove its historicity.

1. Different versions: Location—There is no question that the incident occurred in Cracow and not in Warsaw. Those who cite Warsaw as the location base this on the mistake which appeared in The New York Times article of January 8, 1943. Rabbi Jung later claimed that the mistake stemmed from his secretary’s tendency to attribute any event occurring during the war years in Poland to Warsaw. Rabbi Harlow deliberately maintained the misidentification of the city in which the event allegedly occurred as Warsaw, even though he knew it was Cracow, in order to stress the enormous horror of the event itself which transcended any specific time and place.

Recipient—It appears that the editors of the ultra-Orthodox newspapers and of the Bais Yaakov Jubilee volume found it more impressive to state that the letter was sent directly to Isaac Lewin, a well-known figure, and not to the less prominent Miet Schenklevski. In fact, Schenklevski claims that it was he who had passed the letter on to Lewin.

Text—Although never published before in its entirety, the original letter does exist and a copy of it is appended to this article. Significantly, it makes no mention of S.S. men, the gestapo or a camp, all of which appeared only later in the Kol Yisrael translation of it and which served as a basis for the subsequent scholarly reconstruction and denial of the story. Similarly, many others describing the incident felt it necessary to add details and descriptions which did not appear in the original. For example, “vile gestapo men” certainly sounds more striking than simple “German soldiers” and, anyway, in the eyes of many Jews in the free world, all German soldiers were considered “gestapo.” Furthermore, its German-Hungarian Yiddish dialect may simply reflect the fact that its author was from a German-speaking area and came to Cracow for her education. Conceivably it is possible that Chaya Feldman lived in Austria or in the German part of Czechoslovakia and after the Anschluss in 1938 was sent to Cracow, which at that time was still free. Marienbad, itself, for example, is in the German part of Czechoslovakia and what may have brought her to the Knessiah Gedolah there in 1937 was simply the fact that it was her home town.

2. Conditions in the ghetto: During the period in question, the ghetto was overrun by German soldiers. We know that the seminary had continued to function in secret during the roundups, and it conceivably is possible to imagine that a large group of students had been captured at one time. As for the feasibility of smuggling a letter out of the ghetto, we know of other similar incidents in the

Warsaw ghetto during the same period. While it is impossible to reconstruct the exact route via which the letter allegedly made its way from Cracow to Switzerland, presumably it was transferred by the underground as were most other letters smuggled out of occupied Europe during this period.

3. Racial Laws: While laws against racial pollution did indeed exist, they were not relevant to the story under consideration here. First of all, bearing in mind that the group in question was described as being composed of “German soldiers” and not of “S.S. men and gestapo,” it may well be that they were ethnic Germans (Volkseutsche) or members of another minority group. While the likelihood of establishing a Jewish brothel for S.S. men may have been remote, the same cannot be said with regard to a brothel for German soldiers and particularly for members of the minority groups permitted to serve in the Wehrmacht. Furthermore, in view of the conditions in the Cracow ghetto during the summer of 1942, this might not have been an organized matter based upon any official policy.

Secondly, there is other evidence that Germans did force Jewish women to have sexual relations with them, in spite of official German legislation which forbade it. In his book of responsa, Out of the Depths, Rabbi Elrhim Oshry cites a question posed by a young man from Kovno who asked whether he was permitted to live with his wife after the war:

She, like many of her poor sisters, had been caught by the cursed Germans and given over to prostitution, and in addition to the fact that the vile ones tortured her pure body, they also tattooed upon her arm the words “whore for the soldiers of Hitler.”

This sad evidence, taken from a halakhic context, points to the fact that the situation in which the girls from Cracow had been placed was not at all unique. Such incidents took place regularly in cities, ghettos and in camps. For example, the Nazis ordered Jewish leaders in Warsaw to organize a Jewish brothel for German soldiers. In response to opposition, the local leader of the Gestapo explicitly said, “Don’t let the race-laws bother you. War is war, and in such a situation all theories die out.”

58It is, however, interesting to note that in a letter written to Mr. Manfred Meyer of New York City on May 15, 1990, Daniel Lewenstein’s widow, Esther, states that she had never heard of this story and that she checked her late husband’s files for the years 1940-1944 and found nothing that related to it.

59Rabbi Elrhim Oshry, Sefer She’edut u-Teshuvot mi-Maamarim I (New York, 1976), 151, #27. This responsa has been cited in Irving J. Rosenbaum, The Holocaust and Halakah (1976), 145-47 and in H. J. Zimmels, The Echo of the Nazi Holocaust in Rabinic Literature (1977), 199-200.


Furthermore, Jewish girls were used for prostitution after the Wielicka ghetto near Cracow was liquidated sometime in 1942. Interview (Schacter) with Mr. Sigmunt Rotten-
4. Witnesses: The question of witnesses is a delicate one, particularly in the case of a group where all members had committed suicide. It is even more problematic that no one has been able to identify Chaya Feldman or to describe her history. Schenkelwesky claims that he met so many Bais Yaakov girls in Marienbad that it would be impossible for him to remember one particular girl. Nevertheless, Hannah Weiss' essay partially fills this gap.

5. The arguments appearing in ha-Ir: True, the ghetto area was circumscribed during this period, but it still comprised more than the "four streets" quoted in the article. Furthermore, while a Jewish council did function in the ghetto, deportations were taking place daily and it is possible that the girls' sudden disappearance was considered as yet another Nazi "population transfer." This hypothesis is strengthened by the lack of precise information regarding the location to which the girls were transferred after their capture. If they were removed immediately from the ghetto, it might indeed have been assumed that they had joined one of the transports. Professor Gutman's claim that the Judenrat would have reacted to the girls' suicide is a convincing argument -- if the girls committed suicide within the ghetto confines. However, what if this event occurred outside the ghetto walls? This would explain how neither witnesses from the Cracow ghetto nor the Yizkor books from Cracow make any mention of the story. Regarding the problem of disposing of 93 corpses, it must be remembered that the letter speaks only of the girls' intention to commit suicide. There is no evidence that, in fact, they managed to carry out their plan. Furthermore, since we have no clear proof of where the incident allegedly occurred, we are spared with having to account for the disposal of 93 corpses within the ghetto.

The final historical issue involves the primary sources describing the incident. The May 9, 1990, Mr. Rottenberg was interned in a labor camp in Plaszow near Cracow and was part of a one-day operation to clean up the Wieliczka ghetto after it was liquidated. At that time he met a number of Jewish girls who told him that they made that decision in order to save their lives. See also Joan Miriam Ringelheim, "The Ethical and the Unthinkable: Women and the Holocaust," Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual 1 (1984), esp. 72-74 for information about prostitution used as a means of protection; for examples of rape, see Sybil Milton, "Women and the Holocaust: The Case of German and German-Jewish Women," When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany, ed. by R. Bridenthal, et al. (New York, 1994), 297-333.

For other evidence of this in rabbinic literature, see R. Mordekhai Yaakov Breisch, Sefer Hekhal Yaakov (Jerusalem, 1951), I, 37, #16, beginning; R. Tuviyah Yehudah Tavonyo (Gutentag), Sefer Erez Touah (Jerusalem, 1947), I, 188, #61, beginning. For a discussion of these and other sources, see H. J. Zimmels, ibid., 185-200. See also Eliyahu ben Zimrah, "Kedushat ha-Hayyim um-Mesorot Nefesh bi-Yemei ha-Shoa, al pi ha-Halakhah," Sinai 80 (1976):175-79; Shimon Huberband, Kiddush Hashem: Jewish Religious and Cultural Life in Poland During the Holocaust, trans. by D. Fishman (Hoboken, 1987), 242.

The matter of the poisoning allegedly used by the girls also poses no historical problem. In a letter to Dr. Schacter dated May 16, 1990, Dr. Robert Richter noted that it was probably sodium cyanide which was quick and reliable and which was not difficult to conceal in capsule form.

For suicide in general at this time, see Konrad Kwier, "The Ultimate Refuge: Suicide in the Jewish Community under the Nazis," Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 29 (1984):135-67. Our story is especially relevant to the issue briefly discussed there (p. 137) regarding suicide as an act of resistance.

dent. The truth remains that the two documents at hand -- Chaya Feldman's letter and Hannah Weiss' testimony -- are both Jewish sources. No corroboration of the incident is found in any German sources from the period. True, there is a testimony which describes the murder of one hundred Jewish girls in Cracow. This act was a reprisal for the murder of two S.D. men at the hands of Jewish girls whom they had raped. However, the incident occurred during the summer of 1940 and is not related to the one under discussion here which occurred in 1942.

But this story also raises a larger issue, one which transcends the immediate boundaries of this event and speaks to the core of the classical Jewish response to catastrophe. The recent thought-provoking and insightful work of David G. Roskies and Alan Mintz has drawn our attention to the transtemporal patterns, overarching paradigms, and archetypes that govern this response throughout our history. In their effort to maintain faith in God in the face of often incredible suffering, Jewish victims of tragedy in all centuries felt constrained to view their experiences as part of a continuum and not as something radically different and new. Although they may have objectively believed that the magnitude of their suffering was unprecedented, they never presented it as such, for fear that this might indicate that God was finally breaking His covenantal bond and severing His close relationship with His people, a thought they simply could not abide and one that their faith would not allow them to accept. Whatever cataclysmic event they experienced was never seen in isolation, as sui generis, but, on the contrary, was portrayed as just the latest example of the age-old, consistently recurring phenomenon of God's punishment for Jewish sin. Indeed, the Jewish collective memory was so long and strong that any time it confronted even a tragedy of major proportions, it was able to place it into paradigms of previously experienced tragedies and destructions. In fact, the greater the tragedy, the more potentially dangerous it was to Jewish faith and, hence, the greater was the effort to absorb it and subsume it under already established patterns and archetypes. Such a conception, in which even the unprecedented was assigned a precedent, was a comforting and reassuring one, allowing for the classical convenental construct to remain intact. This continuity with the past provided great hope for the future.

Testimony given on January 23, 1963, Yad Vashem Archives, TR-10/1171.

One other issue also remains unresolved. Chaya Feldman's letter is dated August 11 (= 28 Av) and states that in a few hours all will be over. The end of Hannah Weiss' essay places the death of the 93" on 13 Av (= July 28).

It is also interesting to note that a reference to a very similar story was made by BAILA bat Rivka, "An Overwhelming View: One of the Last Paragraphs of the History of Sarah Schenirer's Seminary in Cracow, Poland," The Jewish Observer 18:5 (April 1965):37. "Only years later, as a Bais Yaakov student and teacher, did I learn of the horror and kaddish Hashem that your beautiful building in Cracow had witnessed, the leap to sterility by thirty-five young girls who jumped from the roof (the same roof that sheltered us) in order not to be defiled by the approaching German soldiers, yimach sh'mam." Did the author confuse this event with our story or do we have here the beginning of a new historical fact or myth, "the martyrdom of the thirty-five...?"

See David G. Roskies, Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture (Cambridge, Mass., 1984); idem., The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe (Philadelphia, 1988), 3-12; Alan Mintz, Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in...
Not only did the patterns of thought provided by this archetypal notion of tragedy govern ex post facto conceptualizations (and rationalizations) of Jewish suffering, but it also greatly influenced the immediate behavioral response of those who actually experienced it first hand. Here too the actions of the victims, confronted by terrifying choices and realities, were governed by patterns of behavior established in similar situations over the course of centuries of Jewish pain and persecution. These modes of behavior were recorded and transmitted from one generation to the next and became hallmarks of the inner psyche of the Jew. Subsequent generations were almost programmed by their knowledge, conscious or otherwise, of how their devout, pious, and exalted ancestors responded in similar situations. In a word, the nature of the Jewish intellectual as well as practical response to catastrophe was conditioned by the response of previous generations to previous persecutions.

This issue of historical continuities, paradigms and archetypes becomes particularly controversial and emotional when discussing the Holocaust. For some, this is yet another horrible tragedy, to be plotted along the continuum of other tragedies which Jews had to face throughout history. The same historical line includes the destruction of the Temples, the Crusades, the Chmielnicki massacres, the Kishinev pogrom, and the Holocaust which, although more severe than the others, is considered to be part of the same category. For others, however, the Holocaust was so horrible and awesome a tragedy that it cannot possibly be subsumed under the category of previously experienced Jewish suffering; prior paradigms or typologies are simply wholly insufficient to serve as models for it. Yehuda Bauer wrote:

A number of Jewish religious authorities have said that the Holocaust is not essentially new, and represents a continuation of the persecution which has plagued the Jews for two thousand years. The need to integrate the Holocaust into the tradition of Jewish martyrdom is understandable from a religious point of view, but it is historically erroneous. For one thing, never before was there a plan to annihilate the Jewish people everywhere. Persecutions were limited in area—Jews usually had the possibility of escaping elsewhere. The attacks and expulsions were the result of local social, religious, economic or political tensions. And the Jews had, as a rule, the option of abjuring their faith—sometimes only temporarily—and if they chose to do so, their lives were usually spared. There was never a persecution that saw in the total annihilation of the Jewish people a panacea for the ills of humanity. In that sense, Nazi anti-Semitism represented a new departure, because while the elements on which it built were familiar, their combination was qualitatively unprecedented, total and murderous. From a Jewish historical perspective,

Therefore, the Holocaust, while containing many elements familiar from the long history of Jewish martyrdom, is unique. 62

Passions run very high on this issue among survivors and nonsurvivors alike, but one thing is clear. As unprecedented as the Holocaust may have been in the force and scope of its destruction, the literary and practical reactions of the victims themselves were anything but unprecedented. While from the perspective of the suffering inflicted on the Jewish people, the Holocaust may (and should) be lifted out of history and severed from the millennia-old Jewish experience, from the perspective of the reactions of its victims it is very much rooted in Jewish history. The literature of the Holocaust retrieved and reappropriated ancient archetypal images of faith, acceptance and challenge in the face of tragedy, as did the actions of the Jews themselves who experienced it. 63 Both fit precisely into pre-existing patterns and together they serve as one more tragic link in the chain of Jewish responses to catastrophe since ancient times.

The story of the ninety-three Bais Yaakov girls of Cracow is a perfect example of this point from both of these perspectives, each of which will be analyzed in some detail. As indicated above, it inspired a small but significant corpus of literature which, in its fictional descriptions and poetic laments, reflects familiar, oft-repeated and well-known themes and motifs. The most famous literary work written in connection with this story is the poem by Hillel Bavel which first appeared in Hadoar in January, 1943, and was popularized through its inclusion into the Yom Kippur service in two widely used High Holiday prayerbooks. 64 Already at the beginning of his introduction to the poem, Bavel placed the story into a broader historical context. He noted how “this affair adds the voice of our own generation to the voice of past generations by proclaiming and stating: it is better to sanctify the name of God than to profane it and live.” He went on to state how “the ninety-three

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63 For the first view, see R. Moshe Feinstein, "bi-Devar Knevet Yom Tov Taanit le-Kedoshei ha-Shoah," Am ha-Torah 2:10(1985):17-18. "...one should not establish another [fast] day exclusively for the decrees that were in our times. It is in the category of all the decrees that were made in the course of this entire, long Exile..."

64 In the course of an early debate (1952) in the Israeli Knesset about the propriety of accepting German reparations money, Pinhas Lavon, who later became minister of defense, argued against those who feared that doing so would undermine the unique historical sorrow of the Holocaust. He claimed that Jews had always been killed by their enemies. Yes, more Jews were killed this time but that was only because there were more Jews living in the world at that time and also because the Nazis were particularly efficient in their methods. See Disrei Knesset (1952), 910. For the significance of this comment in the context of the general difficulty in dealing with the Holocaust in the early years of the State, see Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, Civil Religion in Israel (Berkeley, 1983), 106f.

For a recent discussion about historical continuities and discontinuities in connection with the Holocaust, see Irving Greenberg, The Jewish Way (New York, 1988), 314f.

65 See the works cited above, n. 61.

66 See above, n. 20, 35, 36.
maidens followed in the path of the martyrs of Israel of old” by pouring out their hearts in prayer, drinking the poison and returning their souls to God. Later, in his afterword, Bavli again associated these girls with the martyrs of old. He addressed God and prayed that, “may the memory of these pure souls and the memory of all the martyrs of the generations who died affirming Your unity rise before You.” Finally, in the course of the poem itself he invoked a very popular ancient archetypal image of Jewish suffering, the akedah. Bavli wrote:

In their presence we will drink the cup of poison and die.
Innocent and pure, as befits the daughters of Jacob.
Before our mother Sarah, we will fall in prayer and say to her:
“Here we are! We have met the test of the Akedah.”

The use of this theme in Jewish martyrological literature has a long, interesting history, but what is of particular interest is that it is invoked here in our context in an unusual and perhaps even unprecedented way. In order to fully appreciate the novelty of this passage, a few preliminary remarks are necessary.

One of the major issues discussed in rabbinic literature in connection with this story is the identity of the individual being tested by God. The biblical verse states explicitly “and God tested Abraham” (Genesis 22:1) and this notion of the akedah as Abraham’s test is echoed later in Jewish tradition as well. During the Kosh Hashanah Musaf amidah, we make mention of Abraham’s great, selfless expression of faith in God and beseech Him to treat us with compassion in his merit:

Remember in our favor, Lord our God, the covenant, the kindness and the oath which You made to our father Abraham on Mount Moriah. Be mindful of the time when our father Abraham bound his son Isaac on the altar, suppressing his compassion that he might wholeheartedly do Your will. So too may Your mercy overcome Your anger from us and, in Your great goodness, may Your wrath turn away from Your people, Your city and Your inheritance.

Abraham is the hero and it is his heroism that we invoke on our behalf, in this text as well as in others.

However, post-biblical Jewish sources go out of their way to ascribe a much more active role to Isaac than would appear from the biblical narrative. Indeed, for them, Isaac is the real hero for, after all, he was the one who was prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice. This tendency is accurately summarized by George Foot Moore:

In Genesis it is Abraham’s faith and his obedience to God’s will even to the offering of his only son, the child of promise, that constitutes the whole significance of the story; Isaac is a purely passive figure. In the rabbinical literature, however, the voluntariness of the sacrifice on Isaac’s part is strongly emphasized. Instead of a child he is a man in the fullness of his strength (according to the rabbinical chronology, thirty-seven years old), when, plainly, the aged father could not have bound him against his will.

After the sin of the Golden Calf, the Midrash relates how Moses told God,

If it is burning that they desire, then remember, [O Lord,] Abraham who jeopardized his life in the fiery furnace in order to be burnt for Thy name and let his burning cancel the burning of his children; and if it is decapitation that they desire, then remember their father Isaac who stretched forth his neck on the altar ready to be slaughtered for Thy name, and let now his immolation cancel the immolation of his children... Indeed, it is Isaac’s role in the akedah which is invoked to serve as a merit for the Jewish people, here and elsewhere as well.

In yet another group of texts, the actions of both father and son are highlighted together. In an exegetical comment on the introduction to the story, “and it came to pass after these words” (Genesis 22:1), the Talmud states:

For a discussion of this text, see Yaakov E. Ephrath, Parashat ha-Akedah (Petaḥ Tikvah, 1983), 141–46. See also Bereshit Rabbah 56:1.

George Foot Moore, Judaism 1 (Cambridge, 1927), 539. See too the commentary of Abraham ibn Ezra on Genesis 22:4: “There is nothing in the text about Yitzhak.”

Shemos Rabbah 44:5.

See also Tannit 16a: “... that God may remember for our sake the ashes of Isaac”;
Berakhot 62a; Bereshit Rabbah 43:8; Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah 1:14; Pesikta de-Rav Kahana, ed. by Salomon Buber (Lyon, 1868), 20b, Deuteronomy, #95.

It is also interesting to note that in a number of medieval Christian plays based on this story, Abraham’s role is glossed over and Isaac alone is the hero, highlighting the role of the son here as a prefiguration of Jesus’ later crucifixion. See Rosemary Woolf, “The Effect of Typology on the English Medieval Plays of Abraham and Isaac,” Speculum 32(1957):85–25. Conversely, in the Qur’an’s account of this story, the name of the son is not even mentioned and the Muslim tradition eventually identified him as having been Ishmael. See Encyclopedia of Islam IV (1978), 109–10, s.v. Ishâq. What both these traditions have in common is a clear respect for Isaac’s role in this story; the Christians substituted Jesus for Isaac and the Muslims substituted Ishmael.

What is meant by “after?” R. Yohanan said on the authority of R. Yose b. Zimra: After the words of Satan, as it is written “And the child grew, and was weaned” [and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned] (Genesis 21:8). Thereupon Satan said to the Almighty: “Sovereign of the Universe! To this old man You did graciously vouchsafe the fruit of the womb at the age of one hundred, yet of all that banquet which he prepared, he did not have one turtle-dove or pigeon to sacrifice before You! Has he done right but in honor of his son?” Replied He, “Yet were I to say to him, ‘Sacrifice your son before Me,’ he would do so without hesitation.” Straightway, God tested Abraham.

R. Levi said: After Ishmael’s words to Isaac, Ishmael said to Isaac: “I am more virtuous than you in good deeds, for you were circumcised at eight days but I at thirteen years.” “On account of one limb would you incense me!” he replied. “Were the Holy One, blessed be He, to say unto me, ‘Sacrifice thyself before Me,’ I would obey.” Straightway, God did tempt Abraham.  

This is precisely at issue here in this talmudic passage. For R. Yohanan, Abraham is being tested; for R. Levi, it is Isaac. Furthermore, an oft-quoted rabbinic passage confines both of their roles:

R. Bib. b. Abba in the name of R. Yohanan explained: Our father Abraham stood before the Holy One, blessed be He, in prayer and supplication, and said to Him: “Sovereign of the Universe! It was manifest and known to You, when You said to me, ‘Take now your son, your only son’ (Genesis 21:2), that there was in my mind an answer I could have given You and that there was in my mind something I could have said, viz.: But yesterday You promised me, ‘For in Isaac shall seed be called to You’ (Genesis 21:12), and now You tell me, ‘Offer him there for a burnt-offering’ (Genesis 22:2)! However, just as I had an answer to give You but controlled my inclination and did not reply to You, ‘As a deaf man, I hear not and … as a dumb man that opens not his mouth’ (Psalm 38:14), so when the children of Isaac go way to transgressions and evil deeds, recollect for them the binding of their father Isaac and rise from the Throne of Judgment and betake Yourself to the Throne of Mercy, and being filled with compassion for them, have mercy upon them and change for them the Attribute of Justice into the Attribute of Mercy!”

Although drawing God’s attention to his own personal act of faith, Abraham’s concluding request was not that God should remember what he did when his children will sin but that God should remember what Isaac did when Isaac’s children will sin. Both father and son acted in a virtuous way and the actions of both should later redound to the favor of their descendants.  

The image and precedent of the akedah occupied a very prominent position in Jewish mythological literature beginning with ancient times. In keeping with the simple biblical text, the earliest sources highlight the role of Abraham in that episode. In the famous story of “The Woman and Her Seven Sons,” the mother gave a message to her children who one by one refused to bow down to an idol and were therefore all taken to be killed:

Their mother wept and said to them: “Children, do not be distressed, for to this end were you created—to sanctify in the world the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He. Go and tell Father Abraham: Let not your heart swell with pride! You built one altar but I have built seven altars and on them there have offered up my seven sons. What is more: Yours was a trial; mine was an accomplished fact.”

In the akedah story, the focus is on Abraham’s action. If his behavior was meritorious, argued the mother, then hers should certainly be considered as such.

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73See also Midrash Tanhuma (Jerusalem, 1982), 89, Bereshit, Parashat Vayera, §18, end; Midrash Ekhah Rabbah, ed. by Salomon Buber (Wilna, 1899), Ha, Proem 24.
74Vayikra Rabbah 29:9. See also Bereshit Rabbah 56:10; Talmud Yavnihalni, Taamim 2:4; Midrash Tanhuma, op. cit., 95, Parashat Vayera, §23, end. In this latter passage, God assures Abraham that He will favorably respond to his request: “The children of Israel are destined to sin before Me and I will judge them on Rosh Hashanah. However, if they wish me to search for a merit on their behalf (she-ahapes tahem zekhu) and remember for them the akedah of Isaac, let them blow before me with the shofar of this [ram].” For the different versions of

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for her sacrifice was far greater than his, both in numbers and, more importantly, in result.

Here, the focus is not on the exemplary behavior of the sons but, rather, on the extraordinary sacrifice of the parent (the mother), hence the identification with the parent (the father) in the akedah episode. The authors of subsequent Jewish martyrlogogical works, however, identified more directly with Isaac who, as the victim of the akedah, much more closely prefigured their own situation. Indeed, it has been suggested that it was precisely the new historical reality of persecution, suffering and martyrdom in the centuries before and after the destruction of the Second Temple which was responsible for the later rabbinic reshifting of the focus in the akedah story from the exclusive biblical emphasis on Abraham to a more active and central role for Isaac. In their search for biblical paradigms, these beleaguered Jews found in Isaac an excellent role model and reformedulated his role to fit their own needs. They even went so far as to claim that Isaac was actually killed, all in an attempt to parallel his story as much as possible with their own.

No longer was Abraham the hero; it was now Isaac, the martyr, who was the hero. And not only was his exemplary behavior to act as a source of merit in the Heavenly court for the Jewish people down through the ages, it was to be actually emulated by all future generations. In a celebrated passage explaining the mitzvah of blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, R. Saadya Gaon wrote:

The sixth reason is to remind us of the akedah of Yitzhak who gave his life for the sake of Heaven. So too must we be prepared to give our lives for the sake of Heaven, for the sanctification of His name.

The most famous references to the akedah story as a paradigm of Jewish martyrlogy in medieval Hebrew literature are found in the literature surrounding the First and Second Crusades of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. For example, one Crusade chronicler wrote in a well-known passage:

Please inquire and find out as to whether there ever was such a mass akedah from the days of Adam; have there ever been eleven hundred akedot in a single day, all of them like the akedah of Isaac son of Abraham? A single one performed on Mount Moriah shook the world, as it is written, “Behold their valiant ones cry without; the angels of peace weep bitterly” and the skies darkened. But now what have they done? Why have the skies not become black, and the stars withdrawn their shining, and why have not sun and moon darkened in their courses, when on a single day, a Tuesday, the third of Sivan, were killed and slaughtered eleven hundred martyrs, including infants


See Abudarham ha-Shalem (Jerusalem, 1959), 270; M. Givati, op. cit., 153.

and children who had never sinned and souls of the innocent and humble? Will You in the sight of these things withhold Your anger?

When hundreds upon hundreds of men and women slaughtered one another and their children, no immediate historical precedent was provided. The chronicler preferred to go all the way back to the Bible and did so to accomplish a two-fold purpose. First, in order to link the current acts of martyrdom with a typological antecedent of great resonance and, hence, not only to legitimize them but even to exalt them. Secondly, he intended to go one step further and show that even this exalted precedent cannot legitimately serve as such for it does not even compare to what happened later, either in numbers or outcome. "Please inquire and find out as to whether there ever was such a mass akedah from the days of Adam," asks the chronicler. Clearly he is convinced that the answer to this rhetorical question is "no", that no such event ever took place in all of human history. The scope of the present martyrdom remains, therefore, unprecedented and the faith it reflected is, as a result, even more remarkable and praiseworthy. And indeed, these martyrs of the Crusades, with their appeal to the imagery of the akedah, become very significant role models for the martyrs of subsequent generations.

It is against this literary-historical background that we can appreciate the significance of the use of the akedah precedent as a historical paradigm for the ninety-three Bais Yaakov girls. In the two examples cited above—whether that of "The Woman and Her Seven Sons" or the martyrs during the Crusades— it was used as a precedent for an act of either allowing a loved one to be killed ("The Woman") or actually killing someone else (the Crusade martyrs) in order to sanctify the Name of God. Indeed, both of these conclusions were logical extensions of the biblical story and its midrashic elaborations. In fact, it is in keeping with such a context that we also find a reference to the akedah motif in a poem about the

80See the chronicle by R. Shelomo b. Shimshon printed in A. M. Haberman, Sefer Gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Tzarefat (Jerusalem, 1945), 32.


See also the short story by Shmuil Yosef Agnon, "Lehi ha-Tsair ha-Sekhar," ha-Esh ve-ha-Arzim, Kol Sippuro Shel Shmuil Yosef Agnon VIII (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1962), 5-19; idem, Yamim Noraim (1938), 48-52; Michah Yosef ben Gurion (Berdycewski), Tefillot ve-Aggadot: Aggadot Am I (Leipzig, 1925), 116.

It is interesting to note that the Crusade chronicles also refer to Abraham's behavior as a paradigm for their own: "And Zion's precious sons, the people of Mainz, were put through the ten trials like Father Abraham. . . . They too offered up their sons, exactly as Abraham offered up his son Isaac." See A. M. Haberman, ibid., 31-32.

For the use of the akedah motif in Selihot written by Ashkenazi Jews to describe their own experience during the Crusades, see Yaakov Rotschild, "Seder ha-Selihot," Maayanot: Me'asef le-Iyuney Hinukh ve-Horasah IX (Jerusalem, 1968), 453, 466, 472-73.
application here is unusual, if not unprecedented. But the unprecedented should no longer surprise us, especially in this context. It has long been noted that the mass martyrdom of the victims of the Crusades themselves was also unprecedented, going beyond any mode of behavior mandated by the biblical akedah story or, for that matter, by the halakah itself. And so, in our case, the unprecedented is taken yet one step further—the akedah paradigm moving from one, near killing at the command of God (the biblical story) to eleven hundred real killings spontaneously done (during the Crusades) to ninety-three suicides. And, as we move further and further away from the original source, the tremendous self-sacrifice of Jews in time of great persecution and suffering gets raised to yet another level of saintliness and virtue.

The theme of the akedah was not the only biblical paradigm invoked in the poetic and bellettristic literature about "the ninety-three." Poets and essayists alike mined the corpus of Jewish tradition for other motifs which they utilized in attempting to cloak this story in ancient biblical imagery for the purpose of granting it transcendental meaning and significance. In David Shimon’s poem mentioned above, he paralleled the levels of purity and courage which these young women attained to the heights of Mount Sinai which their ancestors dared not ascend during the time of revelation. He also referred to the ninety-three as "slot" or burnt offerings, putting their death on par with biblical sacrifices brought to expiate Israel’s sins. Furthermore, he wrote that the container of poison they used “shall be hidden like the jar of manna in the memory of the nation for generations.” The poison which took the lives of these girls is as exalted as was the manna which sustained the lives of their forefathers in the desert. Also, not only will their story enter the storehouse of the collective memory of the Jewish people, but the very physical essence of the poison, like the jar containing the manna (and the ark, the cruse of anointing oil and the staff of Aaron with which it is grouped in the talmudic text), will ultimately be unearthed and proudly displayed in a position of prominence at the end of days.

Furthermore, Shimon noted that: “We do not know their burial place, like the burial place of the faithful shepherd. But we do know that, like him, they died at the will of God.” This identification of the ninety-three with Moses is significant and shows the extent to which Shimon was prepared to go to glorify their act and their memory. After all, it was God Himself who buried Moses. Furthermore, this imagery raises another association with a relevant rabbinic passage:

R. Hanna b. Hanina said: Why was Moses’ burial place hidden from human beings? For it was obvious and known to God that the Bet ha-Mikdash was destined to be destroyed and the Jewish people would be exiled from their land. Perhaps they will come to Moses’ grave and cry and plead, and Moses will rise and nullify decrees. For the righteous are more beloved in their death than in their life.

He kept him as the apple of His eye” (Deuteronomy 32:10): Had the Holy One, blessed be He, asked Abraham for his eyeball, he would have given it to Him; and not only his eyeball but his very soul, the thing most precious to him of all, as it is said: “Take now your son, your only one... even Isaac” (Genesis 22:2). But is it not well known that Isaac was his only son? Rather, this refers to Abraham’s soul, which is called “only one,” as it is said, “Deliver my soul from the sword; mine only one from the power of the dog” (Psalms 22:21).

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84 Although “the woman” did commit suicide after her seventh son was killed (Gittin 57b; Yalkut, op. cit., no. 76) and there were many examples of suicides in the Crusade chronicles, the akedah motif need not be understood as having been directly applied to them, as it clearly is in our story.

85 See Sifre Sefer Devarim, ed. by Eliezer A. Finkelstein (Berlin, 1940), 58.

86 R. Meir says: Scripture says, “Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart.” Love Him with all your heart, as did your father Abraham, of whom it is said, “But thou, Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham My friend” (Isaiah 41:8). “And with all thy soul,” as did Isaac who bound himself upon the altar, as it is said, “And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son” (Genesis 22:10).

87 The standard assumption, however, is that Abraham bound Isaac to the altar (as per Genesis 22:9). According to some midrashic traditions, he did so at Isaac’s request. See Bereishit Rabbah 56:8. See Menachem M. Kasher, Hamidrash Torah Shelema 3:2 (New York, 1949), 866-87, #108-109; Y. Ephrati, op. cit., 252-56.

88 It is, however, most striking to note that the Midrash associates suicide with Abraham’s role in this story. See Sifre Sefer Devarim, ibid., 355, #313:

89 He kept him as the apple of His eye” (Deuteronomy 32:10): Had the Holy One, blessed be He, asked Abraham for his eyeball, he would have given it to Him; and not only his eyeball but his very soul, the thing most precious to him of all, as it is said: “Take now your son, your only one... even Isaac” (Genesis 22:2). But is it not well known that Isaac was his only son? Rather, this refers to Abraham’s soul, which is called “only one,” as it is said, “Deliver my soul from the sword; mine only one from the power of the dog” (Psalms 22:21).

90 This passage is cited in the En Yaakov on Sotah 13b. See too R. Barukh Halevi Eustein, Torah Temimah on Deuteronomy 34:6, s.v. ve-lo yada.
The contemporary relevance of this passage to the Holocaust is clear. God was absolutely insistent on going through with this great destruction, including the death of the ninety-three, and refused to allow anything that might possibly stop this "destined" act. Also, the final phrase provides solace to those who mourn their loss, for as righteous as they were in life, they were even more so in death.

The parallel of the experience of the ninety-three to Mt. Sinai is also found in an English poem written about them by Alter Abelson:

"For chastity, we chose to die
Rather than live like swine in sty.
Recite the Kaddish hymn, we pray,
In our behalf on Yizkor day."

So Haya wrote the day before
The Nazis came to shame their core.
A glory trembled in the world,
As when on Sinai's heights was heard
The voice of Heaven, by Israel's tribe,
Which God's eternities inscribe...

Finally, another one of the literary sources, a short story by Eugene Wintraub, acknowledges the twin responses of acceptance and challenge which characterize the Jewish response to catastrophe through the ages. At first, he places the following remark into the mouth of the girls' principal: "Yes children, you can shed your tears, but remember that we have a duty to perform. God has seen fit to appoint us for the task about to be done. We should be proud. Just as our fathers and mothers - just as our brave ancestors of old - had their appointed hour so have we to face our task." What an expression of faith and belief in God! But the story ends on an entirely different note. Sister Sarah prayed: "Where are you this night, Almighty, when your children cry for the need of Your protection. Where are You, oh God, when monsters are coming to destroy what you have brought forth."

This, too, is a classial Jewish response to catastrophe and has ample precedent in ancient and medieval times. The typology is thus maintained, both in descriptions of the tragedy as well as in the responses to it.

But there is one last, historical typology that remains to be explored. Our interest here is not in the general act of suicide in the service of martyrdom, but in the more specific act of taking one's life to avoid being forced to engage in sexual activity with an enemy. Whether this particular episode of the ninety-three occurred or not, we do not know. But it is clear that it could have occurred. For the collective memory of the Jewish people contains many such instances, from ancient times into the modern period. A few salient examples of suicide for the sake of maintaining chastity will suffice to make the point clear.

A famous talmudic passage already describes such an event as having taken place during the time of the destruction of the Second Temple:

Rabbi Judah said in the name of Samuel, or it may be R. Ammi, or as some say it was taught in a Baraita: On one occasion four hundred boys and girls were carried off for immoral purposes. They divined what they were wanted for and said [to themselves,] "If we drown in the sea shall we attain the life of the future world?" The eldest among them expounded the verse, "The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring again from the depths of the sea" (Psalms 68:23). "I will bring again from Bashan," from between the teeth of [ben shineil] lions. "I will bring again from the depths of the sea," those who

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91 See above, n. 22.

92 Ibid.

93 See the works of David G. Roskies and Alan Mintz cited above, n. 61. Compare the challenge described here with the absolute passive acceptance, prayer, and expressions of faith in God which greeted the news of this event at a meeting of the Vaad Hatzalah in New York City described above, p. 98.

94 For examples of suicide as an act of martyrdom in general, see the Crusade chronicles discussed above which are full of them and the literature cited above, n. 81. In addition, see Abraham Zacuto, Sefer Yipherals ha-Shalem (Frankfurt am Main, 1924), 51; Sidney Goldstein, Suicide in Rabbinic Literature (Hoboken, 1989), 41-50.

95 We will also not enter into the issue of the halakhic legitimacy of allowing oneself to be killed and certainly taking one's own life when faced with the alternative of forced conversion. There is a large literature on this subject, especially in connection with the suicide of the Jews at Masada. For a bibliography of this literature, see Louis H. Feldman, Josephus and Modern Scholarship (1937-1980) (Berlin and New York, 1984), 779-89.


97 For this issue as it arose during the Holocaust, see Irving J. Rosenbaum, The Holocaust and Halakhah, op. cit. (n. 56), 35-40; J.H. Zimmels, The Echo of the Nazi Holocaust in Rabbinic Literature, op. cit. (n. 56), 63-64, 82-85, 244-50.

98 For the halakhic issue as to whether Jewish law permits a (unmarried) woman to let herself be killed or commit suicide to avoid sexual relations with a gentile, see S. Yisraeli, "Mirvat Kiddush Hashem bi-Shlosh Averot ha-Hamurot," Torah She-Be'al Peh XIV (1972), 72-78; Shmuel T. Rubenstein, "Hatzalat Nefeshot al Yedei Giluy Arayot - ba-Halakhah," ibid., 89-96; Eliyahu ben Zimrah, op. cit. (n. 57).

99 One thing is crystal clear. By the twentieth century, the (alleged) action of the ninety-three Bais Yaakov girls had been so much a part of normative Jewish behavior for centuries that not only did it not occur to anyone to question their behavior on halakhic grounds and accuse them of violating the law but, on the contrary, it was held in the highest regard and esteem as being a most exalted act of kiddush Hashem.

Another context for this story is the special role played by women in Jewish martyrlogy, both by killing themselves as well as by allowing themselves to be killed by others. For a preliminary treatment of this phenomenon, see M. Kayserling, Die Judischen Frauen in der Geschichte, Literatur und Kunst (Leipzig, 1879), 63-73; Shlomo Ashkenazi, Neshei Yisrael bi-Ovnavtan, op. cit. (n. 31); reprinted with additions as Giborot ha-Yisrael, op. cit. (n. 31); idem., ha-Ishah be-Ashkaliyarut ha-Yahadut, op. cit. (n. 31), 61-67; Yitzchak Rivkind, "Kiddush Hashem fun Froyen," op. cit. (n. 38), 1029-39; S. Noble, "The Jewish Woman in Mediavel Martyrology," Proceedings of the Fifth World Congress of Jewish Studies II (Jerusalem, 1972), English section, 133-40.
A slightly different version of the story appears in Midrash Ekhah Rabba:

Vespasian, may his bones be pulverized, filled three ships with men and women of the nobility of Jerusalem, planning to place them in the brothels of Rome. When they had embarked on the sea, they said, "Is it not enough for us that we have angered our God in His holy house? Shall we now outrage Him overseas as well?" They said to the women, "Do you want such a thing?" They said to them, "No." They said, "Now if these, who are accustomed to this, do not want it, as to us, how much the more so!"

They said to them, "Tell us, if we throw ourselves into the sea, shall we have a portion in the world to come?" The Holy One, blessed be He, enlightened them with this verse: "The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring again from the depths of the sea" (Psalms 68:23). Those in the first ship stood up and said, "Have we forgotten the name of our God or spread forth our hands to a strange God? [Surely not!]" (Psalms 44:32), and threw themselves into the sea. The second group went and said, "Would not God search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart" (Psalms 44:22), and they threw themselves into the sea. The third group said, "Yea, for Thy sake we are killed all the day long, we are counted as sheep for the slaughter." (Psalms 44:23), and they threw themselves into the sea. And the Holy Spirit cried, "For these things I weep" (Lamentations 1:16).  

Not only is there evidence here that such behavior occurred, but it clearly had the blessings of the rabbis, even in this case where the involvement in sin they were trying to avoid was not immediate. In fact, while in the first text, the assurance of a share in the world to come for those who committed suicide under these circumstances comes from "the eldest among them," in the second text it is provided by none other than God Himself.

In another rabbinic text, this act was not even questioned and was simply taken for granted as being an appropriate mode of behavior:

It once occurred with seventy virgins who were captured and put in a ship to be brought and placed in brothels. Those virgins said to one another: "Let us come and sanctify the Name of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and not allow ourselves to be defiled by uncircumcised idolators." What did they do? They went up to the roof, fell into the sea and drowned themselves in it.  

These stories must have made a tremendous impression on subsequent generations and, with the passage of time, they seeped into the collective consciousness and historical experience of the Jewish people.

Close to one thousand years later, the story is repeated in Abraham ibn Daud's Sefer ha-Kabbalah in connection with a tragic episode which occurred in the tenth century. At the beginning of his famous story of "the four captives," Ibn Daud recounted how the commander of the ship carrying these great scholars wanted to violate the wife of one of them, R. Moses, who later became the leading rabbinic figure in Spain at that time:

Thereupon, she cried out in Hebrew to her husband R. Moses and asked him whether or not those who drowned in the sea will be quickened at the time of the resurrection of the dead. He replied unto her: "The Lord said: I will bring them back from Bashan; I will bring them back from the depths of the sea." Having heard his reply, she cast herself into the sea and drowned.  

While there are at least a dozen other examples of the phenomenon of women committing suicide to preserve their chastity among both Ashkenazi and Se-

95See Yalkut Shimoni, Ekhah, #1017; see too Midrash Zuta, Ekhah, op. cit., 64, #13 (Parma ms. 541); 135, #9 (Parma ms. 261). See also Gerson D. Cohen, "The Story of the Four Captives," below (n. 99), 86–89.
96See Midrash Ekhah Rabba, ed. by Salomon Buber (Vilna, 1899), 41a–b. For a slightly different version of this text, see the standard edition of Midrash Ekhah, Ekhah l45b, beg.
97For the ancient concern that someone who is drowned will not merit resurrection, see Menahem Stern, "Ema-Adamah be-Sifrut ha-Ivrit ha-Atitkah," Tarbiz 9:3–4 (1938):272–74; Saul Lieberman, Shekhen (Jerusalem, 1939), 58; idem., "Some Aspects of After Life in Early Rabbinic Literature," Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume II (Jerusalem, 1965), 527–30. Both cite our text as an example of this fear, implicitly suggesting that what concerned these martyrs is not that their suicide may make them ineligible for olam ha-ba but rather the fact that they would perish in water and not be buried in the ground. Cf. D. Noy, op. cit. (n. 77), 143, who interprets their concern as stemming from their contemplated suicide.
phardic Jews during medieval times. The next most famous example of this activity comes from the Jewish experience during the Chmielnicki massacres in Poland in the middle of the seventeenth century. In describing the destruction in the city of Nemirow, R. Nathan Nata Hannover wrote: “They ravished women and young girls as they wished, but some of the women and maidens jumped into the moat surrounding the fortress in order that the uncircumcised should not defile them. They drowned in the waters.” Then, in one of the most well-known and dramatic passages of the work, he provided two specific examples:

It happened there that a beautiful maiden, of a renowned and wealthy family, had been captured by a certain Cossack who forced her to be his wife. But, before they lived together, she told him with cunning that she possessed a certain magic and that no weapon could harm her. She said to him: “If you do not believe me, just test me. Shoot at me with a gun, and you will see that I will not be harmed.” The Cossack, her husband, in his simplicity, thought she was telling the truth. He shot at her with his gun and she fell and died for the sanctification of the Name, to avoid being defiled by him. May God avenge her blood.

Another event occurred when a beautiful girl, about to be married to a Cossack, insisted that their marriage take place in a church which stood across the bridge. He granted her request and, with timbrels and flutes, attired in festive garb, led her to the water. As soon as they came to the bridge she jumped into the water and was drowned and was sanctified for the sanctification of the Name. May God avenge her blood. These and many similar events took place, far too numerous to be recorded.102

The events of 1648–1649, in general, left an indelible imprint on the collective Jewish historical consciousness. They served the subject of many liturgical works (piyyutim, kinot, selihot) in Hebrew and Yiddish and a number of historical chronicles, and served as the cause for the establishment of the twelfth of Sivan as an annual day of fasting.103 In the nineteenth century, they continued to provide

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104 For a number of examples, see S. Ashkenazi, Neshei, ibid., 32, 34, 55, 59–60, 68–69, 76, 82, 86, 96–97, Giborot, ibid., 44, 46, 50–51, 92, 100, 107–08, 110, 111n., 113, 128–29. See also Yosef Hakohen, Emek ha-Balda, ed. by M. Letteris (Cracow, 1895), 25, 44, 113.

105 R. Nathan Nata Hannover, Yeve Metzulah (Tel Aviv, 1966), 38.

106 ibid., 39. S. M. Dubnow accepted this description as historical fact. See his History of the Jews in Russia and Poland I (Philadelphia, 1915), 167.


108 For historical chronicles in addition to Yeve Metzulah, see, for example, R. Shabbetai Kohen, Megillat Afah, printed in Bet Yisrael be-Po’alim II, ed. by Israel Halpern (Jerusalem, 1954), 252–55 (among other places); H. J. Gurland, le-Korot ha-Gezerot al Yisrael, 7 vols. (Jerusalem, 1972); M. Hendel, Gezerot Tah Tat (Jerusalem, 1950).

109 For the fast of the twelfth of Sivan and its relationship to an earlier historical tragedy (the massacre at Blois in 1171), see Shalom Spiegel, “mi-Piigmaye ha-Akedah,” Sefer ha-Yovel le-Kheved Morekhim Manhemim Kaplan (New York, 1953), 268–70; Yosef H. Yerushalmi, Zakhker: Jewish History and Jewish Memory, op. cit. (n. 61), 48–52.


102 For another example of the resonance of the fast of the twelfth of Sivan in the twentieth century, see Yosef Halevi, “Ta'anan Tishmir Kavanu: Tehilah Nishkhat be-Ikivot ha-Peraot be-Russian be-Rusht ha-Me‘ah,” Divrei ha-Koneges ha-Olim ha-Astar le-Ma‘ati ha-Yahadut 3/2(Jerusalem, 1990):121–28. Also, the same issue of ha-Pardes which contains a description of the story of our ninety-three Bais Yaakov girls (above, n. 17) begins with an “el maleh rahamim” prayer commemorating the destruction caused by the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648–49 and composed for recital on the twelfth of Sivan. See ibid., 2. The day is also marked in the annual Liah Minhogei Bet ha-Keneset distributed by the Ezra Torah organization up to and including the present time.

103 For an example of the widespread knowledge about these massacres in the period immediately preceding the Holocaust and their being seen as the prototype of Jewish suffering, see Éphraim Shmuely, “Kidush Hashem bi-Yemei ha-Soah,” Sefer Yosef li-Kheved Morenu ha-Gaan Rabi Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik Shita II (Jerusalem and New York, 1984), 1188.


The Ninety-three Bais Yaakov Girls of Cracow

What conclusions may be drawn from our description and analysis of the episode of the ninety-three girls? First and foremost, we must recognize that the informa-


The Yeve Metzulah text about the two maidens was reproduced in later collections of sources dealing with the events of 1648-1649. See, for example, Abraham Kahane, Sifrut ha-Historiyah ha-Yisraelit II (Warsaw, 1923), 306; S. Berend, Sefer ha-Demaoth, op. cit., 117-18; M. Hendel, op. cit. (n. 103), 17-18; A. Ben-David, Moyrzeke Meysses I (New York, 1963), 59; D. Roskies, The Literature of Destruction, op. cit. (n. 61), 112-13.

It is most striking that in attempting to show the development of the Yiddish language from the seventeenth to the twentieth century at the end of his Hebrew article cited above (n. 104) by examining successive Yiddish translations of Yeve Metzulah, C. Shmeruk chose precisely these two stories as his example. See ibid., 381-84.

For other references to this story (and others like it), see M. Kayserling, op. cit. (n. 94), 71; S. Noble, op. cit. (n. 94), 136; S. Ashkenazi, Neshei, op. cit. (n. 31), 104-06; idem., Giborot, op. cit. (n. 31), 138-39, 142-44. For a more elaborate version of it, see H. J. Gurland, le-Korot ha-Gerezot al Yisrael, op. cit., V, 34-35.

108 For some examples, see S. Ashkenazi, Neshei, ibid., 143-54; idem., Giborot, ibid., 177f., esp. 352-59.

See Y. Rivcind, op. cit. (n. 94), 1036:

[The story of the 93] maybe a consciously fabricated legend, without a basis in reality. But it is in the spirit of our thousand-year martyrdom. Therefore it found such an echo and was so praised by Yiddish and Hebrew poets.

The curriculum of the Bais Yaakov schools stressed the paramount importance of modesty or tzniut. For an example of this, see an essay by Sarah Schenierer on the subject in Em bi-Yisrael I (Tel Aviv, 1955), 162-64.

109 Y. Ganc, op. cit. (n. 105), 61-62, even tries to see the number 93 and the word tzniit (the numerical value of which in Hebrew is 93) in typological terms.

110 In a conversation on July 1, 1991, an individual who requested anonymity informed Dr. Schacter that Dr. Jacob Griffl, an individual who worked for the Vaad Hatzalah during and after World War II, told him that his daughter was one of the ninety-three.

A recent book about the Bais Yaakov girls of Cracow during the Holocaust by Pearl Benisch, To Vanquish the Dragon (Jerusalem/New York, 1991) makes no mention of the story.
APPENDIX I

Reproduction of Handwritten Letter from Chaya Feldman to Mr. Schenkolewsky, August 11, 1942

August 1942

Herzlichsten Grüßen Herrn Schenkolewsky in New York,

ich náhr nicht ob dieser Brief, wird sie erhalten. Vielleicht Sie noch
nicht wissen, ob ich bin. Wir haben einige in der Kaserne des Friedens
von Chaya Schenkolewsky getroffen und
später in Marnekad nicht getroffen. Ihre
Briefe in Ihrer Hande errichtet, leite ich
nicht mehr. Wir sind 92. Bis zum Ende
zusammen. Noch einige Dinge und alles
ist nicht mehr. Grüßen Sie ihren
Sohnenheim und meinen Freunden. Gutman,
Leide in England. Wir haben einige alle
en Memelland jetzt unsere. Freunde, zu
gehen und sich um uns zu kümmern. Wir
könnten uns freuen, wenn wir Sie
eindeutig nicht weder, und in ein Dutzend
Dinge geprüft, haben nur 2451, 1453, 1453.
Schn poisonous, das neue Pferd. Ich
hätte gerne, wenn Sie nur)

APPENDIX I (CONTINUED)

...acht nicht mit den künftigen Deutschen über uns sprechen. Ihre haben gebracht die
schwere erweiterung zu sterben. Den
hat als gebraten in ein großes Haus,
mit lechte Atem und schämen sich
ausdrücklich. Deutsche, sie sind alle
Brot ist unsere Leute vor den Tod.
Man hat uns, sich alles genommen,
und wir eine. Hängt gebracht, wie
haben alles. Den Soldaten
können werden wir alle drücken,
Hängt sind wir zusammen, heute
gehen jen vom vielen. Ich habe
Käme keine. Danke gute
Freund, wie alles. Wir haben eine
Bitte, sagen Sie heute, wie vieles
93 ihrer Kinder Boedde sind wir
dei mama Loro. Es grüßt sie

Chaya Feldman von

Krakow
Reproduction of Letter from Jacob Rosenstein to
Rabbi Dr. Leo Jung, January 5, 1943

In Search of the Other
Jewish Center: On the
Writing of the Social History
of American Orthodoxy,
1900–1918

Jeffrey S. Gurock

In his inaugural sermon as founding rabbi of The Jewish Center in March 1918, Mordecai M. Kaplan, great innovator that he was, sought to articulate the uniqueness of his new endeavor. In his published remarks he asserted that for too long philanthropically inclined, newly affluent East European Jews had only been concerned with the physical and social fate of their poor coreligionists downtown. The communal institutions they had built ignored their own Jewish needs. The time had come, he argued, and The Jewish Center was the place for

the higher and enlightened form of selfishness ... in us. Frankly ... we are establishing the Jewish Center for the purpose of deriving from it for ourselves pleasures of a social, intellectual and spiritual character ... We are not building an institution for the doing of uplift work. This time we feel that we are as much in need of being uplifted as they for whose benefit the city is dotted with communal institutions. ³

³Mordecai M. Kaplan, "The Jewish Center," The American Hebrew and Jewish Messenger (March 22, 1918), 529-31.