

71 OYNEG SHABBES

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*Literally:
Enjoyment of the
Sabbath; here, a
Friday evening
gathering in honor
of the Sabbath.
The Defensywa
(Polish Secret
Political Police)
kept a file on left-
wing party
activists that fell
into the Germans'
hands.*

During three and a half years of war the Ghetto Archive was run by the group called *Oyneg Shabbes*.^o This curious name originated from the planning sessions of the group, which took place on the Sabbath; the whole institution was dubbed *Oyneg Shabbes* for reasons of secrecy. I was the one to lay the cornerstone of the Archive in October 1939. At that time the atmosphere in Warsaw was very oppressive. Every day brought new ordinances against the Jews. People were afraid of political reprisals; they dreaded searches of a political nature. They feared the files of the *Regierungs-Kommissariat* and the *Defensywa*.^o

The scare dragged on for months but proved groundless. The Germans were not looking for individual "criminals." Their aim, which they achieved, was the collective. They aimed at whole groups and professionals, not individuals. In the first months of occupation, especially in January of 1940, mass arrests occurred, and there were probably also mass executions of the intelligentsia. The arrests were made according to a roster of the groups concerned (The Doctors' Association, The Engineers' Union, etc.). They were not linked with any particular searches. In general, the Germans did not carry out any investigations at all but took the easiest course and shot all who fell into their hands.

The frequent and thorough searches that were actually carried out were aimed at something altogether different: finding foreign currency, gold, diamonds, valuables, merchandise and the like. Such searches have been going on during the entire three and a half years of war and continue to this day.

We have dwelt on the nature of the searches because it greatly affected the survival of written documents from the war period. During the earliest months the population was terror stricken and in dread of the searches. Everything was burned, down to innocent books that even Hitler did not regard as *treif*. Most of the socialist literature in libraries and private dwellings was destroyed. The exiled German writers, such as Thomas and Heinrich Mann, [Lion] Feuchtwanger^o and [Emil] Ludwig,^o also suffered. Anticipating searches, people were afraid to write.

The terror kept mounting, but as we have said, the targets were whole groups and classes. The Germans did not care what the Jews did in their own homes. So the Jews began to write. Everyone wrote: journalists, writers, teachers, community activists, young people, even children. The majority wrote diaries, in which daily events were illumined through the prism of personal experiences. A great deal was written, but the largest part by far was destroyed along with the end of Warsaw Jewry in the Deportation. All that remained was the material preserved in O.S. [*Oyneg Shabbes*].

I began collecting contemporary materials as early as October 1939. As director of the Jewish Self-Help (at that time it was the coordinating committee of the

*Author
(1884-1958) of
The Jew Süss and
other historical
novels.*

*Author
(1881-1948) of
many historical
biographies, e.g.,
Napoleon.*

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee was founded in 1914. Isaac Gitterman, who headed the Polish office, was a close friend of Ringelblum's.

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A Left Labor Zionist who survived and helped retrieve the Archive after the war.

welfare organizations), I was in active daily contact with the life around me. News reached me about everything that was happening in Warsaw and its suburbs, because the coordinating committee was an outgrowth of the Joint,^o where delegations came from the provinces almost every day and told about the harsh experiences of the Jewish population in their areas. In the evenings I recorded the mass of information I had heard during the day and supplied footnotes of my own. As time went on, these records grew into a sizeable book, several hundred closely written pages, which provides an overview of that period. After a while I replaced these daily recordings with weekly and monthly reports. I did this when the staff of *OyNEG Shabbes* had grown into a large body.

Already in the first months of my work with O[yNEG] S[habbes] I chose several people, but no great advantage came of this. It was not until I enlisted the cooperation of the young historian Rabbi Shimon Huberband^o that *OyNEG Shabbes* acquired one of its best coworkers. Unfortunately, however, Rabbi Huberband kept his records in the form of marginal notations inside various religious books so that they should pass for textual emendations. Not until later did he let himself be convinced that no danger accrued in his recording everything rather than using the cryptic method he had first employed.

In May 1940 I felt that the time had come to give this very important work a broad social base. Because I had made a good choice of personnel, the work started off in the right direction and was carried on with appropriate scope. The staff of O[yNEG] S[habbes] then elected as its secretary Hirsh W[asser], who continues in this post up to the present.^o Through his political activities, Comrade W., himself a refugee from Lodz, had acquired the experience necessary for this kind of work. His daily contact with hundreds of refugee delegates from every part of the country made it possible to produce the hundreds of monographs on cities, which are the most important treasure in the O[yNEG] S[habbes] project.

Our genial comrade, Menakhem [Mendel Kon, a social and cultural activist] brought the finances up to the required standard. A rich cultural life began developing in Warsaw. Benefit public readings, special forums and concerts were given. This provided a basis for extending and deepening the work of O[yNEG] S[habbes].

The instituting of the ghetto, the confinement of the Jews within walls, gave the archival work still greater opportunities. We became convinced that the Germans cared very little what the Jews did amongst themselves. Meetings were held, in an atmosphere and on subjects that would not have been possible before the war. In every house committee, soup kitchen and meeting place of a social institution, people could say anything that came into their heads without the slightest interference. The Jewish informers of the Gestapo were busy searching for rich Jews, warehouses full of goods, smuggling, etc. They took little interest in politics. We reached the point where illegal editions of work of all political leanings were published with almost complete freedom. People read them openly in cafés, collected money for the press fund, debated with rival publications: in short, they behaved almost as they had before the war. It is not surprising that in this "freedom" that prevailed among the prisoners of the ghetto, the work of O[yNEG] S[habbes] had favorable opportunity for development. The project branched out. Dozens of people joined the staff of O[yNEG] S[habbes], some full time, others part time. The work extended its range but remained conspiratorial.

Survived the war and wrote extensively on Jewish cultural life in the Warsaw ghetto.

A Jewish literary critic who wrote in Polish.

She actually survived.

Breslav and Kaplan, active in Hashomer Hatsair (a left-wing Zionist youth movement), were shot by the Gestapo in September 1942.

Economist M. Linder (born 1911) was shot in the Aktion of April 18, 1942. Bloch (born 1889) was active in the democratic wing of the General Zionists and headed the Keren Kayemet in Poland. He died in Mauthausen.

In order to give our work a legal sanction, we announced to some dozens of writers, teachers and intellectuals that we were holding a contest and offering money prizes. These prizes, which were funded by the Joint with a single cash payment, enriched the Archive with a series of valuable works, such as the work on the Yiddish theater in wartime by Jonas T[urko]w,^o [the well-known writer, stage director and actor]; the monograph on Jewish life in Lemberg under Soviet rule, by [the Zionist activist] Esther M[angel] and her husband Sh[vayge]r; the history of a Jewish family during the war by the poetess Henryka Lazawert; and the monograph on the Kampinos labor camp by Rabbi Huberband.

O[yneg] S[habbes] branched out so widely, and so much valuable material was assembled, that it seemed to all of us that the time had come to make, if not a synthesis, at least a summing up of various problems and important phenomena in Jewish life. If this plan had been realized, it would have been a highly important contribution to the history of the Jews in the days of Hitler. It is to be greatly regretted that only part of the projected work was carried out. We lacked the peace and quiet necessary for a project of such scope and size. The authors who undertook to work on one chapter or another did not have the opportunity to bring their work to a conclusion. More than one writer went to [his or her death at] the *Umschlagplatz* (Mrs. Slopak,^o Rabbi Huberband, [Helena] Szereszewska^{oo}); more than one was killed by a bullet (Menakhem Linder, Shmuel Breslav, Yoysef Kaplan^o); more than one crossed to the Other [Aryan] Side.

The plan was familiarly known as "The Two-and-a-Half Year Plan" because it was intended to provide a survey and summing up of Jewish life in Warsaw during two and a half years of war. The plan was divided into three [in fact four] parts: a general section, an economic section, a cultural-scientific-literary-theatrical section and one dedicated to social welfare. The work, which was started at the beginning of 1942, was directed by an editorial board consisting of the present writer, along with Menakhem Linder and Lipe B[lo]ch.^o

The present writer took on [the task of writing] the first and third sections; Linder, the economic section; and Lipe B., social welfare. The work was intended to have a semilegal character. New forces joined the project, professionals from various walks of life. The work was designed to be more than one hundred printed pages long and one of the most important documents of the war. We wanted to hold our coworkers' attention to certain guidelines and set the direction for them to follow. By this we did not mean to impose any particular approach on the writers of the articles. Articles were written on the Jewish Police, on corruption and demoralization in the ghetto, about social activities, the school system; there was a questionnaire on the life and work of Jewish creative artists during the war, Jewish-Polish relations, smuggling; a questionnaire on the state of the different artisan groups, youth, women, etc.

Seeing that it was difficult to elicit the work that had been assigned to the various authors, we introduced the principle that each author was obliged to give us the source material that he collected in connection with his work; for example, the biographies of young people on which one author was supposed to base his article on youth. In this way interesting material was amassed on various aspects of our wartime situation.

In the course of our work, our experience as to how such a project should be carried out was greatly enriched. Many authors had already made much progress

in their assignment, but just when the two and a half years [of the "plan"] was about to turn into three, a new disaster descended upon [the heads of] the Warsaw Jews, a disaster that cost us three hundred thousand victims—the Deportation.

The work of *O[yneg] S[habbes]*, along with the whole of our social and economic life, was disrupted. Only a very few comrades kept pen in hand during those tragic days and continued to write about what was happening in Warsaw. But the work was too sacred and too deeply cherished in the hearts of the *O[yneg] S[habbes]* coworkers; the social function of *O[yneg] S[habbes]* too important for the project to be discontinued. We began to reconstruct the period of the Deportation and to collect material on the slaughterhouse of European Jewry—Treblinka. On the basis of reports made by those who returned from various camps in the province, we tried to form a picture of the experiences of Jews in the provincial cities during the time of the Deportation. At the moment of writing, the work is proceeding full force. If we only get some breathing space, we will be able to ensure that no important fact about Jewish life in wartime shall remain hidden from the world.

There were two classes of coworkers in *O[yneg] S[habbes]*: full time, who dedicated themselves entirely to the project, and part time, who wrote on a one-time basis about their personal experiences in their city or town and then ended their connection with *O[yneg] S[habbes]*.

Everyone appreciated the importance of the work that was being done. They understood how important it was for future generations that a record remain of the tragedy of Polish Jewry. Some realized that the collection of writings would also serve to inform the world about the atrocities perpetrated against the Jewish population. There were several part-time coworkers who became so involved in the project that they stayed on full time.

Of the several dozen full-time staff, the great majority were self-educated intellectuals, mostly from proletarian parties. We deliberately refrained from drawing professional journalists into our work, because we did not want it to be sensationalized. Our aim was that the sequence of events in each town, the experiences of each Jew—and during the current war each Jew is a world unto himself—should be conveyed as simply and faithfully as possible. Every redundant word, every literary gilding or ornamentation grated upon our ears and provoked our anger. Jewish life in wartime is so full of tragedy that it is unnecessary to embellish it with one superfluous line. Second, there was the matter of keeping a secret; and as is well known, one of the chief failings of journalists is that they reveal secrets. A few able journalists might have been enlisted as time went on, had they not sought contact with the Gestapo informer [Abraham] Gancwajch,^o and although this relationship was not of a "professional" nature, it nonetheless made it impossible for us to associate with the journalists in any way.

Those who helped us with a single piece of work were ordinary people, who had lived the whole of their daily lives in their hometowns. Upon arrival in Warsaw with the horde of 150,000 refugees, they continued to lead their [fellow] townspeople in the so-called *landsmanshaftn*^o organized by the refugee center of the Jewish Self-Help. After a day of hard work at the Committee, distributing bread or performing other kinds of assistance, these delegates of the *landsmanshaftn* spent the evening writing—according to our plan—the history of their town; or they related it to our coworkers, who later wrote it up. This was very arduous work. In the terrible overcrowding of the ghetto, the refugees lived in [housing] condi-

Gancwajch headed the Office to Combat Usury and Profiteering in the ghetto, which was subject directly to the Germans. He vied with the Judenrat for control of the ghetto and fell from power in July 1941.

An organization of Jews hailing from the same town or region.

tions that simply cannot be described. To preserve secrecy under such conditions was a difficult task. It was cold in the winter nights: last winter most of the Jewish houses did not have electricity. Writing necessarily has attendant risks and indescribable difficulties, and to obtain the chronicle of a town required long weeks and months of exertion. It demanded much effort to encourage my coworkers not to be distracted by all these obstacles and to do their work. Let me complete the picture by adding that at the beginning there was a fear of being discovered by the Gestapo informers. More than one manuscript destined for O[yneg] S[habbes] was destroyed as the result of a search in a tenement.

As we have mentioned, our coworkers were mostly [just] ordinary people. Among them were talented individuals whom we spurred on to literary creativity. Had these people not died of hunger or disease, or in the Deportation, we would have been enriched with their new writing talent. And new literary energy would have been infused into a field that was so neglected among us [eastern European Jews]—the writing of memoirs. Because most of our coworkers were suffering great hunger in Warsaw, that city of pitiless Jews, O[yneg] S[habbes] had to provide for them. We lobbied the social institutions to supply them with food parcels.

O[yneg] S[habbes] strove to give a comprehensive picture of Jewish life in wartime—a photographic view of what the masses of the Jewish people had experienced, thought and suffered. We did our best to arrange for specific events—in the history of a Jewish community, for example—to be described by an adult and by a youngster, by a pious Jew—who was naturally concerned with the rabbi, the synagogue, the Jewish cemetery and other religious institutions—and by a secular Jew, whose narrative emphasized other, no less important factors.

Typhus, which claimed thousands of victims among the Jewish population of Warsaw, was rampant among our coworkers. This was not surprising. Our people worked among thousands of refugees, who constituted the largest contingent of its victims. Our people came into contact with returnees from the labor camps, who were the principal carriers of typhus among the population. No one was immunized against typhus because no one could afford a five-hundred- to six-hundred-zloty injection.

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Rabbi Huberband, Hirsh W. and Peretz O[poczynski]^o recovered from typhus. A whole group of our coworkers died of it. [. . .]

Comprehensiveness was the chief principle of our work. *Objectivity* was the second. We aspired to present the whole truth, however painful it might be. Our depictions are faithful, not retouched.

The atrocities of the Germans against the Jewish population predominate in our work. However, quite a lot of material reveals humanity on the part of Germans. There are constant indications, both in the completed essays and in the oral reports, that we must be objective even in the case of our deadly enemies and give an objective picture of the relationship of Germans and Jews.

The same can be said of Polish-Jewish relations.^o Opinions prevail among us that anti-Semitism grew significantly during the war, that the majority of Poles were glad of the misfortunes that befell the Jews in the Polish towns and cities. The attentive reader of our material will find hundreds of documents that prove the opposite. He will read, in more than one report on a town, how generously

See Ringelblum's *Polish-Jewish Relations during the Second World War* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1974).

the Polish population behaved toward the Jewish refugees. He will encounter hundreds of examples of peasants who, for months on end, concealed and fed Jewish refugees from the surrounding towns.

In order to ensure the greatest possible objectivity and to obtain the most exact, comprehensive view of the events of the war as they affected the Jews, we tried to have the same events described by as many people as possible. By comparing the different accounts, the historian will not find it difficult to reach the kernel of historical truth, the actual course of an event.

Our coworkers wrote the truth; and they had an additional reason for doing so. We assured everyone that the material, insofar as it concerned living people, would not be exploited for immediate use. Therefore, everyone should write as if the war were already over. He should fear neither the Germans nor those *kehillah*^o members who were attacked in a report on a given city. Because of this, the material of *O[yneg]* *S[habbes]* is of great importance for the future tribunal, which, after the war, will bring to justice offenders among the Jews, the Poles and even the Germans.

The war changed Jewish life in the Polish cities very quickly. No day was like the preceding. Images succeeded one another with cinematic speed. For the Jews of Warsaw, now closed in within the narrow confines of a shop, the ghetto period seems like a paradise and the pre-ghetto period an unreal dream. Every month brought profound changes that radically altered Jewish life. It was therefore important to capture at once every event in Jewish life in its pristine freshness. What a quantum leap from the pre-Deportation shop to that which came after! The same is true of smuggling, and of social and cultural life; even the clothes Jews wore were different in the different periods. *O[yneg]* *S[habbes]* therefore tried to grasp an event at the moment it happened, since each day was like decades in an earlier time. We succeeded in doing this with many of the events. What greatly aided us in this task was that some of our own coworkers kept diaries in which they not only recorded the facts and happenings of day-to-day life but also evaluated noteworthy events in the ghetto.

As we have already said, the work of *O[yneg]* *S[habbes]* was secret. We had to find ways of hiding the collected materials. In establishing contact with the hundreds of refugees from the province, we were afraid of falling foul of one of the several hundred agents of the "thirteenth,"^o which was then at the height of its "glory." Fortunately, this danger was averted as a result of the extreme cautiousness of *O[yneg]* *S[habbes]* operations. We had a principle: before entering into relations with anyone, we found out first about his character, social and political past, etc. Not until we had this information would we sit down and talk with the person to obtain the news we needed. Very few people knew the real purpose of the conversations we conducted with them. Very often, especially in the last months before the Deportation, our coworkers did not record the facts they had heard in the presence of the informant, but did so afterward. This method of recording lessened the authenticity of the material, but there was no other way to keep the work as secret as it had to be.

In writing the monographs, we duped people into thinking we were collecting data on their native towns for use by the *landsmanshaftn*. Most people played innocent and pretended not to understand what our work was for.

Because of the secrecy that had to be employed in the *O[yneg]* *S[habbes]* work

Ringelblum uses this word as a synonym for the Judenrat.

The popular name for Gancwajch's Office to Combat Usury and Profiteering; see previously.

however far-reaching that work might be, it was still narrow in comparison with the vast treasury of news and facts that could and should have been assembled during the war. "We have to work badly" was the watchword of *O[yneg] S[habbes]*. We had to do all we could to prevent the precious treasure of *O[yneg] S[habbes]* from becoming an open secret.

For this reason we avoided all contact with people from the *kehillah*, even those among them who were honest. An atmosphere of Gestapo seeped from the walls of the Jewish Council. We were afraid to have any dealings with it: that is why we are so poor in its official materials.

What sort of material is preserved in the *O[yneg] S[habbes]* Archive? The most important treasures are the monographs on cities and towns. They contain the experience of a given town from the outbreak of war to the deportation and liquidation of its Jewish community. The monographs, which were written according to our outline, encompassed all aspects of life: economic life, the relationship of Germans and Poles to the Jewish population, the *kehillah* and its activities; social welfare; important episodes in the life of the community, such as the arrival of the Germans, pogroms, expulsions and acts of atrocity perpetrated during Jewish holidays; religious life; work and matters connected with it (labor camps, the obligation to work, impressment of labor, the Labor Department of the *kehillah*, relationship of Germans to Jews at work); etc.

Such was the appearance of a monograph in its general outline. Few monographs, however, conformed to the preceding outline in reality. The authors wrote in various ways. But all the monographs express the tragic sufferings of the Jews in the Polish cities. The monographs were written with a sense of compassion. It is often remarkable with what epic stoicism the authors relate the most tragic facts about their [own] towns. This is the stoicism of the graveyard, the stoicism born of painful ordeals and of the resignation that follows these ordeals. This is the stoicism of people who know that anything can be expected from the Germans, that there is no cause for surprise at the indescribable savageries that have been perpetrated.

The greatest number of monographs comes from former Congress Poland.^o The other regions of prewar Poland are meagerly represented. This is because all the monographs were written in Warsaw, and most of the refugees there had come from former Congress Poland. From Galicia, in particular from Lemberg, we began to receive news only after the outbreak of the Russo-German war, when people who had left in September 1939 or in the following months began returning to the capital. The same applies to Vilna, Slonim, Grodno, Rowno, etc., cities in the occupied eastern territories. From those areas, too, we received news from returnees. An especially large amount of information was brought by the wave of people returning from Bialystok and the Bialystok region.

Because of the conditions of conspiratorial work with people who had never before engaged in historical research, there is no complete record of what exists in the materials of *O[yneg] S[habbes]*. Therefore, it is hard for me to tell how many monographs on cities we possess. It is certain at any rate that they can be numbered in the hundreds. On some cities there are several monographs or even several dozen.

Apart from comprehensive monographs, we sought accounts of *single, significant episodes in the various cities*. We elicited the accounts from those who were involved

The historic heartland of Poland set apart from the rest of the Russian Empire after the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

On November 1, 1939, the Germans arrested fifteen Jewish social activists at the Astoria café in Lodz. All of them were shot.

in the episode in question directly or indirectly, as participants, witnesses or people associated with the episode in some other way. For example, to this category belong the account of the execution of fifty-two Jews from Nalewki 9 after a Jewish underground hero had killed a Polish policeman; and the account of the Savoy Restaurant execution of seven dozen Lodz Jews,⁹ etc. We always endeavored to give the description of each happening the stamp of directness, of true experience. That is why the materials of *O[yneq] S[habbes]* are so deeply imbued with subjective elements and why the narratives are often highly dramatic. The monographs on the cities are not free from this subjective approach.

In order to elicit the most direct report possible of a writer's or narrator's experiences, we dispensed with a set protocol in many cases and told him to relate what had happened in whatever order he thought best. Most of these narratives have the character of *tales of wandering*. A hair-raising example of this genre relates the death march of eight hundred Jewish POWs, of whom half were murdered on the way from Lublin to Biala.

Another narrative of a journey, by a Jewish Red Army soldier who originally came from Warsaw, has its beginnings as far away as Orshe. This route is marked everywhere by rivers of Jewish blood, spilt on the fields of White Russia, the Ukraine, Podolia and Galicia. Another account of the mass slaughters of Jews in the southern parts of Russia is to be found in the wandering narrative of a young man from Warsaw, who strayed to Mariumpol in the Crimea.

"Blood-red Highways"—this is the name we can give to all the tales of wandering of Jewish men and women, young people and children, who roamed constantly from the time the Germans approached their homes until they found a place of rest and settled in a spot from which they could wander no farther. All the highways are stained, like Jewish history, with drops of blood shed by the Gestapo murderers or the Wehrmacht.

An important section of the *O[yneq] S[habbes]* project is on the *labor camps* where thousands of young Jews died. Except for the ghettos, the labor camps are one of the most effective instruments to destroy the Jewish population, robbing it of its best elements: the young people and men of working age. This is not the place to describe the labor camps, but one thing may be said: with a few minor exceptions, the labor camps were designed not for labor but to bring about the death of their inmates. Of those who did not succumb to the dreadful working conditions and inadequate nourishment, those who were not shot or tortured to death by the notoriously inhumane camp guards, most perished after their return home. A great portion of the blame rests on the Judenrats, which did very little to provide for the camp inmates or to keep alive those who returned. Of all the Jewish councils, the Warsaw *kehillah* was the worst in its relationship to the camp inmates. *O[yneq] S[habbes]* succeeded in collecting a rich supply of material on almost all the labor camps, at least the major ones. Among the most important and comprehensive is the exhaustive description of the labor camp at Kampinos, where, on the notorious "Hill of the Dead," over fifty young Jews were buried, shot or tortured to death by the camp guards. This account, compiled by Rabbi Huberband, is one of the most important documents on Nazi brutality toward Jewish laborers.⁹

The section of narratives under the heading "Experiences in Prisons and Concentration Camps" is a meager one, not because few Jews spent time in these places, but for the simple reason that from the very outset, as a rule, a Jew did

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not come out alive. Thousands of Jews were sent to Auschwitz, but not a single one returned. The one document relating to these victims is the telegram to their families, bearing the standard form message that the "guilty party" is dead and his property can be picked up at a specified place. I knew two people who had returned from Dachau. One of them was afraid to relate the slightest thing; the other—incidentally, a very interesting personality described by Rachel Auerbach in her diary—died of hunger.

Those who returned from the prison were [also] so intimidated that they were afraid to tell us the smallest detail. I was able to convince two former prisoners to relate their experiences. One of them was Meylekh Shteynberg, an activist of the Left Labor Zionists. A printer by occupation, he had earned a large income before the war managing the Left Labor Zionist newspaper *Arbeter-tsaytung*, on account of which he had been imprisoned in Polish jails more than once. Now too, in wartime, he was imprisoned in the Pawiak^o for his previous crimes. By playing the role of a simpleton, he succeeded, with great good fortune, in being released from jail. Comrade Shteynberg, together with his family, died during the Deportation.

A Tsarist-built prison situated in the ghetto and used by the Germans to imprison Poles, Jews and other political prisoners.

O[yneg] S[habbes] also preserved materials from the Polish-German war of 1939. The Jewish population remembered well the sufferings of Jews in Germany and other occupied countries. They had a clear presentiment of what Hitler had in store for the Polish Jews. For this reason, the Jewish soldiers fought with extraordinary heroism. This is acknowledged by many leaders of the Polish Army. It was very important for future history, and for the mutual relations of Jews and Poles, to collect the account of *experiences of Jewish soldiers* in the German-Polish war. The collected materials illustrate a crisis in the mood of the Polish population, and for a short time it liberated itself from the plague of anti-Semitism. Defeats on the battlefield and the need to find a scapegoat led to the resurgence of anti-Semitism; for example, in Warsaw it gave rise to the emergence of a new Jablonna,^o i.e., the segregation of Jews from the common military divisions and setting up of unarmed Jewish battalions, detailed to work on fortifications.

Town near Warsaw where, in 1920, an internment camp was set up for Jewish soldiers and officers of the Polish Army.

This mood of anti-Semitism, which was already manifest in the dying days of the Polish State, was roused to full activity in the POW camps, where Jewish soldiers suffered far more from their Polish comrades [in arms] than from the German guards. A host of such facts is recounted in the personal narratives of the Jewish POWs in Germany. The best is by Daniel Fligelman; it is entitled *Die Waren in Deutschland gefangen*.

These narratives inform us of the highly gratifying fact that the Jewish POWs won themselves a reputation in Germany as a diligent and desirable element. "You came to Germany as damned Jews and you are returning home as blessed children of Israel." Such were the words of praise with which a German characterized the changed attitude toward the Jewish POWs. This may well be the main reason why the Jewish soldiers were freed from captivity, whereas the Poles remain imprisoned up to this day.

It is impossible to list all the topics covered by the work of O[yneg] S[habbes]. They are as numerous and variegated as our life. We attempted many subjects but did not find suitable coworkers for all of them. It can, however, be asserted with confidence that there is no important phenomenon of Jewish life in wartime that was not mirrored in the materials of O[yneg] S[habbes]. A subject such as smuggling,

Abbreviation for
dekagrams.

which is always extremely important in wartime, is represented in *O[yneg]* *S[habbes]* by the work of Comrade T[itelman]. In this work we see the tremendous scope of smuggling in Warsaw: during the whole period of the ghetto's existence it saved the four hundred thousand members of the Jewish community from dying of starvation. If the Jews of Warsaw had had to live on the official ration of eighteen deka° of bread a day, all trace of Jewish Warsaw would long since have vanished. Smuggling caused the loss of several Jewish lives every day and, on the eve of the Deportation, a dozen or dozens of lives a day. In the liberated Poland of the future a monument should be set up to smuggling, which, by the way, also saved the Polish population of the city from dying of hunger.

Comrade T[itelman]'s work on smuggling portrays its folkloric aspects—argot, customs, etc.—rather than its economic significance.

O[yneg] *S[habbes]* was in general somewhat unsuccessful in the economic field. Good plans were set up on various economic topics, with detailed outlines, but very few of these were carried out, owing to a lack of suitable coworkers. Economic problems [also] require a tranquil mind. They require time, and the right materials, based on comprehensive investigations: we had neither time nor the proper working conditions. Nonetheless, we did manage to elicit a few valuable articles. One of these, by Comrade W[inkle]r, deals with the *ability of a society in wartime to adapt itself to altered economic conditions*. The author shows how the Jews, in the intolerable conditions of the ghetto, built up a whole series of branches of production to serve the so-called Aryan side. The astonishing skill that the Jews displayed in obtaining raw materials and creative ersatz materials testifies to the tremendous ingenuity of the Jews in finding a way out of the most difficult situations. It is proof of the vitality of the Jewish population, which not only created this production but developed smuggling to a level at which the total production could get "abroad" [i.e., the Aryan side, the consumer].

Of the fragmentary projects in the economics section, we should mention the work of Comrade G[utkowski]° on *the foreign currency trade*—another wartime phenomenon of great importance. Comrade G. succeeded in fathoming the deepest secrets of the foreign currency trade. He describes not only its economic aspect but also its folkways, the argot of the money changers and their customs. He gives highly important tables, which illustrate the fluctuating rates of exchange throughout almost the entire period of the war. It will be an interesting project for the future researcher to find in the events of world politics, in the occurrences in the surrounding Jewish and Polish life and in yet other factors the key to these fluctuating rates of exchange. Incidentally, we learn from the work of Comrade G[utkowski] the "secret" that a foreign currency factory existed on Pawia Street, where "hard ones" (gold dollars) and "pigs" (gold rubles) were forged. After the war, the national banks of the countries in question will no doubt be kept busy dealing with the currency "Made in the Ghetto."

Among fragmentary articles on the subject of the *kehillah*, we find one on *The Jewish Mail*, which was resurrected after a hiatus of more than a hundred years. One of the "mailmen" was the Yiddish journalist, Peretz O[poczynski], who describes for us the hard work of a Jewish mailman and the relationship of the Jewish population to the mailmen, who often had to collect the tax from their neighbors, which the *kehillah* had decreed as an extra payment to be made on correspondence and also on parcels.

Eliyohu
Gutkowski
(1900–1943), an
active Labor
Zionist in prewar
Łódź. Edited the
information
bulletin of O.S.
together with
Hirsh Wasser.

In English in the
original.

Also incorporated
into 73.

See 73.

Ringelblum himself
was instrumental
in setting them
up.

Cf. 74.

The name is
missing.

There are a few articles on the topic of *sanitation*; one of them, by the journalist Peretz O[poczynski], is dedicated to one of the ten plagues of the ghetto, the plague of *Disinfection Brigades*.^o The writer depicts a *paruvke* [delousing] in a poverty-stricken Jewish tenement. The second article, by a member of the Disinfection Brigade, is like a final confession. The author admits and proves, with concrete facts, that the Disinfection Brigades were disseminators of typhus, as a result of the corruption and demoralization that prevailed among them. Peretz O[poczynski] reaches the same conclusion.

The same Peretz O[poczynski] conducted an interesting experiment, which, unfortunately, has not yet been concluded.^o He wrote "The History of a Warsaw Tenement during the War." The starting point was the story of the House Committee, set against a background of the general condition of the tenement and its residents. The work, originally quite restricted in scope, grew into the history of a whole tenement courtyard and its inhabitants, beginning on the eve of the war and continuing through the bombing of Warsaw, the entry of the Germans, the flight [and wanderings on the way] to Russia and so forth. This microcosm may serve as an introduction to the history of Warsaw, the macrocosm.

"The History of the House Committee at 23 Nalewki" described the establishment and activities of one of the most interesting institutions in wartime Poland.^o The House Committees were transformed from social welfare organizations into institutions of a public nature, which fulfilled many different administrative functions. Apart from this, the House Committees played a cultural and social role in introducing various cultural events and entertainment. There was no aspect of Jewish life in wartime that was not associated with the House Committees. They provided for refugees who had returned from the camps, supported various children's institutions, took care of domestic sanitation, procured practical assistance for neighbors, solved various disputes between neighbors and, most important, took responsibility for the fate of impoverished neighbors, for whom the House Committee was the address to turn to in case of need.

Dr. Celina Levin has portrayed one of the oldest and best organized House Committees, which for many months ran its own kitchen and, during the bombing, even bought its own generator for a sum of seven thousand zlotys.

The writer Peretz O[poczynski] describes the activities of another House Committee at 24 Leszno.

In the social welfare section, we should mention the work of the writer Rachel A[uerba]ch on the public kitchen at 40 Leszno. Describing the establishment of this kitchen and depicting its patrons, she comes to the melancholy conclusion that the Jewish Public Kitchen, which at times served up to a hundred thousand diners, i.e., a quarter of the Jews of Warsaw, did not save a single person from dying of hunger.^o And that is why there was such a rapid turnover of diners in the kitchens. While one group took its place in the mass graves of the Warsaw cemetery, the kitchen was filled with a new wave of diners from among the newly returned refugees or the pauperized, whose only food from then on was the thin soup of the People's Kitchen. Among the characters at the public kitchen at 40 Leszno, the most memorable was the man from [?], a refugee from Germany, whose health was ruined in the notorious Dachau Camp. He was not helped by the five or six helpings of soup that the head of the kitchen, the writer Rachel A[uerba]ch, forced into him every day. Deprived of fats and other life-giving nour-

ishment, his organs refused to go on working. Despite all the efforts of Rachel A[uerba]ch, he died of hunger.

This death proved clearly that social welfare can exist only when it has vast financial means at its disposal and can substantially help the needy: social welfare activities of minimal scope are a wasted effort.

A rich area of O[yneg] S[habbes] was the *diaries*. We have already mentioned that during the present war everyone has been writing something, particularly diaries. Some wrote their diaries in a finished form, while others contented themselves with brief notes that could be written up after the war. Most of these diaries were destroyed during the Deportation or because their writers were dragged off to the *Umschlagplatz* and the writings they left behind were destroyed along with the rest of their property. Other diary writers also, because of the continual blockades and need to relocate from one street to another, often lost the greater part of their manuscripts. It is safe to estimate that dozens if not hundreds of diaries were lost, for it should be remembered that only a small fraction of those who wrote diaries admitted to it. Most of them kept it a secret.

See 75.

The diary of the Hebrew writer and teacher [Chaim Aaron] Kaplan,^o written in Hebrew, amounted to thousands of pages and contained a mass of information about what happened each day in Warsaw. Kaplan was not a man of broad interests; but the experiences of every ordinary Warsaw Jew, his sufferings and feelings, his thirst for revenge, etc., are all faithfully conveyed in Kaplan's diary. It is precisely the ordinariness of the writer that makes the diary important. I asked Kaplan more than once to give his manuscript to the Archive, on the guarantee that it would be returned to him after the war. Most reluctantly he was persuaded to let us copy the manuscript. But this was very difficult. A part remains in the O[yneg] S[habbes] Archive. The complete manuscript was lost during the Deportation, together with the author, who was taken to the *Umschlagplatz* [...].

See *The Warsaw Diary of Adam Czerniakow* (New York: Stein and Day, 1978).

The head of the Warsaw Jewish Council, the unfortunate [Adam] Czerniakow, kept a logbook on everything that happened in the ghetto during his tenure.^o The diary or, more correctly, logbook is undoubtedly very interesting, for Czerniakow was in daily contact with the German authorities and also with the Polish municipal authorities, and, as chairman of the *kehillah*, he held the reins of Jewish daily life in his hands.

Professor Mayer Balaban began writing his memoirs during the war, starting with his early childhood. His son, Alexander Balaban, informs me that his father's memoirs reached the war years, on which he wrote a considerable amount. The diary is on the Aryan Side.^o

The diary was lost.

Published in English translation by the Holocaust Library in 1978.

The famous Polish-Jewish writer for children, and no less a famous pedagogue, Dr. Janusz Korczak (Dr. Goldschmidt) kept a diary, which is on the Other Side.^o In this diary, Dr. Korczak, who was a master writer in Polish, has unquestionably left a monument to the tragedy of the Jewish children, whom the German occupation deprived of air, sun, school and bread.

Many materials for a diary were collected by the well-known singer and journalist [Menakhem] Kipnis. After Kipnis's death we endeavored to obtain these materials for O[yneg] S[habbes]. However, his widow would not give her consent. She was taken to the *Umschlagplatz*, and no trace of the materials remains.

The same thing happened to the diary of the journalist Krimski, who was taken during the Deportation.

A Hebrew edition was published by the Ghetto Fighters' House in 1969.

Unfinished sentence in the original.

The so-called Night of Blood, when fifty-two Jews of a wanted list of sixty were shot by the Germans. This Aktion was ostensibly aimed at stopping the underground press.

My daily—later, weekly and monthly—recordings survive. Later these were especially important for the first year of the war, when others did not keep diaries. The weekly and monthly reports supply not only data on the most important events of this period but also an evaluation of them. Because of my social activities, these evaluations are important documents, as they express what the surviving remnant of Jewish society thought about the current questions of its life.

An important document is the diary of A[braham] L[evi]n.⁹ The author has kept his diary for the past year and a half and poured his entire literary creativity into it. Each sentence in the diary is planned. Comrade Levin puts into it everything that is reported, not only about Warsaw, but about the harsh sufferings of Jews in the provinces. Even in the period of the Deportation, when he suffered the terrible loss of his wife Luba, he kept his diary daily, in conditions that seemed impossible either for work or for creativity. Because of the purity and conciseness of style, the exact rendering of facts and its profound content, the diary can qualify as an important literary document that should certainly be published after the war. It was written in Yiddish until the Deportation, and in Hebrew thereafter.

The Deportation, which began on July 22, 1942, marked the start of a new era in the history of the Warsaw Jews. The work of *O[yneg] S[habbes]* also changed in character. There was an interruption of several months in our activities. At a time when one was in constant danger of being caught [and sent off] to Treblinka, there could be no question of the systematic work of collection. Only a few coworkers continued to keep their diaries during the Deportation and note down their daily experiences. As soon as things settled down a bit, we started our work afresh. But it was not possible to write monographs on cities that [°].

The staff of *O[yneg] S[habbes]* made up and continue to make a coherent group, inspired by a united spirit, guided by a single idea. *O[yneg] S[habbes]* is not an association of scholars who compete and struggle among each other, but a coherent group, a brotherhood in which each helps the others and strives toward the common goal. For months on end the pious Rabbi Huberband sat next to the Left Labor Zionist Hirsh W[asser] and the General Zionist Abraham L[evin] at one table. And yet we worked together, in harmony. *O[yneg] S[habbes]* did not forget its coworkers. The faithful father and provider was the ailing Menakhem K[on], who saved both Hirsh W[asser] and Rabbi Huberband from dying of typhus, who cared about the sick child of Comrade G[utkow]ski and who greatly aided the writer and the journalist Peretz O[poczyn]ski, who was always suffering from hunger. The quiet dove, Daniel Fligelman, would have died long since had it not been for the constant and affectionate help of our dear Comrade Menakhem. There were countless occasions on which he pressed me to leave Warsaw after the bloody night of April [18], 1942.⁹ Every coworker of *O[yneg] S[habbes]* knew that his effort and pain, his difficult toil and tribulations, the risk he ran twenty-four hours a day in the clandestine work, carrying materials from one place to another—that all this was for the sake of a noble ideal and that, in the days of freedom, society will correctly evaluate and award it the highest honor of free Europe. *O[yneg] S[habbes]* was a brotherhood, an order of brothers, who wrote upon their banner, "Readiness for Sacrifice; Loyalty of One to Another; Service to Society."

End of January 1943

the water in tin cans from the cellar to the roof and the other to pass the emptied tins back down to the cellar.

I was handed a pair of goggles and took my place on the roof. Facing me was my former home, where I had once had a bed and a pillow on which to lay my head and which was now bursting with flames that were swallowing everything inside. The two of us on the roof had to make sure that every spark that landed there was put out immediately, for the tarred surface was extremely flammable. Because the smoke was heavy, we had to relieve each other frequently.

We were surrounded by a sea of fire. The greatest film directors have not yet succeeded in capturing such a scene; it roared and crackled and shot flame; it deafened us so that we couldn't hear a thing, not even the others shouting to us. We were working with our last measure of strength, we were fighting with superhuman endurance. And we were winning.

After laboring a whole night, we succeeded in saving the building. By morning the danger of being engulfed by the fire had passed.

We looked around us. Of the five hundred who had escaped to this place from neighboring houses, many had died in the fire, suffocated by smoke in the cellars. And we who survived—were we really saved? For the moment, we didn't think about this. Everyone was hard at work, removing flammable material from the house, especially from the paper storeroom: an entire warehouseful of paper had to be thrown into the courtyard and burned. We were all exhausted, our eyes smarting.

And then a bright, sunny day dawned and revealed to us the incinerated houses of the ghetto, of the murdered city.

And let this remain for a memory.

Sunday, the twenty-fifth of April, 1943. In the evening, the Jewish ghetto in Warsaw was set on fire, and tens of thousands of men, women and children perished in the flames; those who tried to escape the fire were shot on the streets and those who miraculously did escape were hunted and tormented for weeks, for months, until they too were annihilated.

And when later, searching through one of the cellars full of suffocated people, I came upon children whose mouths gaped like black, scorched holes and women whose closed fists clutched hair torn from their heads, I wept and clenched my own fists and remembered the millions of clenched fists all over the world, raised against Hitlerism and Fascism.

The Aryan Side of Warsaw, 1943

78 Yizkor, 1943

RACHEL AUERBACH

I saw a flood once in the mountains. Wooden huts, torn from their foundations were carried above the raging waters. One could still see lighted lamps in them; and men, women and children in their cradles were tied to the ceiling beams.

Other huts were empty inside, but one could see a tangle of arms waving from the roof, like branches blowing in the wind waving desperately toward heaven, toward the river banks for help. At a distance, one could see mouths gaping, but one could not hear the cries because the roar of the waters drowned out everything.

And that's how the Jewish masses flowed to their destruction at the time of the deportations. Sinking as helplessly into the deluge of destruction.

Cf. Ps. 137 (3).

And if, for even one of the days of my life, I should forget how I saw you then, my people,^o desperate and confused, delivered over to extinction, may all knowledge of me be forgotten and my name be cursed like that of those traitors who are unworthy to share your pain.

Every instinct is revealed in the mass—repulsive, tangled. All feelings churning, feverish to the core. Lashed by hundreds of whips of unreasoning activity. Hundreds of deceptive or ridiculous schemes of rescue. And at the other pole, a yielding to the inevitable; a gravitation toward mass death that is no more substantial than the gravitation toward life. Sometimes the two antipodes followed each other in the same being.

Who can render the stages of the dying of a people? Only the shudder of pity for one's self and for others. And again illusion: waiting for the chance miracle. The insane smile of hope in the eyes of the incurable patient. Ghostly reflections of color on the yellowed face of one who is condemned to death.

Condemned to death. Who could—who wished to understand such a thing? And who could have expected such a decree against the mass? Against such low branches, such simple Jews. The lowly plants of the world. The sorts of people who would have lived out their lives without ever picking a quarrel with the righteous—or even the unrighteous—of this world.

How could such people have been prepared to die in a gas chamber? The sorts of people who were terrified of a dentist's chair; who turned pale at the pulling of a tooth.

And what of them . . . the little children?

The little ones, and those smaller still who not long ago were to be seen in the arms of their mothers, smiling at a bird or at a sunbeam. Prattling at strangers in the streetcar. Who still played "pattycake" or cried "giddyup" waving their tiny hands in the air. Or called, "pa-pa." O, unrecognizable world in which these children and their mothers are gone. "Giddyup."

Even the sweetest ones: the two- and three-year-olds who seemed like newly hatched chicks tottering about on their weak legs. And even the slightly larger ones who could already talk. Who endlessly asked about the meanings of words. For whom whatever they learned was always brand new. Five-year-olds. And six-year-olds. And those who were older still—their eyes wide with curiosity about the whole world. And those older still whose eyes were already veiled by the mists of their approaching ripeness. Boys who, in their games, were readying themselves for achievements yet to come.

Girls who still nursed their dolls off in corners. Who wore ribbons in their hair; girls, like sparrows, leaping about in courtyards and on garden paths. And those who looked like buds more than half opened. The kind to whose cheeks the very first wind of summer seems to have given its first glowing caress. Girls of eleven, twelve, thirteen with the faces of angels. Playful as kittens. Smiling May blossoms.

And those who have nearly bloomed: the fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds. The Sarahs, the Rebeccahs, the Leahs of the Bible, their names recast into Polish. Their eyes blue and gray and green under brows such as one sees on the frescoes unearthed in Babylon and Egypt. Slender young *fräuleins* from the wells of Hebron. *Jungfraus* from Evangelia. Foreign concubines of Jewish patriarchs; desert maidens with flaring nostrils, their hair in ringlets, dark complected but turned pale by passion. Spanish daughters, friends of Hebrew poets of the Middle Ages. Dreamy flowers bent over mirroring pools. And opposite them? Delicate blonds in whom Hebrew passion is interwoven with Slavic cheerfulness. And the even brighter flaxen-haired peasants, broad-hipped women, as simple as black bread; or as a shirt on the body of the folk.

It was an uncanny abundance of beauty of that generation growing up under the gray flag of ghetto poverty and mass hunger. Why was it that we were not struck by this as a portent of evil? Why was it that we did not understand that this blossoming implied its own end?

It was these, and such as these, who went into the abyss—our beautiful daughters. These were the ones who were plucked and torn to bits.

And where are the Jewish young men? Earnest and serious; passionate as high-bred horses, chomping at the bit, eager to race. The young workers, the *halutsim*, Jewish students avid for study, for sports, for politics. World improvers and flag bearers of every revolution. Youths whose passion made them ready to fill the prison cells of all the world. And many were tortured in camps even before the mass murder began. And where are the other youths, simpler than they—the earthen roots of a scattered people; the very essence of sobriety countering the decay of idealism at the trunk. Young men with ebullient spirits, their heads lowered like those of bulls against the decree spoken against our people.

And pious Jews in black gaberdines, looking like priests in their medieval garb: Jews who were rabbis, teachers who wanted to transform our earthly life into a long study of Torah and prayer to God. They were the first to feel the scorn of the butcher. Their constant talk of martyrdom turned out not to be mere empty words.

And still other Jews. Broad shouldered, deep voiced, with powerful hands and hearts. Artisans, workers. Wagon drivers, porters. Jews who, with a blow of their fists, could floor any hooligan who dared enter into their neighborhoods.

Where were you when your wives and children, when your old fathers and mothers were taken away? What happened to make you run off like cattle stampeded by fire? Was there no one to give you some purpose in the confusion? You were swept away in the flood, together with those who were weak.

And you sly and cunning merchants, philanthropists in your short fur coats and caps. How was it that you didn't catch on to the murderous swindle? Fathers—and mothers of families; you, in Warsaw. Stout women merchants with proud faces radiating intelligence above your three chins, standing in your shops behind counters heaped with mountains of goods.

And you other mothers. Overworked peddler women and market stallkeepers. Disheveled and as anxious about your children as irritable setting hens when they flap their wings.

And other fathers, already unhorsed, as it were. Selling sweets from their wobbling tables in the days of the ghetto.

What madness is it that drives one to list the various kinds of Jews who were destroyed?

Grandfathers and grandmothers with an abundance of grandchildren. With hands like withered leaves; their heads white. Who already trembled at the latter end of their days. They were not destined simply to decline wearily into their graves like rest-seeking souls; like the sun sinking wearily into the ocean's waves. No. It was decreed that before they died they would get to see the destruction of all that they had begotten; of all that they had built.

The decree against the children and the aged was more complete and more terrible than any.

Those who counted and those who counted for less. Those with aptitudes developed carefully over countless generations. Incomparable talents, richly endowed with wisdom and professional skill: doctors, professors, musicians, painters, architects. And Jewish craftsmen: tailors—famous and sought after; Jewish watchmakers in whom gentiles had confidence. Jewish cabinet makers, printers, bakers. The great proletariat of Warsaw. Or shall I console myself with the fact that, for the most part, you managed to die of hunger and need in the ghetto before the expulsion?

Ah, the ways of Warsaw—the black soil of Jewish Warsaw.

My heart weeps even for the pettiest thief on Krochmalna Street; even for the worst of the knife wielders of narrow Mila, because even they were killed for being Jewish. Anointed and purified in the brotherhood of death.

*Called khosedlekh
in Warsaw slang.*

Ah, where are you, petty thieves of Warsaw; you illegal street vendors° and sellers of rotten apples. And you, the more harmful folk—members of great gangs who held their own courts; who supported their own synagogues in the Days of Awe; who conducted festive funerals and who gave alms like the most prosperous burghers.

Ah, the mad folk of the Jewish street! Disordered soothsayers in a time of war.

Ah, bagel sellers on winter evenings.

Ah, poverty stricken children of the ghetto. Ghetto peddlers; ghetto smugglers supporting their families; loyal and courageous to the end. Ah, the poor barefoot boys moving through the autumn mire with their boxes of cigarettes, "Cigarettes! Cigarettes! Matches! Matches!" The voice of the tiny cigarette seller crying his wares on the corner of Leszno and Karmelicka Streets still rings in my ears.

Where are you, my boy? What have they done to you? Reels from the unfinished and still unplayed preexpulsion film, "The Singing Ghetto," wind and unwind in my memory.° Even the dead sang in that film. They drummed with their swollen feet as they begged: "Money, ah money, Money is the best thing there is."

*A Nazi
propaganda film
made in the ghetto
in May 1942.*

The Tokheho °.

There was no power on earth, no calamity that could interfere with their quarrelsome presence in that Jewish street. Until there came that Day of Curses°—a day that was entirely night.

Hitler finally achieved his greatest ambition of the war. And finally, his dreadful enemy was defeated and fell: that little boy on the corner of Leszno and Karmelicka Streets; of Smocza and Nowolipie; of Dzika Street. The weapons of the women peddlers reached to every market square.

What luxury! They stopped tearing at their own throats from morning until night. They stopped snatching the morsels of clay-colored, clay-adulterated bread from each other.

The first to be rounded up were the beggars. All the unemployed and the homeless were gathered up off the streets. They were loaded into wagons on the first morning of the Deportation and driven through the town. They cried bitterly and stretched their hands out or wrung them in despair; or covered their faces. The youngest of them cried, "Mother, mother." And indeed, there were women to be seen running along both sides of the wagons, their headshaws slipping from their heads as they stretched their hands out toward their children, those young smugglers who had been rounded up along the walls. In other of the wagons, the captives looked like people condemned to death who, in the old copperplate engravings, are shown being driven to the scaffold in tumbrils.

The outcries died down in the town, and there was silence. Later on, there were no cries heard. Except when women were caught and loaded onto the wagons and one could hear an occasional indrawn hiss, such as fowl make as they are carried to the slaughter.

Men, for the most part, were silent. Even the children were so petrified that they seldom cried.

The beggars were rounded up, and there was no further singing in the ghetto. I heard singing only once more after the deportations began. A monotonous melody from the steppes sung by a thirteen-year-old beggar girl. Over a period of two weeks she used to creep out of her hiding place in the evening, when the day's roundups were over. Each day, looking thinner and paler and with an increasingly brighter aureole of grief about her head, she took her place at her usual spot behind a house on Leszno Street and began the warbling by whose means she earned her bit of bread. . . .

Enough, enough . . . I have to stop writing.

No. No. I can't stop. I remember another girl of fourteen. My own brother's orphan daughter in Lemberg whom I carried about in my arms as if she were my own child. Lussy! And another Lussy, older than she, one of my cousins who was studying in Lemberg and who was like a sister to me. And Lonye, my brother's widow, the mother of the first Lussy, and Mundek, an older child of hers whom I thought of as my own son from the time that he was orphaned. And another girl in the family, a pianist of thirteen, my talented little cousin, Yossima.

And all of my mother's relatives in their distant village in Podolia: Auntie Bayle; Auntie Tsirl; Uncle Yassy; Auntie Dortsy, my childhood's ideal of beauty.

I have so many names to recall, how can I leave any of them out, since nearly all of them went off to Belzec^o and Treblinka or were killed on the spot in Lanowce and Ozieran in Czortkow and in Mielnica. In Krzywicz and elsewhere.

Absurd! I will utter no more names. They are all mine, all related. All who were killed. Who are no more. Those whom I knew and loved press on my memory, which I compare now to a cemetery. The only cemetery in which there are still indications that they once lived in this world.

*A death camp in
Poland.*

I feel—and I know—that they want it that way. Each day I recall another one of those who are gone.

I.e., hiding on the Aryan Side.

And when I come to the end of the list, segment by segment added to the segments of my present life in the town,^o I start over again from the beginning, and always in pain. Each of them hurts me individually, the way one feels pain when parts of the body have been surgically removed. When the nerves surviving in the nervous system signal the presence of every finger on amputated hands or feet.

Not long ago, I saw a woman in the streetcar, her head thrown back, talking to herself. I thought that she was either drunk or out of her mind. It turned out that she was a mother who had just received the news that her son, who had been rounded up in the street, had been shot.

"My child," she stammered, paying no attention to the other people in the streetcar, "my son. My beautiful, beloved son."

I too would like to talk to myself like one mad or drunk, the way that woman did in the Book of Judges^o who poured out her heart unto the Lord and whom Eli drove from the Temple.

A reference to Hannah's prayer in 1 Sam. 1, not in Judges. Eli did not drive Hannah from the Temple.

I may neither groan nor weep. I may not draw attention to myself in the street.

And I need to groan; I need to weep. Not four times a year. I feel the need to say *Yizkor* four times a day.

Yizkor elohim es nishmas avi mori ve'imi morasi . . . Remember, Oh Lord, the souls of those who passed from this world horribly, dying strange deaths before their time.

And now, suddenly I seem to see myself as a child standing on a bench behind my mother who, along with my grandmother and my aunts, is praying before the east wall of the woman's section of the synagogue in Lanowce. I stand on tiptoe peering down through panes of glass at the congregation in the synagogue that my grandfather built. And just then the Torah reader, Hersh's Meyer-Itzik, strikes the podium three times and cries out with a mighty voice so that he will be heard by men and women on both sides of the partition and by the community's orphans, boys and girls, who are already standing, waiting for just this announcement: "We recite *Yizkor*."

The solemn moment has arrived when we remember those who are no longer with us. Even those who have finished their prayers come in at this time to be with everyone else as they wait for the words, "We recite *Yizkor*."

And he who has survived and lives and who approaches this place, let him bow his head and, with anguished heart, let him hear those words and remember his names as I have remembered mine—the names of those who were destroyed.

At the end of the prayer in which everyone inserts the names of members of his family there is a passage recited for those who have no one to remember them and who, at various times, have died violent deaths because they were Jews. And it is people like those who are now in the majority.

Aryan Side, of Warsaw,
November 1943

And on the street a package
Crushed and sticky with blood!
JUNOS ARE ROUND . . .

Warsaw ghetto, January 1943

88 Abraham Sutzkever

*This 5-part
sequence was
reconstructed from
the original
manuscript. In
Sutzkever's printed
works, they appear
scattered.*

Faces in the Mire: I

Night came, turning our abstractions grey.
Doves were owls, white became black.
Our wounds were soldered by the steaming salts of day,
Mocking our dream, smokily calling it back.

Are you trembling earth? Are you as we are: torn?
Does the odor of martyrs tease your sensual memories?
Devour us then, the overconfident, the cursed-when-born.
Devour our generation with its idiot ideologies.

Still thirsty? We'll overflow for you, burst like tires.
We'll pour the gold that is our flesh into your ruts.
A nightmare will go at our faces in the mire,
Faces in the mire, above the dusk, above the wretched huts.

5

10

In the Cell: II

The darkness wants to strangle me.
Invisible, leaden mice gnaw my sanity.
I toss in this awful world of stone,
Dreaming of something human, something known!

I grope and a morsel of glass comes to hand,
The moon pliered in its transparent sand.
I forget whether or not I'm ill:
A hand chipped this, fleshy, palpable.

Testing the lunar edge warily,
I ask: if I offered myself would you want me?
But the glass is freezing, my blood hot.
The blade, my throat: should I? No, not.

5

10

Leaves of Ash: III

I am boiling tea with your letters,
 My only treasure.
 All that's left
 Of their touching measure
 Are leaves of ash,
 Fragile, wormed with glow,
 That only I can read now as I ask:
 Am I really boiling tea with your letters,
 My only treasure?

5

Wind: stay stiller than a gravestone!
 Shadow: don't dare move!
 A single breath
 Would scatter to the jealous world
 All the healing beauties
 Of my treasure.

10

How dear you are to me in these leaves of ash.
 How radiantly you're fading in these leaves of ash
 That only I can read now as I ask:
 Am I really boiling tea with your letters,
 My only treasure?

20

Because I Was Drinking Wine: IV

Because I was drinking wine, friend, and it was late,
 While you waited for me to come set you free,
 My words revolt with incandescent hate,
 Slicing the curtains of my thoughts relentlessly.

Because I didn't stop my heart like a stunned steer,
 Nor let your slaughterer's frenzy drive me insane,
 Worms swarm from the apple of my cheer,
 And my stale laughter brands me like the mark of Cain.

5

A Voice From the Heart: V

A voice from the heart commands me:
 Believe in that degraded term, the right.
 A lion's however distant progeny
 Must shrug off slavery and fight.

There is a way, it arises
 In the forests of recollection.
 There is also an ancient virus
 Still capable of infection.

5

To make sense of your terrible pain
 You must clarify your hells.

10

Our grandfathers shake mythic chains,
Our sons wake to alarm bells.

There is a path through error:
Redeem history's omission.
Death excuses terror
But never submission.

15

Vilna, June-July 1941

I Lie in This Coffin

I lie in this coffin
the way I would lie
in a suit made of wood,
a bark
tossed on treacherous waves,
a cradle, an ark.

5

From here, where all
flesh is taken to eternity,
I call
to you, sister,^o and you
in your distance
still hear me.

10

*A reference to his
sister who died in
Siberia during
Sutzkever's
childhood.*

Something stirs
in my coffin,
a presence; you're here:
I know you by the stars
of your eyes, your light, your
breath, your tear.

15

This is the order of things,
and the plot:
today here, tomorrow not.
But now, in my coffin,
my suit made of wood,
my speech lifts,
my speech sings.

20

25

Vilna, August 30, 1941

Pray

I think I just thought of a prayer,
But I can't imagine who might be there.
Sealed in a steel womb,
How can I pray? To whom?

Star, you were once my dear friend,
Come, stand for the words that have come to an end.

5

But dear, deaf star,
I understand, you're too far.

Still, someone in me insists: pray!
Tormenting me in my soul: pray!
Prayer, oh wildest surmise,
I still babble you till sunrise.

10

Vilna ghetto, January 17, 1942

A Load of Shoes

The cartwheels rush,
quivering.
What is their burden?
Shoes, shivering.

5

The cart is like
a great hall:
the shoes crushed together
as though at a ball.

A wedding? A party?
Have I gone blind?
Who have these shoes
left behind?

10

The heels clatter
with a fearsome din,
transported from Vilna
to Berlin.

15

I should be still,
my tongue is like meat,
but the truth, shoes,
where are your feet?

20

The feet from these boots
with buttons outside
or these, with no body,
or these, with no bride?

25

Where is the child
who fit in these?
Is the maiden barefoot
who bought these?

Slippers and pumps,
look, there are my mother's:
her Sabbath pair,
in with the others.

30

The heels clatter
with a fearsome din,
transported from Vilna
to Berlin.

35

Vilna ghetto, January 1, 1943

To My Child

Because of hunger
or because of great love—
your mother will bear witness—
I wanted to swallow you, child,
when I felt your tiny body
cool in my hands
like a glass
of warm tea.

5

Neither stranger were you, nor guest.
On our earth, one births
only oneself, one links
oneself into rings and the rings into chains.

10

Child, the word for you would be love
but without words you *are* love,
the seed of dream,
unbidden third,
who from the limits of the world
swept two of us
into consummate pleasure.

15

How can you shut your eyes,
leaving me here
in the dark world of snow
you've shrugged off?

20

You never even had your own cradle
to learn the dances
of the stars.

25

The shameful sun, who never shone
on you, should shatter like glass.
Your faith burned away
in the drop of poison
you drank down as simply
as milk.

30

I wanted to swallow you, child,
to taste
the future waiting for me.
Maybe you will blossom again
in my veins.

35

I'm not worthy of you, though.
I can't be your grave.
I leave you
to the summoning snow,
this first respite.
You'll descend now
like a splinter of dusk
into the stillness,
bringing greetings from me
to the slim shoots
under the cold.

for wanting to smuggle a
flower through the
gates
my neighbor 40
had the price of
7 carboys
45
now two
blue petals
with their nucleus
of solid
recesses
one such a
sign of spring
returning
10
my neighbor
hears
15
his ears
with war
spring respite
My-cush his
March
with me
much
fear-ly
10

Vilna ghetto, January 18, 1943

Last Hour

Last hour, when you come, bring strength enough
For me to see a palace in ruined masonry,
To drive my final moments to their given end,
To tap a message to my prisoner soul: Be free!

Last hour, bring with you such nourishing belief
That in a single tear seven suns will be afire,
And in the resurrected dust, the seeds of heroes
Will germinate their will and terrible desire.

Last hour, stir up storms in me,
Bleach out my wrongs, untangle my cacophony.
Form me like molten gold into your mold,
Sear my chaff away, leave me in melody.

Transform to love my weary self-disgust.
Let my corrosive sorrow have been withstood.
Exalt me to believe that the most wretched life,
If only in its longings, is still good.

Dated "March 2,
1943" in all
published versions.

How?

How and with what will you fill
Your cup on the day you're free?
Will you in your joy still
Hear the scream of the past
Where the skulls of chained days
Clot in bottomless pits?

Searching hopelessly
For the keys to jammed locks,
You'll chew pavement like bread
And think it was better before,

Vilna ghetto, January 26, 1943

And time will gnaw your hand gently
Like a cricket under the floor.

In a rubble-encrusted old city
Your memory will be like a hole,
And your glance will burrow furtively
Like a mole, like a mole.

15

Vilna ghetto, February 14, 1943

Kernels of Wheat

Caves, crack asunder.
Split open under my blow!
Before a bullet can get me—
I bring you a sack full of gifts.

Aged purposeful pages
With purple on silver hair,
Words on parchment, created
Through thousands of torturous years.

5

Like a hen sheltering its chick—
I run with the Jewish word,
Rummaging in every courtyard,
So its spirit won't be extinguished.

10

Stretch your arms into the bonfire
And rejoice: The main thing is this:
I still have Amsterdam, Worms,
Livorno, Madrid, and YIVO . . .

15

Oh, how I am tormented by a sacred page
Tossed about in a smoky wind!
Secret songs are choking me:
Conceal us in your labyrinth.

20

I dig holes and plant manuscripts . . .
And when despair overwhelms me
My mind turns to Egypt, to
A story about kernels of wheat.

I tell it to the stars:
Once upon a time, a king
Built his pyramid beside the Nile
So he could rule there after his death.

25

He ordered his servants
To pour wheat
Into his golden coffin—as a memorial
Of our earthly world.

30

Nine thousand years did suns
Rise and set in the desert
Before the kernels were discovered 35
In the pyramid.

Nine thousand years had passed!
But when the kernels were planted,—
They bloomed in gardens 40
Of sunny stalks.

Maybe the words, too, will wait patiently
To see the light,
That predestined hour
When they, too, burst unexpectedly into flower.

And like the age-old seed 45
That unravelled itself in the stalk,—
So the words, too, will nourish,
And will belong
To the People in its eternal journey.

Vilna ghetto, March 1943

*Declaimed at a
memorial gathering
for Liza Magun,
the U.P.O.'s
main liaison and
courier, who was
caught by the
Gestapo and killed
in Ponar on
February 17,
1943.*

Song For the Last

You aren't moths, moths have power
enough to throw themselves into flame.
And not threshed grain
nor grass trampled underfoot.
Don't look in the mirror 5
if you want to know who you are:
tear a chunk of raw time off
and sniff it: it is your death-odor.

Brothers, lift your heads, your sick
heads sinking 10
like the sun: I want to see you as you sink
hearing at least what I'm thinking.
Stay naked for now, stripped of the present.
Read yourself, as condemned men
read scratches in the walls of their cell. 15
Do you think your pain will surmount its moment?

Yesterday you knew what you meant,
and hardly bothered to think what came next.
You built foundations on a breeze and a river
and on the gods of quicksand. 20
And envy, of course, and competition,
trumping your friend's hand.
And didn't know that thorns were your element,
and venom, and that your days would be perdition.

An animal in danger 25
 will tear its own flesh to get free:
 you never felt the trap close,
 you thought the arrow could no longer see.
 Millions at a time you were no one's
 but believed in your individuality. 30
 The clear words of your language were illicit;
 you licked the honies of alien spit.

And when a thousand years of enmity
 has walled the light out completely,
 and cursed you, last generation, 35
 wicks in your nation's memorial candles;
 when each of you is a separate city
 cemented together out of kith's congealed faces,
 has destruction's furious violation
 dared your footsteps to leave traces? 40

Have you broken apart, like a forest
 when the night's hordes of lightning attack?
 And felt the earth tremble and crack
 and knew no one was there to protect you?
 You haven't changed at all, 45
 your sense and feeling have left you.
 You're your nation's nettle, not its fruit,
 your treasure is trash, your well webbed with disuse.

You loathe your filthy selves and envying
 your enemy guide his hands to your throat. 50
 You kiss his bloody conscience clean
 while you attend his gentle permissions.
 If you could believe, still, and pray,
 it would be him who'd have your ablutions.
 You find your origins disgusting and don't see 55
 that it's you yourselves who've filthied the clay.

I fear the freedom you'll find finally
 more than the three seconds I propose for myself.
 Will you be admitted to that hallowed land
 where stars ignite lamps on the shelf? 60
 I beat my skull on stones to find consolation
 for you in the fragments, you, the last,
 for I, too, am a letter in your book,
 my sun, too, is spring's leprous outcast.

Brothers, help me find what can console: 65
 My head is broken, like blank slate.
 Listen closely, remember its name,
 help find how it might propagate.
 It has to exist! How else lift the flags

of all our tomorrow's golden suns?
No, you're weak, your soul sags,
you, the disgustingly patient, last of millions.

70

Vilna ghetto, March 16, 1943

Beneath the Whiteness of Your Stars

Beneath the whiteness of your stars,
Stretch out toward me your white hand;
All my words are turned to tears—
They long to rest within your hand.

See, their brilliant light goes darker
In my eyes, grown cellar-dim;
And I lack a quiet corner
From which to send them back again.

5

Yet, O Lord, all my desire—
To leave you with my wealth of tears.
In me, there burns an urgent fire,
And in the fire, there burn my days.

10

Rest, in every hole and cellar
Weeps, as might a murderer.
I run the rooftops, even higher,
And I search—where are you? Where?

15

Past stairs and courtyards I go running,
Chased by howling enemies.
I hang, at last, a broken bowstring,
And I sing to you—like this:

20

Beneath the whiteness of your stars,
Stretch out toward me your white hand;
All my words are turned to tears—
They long to rest within your hand.

*Dated according to
the original
manuscript.*

Vilna ghetto, May 22, 1943°

Moderato



Un - ter day - ne vay - se shte - rn Shtrek tsu mir dayn vay - se hant, -



May - ne ver - ter zay - nen tre - rn, Vi - ln ru - en in dayn hant. -



Ze, es tun - klt zey - er fin - kl — In mayn ke - ler - di - kn blik, —

Un ikh hob gor - nit keyn vin - kl Zey tsu shen - ken dir tsu - rik,

Un ikh hob gor - nit keyn vin - kl Zey tsu shen - ken — dir tsu - rik.

Charred Pearls

My words tremble so violently they moan,
Like broken hands they plead, entreat,
Helplessly hone
Their edges like fangs lusting for meat.

I'm moved no longer by your howls,
Oh written word, fanner of the world's fire:
Instead, charred pearls like emptied vowels
Gaze blankly at me from their pyre.

And not even I, dead already to my death,
Can recognize this woman in flame.
Of all her pleasures, body, being, breath,
Charred pearls are left, not even a name.

5

10

Vilna ghetto, July 28, 1943

No Sad Songs Please

No sad songs please:
Sad songs just tease
At sorrow.
Words, too, betray,
And names,
Forever,
And tomorrow.

5

Look out at the snow:
In memory's art
Is unexpected
Radiance, and in

10

The speeches of the heart
You yourself are
Resurrected.

Stretch your hands out
To that whiteness:
In its cold and burning
Veins
You'll feel returning
The redeeming life
It contains.

15

20

The Sutzkevers,
along with a
group of U.P.O.
fighters, left the
ghetto on
September 14,
1943. The Narocz
forests, located 90
miles east of
Vilna, were a
staging ground for
partisan activity
under the
command of
F. Markov.

Narocz forests,° February 5, 1944

89 Rabbi Kalonymus Shapiro

From Fire of Holiness

Parashat Mishpatim [Exod. 21:1–24:18]

(Shekalim [additional reading of Exod. 30:11–16])

Exod. 21:1.

NOW THESE ARE THE ORDINANCES WHICH YOU SHALL SET BEFORE THEM.^o
We find a passage in *Berakhot* (3a):

In Hebrew,
bat kol.

The words "to
Me" were omitted
from all standard
editions of the
Talmud; they do
appear in the Ein
Ya'akov and
Menorat Hama'or.

In Hebrew,
keveyakhol, if one
could say such a
thing.

Following the *keri*
of the Masoretic
text.

B. Sanhedrin 46a.

No such source
has yet been
located.

Here Rabbi
Shapiro begins his
own interpretation.

Note the radical
twist on the
concept of divine
transcendence.

Further may mean
that prior to this
incident Rabbi
Yosi had already
attained a level of
self-annihilation.

As the borders of
the self recede, the
mystic perceives
the divine
suffering.

Rabbi Yosi says, I was once [traveling on the road], and I entered into one of the ruins of Jerusalem in order to pray. Elijah of blessed memory appeared [and waited for me at the door till I finished my prayer. After I finished my prayer,] he said to me: [Peace be with you, my master! and I replied: Peace be with you, my master and teacher! And he said to me: . . . My son, what sound did you hear in this ruin? I replied:] I heard a divine voice,^o cooing like a dove, and saying: Woe to Me^o for I have destroyed My house and burnt My temple and have exiled My children [among the nations of the world.] He said to me: [By your life and by your head! Not in this moment alone does it so exclaim,] but thrice each day does it exclaim thus! And more than that, whenever the Israelites go into the synagogues and schoolhouses and respond "May His great name be blessed!" the Holy One; blessed be He, as it were,^o shakes His head and says: [Happy is the king who is thus praised in this house! Woe to the father who had to banish his children, and woe to the children who had to be banished from the table of their father!]

Inspect this passage at its source. We have already raised the following point about the passage. Why did Rabbi Yosi hear the voice only when he prayed in the ruin? Does not the Holy one, blessed be He, speak thus [as specified in the passage] three times every day?

Now the Israelite who is tormented by his afflictions thinks that he alone suffers, as if all his personal afflictions and those of all Israel do not affect [God] above, God forbid. Scripture states, however, IN ALL THEIR TROUBLES HE WAS TROUBLED (Isa. 63:9)^o; and the Talmud states: When a person suffers, what does the Shekhinah say? 'My head is too heavy for me, My arm is too heavy for Me.'^o Our sacred literature tells us that when an Israelite is afflicted, God, blessed be He, suffers as it were much more than the person does.^o It may be^{oo} that since He, blessed be He, is not subject to any limitation—for which reason no conception of Him is possible in the world—therefore His suffering from Israel's troubles is also boundless.^o It is not merely that it would be impossible for a person to endure the experience of such great suffering, but that even to conceive of His suffering, blessed be He—to know that He, blessed be He, does suffer, to hear His voice, blessed be He: 'Woe to Me for I have destroyed My house and have exiled My children'—is impossible, because He is beyond the confines of the human. It is only when Rabbi Yosi entered one of the ruins of Jerusalem so that his selfhood was further^o annihilated, and the constricted, bounded aspect of his being was further destroyed, that he heard the voice of the Holy One, blessed be He.^o Even then he only heard a bit of it: he heard a divine voice that merely cooed like a

I.e., if God roars like a lion over the Hurban, then to hear a voice cooing like a dove represents but a partial revelation.
See 14.

dove, whereas Scripture states HE SURELY ROARS OVER HIS HABITATION (Jer. 25:30)—like the roar of a lion, as it were, over the destruction of the Temple.^o

This explains why the world remains standing on its foundation and was not destroyed by God's cry of suffering over the afflictions of His people and the destruction of His house: because His great suffering never penetrated the world. This may be what underlies the passage found in the Proem of Midrash Lamentations Rabbah [which speaks of God's weeping at the destruction of the Temple].^o The angel said:

"Sovereign of the Universe, let me weep, but don't You weep." God replied to him, "If you don't let me weep now, I will go to a place where you have no permission to enter, and weep there," [as Scripture says, BUT IF YOU WILL NOT HEAR IT,] MY SOUL SHALL WEEP IN SECRET (Jer. 13:17).

Citing the passage from memory, Rabbi Shapiro added the attribution to an angel.

Inspect this passage at its source. Furthermore, in *Tanna debe Eliyahu Rabbah* [chap. 17], we find that the angel said, "It is unseemly for a king to weep before his servants."^o But if the issue was merely that of the unseemliness of a king weeping before his servants, then the angel could have gone away; then [God's weeping] would no longer be 'before his servants.' In light of what we've stated above, however, the passage suggests the following: what the angel meant to say was that it is unseemly, with respect to the king's servants, for the king to *need* to weep. Rather, since His suffering, as it were, is boundless and vaster than all the world—for which reason it has never penetrated the world and the world does not shudder from it—therefore the angel said, "Let me weep so that You won't need to weep." In other words, since angels are also messengers of God—for it is through them that He performs His actions, that is why the angel wanted the divine weeping to be manifested *in the world*; the angel wanted to transmit the weeping *into* the world. For then God would no longer need to weep; once the sound of divine weeping would be heard in the world, the world would hear it and explode.^o A spark of His suffering, as it were, would penetrate the world and would consume all His enemies. At the [parting of the] Sea [of Reeds, Exod. 14–15], the Holy One, blessed be He exclaimed [to the ministering angels who wished to chant their hymns], "My creatures are drowning in the Sea, and you wish to sing hymns!"^o Now that Israel is drowning in blood, shall the world continue to exist?! [So the angel said,] "Let me weep, but don't You weep"—in other words, You will no longer need to weep.^o But since God wanted to atone for Israel's sins, and that time was not yet a time of salvation, He answered, "I will go to a place where you have no permission to enter and weep there."—Now the suffering is so great that the world cannot contain it; it is too sublime for the world. He causes His suffering and pain to expand, as it were, still more so that they would be too sublime even for the angel, so that even the angel would not see. In the Talmudic tractate Hagigah (5b), we find that this place [where God weeps] is in the inner chambers [of heaven]. There weeping can, as it were, be predicated of Him. In the commentary of Maharsha^o [ad loc.] we find that the term *inner chambers*, understood kabbalistically, refers to the *sefirah* of *Binah*^o; inspect this statement at its source. In light of what we've said above, the significance of Maharsha's statement is that *Binah* is a state in which questioning, but not knowledge, is possible;^o it is

Here Rabbi Shapiro's own voice breaks through the literary convention.
B. Megillah 10b.

I.e., the angel was asking permission to transmit God's pain to the world, thus precipitating a cataclysmic explosion.

Rabbi Samuel Eliezer ben Judah Edels (1556–1631).

"Understanding" the third of the ten divine emanations.

See Zohar I:16; III:193b.

beyond conception. In this state, therefore, His suffering is, as it were, hidden from the angel and from all the world.

February 14, 1942

Parashat Haḥodesh [Exod. 12:1–20]

... The Talmud states in Ḥagigah [5b] that, concerning God's outer chambers, we may apply the verse **STRENGTH AND REJOICING ARE IN HIS PLACE** (1 Chron. 16:27), but in His inner chambers, He grieves and weeps for the sufferings of Israel. Therefore, there are occasions when, at a time of [Divine] hiddenness—meaning, when He, may He be blessed, secludes Himself in His inner chambers—the Jewish person communes with Him there, each individual in accord with his situation, and [new aspects of] Torah and Divine Service are revealed to him there. We have already mentioned how the Oral Torah was revealed in exile, and how the Holy Zohar was revealed to Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai and his son Rabbi Eleazar at a time of acute suffering, caused by the terror of the [Roman] government.

At times the individual is amazed at himself. [He thinks:] "Am I not broken? Am I not always on the verge of tears—and indeed I do weep periodically! How then can I study Torah? How can I find the strength to think creatively in Torah and Hasidism?" At times the person torments himself by thinking, "Can it be anything but inner callousness, that I am able to strengthen myself and study, despite my troubles and those of Israel, which are so numerous." Then again, he will say to himself, "Am I not broken? I have so much to make me cry; my whole life is gloomy and dark." Such a person is perplexed about himself; but, as we've said, He, may He be blessed, is to be found in His inner chambers, weeping, so that one who pushes in and comes close to Him by means of [studying] Torah, weeps together with God, and studies Torah with Him. Just that makes the difference: the weeping, the pain, that a person undergoes by himself, alone—they may have the effect of breaking him, of bringing him down, so that he is incapable of doing anything. But the weeping that the person does together with God—that strengthens him. He weeps—and is strengthened; he is broken—but finds courage to study and teach. *It is hard to rise, time and again, above the sufferings; but when one summons the courage—stretching the mind to engage in Torah and Divine service—then he enters the inner chambers where God is to be found. There he weeps and wails with Him, as it were, together, so that he even finds the strength to study Torah and perform acts of Divine service.*

March 14, 1942

Parashat Mattot [Num. 30:2–32:42]

... How can we lift ourselves up at least a little bit in the face of the terrifying reports, both old and new, which tear us to pieces and crush our hearts? With the knowledge that we are not alone in our sufferings, but that He, may He be blessed, endures with us [as Scripture states], **I AM WITH HIM IN TROUBLE** (Ps. 91:15). But more: there are some sufferings that we suffer on our own account—whether for our sins, or as sufferings of love in order to purge and purify us—in which case He, may He be blessed, just suffers along with us. There are, however, some sufferings that we just suffer along with Him, as it were. These are the sufferings

of *Kiddush Hashem*. [As our liturgy states,] "Our Father, our King, act for the sake of those who are slain for Your holy name."—They are killed, as it were, for His sake and for the sake of sanctifying His holy name. [As our liturgy states,] "Save, please, those who bear Your burden."—Israel also bears His burden [besides its own]. The sufferings are basically for His sake, on His account; in sufferings such as these, we are made greater, raised higher. As a consequence, we can strengthen ourselves a bit more. [As our liturgy states,] "Save those who study Your Torah, whose cheeks are torn of hair, who are given to the floggers, who bear Your burden." . . . How is it possible to study Torah when "our cheeks are torn of hair," when we are "given to the floggers"? Because we know that we "bear Your burden," and we thereby strengthen ourselves a bit.^o

From Isa. 50:6—
the Suffering
Servant.

B. Megillah 12.

How can we tell if the sufferings are only on account of our sins, or whether they are to sanctify His name? By [noticing] whether the enemies torment only us, or whether their hatred is basically for the Torah, and as a consequence they torment us as well. Regarding Haman's decree, the Talmud asks, "What did the Jews of that generation do to deserve destruction?"^o whereas regarding the Hellenic decree [against the Jews that resulted] in the miracle of Hanukkah, the Talmud does not raise the question, despite the fact that thousands of Jews were killed, nearly all of the Land of Israel was conquered, and the Temple was invaded. The difference is that Haman's decree was directed only against the Jews [not their religion]; it follows, then, that the decree [against them] was on account of some sin. However, with respect to the Hellenic [persecution], [our liturgy] states: "In the days of Mattathias, when the wicked Hellenic kingdom arose . . . to make them forget Your Torah and transgress the statutes of Your will. . . ." So it is not appropriate to ask "for what sin [did the sufferings come]," since, while they did purge them of sin, they were [essentially] sufferings of *Kiddush Hashem*. . . .

July 11, 1942

90 Zelig Kalmanovitsh

Three Sermons

Sunday, October 11, [1942]

Jacob Gens.

One of seven
processional
circuits around the
bimah, with
members of the
congregation
carrying Torah
scrolls.

On Simhat Torah eve at the invitation of the rabbi, I went for *hakafot* in a house that had formerly been a synagogue and was now a music school. The remnants of the yeshiva students and scholars were assembled, as well as some children. There was singing and dancing. The commandant^o and his assistants were also there. I was honored with the first *hakafa*.^o . . . I said a few words: "Our song and dance are a form of worship. Our rejoicing is due to Him who decrees life and death: Here in the midst of this small congregation, in the poor and ruined syn-

Deut. 11:21.

agogue, we are united with the whole house of Israel, not only with those who are here today and with the tens of thousands of the pure and saintly who have passed on to life eternal, but with all the generations of Jews who were before us. In our rejoicing today we give thanks for the previous generations, the noble generations in which life was worthwhile. We feel that with our song today we sanctify the name of Heaven just as our ancestors did. And, I, a straying Jewish soul, feel that my roots are here. And you, in your rejoicing, atone for the sins of a generation that is perishing. I know that the Jewish people will live, for it is written: 'As the days of the heaven upon the earth. . .'.^o And even if we were the last generation, we should give thanks and say: 'Enough for us that we were privileged to be the children of those!' And every day that the Holy One, blessed be He, in His mercy gives us is a gift which we accept with joy and give thanks to His holy name."

Sunday, [December] 27, [1942]

7 A.M. to 6 P.M.

This morning I was in the children's nursery. Women who work leave their children from 7 to 6.^o There are 150 children between the ages of three months and two years, [one group] from two to three years, [one group] from three to six, and another group that studies reading and writing. Speeches, dramatic presentations, the children march in line. But the Jewish flavor is missing. In ghetto circumstances the order is remarkable. What vitality in this people on the brink of destruction!

From here on, the entry was recorded in Yiddish.

Who mourns the destruction of East European Jewry? The destruction is a hard fact. Undoubtedly also those who predicted it did not envisage it in this form. Three or four years ago the central Zionist organ was writing of a Jewish center in the Diaspora parallel to the center in Palestine. But the catastrophe was nevertheless a definite thing, its contours so visible. Indeed, the innovative horror for our human consciousness is the personal destruction of human lives: old people, children, blossoming youth, weak and old men, but also those in full vigor. There is no doubt, it tears the heart. But millions of people are losing their lives in all parts of the world in the war. Not only combatants, but also infants and old people. The war has put its face on our destruction. But the destruction was certain even had there been no war. It proceeded on its way in an expansive manner. No one attempted to stem it. On the contrary, whoever attempted to convince himself and the world that he was erecting a defense, actually collapsed. The full proof came in the East [in the U.S.S.R.]. Everything was swallowed up in one great endeavor to disappear.^o The apparent life of culture was pure nonsense, arid. When the East came here, no one as much as raised his voice.^o All was happiness. All found a place, a sense of belonging. Undoubtedly here and there someone thought: something is missing. Another reflected: Judaism is disappearing. But all this was glossed over by the fact of mere existence. There is no discrimination. One amounts to something, particularly something in the apparatus. One can have his say. Had the thing continued in existence, nothing would have been left of the 'enemies of Israel anyway, except, of course, the youth that yearns thither [Palestine]. Could they actually have got there, they would have been saved for our people, and the people through them. But the rest? The individuals would have remained intact, but would have been lost to our people. Jewry in the East is disappearing. The final result is the same as now.

A reference to the Soviet policy of forcibly assimilating the Jews and to the conformist Communist culture in Yiddish.

A reference to the Soviet occupation of Lithuania from June 1940 to 1941.

Palestine.

Gen. 37:33.

The plan to kill
Joseph.

In Yiddish,
khuurbm [fhuurban].

What is better? Better for whom? The individuals who are saved are saved individuals. There are two billion people in the world, two billion people + x. For our people—the Jewish people—had constructive elements in East European Jewry. Those that yearned thither,^o if they actually succeeded in coming there, they strengthened our people. Otherwise, our people will mourn them. Great will be the sorrow and mourning, the joy of redemption will be wrapped in black. But the same sorrow is also for the parts that disappeared through apostasy. And if you wish, the sorrow is even greater. Here the evil beast came: "Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces."^o But how Jacob would have wept if the first plan, God forbid, had been carried out!^o In that case the Jewish people would have been justified in feeling that sick, impure blood courses in our veins. No external enemy tears off our limbs. Our limbs rot and fall off by themselves. And a page of history will read: The grandchildren were not inferior to the grandfathers. Only fire and sword overcame them. A curse upon the murderer! Eternal glory to the innocent victim! But here, where comfort lures people into the camp of the mighty, it is of no interest to history. It will not condemn, but silence means condemnation. You are no longer. Like all of them—Ammon, Moab, Edom, the hundred kingdoms of Aram . . . an object for excavations and students of epigraphy. History will revere your memory, people of the ghetto. Your least utterance will be studied, your struggle for man's dignity will inspire poems, your scum and moral degradation will summon and awaken morality. Your murderers will stand in the pillory forever and ever. The human universe will regard them with fear and fear for itself and will strive to keep from sin. People will ask: "Why was it done so to this people?" The answer will be: "That is the due of the wicked who destroyed East European Jewry." Thus the holocaust^o will steal its way into world history. Extinction by means of a loving caress creates no sensation and means nothing to anyone.

Eventually the Jewish people itself will forget this branch that was broken off. It will have to do without it. From the healthy trunk will come forth branches and blossoms and leaves. There is still strength and life. Dried up and decayed—this happens to every tree. There are still thousands of years ahead. Lamentation for the dead, of course, that is natural, particularly if they are your own, close to you. But the Jewish people must not be confused. The mourning for close ones—some people bear their sorrow long; most find comfort. Human nature—such is the world. Whatever the earth covers up is forgotten. In the ghetto itself we see how people forget. It cannot be otherwise. It certainly is not wrong. The real motive in mourning is after all fear of one's own end. Wherein are we better than those tens of thousands? It must happen to us, too. If we only had a guarantee of survival! But that does not exist and one cannot always be fearful, then the feeling of fear is projected into mourning for the fallen, and sorrow over the destruction of Jewry. Spare yourself the sorrow! The Jewish people will not be hurt. It will, it is to be hoped, emerge fortified by the trial. This should fill the heart with joyous gratitude to the sovereign of history.

Friday, [April] 30 [1943]

Passover is over. There were *sedarim* in the kosher kitchen. . . . At the second *seder* I spoke briefly.^o

"A year ago some intellectual circles in the ghetto searched for an answer to

Kalmanovitsh
recorded this
speech in Yiddish
a month after it
was delivered.

the question: What is a Jew or who is a Jew? Everybody was tremendously preoccupied with this question. Formerly the majority of these people had never given much thought to this question. They felt that they were Jews. Some more so, others less. Some, perhaps, did not feel so at all. And if someone suffered because of his Jewishness, he somehow found a remedy for it and, in general, occupied himself with other more substantial matters, rather than speculate about such an 'abstract' matter. Now these diverse people were herded together and imprisoned within the narrow confines of the ghetto. People of diverse languages, diverse cultures, diverse interests and beliefs, of diverse and, at times, conflicting hopes and desires were assembled together in one category: Jews. Confined as if being punished for that; that is, they committed a crime and the crime consisted in being a Jew. Many of them actually did not know what to say about the 'crime.' They did not know what it means 'to be a Jew.' To be truthful, practically nothing resulted from all these speculations and reflections. It was impossible to find a clear and definite answer to the question: Who is a Jew nowadays? For only now, in our generations, in the past 150 years, has the concept of Jew assumed so many meanings. Earlier, 'Jew' was a clear concept that had only one meaning. A Jew was one who observed Jewish law and belonged to the Jewish community. Now various kinds of people are considered and consider themselves Jews, even such as do not observe Jewish law or even respect it, or have no idea what Jewishness is. But also in this case I obtained an answer to the question 'who is a Jew' from a child in the ghetto. The truth of the verse, 'Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings has Thou found strength,'²⁰ was again confirmed. A teacher of religion in the ghetto school told me the incident, from his own experience. Children attend who are totally alienated from Jews, who had never heard at home, in school, in the street, anything of the Jewish past, of Judaism. Now in the ghetto many of these children listen eagerly to the stories of ancient sacred history, of the Bible. One such child, who had once attended a Polish school and spoke Polish at home, studied with great interest the stories of the Bible. When, in the weekly portion of *Toledot*, they studied the story of Jacob and Esau, this child suddenly called out: 'Teacher, we are indeed the descendants of Jacob and they (i.e., those who do evil to us) the descendants of Esau. Isn't that so? It's good that way. For I really want to belong to Jacob and not to Esau.' I reflected on this story and discovered that I could deduce from it a method to decide who is a Jew. This is how: Man's imagination is after all free, no bonds can confine it. A ghetto person can then sometimes imagine that he has the freedom to choose: he can divest himself of his fallen and defeated Jewish identity and assume the identity of the ruler over the ghetto. Now I ask: What would he do? If he wanted to change, if he was eager to assume the identity of the ruler, we could suppose that he is not a Jew. But if by free choice he wishes to remain a Jew, then he is a Jew. Reflecting further: the Jewish child instinctively chose to be a Jew. He naturally feels at home among Jews. As for the adult who I imagine chooses freely to be a Jew, is instinctual feeling a sufficient ground or are there also rational motives?

"I think so. To be a Jew means in every instance to be on a high plane. The temporary suffering and blows that descend upon the Jew have a meaning, are not merely oppressions, and do not degrade the Jew. For a Jew is part of the sacred triad²¹: Israel, the Torah, and the Holy One, blessed be He. That means the Jewish people, the moral law, and the Creator of the universe. This sacred triad courses

Ps. 8:3.

*The sacred triad
was first conceived
by poet, kabbalist
and ethical*

philosopher Moses
Hayyim Luzzatto
(1707-1746)
and was later
popularized by the
Gaon of Vilna and
the Maggid of
Mezritsh.

through history. It is a reality that has been tested countless times. Our grandfathers clung to the triad, lived by its strength. And now too: the Jew who does not cling to this triad is to be pitied. He wanders in a world of chaos, he suffers and finds no explanation for his suffering; he can be severed from his people, that is, he can wish to change his identity. But the Jew who clings to the sacred triad needs no pity. He is in a secure association. To be sure, history rages now, a war is waged against the Jews, but the war is not only against one member of the triad but against the entire one: against the Torah and God, against the moral law and the Creator. Can anyone still doubt which side is the stronger? In a war it happens that one regiment is defeated, taken into captivity. Let the ghetto Jews consider themselves as such prisoners of war. But let them also remember that the army as a whole is not defeated and cannot be defeated. The Passover of Egypt is a symbol of ancient victory of the sacred triad. My wish is that together we shall live to see the Passover of the future."