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G-d and The Holocaust:
(Shmuz #33)
Rabbi Bentzion Shafier

If you look at Jewish history, time and time again, we were tortured and killed and somehow we always survived. The last time this happened was not too long ago in the Holocaust. The famous question people ask is: where was God during the Holocaust? The fact that the world didn't care, was not surprising. The Lithuanians wanted to kill the Jews before the Nazis came to town. They went from house to house and butchered people. One person who survived and came back after the massacre went to visit the Kovna Rebbe's house. He found him in his study, with his Gemara open, sitting tied to his chair, with his head on the floor. The world that are resist in killing Jews. How could God allow this to happen to innocent people and righteous people? When the Holocaust is studied, people think Germany was widely anti-Semitic before Hitler, but this is not the case. Jews had more rights there than anywhere else, Jews were well off over there and prospered in every field. If you asked someone in Germany, pre Hitler time, if there was anti-Semitism, they would respond that there was very little. Only 12.5% of Germany was supporting the Nazi party at its peak! That's 10 million out of 80 million people! The Jews were all know while owed everywhere and Germans supported them, funded their communities. If you asked them, they wouldn't think it was possible that one person could influence so many people to become rabid anti-Semites, especially in a democratic society. Hitler was a dictator, but Germany was a democratic government, how did this happen?

The odds of this happening was infinitely small. Especially because Hitler was unsuited and unprepared for his position. He wrote an 800 page book called Mein Kampf. In it, he writes that in his home, he was never exposed to a Jew. Only in his mid-20s he was exposed to a Hungarian Jew who happened to be his roommate. He was an average person, an average student; he dropped out at the age of 16 from school. At 19 he left to Vienna to become an artist, he was accepted into art school. So he basically did

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nothing, he was highly odd and unsuccessful. He would get up at midday and just stroll around, he would imagine and fantasize things but he wouldn't do anything. For six years he was a bum. At age 26, he had no money, no career, and failed everything. But then things changed, World War I happened and he volunteered to fight in the Army. He was only on the rank of corporal, because "he could never demand respect" if he was on a higher rank. When he was 29 years old, the war was over and he was back as a bum and very depressed. Then, he got a job as propaganda from the Ministry. At the time, there were many small political parties. One of them was the German Labor Party. Hitler joins this group, they find them very influential, and that was the start. In 1919, the party only had 111 people.

Years later, when they had thousands of people, they dominated all the other groups. He had a power to captivate crowds but the words he said were not very strong, they were unintelligent, weak concepts. He had a childlike view of the world. He spoke nonsense and he only attracted lowlifes. But certain situations caused him to gain his power. Germany had to pay reparations after the war and thus became a poor country. Hitler was preaching to retain the land to what it once was. His only talent was speaking, he was the lowlife though, he was dressed odd and he smelled. In 1926, he decided he was taking over the government, but he was crazy. He walks into a government building and fires his gun and miraculously receives a very light sentence from the judge to sit in prison and this was when he wrote *Mein Kampf*. During this time, the Nazi party fell apart, because there was no Nazism without Hitler. But when he came out (1926 to 1933) he amassed more and more people. He would speak morning and night; the party was a propaganda machine. By 1933, 37% of the country voted for him. This is not enough to win, but Hitler was appointed to be a chancellor by President Hindenburg. But by August 1934, Hitler becomes a total dictator from his chancellor position, leader of 80 million people, but it makes no sense. He was highly unsuited to become a dictator.

The Rambam writes that one of the beliefs that Jewish people must have is that God is the creator and runs the world. Not only does he run the world but he runs all the activities that go on in the world. If one asks where God was, one would think that He is violating this principle. This is wrong. God was there every step of the way. The fact that

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Hitler rose to power was a miracle. Hitler *himself* never believed he would reach such a position, he acknowledged that it all came from God. Talk to any Holocaust survivor and you will hear countless miracles. Isn't it ironic that the Israeli Defense Force is the greatest army in the region, so much power, but the citizens are not safe in the streets? If one thinks that the Israeli Defense force would have saved the Jews in 1941, they are a fool. The Torah says that if the Jews keep the Torah, God promises a wonderful life. But if not, there will be tragedies. The real question is: where were *we* in the Holocaust? Jews were not created to be okay, we are the chosen nation, and we are created to be a holy people. If you become like the Gentiles, we're not living up to who we should be.

The central message is that Jews have the power to make history. It's the same cycle over and over. But we just have to be the best that we can be. Follow the Torah and the mitzvot and not settle to be just okay. We should expect our best because G-d expects out best.

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