

**TISHEBOV LAMENTATION FOR MICHALISHIK<sup>1</sup>**  
**(This manuscript is untitled)**

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ca. Jul 1994

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Aug 2022

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10/XI/94 (10 November 1994)

My wife Rokhl a couple of years ago has visited her place of birth Vilne and, also went to visit my native shtetl Michálishek, 60 kilometers from Vilne, and brought photographs of Michálishek [after] the *Khurbn* (Destruction).

Michálishek, your beauty is unforgettable, with the splendid Vilia that flows through you. Your pine forests, that embellish you. The grassy meadows by the Vilia where they make hay and then the whole town smells of it. The *Smoliarnie* (Turpentine factory) which hovered over the town, and the nice Vilner street with the brick buildings of the Seven Stores. And the Market square, where the large inn of Dovid Krivitski stood, and the gorgeous *shul*<sup>2</sup> and the Jewish cemetery not far away. [*Di*] *Kumsh*e, the football field, the volunteer fire brigade.<sup>3</sup> At the seven stores (*ba di zimm kromen*) there was the *Tarbush shul* (Tarbut school) where I used to learn.<sup>4</sup> There also was the *Beit Medresh*, and there, up on the women's gallery was a large library, and a drama circle. There was the community bath, the *Chalutz*.<sup>5</sup> The whole *shtetl* was burnt out, but for several houses that the *goyim* have rebuilt. What a horror, it is a cemetery, all is utterly ruined (*khorev venekhrev*). And they begun to dump garbage on the cemetery there, when I saw that on the pictures [video]<sup>6</sup> on TV, that great Destruction,

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I could not hold my tears.

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<sup>1</sup> A copy of the original letter written in Yiddish is posted at Dovid Katz's <https://defendinghistory.com/yizker-book-for-mikhaleshik-michaleshik-in-vilna-province-michalishki-belarus> as *Tishebov Lamentation for Michálishik*.

<sup>2</sup> It is unclear (as it is in Urke's *togbukh*) whether Urke was referring to a synagogue or to a school. Ashkenazi Jews often referred to a synagogue as a *shul*, but they also referred to a school as a *shul* (which is what the word means in German).

<sup>3</sup> This is a verbatim translation of a text that, in many parts, is not completely coherent. As given, it is simply a numeration of places at Micháleshik being remembered by Urke. Whether the field where the Micháleshiker boys played football was *di Kumse* (as it may well have been) is unclear.

<sup>4</sup> Again, this is a verbatim translation of the text but perhaps meaning *in addition to the seven stores*.

<sup>5</sup> Probably *HeChalutz/HeHalutz* meaning *armed men*, a Zionist organization called for by Menachim Ussishkio early in the twentieth century as a *Jewish workers organization made up of unmarried young people of sound body and spirit [who] would commit to settle in Eretz Israel for a period of three years [to] render army service for the Jewish people . . . weapons being not the sword and rifle but the spade and the plow*.  
See: <https://free.messianicbible.com/feature/hechalutz-pioneers-israel/>

<sup>6</sup> The video to which Urke refers in this piece written for the benefit of Dovid Katz to be used in a proposed (and still unrealized) Micháleshik *Yizkorbukh* is the one made by Dovid Katz for his father Menke of his first visit to Micháleshik in December 1990. It is available on-line at Dovid Katz's [Lithuanian Yiddish Video Archive](#) (LYVA) listed as *Mikhaleshik (Michalishki) [BY]: My First Visit in 1990 (1) and (2)*. Exactly how Urke came to have a copy is unclear but perhaps it was given to him by Dovid Katz.

The *shtetl* which swarmed and teemed with life (*geshvibelt* and *gegribelt* in the Michálishker language),<sup>7</sup> is completely wiped out by the Nazi Germans (*Yimakh shmeiah*<sup>8</sup> - may their names perish). They must yet pay for what they have done to our people.

The heaps of ashes from our people were taken by the winds to the clouds, and there will come a time when the clouds will release the stored ashes of my people and the flood will befall on you from all sides the way it happened in the Noah's times.

And for you, Dovid Katz, I have no words, for the son of such a father as Menke Katz, who installed upon you the task to immortalize our beloved *shtetl* Michálishek, which you research with such a devotion. I see on TV [on video] how you travel there with Avremele Rein, our fellow townsman, and with some other Jew who is not from Michálishek. And you saw the ruin of the cemetery and the complete desolation, and you visited several times and tried to do something, it's a hard work. Elenke Ravdanovitch<sup>9</sup> told to my wife that you trace the gravestones taken from the cemetery by the *goyim* from the surrounding

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villages to build the house foundations.<sup>10</sup> Other *shtetls* in the area have not been destroyed so completely as Michálishek, but they are dead without Jews. My wife has walked around the streets and she saw no people there. My wife Rokhl remembers Michálishek when her mother Gitl with her sister used to come in the summer to a *dacha* (summer house) from Vilne and she remembers Michálishek for its beauty.<sup>11</sup> All the *shtet un shtetlach* (towns and villages) built by the Jews with so much energy and determination, are washed away forever ... together with their builders, the Jews.

I wrote this on a sleepless night after watching the pictures [videos] on TV. Uri Blacher.

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<sup>7</sup> *Michálishker language*, or as they used so say in Michálishek. Urke was referring to his native *Litvish* which is a dialect of Yiddish. Dovid Katz (to whom this letter was addressed) is a renown scholar of Yiddish dialectology.

<sup>8</sup> *Yimakh sheman v'zichram* (may their names and their memories be erased) is the plural form of *Yimakh shemo v'zichro*, sometimes (as in the case herein) used in its shortened form and often simply abbreviated as *Y.S.*, among the strongest of the Hebrew curses meaning *may his name and his memory be erased*.

<sup>9</sup> It is unclear who Elenke Ravdanovitch was.

<sup>10</sup> Translator Vital Zajka remembers Dovid Katz mentioning that one can see parts or whole gravestones, sometimes with Hebrew lettering visible, in the foundations of some houses in the area.

In October 1991, Dovid Katz, with the help of Siske Shapira and Pieter Ivanov catalogued the tombstones remaining in Michalishk cemetery. Entitled *First provisional list of the remaining tombstones in Michalishk*, it lists the Hebrew text of 98 gravestones, the last being *Shlomoh 5530* (1750). The 15<sup>th</sup> of the tombstones listed is that of *Kasriel son of Reb Uriyoh the Levite 5673* (1914), the father of Uri Blacher.

<sup>11</sup> This sentence appears to suggest that wife Rokhl remembered Micháleshik from summer visits there with her mother and aunt, but possibly with her mother and sister.

I wrote this after the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av,<sup>12</sup> 1994 and it lay there, I had forgotten about it. And then I was going through my papers, and I found it. I send it to you, and if you like it, then *olrayt* (all right), if not--throw it away. Uri Blacher.

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<sup>12</sup> *Tisha b'av* (the 9<sup>th</sup> day of Av on the Jewish calendar) is a fast day in remembrance of the destruction (*khurban*) of both the first and second temples in Jerusalem and is regarded as the saddest day on the Jewish calendar. For many Jews (especially those who survived the Holocaust and their descendants), it is also a day to remember the third *khurban*, the destruction of Jews in Europe also known as the Holocaust or Shoah, although there also exist other dates on which the Holocaust/Shoah is officially remembered.

*Tisha b'av* 1994 [9 Av 5754] was observed based on the Gregorian calendar, from sundown Saturday 16 July to sundown Sunday 17 July, slightly more than fifty years after Urke (and Michálishek) were liberated by the Red Army on Friday 7 July 1944 [16 Tamuz 5704], and slightly more than fifty-one years after his mother, wife, son and daughter were massacred at the labor camp near Kena on Monday 8 July 1943 [5 Tamuz 5703].