

**Good Shabbos Everyone.** At the end of this week's parsha Ki-Seitzei, the Torah gives us the commandment to "wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heaven -- you shall not forget!" (Devorim 25:19) Amalek had attacked the tired and weary Bnai Yisroel when they left Egypt. Amalek's attack was a "cheap shot." Thus, it is a mitzvah to erase the memory of Amalek and to always remember their treachery in order to inspire hatred of the descendants of Amalek.

Historically, Germany has been associated with Amalek. Even if the only basis for such an association is "mashal", we can still learn from it. Just as we are commanded to wipe out the memory of Amalek which perpetrated a cowardly attack on the Bnai Yisroel, so too are we commanded to do to the Germans, who acted in a similar way during the holocaust.

How then do we blot out the memory of those who attacked us so cowardly? The answer is possibly the following: We can never undo what the Germans did; however, we can deny them their victory by perpetuating that which they sought to destroy. By raising big families who are dedicated to Torah observance, we will blot out the memory of the evil forces who destroyed us. The following inspiring true story illustrates one Jewish family's struggle to survive the cowardly German attack and to rebuild their lives.

R' Yisroel Zev Gustman, who passed away in Jerusalem in 5749 (1989), was a link to the glorious days of Torah greatness of pre-War Lithuania. At age twenty-two, he began serving on the Vilna rabbinate headed by the generation's leader, R' Chaim Ozer Grodzensky.

R' Chaim Ozer held the young rav in great esteem and forwarded halachic questions to him which were posed by the some of the greatest poskim of the day. When R' Gustman arrived in Eretz Yisrael several years after the War, he called on the world-renowned Tchebiner Rav, who was considerably older than him. The Rav recognized the name "Gustman" from a correspondence which he had once received when he had sent a question to R' Chaim Ozer many years previous. "Perhaps," the Tchebiner Rav asked him, "you are the son of HaRav Gustman from Vilna?" When the Rav realized that he was speaking to HaRav Gustman himself, he put on his hat and coat and recited the blessing one says when seeing an exceptionally great Torah personality.

Especially in his last years, R' Chaim Ozer's health was frail. On most afternoons, he was taken for a wagon ride in the forests on the outskirts of the city so that his lungs could inhale the fresh country air. Very often, he asked young R' Yisroel Zev Gustman to accompany him, and the two would spend their time together discussing Torah topics.

One afternoon, for reasons which he did not explain, R' Chaim Ozer broke with his usual practice of speaking words of Torah on their rides and instead used the wagon ride to give his escort a "guided tour" of the forest. "Over there," he pointed out, "is a cave . . . That plant over there is poisonous . . . The one over here, on the other hand, is not poisonous, and can in fact provide some sustenance ..." R' Gustman listened and nodded in understanding, but did not understand the purpose of all this information.

September 1, 1939 arrived. The Second World War erupted as Poland was invaded by Germany from one side and Russia from the other. Vilna, which was officially the capital of Lithuania, had been under Polish control since 1919.

Now, in what proved to be one of the great hidden miracles of the Second World War, Russia announced that it would be returning Vilna to Lithuania, and allowed that country to maintain its independence for the time being. Until the transfer officially took place, the border between Poland and Vilna would remain open. R' Chaim Ozer recognized this as an opportunity for rescue, and sent messages to the yeshivos in Poland to flee to Vilna even on Shabbos, in the hope that they could escape Russian tyranny and possibly depart from Lithuania for the free world.

The roshei yeshivah heeded R' Chaim Ozer's call and, along with thousands of yeshivah students, streamed into Vilna. R' Chaim Ozer, ill and often confined to bed, directed the massive organization and relocation of these yeshivos.

By fleeing to Vilna before the border between Poland and Lithuania was sealed shut, many roshei yeshivah and students were able to flee Eastern Europe, be saved from the horrors of the Holocaust, and play a major role in the revival of Torah study after the war.

Less than a year after the war's outbreak, in the summer of 1940, R' Chaim Ozer lay deathly ill. By that time, Russian troops had entered Lithuania and the situation had deteriorated. It would become considerably worse when the Germans declared war on Russia and invaded Lithuania.

As Jewry entered the month of Av, when we mourn the Destruction of both Temples, as well as other national tragedies of this long and difficult exile, it appeared that R' Chaim Ozer's time to leave this world had come. The rabbonim of Vilna were permitted to enter R' Chaim Ozer's room and take leave of him individually. When R' Gustman's turn came, R' Chaim Ozer grasped his hand and said, "You will overcome them — both the East and the West." To no one else did R' Chaim Ozer say these words.

Soon after the Nazis entered Vilna, they declared a certain day "Rabbis' Day," when they made a special effort to track down and eliminate every rav in the city, for they understood that the teachers of Torah infuse their people with faith and spirit. R' Gustman was seized by a Nazi soldier but miraculously escaped. He, his wife and their little daughter fled to the forests of Vilna.

It was then that R' Gustman recalled the day when R' Chaim Ozer had pointed out certain facts about the forest and its vegetation and where to hide in caves, and he now put that knowledge to use in trying to keep his family alive and well!

For almost five years they hid, and on numerous occasions were a hairsbreadth away from death. More than one hundred times during the war, R' Gustman recited Vidui (the confessional prayer said before death), certain that his final moments had arrived. In more than one incident, bullets scraped his scalp, barely missing his head. In several instances, Nazi soldiers looked straight at him but apparently did not "see" him. R' Gustman later said, "it was more than a miracle; it was a decree from Heaven. The Ribono shel Olam (Master of the Universe) Who decrees who shall die also decrees who shall live."

He and his family were among the very few to return to Vilna when the war ended. One night, a Jewish Communist knocked on R' Gustman's door to warn him that the Soviet regime which had regained control of Lithuania was planning to deport him the next day. That night, R' Gustman fled with his family, and eventually arrived safely in America and later to Eretz Yisroel. As R' Chaim Ozer had foretold, he had overcome the "East" — and the "West" — the Russians of Eastern Europe and the Germans of Western Europe.

The ultimate revenge against the Nazis is living a Torah observant life! **Good Shabbos Everyone.**