



# NOT ENOUGH TEARS

BY BATYA RUDELL

## Prologue

In two weeks, I'm going to Poland! The plan happened spontaneously at a Chol Hamoed brunch when Rabbi Dovid Charlop, one of the dedicated rebbeim at the Neve Tzion yeshivah in Eretz Yisrael, invited me to join their yearly trip to the concentration camps with his wife Shulamis. I am incredibly grateful for this amazing opportunity.

6 Av 5775 INYAN 39



## THURSDAY, APRIL 23, 6 A.M.

We're on the plane to Vienna, en route to Cracow. Classical music tinkles out of the aircraft's loudspeakers. It provides quite a European ambiance. I am blessed to live in a time when an airplane's music serenades me to my destination, and not an orchestra of inmates escorting me to the gas chambers.

I still can't believe I'm actually going. What horrors await me there? Am I emotionally prepared? I also need to be strong in order to support the troubled teenage boys from the yeshivah who, at the tender age of 18, already have demons of their own to deal with.

## VIENNA, 8:30 A.M.

We're on the City Airport Train heading towards Vienna, where Shulamis and I are going to spend a few hours before catching our connecting flight. We head off to Stadtpark and watch schoolchildren playing on the well-kept grass. They jump rope and climb trees and play so "properly" that we barely hear them as they frolic among dandelions and daisies. I stroll past a flower stall that smells like fine perfume, and can't remember the last time I saw such an explosion of color. People stroll by, birds twittering above their heads.

But there was a terrible war here, a time when Nazi beasts stomped the streets in their steel-toed boots, bringing evil and death and hatred. This doesn't coincide with the present day tranquility. Everything is so civilized, organized, regimented — the same characteristics that enabled the Germans to murder rampantly, to commit genocide.

## CRACOW, 3:00 P.M.

Rabbi Charlop greets us at the airport with the group's mini-van and driver. We are meeting up with the group in Auschwitz and are racing to get to there before it closes. That strikes me as ironic because during the Holocaust, Auschwitz never "closed." It was open 24/7, available at all times to torture and murder whoever passed through its gates.

*Baruch Hashem*, we make it in time. The boys, who have been in Poland since Sunday, are already inside. When Rabbi Charlop takes us past the registration desk, I briefly wonder why we need to pay money to see how our people were killed.

Two more minutes and I'm standing in front of that infamous sign, "*Arbeit macht frei*." I inhale deeply, feeling fortunate to be a Jew who is free to stand here today. The first thing that hits me is the sheer size of the camp. It is staggering. As we go from exhibit to exhibit, I am dry-eyed and speechless. In one room, behind glass that extends from one wall to the other, there are shoes. Shoes and more shoes, millions of them, all removed from the Nazis' helpless

**"I STAND,  
UNMOVING, FEELING  
A CHILL AND NOT  
BELIEVING WHAT I'M  
SEEING. INSIDE MY  
HEAD I CAN HEAR  
THE DOOR BEING  
SLAMMED SHUT AND  
THEN THE SCREAMS  
— PIERCING, HEART-  
RENDING, FEAR-  
FILLED SCREAMS  
THAT DWINDLE  
GRADUALLY INTO  
SILENCE."**



A display of shoes removed from Jews at Auschwitz.

victims. There are boots and sandals and ladies' high heels, and baby shoes from children's tiny feet. If those shoes could speak, what heartbreaking stories would they tell?

In a different room there is a similar exhibit, this time packed with prosthetics. False legs, arms, neck and back braces, crutches. Nausea bubbles in my throat.

In another room there are lists — meticulously written lists of names, lists whose purpose is to send people to their deaths. Those lists look so innocuous, like an exercise students write in school. Knowing what they represent makes me shudder.

We keep walking, in and out of the barracks, past watchtowers and barbed wire fences, to the famous wall where prisoners were lined up and shot. And then we come to the gas chamber where Zyklon B was first used. I enter a cavernous underground room with walls stained from the chemicals. Rabbi Charlop points to the ceiling, showing us the hatches through which the gas was poured. I stand, unmoving, feeling a chill and not believing what I'm seeing. Inside my head I can hear the door being slammed shut and then the screams — piercing, heart-rending, fear-filled screams that dwindle into silence.

Wordlessly, Rabbi Charlop leads Shulamis and me next door to the most shocking sight I've ever seen in my life — the ovens! Had they been used for the purpose they were meant for, burning firewood, they would not be shocking. But in my mind's eye I can see bodies being shoved into those furnaces, the smell of scorched human flesh, and I cannot find a way to express what I feel at that moment. The brutal inhumanity that these ovens represent is unfathomable to a normal human being; what transpired here is simply beyond comprehension.

Rabbi Charlop moves closer to one of the incinerators to say *Kaddish*. And that's when my tears fall. Until now I've held it together, but the stark reality of this sight has me sobbing and sobbing as I offer up *Tehillim* for all the innocent souls incinerated here. *How* could this have happened?

I come out into the sunlight with the taste of death in my mouth. The sky stretches clear and blue. Birds sing. Here? In Auschwitz?

## BIRKENAU, 5:00 P.M.

We proceed with the group to Auschwitz II, also called Birkenau, which was built by prisoners from Auschwitz I when the Nazis realized they needed more space. Both camps are so massive, it boggles the mind. Each one is a whole village. How every prisoner was always accounted for is incredible. In places this size, how could the Germans have noticed if just one Jew was missing? Their efficiency, employed for evil, astounds me.

Together with the group, I walk along the railway tracks



to the entrance of the camp. I've encountered this world-famous scene as a photograph in books, but nothing prepares me for the real thing. The hastily-built tracks, used at the end of the war primarily to transport Hungarian Jews, run right through the middle of the camp, all the way to the plaza at the end where the "selektzia" and crematorium awaited the victims.

Unlike Auschwitz I, which is reminiscent of a museum, Auschwitz II has been left as it was, with many parts in rubble as a result of the Germans blowing up much of the camp at the end of the war. For me, Birkenau is more real. Here I am not just looking at an exhibit, but feeling the harsh reality of life and death.

We take the long, slow walk down the tracks. It is unnaturally quiet, yet I hear the screams and cries, the dogs barking, the shouts of the SS, the sound of their whips. Jed, our Polish tour guide, who accompanies us throughout the trip, stops at various points to explain things.

Sometimes one of the boys speaks. Most of them have a Holocaust story about their family. One tells of his grandmother hiding candles in Auschwitz and lighting them Erev Shabbos. Another relates the tale of a boy who gave his dying brother his shirt during the death march in the snow.

One boy weeps uncontrollably, crying for kids who don't know about their heritage. He speaks about the special opportunity he has been given to come to the yeshivah at Neve. Rabbi Charlop comforts him as the boys stand around silently. He reminds them that it's a tough, very painful trip, and if you can't cry, it hurts more. "Each one of you is going through his own struggle," he says. "There are no easy answers."

Walking along the tracks, I talk to some of the boys. Later, on the bus, I remember more of Rabbi Charlop's inspirational words. "We're broken," he told them, "and it's not our fault. We are all victims, trying to get back on our feet and feel good about ourselves. When you hear that voice saying, 'What's wrong with me?' just kill that Nazi! Tell it to get out. We won the war; we're survivors!"

How true are his words. The more I get to know the boys and look into their eyes, the more I realize how many personal battles they are fighting. And I don't know which broken souls I cry for more, the ones of the past or the present.

The sun is setting through the trees on the way back. "It's so beautiful, take a picture," Shulamis tells me. I shake my head. Nothing pretty belongs in this graveyard.

## FRIDAY, APRIL 24, 11 A.M.

After a hearty supper in the Jewish quarter of Cracow last night and a good night's sleep, we are on our way to the mass graves in Tarnow. From the window of our van, I stare

Rabbi Moshe Prager saying *Tehillim* next to the children's mass grave in Tarnow.



**"THEY SING HAMALACH HAGOEL, AN OFFERING FOR THESE INNOCENTS WHO NEVER HAD A LAST SHEMA WITH THEIR MOTHERS. AS THEY SING, I HEAR THE CHILDREN'S CRIES."**





The children's mass grave in Tarnow.



out at the countryside. Everything looks so idyllic, yet it is definitely not! When the Jews came knocking on the doors of these Polish peasants, begging for shelter or a slice of bread, they were kicked away like dirt. I watch the forests flash by and I see the image of Jews running through the trees, hunted like animals, hiding among the leafy foliage.

This is a country of cowards, stained with Jewish blood!

All of the familiar names: Katowice, Chelm, Biastoyk, Radom, are written on the road signs. Thriving, vibrant Jewish communities; hundreds of thousands of Jews; all gone.

Tears spring to my eyes. Suddenly I can't stand it here. I want to go home.

I feel a need to go home, to leave this awful place.

## TARNOW

The forest, with its rows of tall, lean trees reaching for the sky, is awesome — not because of its beauty, but because of the mind-numbing atrocities committed here: Six thousand Jews were marched into the forest, murdered and tossed into mass graves. Seven hundred of them were children.

It's the children's grave that draws us. The surrounding pale blue fence has colored strings tied around it and pictures painted on it. Teddy bears, toys, photographs and *yahrtzeit* candles have been placed here by the many visitors who pass through. A group from Baltimore joins us. They sing *Hamalach Hagoel*, an offering for these innocents who never had a last *Shema* with their mothers. As they sing, I hear the children's cries.

"Mommy, Mother, Mama ... save me!"

Are there mothers who don't protect their children? But they couldn't. As a mother, I cannot fathom this.

We prepare to leave, but I can't seem to make my legs move. Part of me wants to stay here with these children, not to leave them alone, cold, lonely and afraid.

How could those monsters have done it — ripped mere babies from their mothers' arms and slaughtered them?

Children, today we cry for you because nobody did then.

Back at the bus, we gather in silence outside the van while Rebbetzin Shulamis Charlop relates a little about her experience as a child of Holocaust survivors. Shulamis's father was from Tarnow, this very town, one of a hundred or so survivors out of a few hundred thousand Jews.

"All my childhood I lived in the shadow of the Holocaust," she says. "I always wanted to run away from the pain of it. When I got married, I never wanted to do domestic chores because I didn't want to be like my mother, who cried while doing the dishes, remembering all she had lost."

Shulamis pauses, going back in time. "Thankfully, I was spared hearing my father's screams at night," she reflects. "It took time to process everything. As a teenager, it was



easy to blame my parents for what was wrong with my life, but that's what the Nazis did — they blamed the Jews. I came to understand that my job was to transform the pain into something meaningful."

## LIZENSK, EREV SHABBOS

I have heard so much about the *tzaddik*, the Rebbe Reb Elimelech of Lizensk, and I can't believe we'll be spending Shabbos here. If seeing the horrors committed against our people has drained me, Lizensk will revitalize me.

I confess that sometimes I have difficulty connecting at *kevarim*, but as soon as I sit down next to the *kever* of the Holy Rebbe, I feel an energy surge through my body, a strength and power that I've never felt before. It pulls out words I didn't intend to say, tears I never thought I'd cry. I plead, sob and ask for forgiveness. I weep for myself and all of the broken souls in *Klal Yisrael*.

Over the course of Shabbos, I go to the *kever* three times and each time the same thing happens: Reb Elimelech has opened my heart to profound and meaningful prayer. He has succeeded where nothing else has.

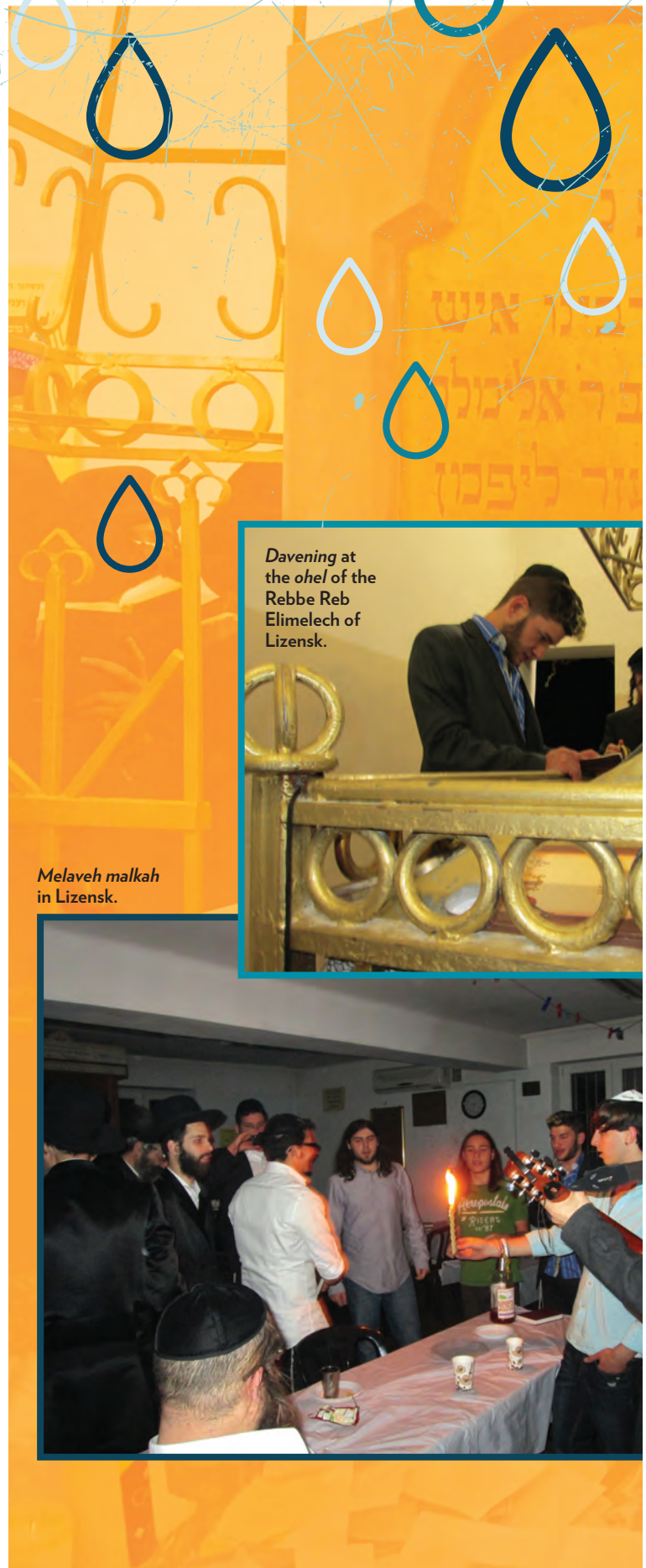
## MOTZOEI SHABBOS

What a Shabbos! Inspiring, moving, thought-provoking; there are not enough words to describe it. The boys began singing and dancing at *Kabbalas Shabbos* and didn't stop until they fell into bed on Motzoei Shabbos. I spent a lot of time talking to these amazing kids, and they touched my heart. Wounded and lost, they are open and authentic. So many soulful eyes in one room; their beautiful *neshamos* shine through. Each boy has his story, his personal pain and anguish.

There was such an ambiance of love this Shabbos, especially from the *rebbeim* to the *talmidim*. They seem to know exactly what the boys need. Rabbi Prager\* constantly talks to one boy from Skver, in Yiddish; the boy seems to hunger for it. Whenever I see Rabbi Prager, he has his arm around a boy's shoulders. Yitzy,\*\* the program director, is a natural at what he does, enforcing rules and boundaries with love, compassion and understanding. And Rabbi Charlop's comforting presence is essential. Without him, the entire experience would be an oyster without a pearl.

Two chassidishe brothers from Monsey join us for a *melaveh malkah*. A couple of boys play guitar, and Rabbi Charlop plays flute. The boys, wearing scruffy jeans, long hair and earrings, sing in Yiddish with the Monsey visitors. The music and singing seem to lift the roof off this modest guest house in Lizensk where we have been plied with enough food to feed a small village.

At two o'clock in the morning, the *bachurim* take their guitars to the *tziyun* and sing next to the Rebbe. There is no separation between people here, only closeness and brotherhood. And after the music dies down, one of the chassidishe brothers hugs the boys, his eyes bright, exclaiming, "I have never had such a *melaveh malkah* in my life. If I didn't have to be somewhere early in the morning, I would stay up all night with you!"



Davening at the ohel of the Rebbe Reb Elimelech of Lizensk.

Melaveh malkah in Lizensk.



The now-marked grave of 14-year-old Avram Teppler, *Hy*"d, who was murdered by the Nazis.

I don't want to leave all this behind, to go back to "normal." All I can think is that Hashem must be happy now. We should always be together and enjoy such *achdus*.

## SUNDAY, APRIL 26; ZAKRZOWEK

Tonight we are flying home. On the way to Warsaw we stop off at a small town for a very moving visit with an elderly Catholic Polish woman named Leokavia. Together with the mayor of the town, she takes us to a secluded spot in the forest that borders the village. We gather around a small granite memorial where Leokavia tells us a horrifying story.

Leokavia was 15 years old when the Germans invaded the village where she lived peacefully with Jewish neighbors. One day, while walking through the forest to school, she stumbled upon the burial of 20 neighborhood Jews.

Several weeks later, not far from the first spot, she witnessed the murder of Avram Teppler, her classmate and friend. These sickening images were stamped indelibly in her brain. After the war, she tried to tell people what had happened, to no avail. Finally, five years ago, she succeeded in getting people to listen. After testifying before police and the local administration, a sonar machine confirmed that there were bones buried in the places Leokavia had indicated. Last year, 72 years after witnessing these gruesome events, the elderly woman was finally able to get the gravesites recognized.

She takes us to the lonely grave of her young classmate and begins to speak. "I have waited my whole life to see Jews pray here," she says. "Now I can leave this world in peace."

I ask her how she continued with life after seeing such shocking events. She grows agitated, beats her chest and speaks in rapid Polish. "It stayed with her forever," Jed translates. "She can see it today as clearly as then. Nothing was ever the same afterwards."

As I listen to her, something suddenly strikes me. All of this is actually real! Even after seeing Auschwitz, Birkenau and Tarnow, my mind can play games with me, and my utter disbelief can still tell me, "This couldn't have happened." But as I hear the words from this elderly woman's mouth, there is no denying it. She was there. She saw it. And as she speaks, I see the horrors too.

## 3 A.M., ON THE PLANE TO ISRAEL

I have much to think about on the way home. This whirlwind trip has been packed with a kaleidoscope of emotions — grief, pain and anguish, but also a spiritual high. It has been an honor to accompany the boys and staff from Neve Tzion. It has been a privilege to *daven* at the *kever* of the *tzaddik* Reb Elimelech of Lizensk. It has been humbling and heartbreaking to visit the sites where my people were murdered. To summarize it all in a sentence, there are simply not enough tears. ■

\*Rabbi Moshe Prager, rebbi and recruiter for Neve Tzion.

\*\*Rabbi Yitzy Tendler, menahel of Neve Tzion