Tonight is the night after the 16th of MarCheshvan. Forty-eight years ago, on November 9, 1938, the so-called “Kristallnacht” occurred: the beginning of a historical tragedy with a fatal ending.

This was a bloody drama indeed. The prelude to this chain of events, though, is not known to most people.

One Friday morning early in November, 1938, all Polish Jews residing in Germany were suddenly arrested and herded onto trains heading toward Poland. All trains stopped at the border town of Spongene (which I remember well from my own travels between Germany and Poland). All day long on the fateful Friday Jews of all ages were arrested for no reason — and heralded over to this Polish border town where, minus their belongings, all 12,000 of them were unceremoniously dumped. Some women had taken along Shabbos candles to light in the train, and the Jewish natives of Poland did their best to welcome these sudden immigrants. However, as you can imagine, these displaced refugees went through much pain and agony.
SELECTED WRITINGS

A Collection of Addresses and Essays on Hashkafah, Jewish History and Contemporary Issues

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for them in the German economy, and their own cultural life was brought to an abrupt halt. It was the beginning of the end. From the Kristallnacht leads a straight path to Auschwitz, Treblinka, Theresienstadt — to the murder of 6 million Kedoshim, 1/3 of our people. Amongst us there are still many who remember these events personally.

But there is much more to this story. By strange “coincidence” (nothing in life is a coincidence!), that same date, November 9, marks a celebration. Seventy-nine years earlier, in 1859, the whole German nation celebrated the Centennial of the birth of the famous German poet, Friedrich Phillip Von Schiller. Schiller was a great humanist, and no German could go through school without mastering Schiller's plays and poetry. He had become, in effect, a national hero. All over Germany there was a jubilant celebration of his 100th birthday.

Also participating in this commemoration was the newly founded yeshiva in Frankfurt-am-Main, the Yeshiva founded by Rabbiner Samson Raphael Hirsch (of which our Yeshiva is a continuation). A detailed account of the school's celebration can be found in the “Gesammalte Schriften”, Vol. IV. Briefly, the higher grades had assembled, together with the faculty, administration, the Board of the Kehillo and the general public. The rooms were festively decorated. Addressing the crowd was none less than the great Rav Hirsch himself. He proceeded to deliver a masterful oration on the topic of the "Shabbas" (the entire speech has been recorded under the title of the "Schillerrede"). Extensively quoting from Schiller's poetry, Rav Hirsch illustrated how this sublime individual stood for all we call virtuous: lofty ideas about the Almighty, righteousness, goodness, justice, honesty, beauty, free will, man above beast, family life, the dignity of women, virtue and truth, etc. All great ideas expressed, even by non-

burning shuls and broken by the shat frightened children.

Let us close this episode in the annals of history with the statement that there are those who do not intend to let happening. People of name and fame are as if they never existed. The wise men are as if they have perished. Men of understanding without intelligence and so are their lives. Most of their actions and so are their lives: The supremacy of man proves to be hollow. Man is merely an intellectual.

This is an apt learned.

We subscribe to:

But we are reminded:

* Most members of our community were arrested and detained. A Nazi officer told him to arrest. In his exclamation: The Nazi screamed "or else!"
burning shuls and synagogues, and until this illusory silence was broken by the shattering of windows and the screaming of frightened children in the night*.

Let us close this dark chapter with a firm belief in the One who will not desert us or forsake us: "לא תעבורי ולא תשים". The age of Humanism was a passing episode in the annals of history. The sentiment was only skin deep and short lived. When the fires of the Holocaust began burning, we suddenly were haunted by the words we say in our daily prayers, as well as in the "Selected Writings":

The great men, the great figures and heroes are like nothing before you.
People of name and fame are as if they never existed.
The wise men are as if they have no knowledge.
Men of understanding without intelligence are empty
Most of their actions, are empty and so are their lives empty.
The supremacy of man over the animals proves to be hollow.
Man is merely an intelligent animal.

This aptly describes the painful lesson we have learned.

We subscribe to the visionary concept of the age of Humanism in the "Selected Writings":

* Most members of our Kehilla know of a miraculous incident which occurred to our late Rav Breuer the day after Kristallnacht. Rav Breuer was arrested and detained along with the other Jewish men. At the lineup, the Nazi officer told him to go home, as he was over 60 years old and not subject to arrest. In his extreme honesty, Rav Breuer protested that he was only 57. The Nazi screamed back, “Don’t contradict me! You are over 66 and out you go— or else!” If not for this miracle, would our Kehilla be here today? Who knows...
Should someone tell you of knowledge, of science, of wisdom among the nations — believe him. But if he tells you of tradition among them — don’t believe him.

True — there is science, technology, law, medicine, political science, history, languages, psychology et al. Our tradition of study applies to that too — that is, the has given of his wisdom to flesh and blood. Therefore, we make a mistake when we see great scientist — we respect the accomplishments of science and most areas of human knowledge.

Most areas, that is. We do not extend to the utmost, to the limit. We include philosophy, ethics, morality and humanism. The teaching of what is right and wrong, what is noble and ignoble, what is decent and indecent, this is not in the realm of the has given of his wisdom to flesh and blood. We do not even study written by a non-Jew. This is the law! The law instructs us in these areas. No longer are we going to seek our Schiller to teach us about humanity. No longer interests us.

The lessons of Kristallnacht — from one November 9th to the other — “הרי אשר בנוו以上の אופל.” Don’t believe there is wisdom among our ancestors, to believe there is any other ethical culture for us besides the law.

I recall when I became thirteen. There was a large table upon which all the gifts were displayed (some people still do that!). I received a book from my grandfather (a rarity in those days!). I got a set of German (beautiful!) ... but, believe it or not, I got a set of Schiller, a set of Goethe, of Gilpatse, of Lessing, of Sarmeso I got all the classics! And so did all other boys back then.

Another lesson from the Kristallnacht: give the boys! If they aren’t fluent in Hebrew, give them Art Scroll! If they can’t read give them translations! But classics? This is not done anymore.

Yes — a tremendous lesson. If gentiles develop an ethical cultural group good for them, they need it. For us it means nothing. It’s a thin veneer which does not penetrate. It fades away. The Nazis burned the books and burnt the meaning of .

I am certain that in the future, if gentiles try to teach us what is right and wrong, what is noble and ignoble, what is decent and indecent, it will wither.

It does not.

ADDITION: The lessons of Kristallnacht — from one November 9th to the other — “הרי אשר בנוו以上の אופל.” Don’t believe there is wisdom among our ancestors, to believe there is any other ethical culture for us besides the law.

Even the lessons of Kristallnacht were taken away, they do not interest us anymore.

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The Nazis were also students of Schiller and Goethe. They studied ethics and humanism — and then they tortured and burnt and destroyed one-third of our people. These were the grisly experiments of this empty humanistic culture. It has lost all meaning for us. Only the teachers of humanism are entitled to teach us what is right and good and true and beautiful.

I am certain that the saintly and wise work of Rabbener S.R. Hirsch will agree with my conclusion. In his famous message, he makes the following comment: "He who is called to head the Chosen Nation because he could be trusted to instruct his progeny:" 

It does not say that they will keep the laws of the realm of the written by a non-human. No longer is humanity. It withers and dies — it is worthless. Only through its field of science do we learn ethics — it lasts for all eternity.

Even the most shining examples of greatness among the people are short-lived episodes. Their lessons are fleeting; they do not penetrate. Only that code of morals, that which derives from the realm of the written can be taken seriously by Our People. It lasts for all eternity.