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OVERVIEW

by Shifra Hoffman

The Scroll of Barracks 62

Purim is a joyful holiday which celebrates a miraculous victory by the Jewish people over the archtypical anti-Semite Haman whose diabolical plot to destroy all the Jews in ancient Persia, ultimately led to his own demise. It has particular relevance at this time. For these are the days when Israel prepares to put on trial John Demjanjuk, the alleged notorious "Ivan the Terrible" who is accused of operating the gas machine at Treblinka death camp where thousands of Jews perished.

Traditionally, however, Purim is a festive day marked by gala family gatherings, colorful costumes, and the giving of little gifts of sweets and triangular shaped pastries called *hamantaschen*, named after the hat worn by the villain who has become synonymous with Jewish genocide through-

lived by Rabbi Yisrael Lau, Chief Rabbi of Netanya, Israel, whom I recently had the privilege to interview, contains a universal message for mankind that bears retelling:

"It was March, 1945, the last year of the war. I was then a child of not quite 8 years, having been smuggled into Buchenwald by my father. Fearing that in the separation and selection process to which Jews were being subjected, he would never see me again, at the age of two I was concealed in a sack and passed through the window of a train headed for Buchenwald. Through what I believe to be divine intervention, my life was saved by a gentile doctor who pretended to know me as a Polish child. (He had removed the letter "P" from a dead inmate and attached it to my sleeve.) In this disguise, I was able to remain among the masses



Rabbi Yisrael Lau, Chief Rabbi of Netanya addressing a group of olim.

searched the recesses of his mind and wrote whatever he could recall. Some parts of the Scroll appeared several times; others, were half-forgotten verses; still others never appeared at all." Rabbi Lau continues his tale: "I do not know if the Scroll was kosher in the literal sense, but I can guarantee it was very holy! In fact, perhaps this was the holiest Megillah during more than 2500 years of Jewish history, since the miracle of Purim itself!

That same night, Jews of Barracks 62 in Buchenwald began the prayer services with the age old chant of their forefathers. All assembled knew that they were not just commemorating the past; this was a spiritual defiance against the modern Haman Adolph Hitler and his ilk. None among them would ever relinquish his faith as

were a testament to the will to survive in human beings.

Among those in the very last row of the 'living dead,' as it were, was a young man of about 22 years who, because of his strong phy-

sique before his incarceration and Buchenwald, was still in relatively functioning condition. Affectionately called Avraham Eli, he appeared to his fellow 'campmates' as a heaven-sent giant of angelic soul. Avraham Eli daily volunteered to be last in the row of slave laborers in order to help bolster his weak and falling brethren. For it was common practice for the S.S. guards to shoot any inmate who could not 'keep up' and fell, sick or unconscious to the ground. By positioning himself at the rear of the line-up, this young brave Jew saved countless lives; pushing, pulling, supporting the 'musselmen' in order to prevent the dire fate that

awaited them should they collapse!"

Rabbi Lau proceeds with his tale: "This was now my sixth year at Buchenwald. We had no information or communication with the outside world. For us, it was truly the Purim of Haman. We imagined the entire Jewish world was under Nazi domination and our Scroll, the Megillah produced from memory just the night before, burned deeply into the psyche of the wretched inmates of Barracks 62.

Suddenly, a Polish guard, one who watched over us daily (and whose countenance had revealed a

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Tragedy in Jerusalem

A YEAR AGO A PROMINENT JERUSALEM SCHOLAR WAS STRICKEN WITH A SEVERE DISEASE. MEDICAL TREATMENT COST EVERY CENT THAT THE FAMILY POSSESSED. NOW THE TALMID CHOCHOM HAS SUCCEMDED, LEAVING A GRIEVING AND DESTITUTE WIDOW AND 7 CHILDREN, THE YOUNGEST AGE 3. THEY HAVE NO INCOME AND NO APARTMENT. TWO OF THE CHILDREN ARE OF MARRIAGABLE AGE, BUT CAN NOT CONSIDER IT WHILE IMPOVERISHED. WE DARE NOT FORGET THEM DURING OUR PURIM SIMCHA !

PSAK DIN

WE DEEM IT A SACRED OBLIGATION OF EVERYONE TO GIVE A PART OF HIS MATANOTH L'EVYONIM TO EASE THE PLIGHT OF THIS WIDOW AND HER CHILDREN.

"We appeal to our merciful brethren to aid this unfortunate family generously. The Father of Orphans and the Judge of Widows will reward all those who assist them