

לז"נ ר' משה בן הרה"ג
חיים יצחק קארב
נפ' (ונולד) ט' אב
Harav Moshe Korb
passed away on
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The Kosel Under Siege

The British Mandate (1920) officially recognized the rights of the Jewish people to a homeland in Israel. This led to a surge in Jewish immigration, which angered factions within the British Foreign Office in London. These forces actively undermined the Balfour Declaration's promise of a Jewish homeland. They enlisted Arab nationalists, hoping to prevent the realization of a "Jewish homeland."

In July 1928, Harry Luke, from a Jewish family that converted to Christianity, was appointed administrator of government affairs in Palestine. With Arab nationalists they restricted Jewish rights at the Kosel. They all understood that the Kosel was a major attraction for the Jewish people to return to Israel, therefore Arab efforts to limit Jewish access intensified. The Foreign Office collaborated with Hajj Amin al-Husseini, who, after orchestrating a bloody attack on Jews in 1920, had become the Arab leader in Yerushalayim. They used the Kosel to incite anti-Jewish hatred.

Arab agitation began with the riots of 1920-1921, which resulted in Jewish deaths and the destruction of settlements. In 1922, the Mandatory Government, under British rule, banned benches near the Kosel. Historically, Muslim governments never had the audacity to challenge Jewish rights to daven at the Kosel. However,

Arabs now began to assert that the area belonged to the Moslem waqf (charitable endowment) and that Jews could daven there with permission.

Throughout 1928-1929, tensions surrounding the Kosel escalated significantly. Edward Kitrutch, the District Commissioner of Yerushalayim, acceded to an Arab request to ban all chairs and benches from the Kosel plaza. Elderly Jews who used small chairs for rest were ordered by British officers to stand, with the chairs then being kicked away.

A diary entry from 1930 by R' Yitzchak Orenstein Hyd (later murdered in the Jewish quarter of the old city in 1948 by an artillery shell) recounts when an Arab officer forcibly removed a chair from under R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld. The Arabs led donkeys laden with dung through groups of praying Jews, even on sacred days such as Erev Yom Kippur and Shavuos.

A major point of contention was the mechitzah, historically used at the Kosel. They were folded and stored when not in use. For the Yomim Noaroyim of 1928, a new mechitzah, was constructed at the instruction of the [Radziminer rebbe](#). Rosh Hashanah passed without incident, and the mechitzah was reinstalled on Erev Yom Kippur. During Kol Nidre, Kitrutch and Officer Doff sent an Arab policeman to demand its immediate dismantling.

Radziminer Rebbe

See Fisher Family Legacy Haggadah pg. 89-95, for Torah, a picture and Pesach-related stories.

The daveners explained that Jewish law prohibited its dismantling on a holiday.

The following morning, an officer reiterated the demand for the mechitzah's removal, receiving the same response. Around 9:00, Officer Doff and police returned during shacharis shmonei esrei and Doff personally tore down the mechitzah. Women who attempted to prevent this were beaten by police with pieces of the broken wooden frame. Other officers enforced the ban on chairs, pulling them from under elderly worshippers. Kitrutch informed them that the dismantling was following a complaint from the Supreme Moslem Council.

The day after Yom Kippur, a delegation of Chief Rabbis and Vaad Leumi leaders met with Harry Luke. Widespread condemnation was organized, with telegrams sent to local officials and to England, mass rallies held, and the Vaad Leumi issuing a call for the liberation of the Kosel from Arab control. R' Yosef Chaim, on behalf of the Eidah Chareidis and Agudath Israel, strongly condemned the desecration and demanded punishment for those responsible. In Yerushalayim,

a general strike was called, and a large rally took place at Eitz Chaim Yeshivah. The London Times reported the event, attributing blame to Arab policemen and omitting any British involvement. His Majesty's Government, in turn, blamed the Jewish shammas and stated that the mechitzah's dismantling was necessary, expressing regret for the ensuing events.

The Mufti wasted no time weaponizing the event. He claimed Jews were planning to convert the Kosel area into a synagogue and take over the Har HaBayis to rebuild the Beis HaMikdash. He held up a Sukkah decoration from Yeshivas Toras Chaim as "proof"—it depicted the Har HaBayis adorned with two Zionist flags.

At a subsequent meeting, it was decided to formally request that authorities prohibit religious articles at the Kosel and forbid Jews from raising their voices during davening.

In hindsight, it became clear: the "Kosel affair" was a coordinated provocation by British and Arab actors. Their goal was to inflame Jewish passions and then respond with condemnation. Tragically, many institutions and leaders took the bait of Harry Luke and Hajj Amin al-Husseini. But R' Yosef Chaim stood apart. He urged restraint and insisted that calm would prevent worse outcomes and expressed faith that the government would eventually correct the injustice. He published a remarkable appeal in both Jewish and Arab newspapers, pleading for an end to hatred and suspicion: He expressed hope that Divine blessings would lead to rejuvenation and guide all nations.

"The Holy Land, to which Hashem affords special supervision, from which blessing emanates to the rest of the world ...

"As one of the elders of the Holy Land, having been privileged to live here nearly 60 years, and as

a personal witness to the years of tranquility and peace that existed between all the lands and habitants, I allow myself to appeal from the depth of my saddened and broken heart to all dwellers of the Holy Land regardless of race and religion who have been granted by Divine Providence the merit of living in the holiest of lands...

...ignore all false suspicions and accusations and build a road to peace!"

Initially, some Zionist newspapers attacked R' Yosef Chaim, calling his message "treason." But they later conceded: he had been right. His foresight could have saved Jewish blood. Eventually, even the Vaad Leumi issued a statement affirming that Jews had no desire to infringe upon Muslim holy sites.

However, the provocations continued. In Iyar 1929, the Mufti arranged for the loud Muslim Zicar ritual to be performed during davening. Weeks later, Arabs built a new wall in the Kosel plaza and added a minaret—loudly disrupting davening. On 25 Tamuz, Jews on the way to the Kosel were beaten.

One positive result was the situation fostered unprecedented unity among Jewish factions, leading the Vaad Leumi and Agudath Israel to form a joint action committee.

Government officials maintained their biased approach, requesting Jewish leaders to curb visits to the Kosel. The government publicly sided with the Arabs, declaring the Kosel a Muslim possession, and prohibited lighting lanterns on Friday afternoon and banned chairs in the area. In August (Chodesh Av), the Mandatory Government requested that Jews refrain from davening at the Kosel on Tishah B'Av. The Vaad Leumi, Jewish Agency, and Agudath Israel convened a joint meeting to discuss this request.



דער קדוש אברהם מזרחי.
זאג איין אומגעקומען אין ירושלים ביי די
אונרוהען צוליב דער כוהל-טערבן.

R' Moshe Blau, a well-known advocate for peace stated, "we must go to the Kosel on 9 Av." He added that if the government orders Jews not to go we "must obey its orders."

On Tisha B'av night, several hundred Betar members defied the order and davened there. A couple days later, on Friday afternoon hundreds of Arabs stormed the Kosel Plaza. However, only the elderly *shamas* was there, and they beat him mercilessly. They also destroyed hundreds of siddurim.

During Shabbos (11 Av), [Avraham Mizrachi](#), 17, was murdered in Sanhedria. The authorities at the funeral gave many guidelines and brutally beat back Jews who did not follow them.

That Thursday (16 Av), Harry Luke had the Jewish and Arab leaders meet and come to an agreement but he himself sabotaged it.

On that bitter Friday of 17 Av, the murder and destruction began on Friday but reached its climax on Shabbos with the massacre in Hebron.

THE YERUSHALAYIM MASSACRE

After Friday prayers at the mosque, thousands of Arabs, incited by the Mufti, attacked the Jews in Rechov Yaffo,

Talpiot, Mekor Chaim, and the Old City. But the main force of 8000, streamed out the Damascus Gate towards Meah Shearim and Beis Yisrael. At their head marched a sheikh brandishing a sword, urging his followers to “kill the Jews—men, women, and children.”

As the murderous column neared the Italian Hospital, ear-splitting cries of “Itbah al-Yahud” pierced the air. Against instinct two brave young men, Aharon Alperstein and Binyamin Zev Yarden, volunteered to try to repel the attackers. Alperstein, his long pe’os streaming from beneath his hat, drew a pistol and fired once and killed the sheikh. Their leader fallen, the attackers were now confused and retreated towards the Damascus Gate. Yarden lobbed a grenade into the fleeing mass, causing them to panic completely. Dozens of rioters were trampled to death by their own comrades.

Considering the ferocity of the riots, Jewish casualties were relatively few. 17 Jews were murdered in Jerusalem and 38 were wounded.

EPILOGUE

Epilogue to this painful episode is a chance meeting between R’ Yosef Chaim and Zionist leader Menachem Ussishkin at the Kosel. Ussishkin wrote:

Erev Rosh Hashanah (1929), a month and a half after the fearful riots had befallen us. Jewish Jerusalem was still wrapped in mourner’s black, and the impact of the frightful occurrences had not yet subsided. . . Under these circumstances, visits and steady services at the Kosel had nearly ceased.

Although I was not accustomed to visiting the Kosel on Erev Rosh Hashanah, I decided to go Minchah-time... the entire route to the Kosel had no Jews; only police and Arabs filled the narrow streets.

Soon, I found myself before the Kosel. . . only two Jews were standing there, the shammas and myself. The entire area was filled with British policemen; above,

near the entrance to the Mosque, Arabs stood looking down on the Jewish ruins...

Darkness began to engulf the Kosel, lanterns began to glimmer nearby yet here it was forbidden to light them. Suddenly, I detected the sound of approaching footsteps. Out of a darkened side-street stepped an elderly Jew of stately appearance, attired in traditional festival garb, and accompanied by two men. He approached the Kosel with bowed head and began to kiss its stones with holy fervor. It was R’ Chaim Sonnenfeld. I did not approach him for I did not want to disturb his awesome reverence.

A deep sigh escaped his lips. He raised his head, gave the stones a final embrace, and turned to leave. Then he noticed me and approached.

“How happy I am,” he said, “that I have found here a brother who shares our anguish and pain. In recent years I have not visited the Kosel on Erev Rosh Hashanah for I find walking this distance difficult. (He was then more than eighty years old.) But after such events I felt compelled to come and see this remnant of our past glory.” He suddenly lifted his head, his eyes shining with fervor and hope, and said, “Do not be dejected. This will also pass. Es vet zei nit helphen! (It will not help them.) We will achieve our goals. Not through narrow alleyways and not with bowed heads will we enter this holy place, but through boulevards and with a proud bearing.”

Rav Yosef Chaim then left. The words of this amazing sage at that time and place left an impression upon me that I will never forget.

THE CHEVRON MASSACRE

Among the many murdered in Chevron were 8 American yeshivah boys.

William (Zev) Berman of Philadelphia; David (Aaron Dovid) Shainberg of Memphis (See Yardena Schwartz’s “Ghosts

of a Holy War”); Benjamin (Bennie) Hurwitz and Wolf (Zev) Greenberg of Brooklyn; and Aharon David Epstein, Harry (Tzvi) Frohman, Hyman (Chaim) Krasner and Jacob (Yaakov) Wexler, from Chicago. H’yd. See Mishpachah Sep. 23, 2020, and Aug. 20, 2024.

Ben Gershon (Volensky), Yisrael Shlomo Zalman; 27: B. Kozova, Poland. He studied at the Mir. In 1922 he immigrated to Israel with his family. A year later he married the daughter of R’ Zerach Epstein, head of the Toras Chaim yeshiva. He was chief secretary of Slobodka. On the morning of the riots, he and Eliezer Dan Slonim went to the British police chief to quell the growing tension. Zalman brought his wife to Eliezer Dan Slonim’s home. The murderers stabbed him to death in front of his wife.

Bernstein, Shmuel Isaac; 26: B. Minsk. At 11, he was enrolled in the yeshiva headed by his father, R’ Chaim Eliezer Bernstein for three years. In 1919 he joined Slobodka in Lithuania, which he arrived to on foot. He relocated to Hebron in 1924, with them. On Thursday, two days before the massacre he completed a work on Mesechat Berachos. He was also by Eliezer Dan Slonim when he was murdered.

Broida, Simcha-Yitzhak; 28: B. Vilkomyr, Lithuania, He studied in Telz and other yeshivas. When he returned home R’ Yehuda Shapira, would arrange for him to give shiurim. In 1920 he began his learning in Slobodka in Lithuania. He published Torah ideas. He arrived in Hebron in 1926. He was called “the great and genius rabbi.” He corresponded with the learned scholars of Lithuania on halachic issues. On the morning of the riots, he was in his room at the Segal guest house learning. The mob stoned him to death. His many books and writings were burned by his killers.

Cohen, Shimon; 27: B. Yazd, Persia. At the age of 13 his father died and in 1922, Shimon traveled by foot across what is today Iraq and from there journeyed by wagon to Jerusalem. He was by Eliezer Dan Slonim when the rioters hit him in the back of his neck with an axe. His body wasn’t found until Monday, therefore he was buried apart from the mass grave in the Hebron Jewish cemetery.

Gershon, Esther, 22: Born in Chevron to the pharmacist Ben Zion Gershon and his wife Zehava (who were both murdered). Three months earlier, she became engaged.

Gozlan, Moshe, 19: B. in Hebron (His father Yaakov was also killed). Thursday his relative Leah Gozlan told him that she heard Sheikh Taleb Marka talking to two other Arab dignitaries in Hebron about an impending slaughter of the Jews in the city.

Grodzensky, Leah, 28: B in Hungary. In the spring of 1929, she married Yaakov Grodzinsky from Hebron and the young couple opened a restaurant catering to yeshiva students. She and Yaakov sought protection in the home of Eliezer Dan Slonim. Her husband was murdered with an axe by the rioters. Her father-in-law Rabbi Moshe Grodzinsky was tortured and killed. She was mortally wounded and lay for three days at Bikur Holim hospital in Jerusalem before she passed away.

Grodzensky, Yaakov, 22: B. in Warsaw, he studied at Novardok and Lomza. In 1925, they moved to Israel.

Heichal, Israel-Arieh, 20

Heichal, Eliyahu Dov, 16: B in Lithuania. On the morning of the riots, the mob tried to break into the Heichel's home. Through the window, Israel-Arieh saw a British police officer on horseback, accompanied by another policeman. The brothers left the sealed house and ran towards the officer to beg for help. The mob attacked them with daggers. Eliyahu Dov grabbed onto the police horse as the rioters continued to stab him. The brothers were murdered in front of their mother who saw everything through the window. The yeshiva students who were at the house wanted to come to their aid, but she prevented them saying: Don't go out. It is enough with the blood of my sons. Only when the murderers began shouting threats at the British officer, did he use his gun to fire several shots into the air and dispersed the rioters.

Heller, Zvi Hirsch; 15: B. in Minsk, and came to Israel in 1921 where he studied at the Etz Chaim Yeshiva. In 1928 he joined Hebron. He succumbed to his wounds on August 30.

Kaplan, Yisrael Mordechai, 22: B. in Vilkomir, Lithuania. His father died while he was still a child. On the morning of the riots, he helped barricade the door at the Slonim house. Despite being shot in the stomach, he held the door. He said, "you must be strong, for I am lost" and whispered the prayer of confession. When the mob broke through, he was struck in the head with a sword and his body fell upon his friend, Arieh Dov Lipkin. He thus saved his friend's life as he lay dying over his friend's body.

Kaplinsky, Yisrael Hillel; 22: B. near Bialystok. He began his studies at the famous Kelm Talmud Torah and then at Telz. He was admitted to the Slabodka yeshiva at the age of 16. He was regarded as a genius and his rebbeim called him a "living Torah scroll." His friends called him "Rosh Barzel" because his mind was clear and profound.

Lazarovsky, Deborah, 4½: B. in Vilna. As a toddler, her family arrived in Herzliya before relocating to Hebron.

Lazarovsky, Israel; 17: B. in Maltesch, Grodno County, Russia. In the home of Eliezer Dan Slonim he was murdered along with his father Betzalel, and sister and grandfather Rabbi Aharon Leib Gutlevsky.

Lipin, Dov; 26: B. in Vitebsk, Russia. He studied at the Kelm yeshiva and later the Chofetz Chaim yeshiva.

Mitavsky, Meshulam Shraga; 26: B. near Vilna. When Meshulam Shraga was two years old, his father was murdered by robbers while serving as rabbi of the community. During the riots, the mob came to the home of Rabbi Moshe Grodzinsky where he lived. He was injured by daggers and died five days later at the Bikur Holim hospital in Jerusalem.

Reizmann, Moshe; 17: B. Jerusalem. His father was drafted into the Turkish army where he suffered and died in 1917. At the age of 5, Moshe was sent to the Diskin Orphanage. He was giving Torah lectures by the age of nine and finished high school at age 13.

Ripes, Moshe Aharon; 25: B. Minsk. He came to Hebron in 1925. This is how he and his fellow group members escaped the pogroms of Russia. He helped 32 Jews move to the Land of Israel. In the summer of 1929, he had saved enough money to bring his parents to Israel. His family only learned of his murder after they docked in Israel.

Rosenholtz, Shmuel HaLevi; 24: B. Vawkavysk, Lithuania. A masmid and genius with an amazing memory. He was the first victim of the Hebron pogrom. On Friday August 23, 1929, Shmuel sat alone in the yeshiva learning Gemara. At 4:30 pm, attackers came to the yeshiva. They were disappointed to find only one victim. A large rock crushed his skull, blood splattering everywhere and covering the Gemara. The mob attacked again and pierced his body with daggers. He died learning.

Senderov, Eliyahu Yissachar 17: B. Jerusalem. His older brother and sister were killed in an aerial bombardment. His parents consoled themselves with their youngest son. In 1928, Eliyahu Yissachar was accepted to Hebron. His days began at 2 in the morning and he studied until late in the evening. On the eve of the riots, his mother came to Hebron and asked him to return to Petah Tikva until the situation calmed down. Eliyahu Yissachar reassured her that the incitement would pass, and it was not worth postponing his studies. His mother returned home alone. He was murdered near the Capilouto home.

Segal, Menachem; 3: B. Hebron. His parents Nachman and Mina Segal ran a guest house and restaurant for yeshiva students. On Saturday morning, the mob stormed the house despite assurances from Arab neighbors the night before that they would be spared. The rioters then killed Nachman and Menachem. His mother's fingers were cut off.

Segal, Nachman; 30: B. a village near Lomza. Orphaned as a child. He grew up in the home of the local rabbi. He married Mina in 1925 and the couple immigrated to Israel, settling in Afula. In 1926 they moved to Hebron where they opened a guesthouse. On Friday evening, the day before the massacre, Arab neighbors, including the landlord visited them, ate and drank at the family table and reassured them that in the event of a riot, they would be protected.

Shapira, Avraham; 18: B. Jerusalem. His mother passed away when he was about 7 and he lived in the Diskin orphanage. His friends would call him: "Avraham the true."

Sher, Haim Shalom Alter, 24: B. Rozalia, Lithuania. At 18 he entered Slabodka and moved with them to Hebron in 1924 and was one of the first students to arrive in Israel. He headed the "Gemilut Hasadim Bnei Torah" and was a member of the Kupat Malveh loan fund. He was also at Eliezer Dan Slonim's home.

Slonim, Aharon; 5: B. Hebron. His father, Eliezer Dan Slonim was a manager at the Anglo Palestine Bank and the only Jewish member of the Hebron city council. Fluent in Arabic, he came from a long line of community leaders in the city starting with Menucha Rochel Slonim, daughter of the first Lubavitcher Rebbe. His mother Hannah was daughter of the chief rabbi of Zikhron Ya'akov, R' Avraham Yaakov Orlansky. Many of the victims were in his house hoping for protection from his "friends."

Yagel, Shlomo, 24: B. Slonim, son of the town's rabbi. After his bar mitzvah, he traveled to Lithuania to the Slabodka yeshiva. He learned there for 5 years until he arrived in Israel in 1927.



YESHIVA IS SHORT BUILDING ON LEFT