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Summary

Rabbi Baruch Goldstein was born on April 23, 1923 in Mława, Poland, a small town north of Warsaw. In addition to his parents, he had a sister, Rachel, one year younger and a brother, Shmuel, two years younger. He grew up in a religiously observant, loving family that was proud of its Judaism. He also had an extended family with many uncles, aunts and cousins who were close and with whom he shared Jewish holidays. None of his family survived the war. He experienced Polish antisemitism before the war, especially in the mid- 1930s, but this did not shake his firm Jewish identity. Mława had about 20,000 people of whom about six or seven thousand were Jews. The Jewish community included devotees of Hasidic Judaism, modern orthodox and secular ideologies of Bundism and Zionists of various shades. In 1937 Goldstein went off to Warsaw to study in a Yeshiva but returned to his hometown shortly before the Nazis invaded Poland in September, 1939.

In the beginning of the war, Goldstein's family hid out in the basement to stay safe from the bombardments. After a few days they came out. Jews were humiliated, some killed, and all Jews had to register and wear the Yellow Star. As horrible as it was Goldstein still believed that this would pass as such treatment of Jews had in the past. He continued to study Jewish texts with one of his cousins. By December 1940 a ghetto was formed in his hometown with a Judenrat made up of rabbis and notables from the community. Goldstein viewed the Judenrat as trying to stabilize the situation and helping as best they could. He believed only one, later chief of the Jewish police, to be a collaborator. He was later beaten and killed in Birkenau by prisoners from the ghetto. In April 1942 conditions considerably worsened as smuggling of food into the ghetto was stopped and many people were shot. In November 1942 liquidations began. His mother was in the first transport, since she was over forty and didn't work. He and his brother were in the third transport. Upon arrival in Auschwitz he and his brother were separated. He was selected to work, his brother for immediate gassing. Goldstein and the others selected for work were shaved, sent to showers to be disinfected and tattooed (76303). It did not take long for him to discover the gassings and crematoria and to realize that this brutalization was different from past Jewish experience and that other nations would not come to their rescue. He survived over two years partly through luck in his jobs, partly through his continued faith and partly because he came to believe that he was the only one in his family that survived and could tell their story.

On January 18, 1945, surviving prisoners were taken on a death march that eventually ended at Buchenwald. By then he was very debilitated. He no longer remembered the liberation or his being sent to Theresienstadt where he partially recuperated with the help of former prisoners from his home town. Eventually, he made his way to southern Italy helped by Zionists who were helping people go to Palestine. In the end he was able to communicate with an uncle and aunt in California who had left Poland before the war. Wanting to be with some remnant of his family, he decided to go to the United States in March 1948 instead of Palestine. Goldstein stated that he continued to live with the pain of his experience and the loss of his loved ones. Though he lost his faith for several years after the Holocaust he gradually regained it, coming to believe that only his belief in God could give meaning to his life and that it was not the absence of God, but of man that led to the slaughter of six million Jews and the brutalization of so many

others. The lesson he came away with was for human beings to keep doing something to create “pockets of tolerance”. He has devoted his life in the United States to increasing these “pockets of tolerance”, in part by telling his story to audiences throughout the United States.