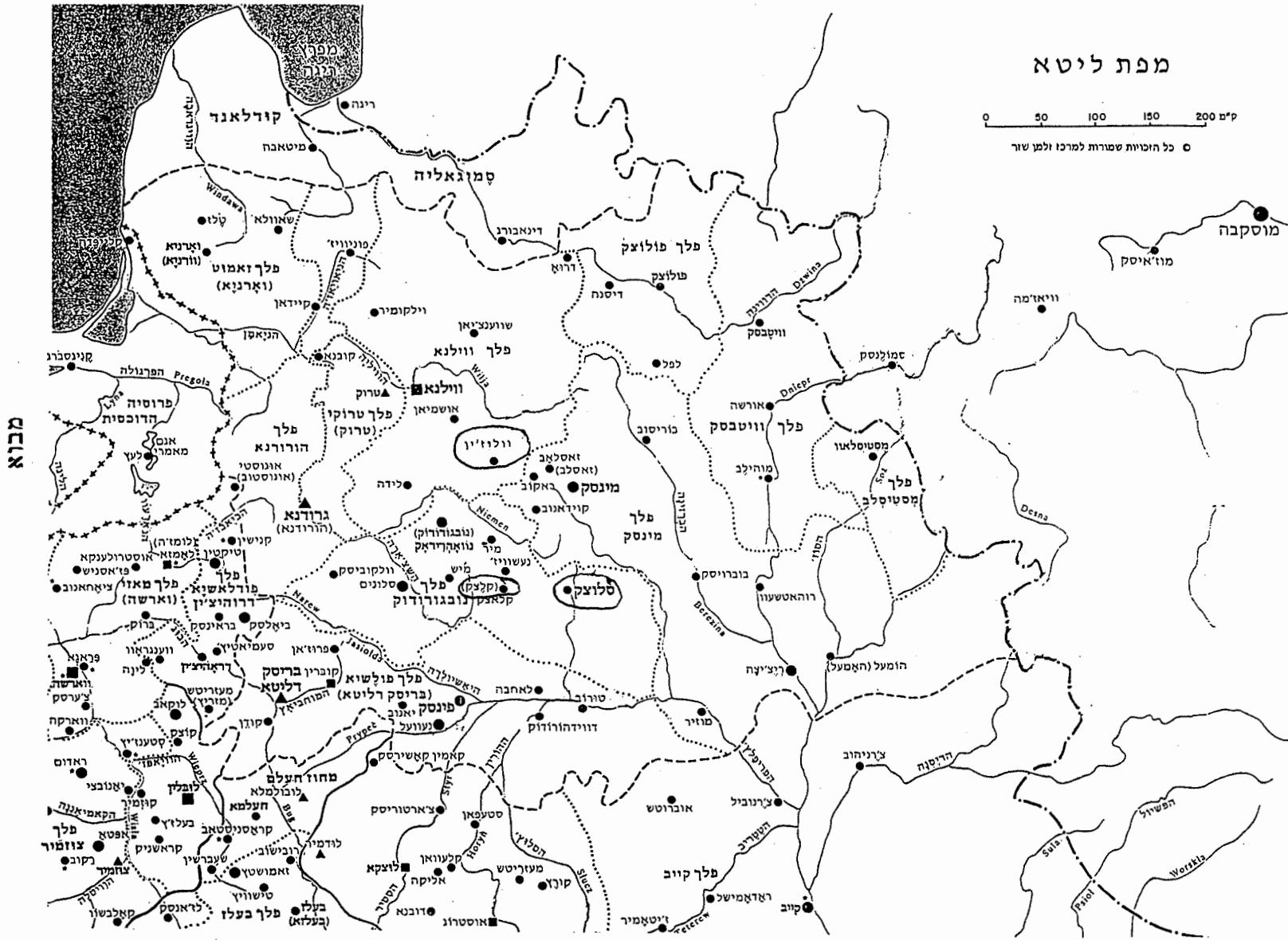


מפת ליטא

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כל הזכויות שמורות למרכז ולמנו שור



מבוא

Bunim indicates both the difficulty of these efforts and the drastic measures that were occasionally taken to convert others to the cause of saving Jewish lives:

IB: During the war he [Rabbi Kotler] was stuck in Russia. I knew about him so I helped get him out. One *Shabbos* noon I was sitting and having lunch when Rabbi Boruch Kaplan [a founder of the Orthodox Beth Jacob schools] and Rabbi Sender Linchner [a son-in-law of Rabbi Mendlowitz] came over in a cab. Rabbi Feinstein, Rabbi Heiman, and Rabbi Mendlowitz sent them to me in a cab on *Shabbos* to go and raise money for that purpose. I think it was 1940. So we went to Flatbush in a cab. They wanted to lynch me there in Flatbush [for violating the Sabbath by traveling in an automobile], but with the rabbis there we convinced them. This is how we raised the money. Then we took it to the Joint Distribution Committee and they made the arrangements.

WH: Why did you feel it was necessary to go on the Sabbath?

IB: For two reasons. First, we needed the money immediately and second, the idea was to create a commotion . . . so they shouldn't sleep on it.⁴⁹

After an arduous journey through Russia, Rabbi Kotler arrived in San Francisco and then traveled by train to New York City. From the moment of his arrival, he was driven by two primary goals: saving other Jews from the clutches of death in Europe and raising the level of Jewish learning in America. Although, in the beginning he worked mostly on the first goal, he did not at any point lay aside the other. Reb Aharon helped the important organization called the *Vaad Hatzala* (Rescue Committee) and was heavily involved in Holocaust-related matters. Still, he found time to give private classes, mostly on weekends, to scholars who were now beginning to come from the great institutions of Eastern Europe.⁵⁰ An effort was made to establish a *beis medrash* in White Plains, New York, under the nominal leadership of Rabbi Hillel Bishco, a man whose primary efforts both in Europe and here were devoted to fund-raising, but who was familiar with Lithuanian scholarship. The students had asked Rabbi Kotler to head their group, but he had declined citing the need to continue his rescue efforts. Later, they attempted to persuade other scholars of stature, but for a variety of reasons these men had also turned down the offer. Finally, in desperation, they returned to Reb Aharon and begged him to reconsider, promis-

Can you give us an example of a hatzolah incident involving your father and Rav Aharon?

AB: Yes. Towards the end of the war, they received a cable from the *hatzolah* heroes, Reb Yitzchok and Mrs. Recha Sternbuch, from Switzerland. A ransom deal had been negotiated with Himmler, the head of the SS, whereby it would be possible to ransom Jews. The deal was that every month, for twenty months, they would pay \$250,000 and the Nazis would release 15,000 Jews. It came roughly to \$17 a person. They immediately needed a down payment of \$1,200,000. The Vaad Hatzolah raised \$230,000, but they were still short \$970,000. Rav Aharon decided to seek assistance from the Joint Distribution Committee and approached Mr. Moe

Leavitt, the head of the Joint, to ask for a loan. Leavitt absolutely refused to transfer funds to the enemy and pay ransom. He said, "You came to the wrong person. We are against bribes." My father became furious and told Leavitt, "If you don't lend us the money that will save Jews from death, I will send a letter to every single member of the Joint telling them exactly what you have done!"

Leavitt got scared and, reluctantly, agreed to the loan. The sole condition was that the United States government grant the Vaad Hatzolah a license to transfer the funds overseas to Switzerland and then, through their agents, to Himmler. It was a condition which Leavitt felt the Vaad could never meet.

Rav Aharon and my father went to Washington to petition President Roosevelt, who directed them to the only Jew in his Cabinet, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau. When the proposal was first made, Morgenthau balked, saying that the United States could not authorize the transfer of funds to the enemy. Upon hearing Morgenthau's answer, Rav Aharon began to shake and, with his eyes flashing, he told my father who served as translator, "Tell him that if he cannot help to rescue his fellow Jews at this time, then he is worth nothing, and his position is worth nothing, because one Jewish life is worth more than all the positions in Washington!"

My father understood that diplomacy dictated that he could not repeat verbatim what Rav Aharon had said, and he took the edge off of Rav Aharon's words, saying, "There comes a time in history when you have to help your brothers." Rav Aharon immediately understood that my father had not properly conveyed what he had said, and he turned to my father and commanded him to tell Morgenthau exactly what he had said. Fearing the worst, my father conveyed Rav Aharon's exact words, but instead of becoming angry, Morgenthau put his head down on his desk for a few minutes. Finally, he picked up his head and, with great emotion, authorized the transfer.

קפט

החזקת התורה

כלל ישראל. ואתם שנאספתם לכבוד התורה הרי אתם עושים חסד עם כל ישראל, מלבד עצם מצות לימוד התורה, ושימשיכו שלשלת התורה לדורות.

ה) ואסיים במ"ש חז"ל (בר"ר נ"ו, י"א) על הפסוק וישב אברהם אל נערו, ויצחק היכן הוא, רבי ברכיה בשם רבנן דתמן דשלחו אצל שם ללמוד ממנו תורה, משל לאשה שנתעשרה מפלכה, אמרה הואיל ומן הפלך הזה התעשרתי עוד אינו זו מתחת ידי לעולם. כך אמר אברהם כל שבא לידי אינו אלא בשביל שעסקתי בתורה ובמצוות, לפיכך איני רוצה שתזו מורעי לעולם, ע"כ, ונפלא למתבונן כי אחרי הפעולה הנשגבה ביותר בכריאה, וכן אנו מזכירים זכות פעולה זו בזכרונות בראש השנה, ומפורש בתורה הבטחה נצחית עבור זה, אכן כל העשירות בפעולה זו הרי היתה מן התורה, ולא הסתפק במדרגה הגדולה ביותר, אלא אדרבא חייבה אותו ללמוד מחדש, ולא החזיק טובה לעצמו כלל, אלא תיכף התאמץ ללמוד מחדש, כי אחרי הפעולה הרגיש חיוב חדש לישוב על התורה.

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חיוב החזקת התורה

א) אף כי הדברים דלהלן פשוטים הם, כבר כתב המס"י בהקדמתו שהדברים הידועים והמפורסמים, לפי רוב פרסומם כך ההעלם מהם מצוי מאד והשכחה רבה. תפקיד הישיבות בעם ישראל הוא תפקיד התורה בישראל בכלל שהוא עצם מציאות של עם ד', וחכמי התורה הם לב ישראל ועיני העדה. ומלבד תפקיד ההשפעה על הציבור הנצרכים להוראה ותפקיד הנהגת התורה בקהל בכללו ומסירת התורה לדורות, תפקידם העיקרי של הישיבות הוא עצם לימוד התורה, שמוכרח שימצא שבט ישראל שיעסק ויעמול בתורה, כי העסק והעמל בתורה הוא קיום העולם ממש.

וע"כ הכרח חיוני הוא שישמרו את הישיבות בטהרתם וצביונם בדרך המסורה מרבותינו מדור דור. וב"ה שלא פסקו עמלים בתורה בכל הדורות, ועל ידיהם נמשכת שלשלת התורה. וכל נטיה ע"י רוחות זרות וכל החלפה בצורת הישיבות וברוחם גרמו לשיבוש גמור של הציבור היהודי בכללו. וכל נטיה מדרך הקבלה בתורה באיזה צד שהוא נסתיימה בפירוד מכלל ישראל בזמן קצר או ארוך יותר. כי ע"ז משתנים עצם היסודות בדעות ומכ"ש בהשקפות של "להבדיל בין הקודש ובין החול ולהבדיל בין הטהור ובין הטמא".

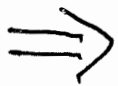
ובפרט בדור הזה של שכחת התורה וריחוק מהתורה, שהקהל הרחב סובל מבורות נוראה ושיבוש הדעות הנובע מזה, מלבד ההשקפות המושפעות מהתרבות של גויים, וכן רדיפת החומר באופן מופרז, והמנהיגים הרוחניים הם תועים ומתעים. ומכל זה כלבול הדעות וטשטוש הגבולות הוא באופן מבהיל מאד בין כאן ובין בא"י נולדוגמא במוסד אורטודכסי שנוצר לפי דברי מייסדו לחזק הדת, לומדים בו בקורת המקרא, ורוב המורים שם הם כופרים גמורים ועוד כהנה].

http://yulib003.mc.yu.edu:2057 הודפס מאתר אוצר החכמה

daughter and long-time personal secretary, Mrs. Sarah Kotler-Schwartzman, put it:

The late Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel [well-known theologian and professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary] once challenged me in 1966: "There is no question that your father wrought a revolution in this country. But I never got a satisfactory answer when I asked people close to him. What was the source of his power to influence American Jewish youth? With what personal resources did he do it?" Although a definitive answer may be beyond my immediate capacity, I responded: "Spiritual leadership is successful in proportion to the degree of truthfulness and dedication. Father's devotion to truth was his quintessential quality. He believed absolutely in the truth of the Torah and his own philosophy and his personal sense of mission, responsibility, and selfless dedication were passionate and total."⁵⁶

Eyes blazing, talking very fast, Rabbi Kotler gave his listeners the feeling that they were going to share in a project that would profoundly affect the nature of Jewish education in this country. His view was that the Torah should be studied because it was God's revealed truth, not because it provided a possibility of employment as a rabbi or yeshiva teacher. In his daughter's words:



Father often used to challenge *baalei batim*. On one such occasion at an emergency fund-raising meeting, he put it in approximately these words: "I don't want you to misunderstand me; I don't want to mislead you. There is a need for *rosh yeshivas* in this country and elsewhere and Lakewood will produce them. There is a need for effective teachers and for the right kind of rabbis and Lakewood will produce these too. There is a need for *baalei-batim-talmidei chachomim* (laymen-scholars) and Lakewood will send them forth. However, the *raison d'être* of Lakewood is '*limud haTorah lishmo*'—to learn Torah for its own value. It is with this understanding, and for this purpose, that I am asking for your support."⁵⁷

It was not easy to explain and popularize this approach to talmudic education in the United States for the Orthodox community was quite Americanized. Even the right-wing yeshivas such as Torah Vodaath had adopted to some extent the utilitarian view that Talmud study would be oriented toward producing rabbis and teachers. While well aware of the tradition of Euro-