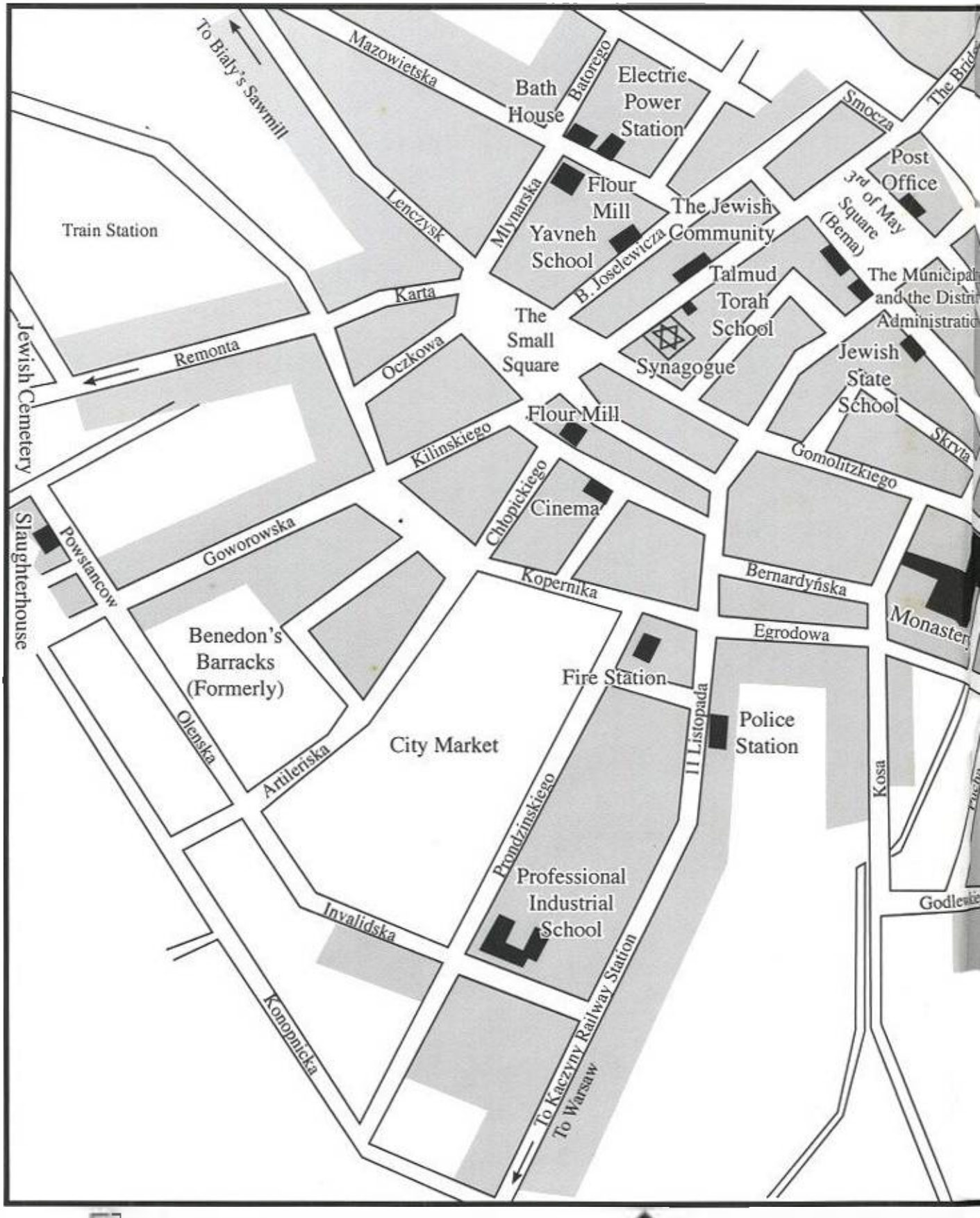
Memorial Book of the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka – Poland

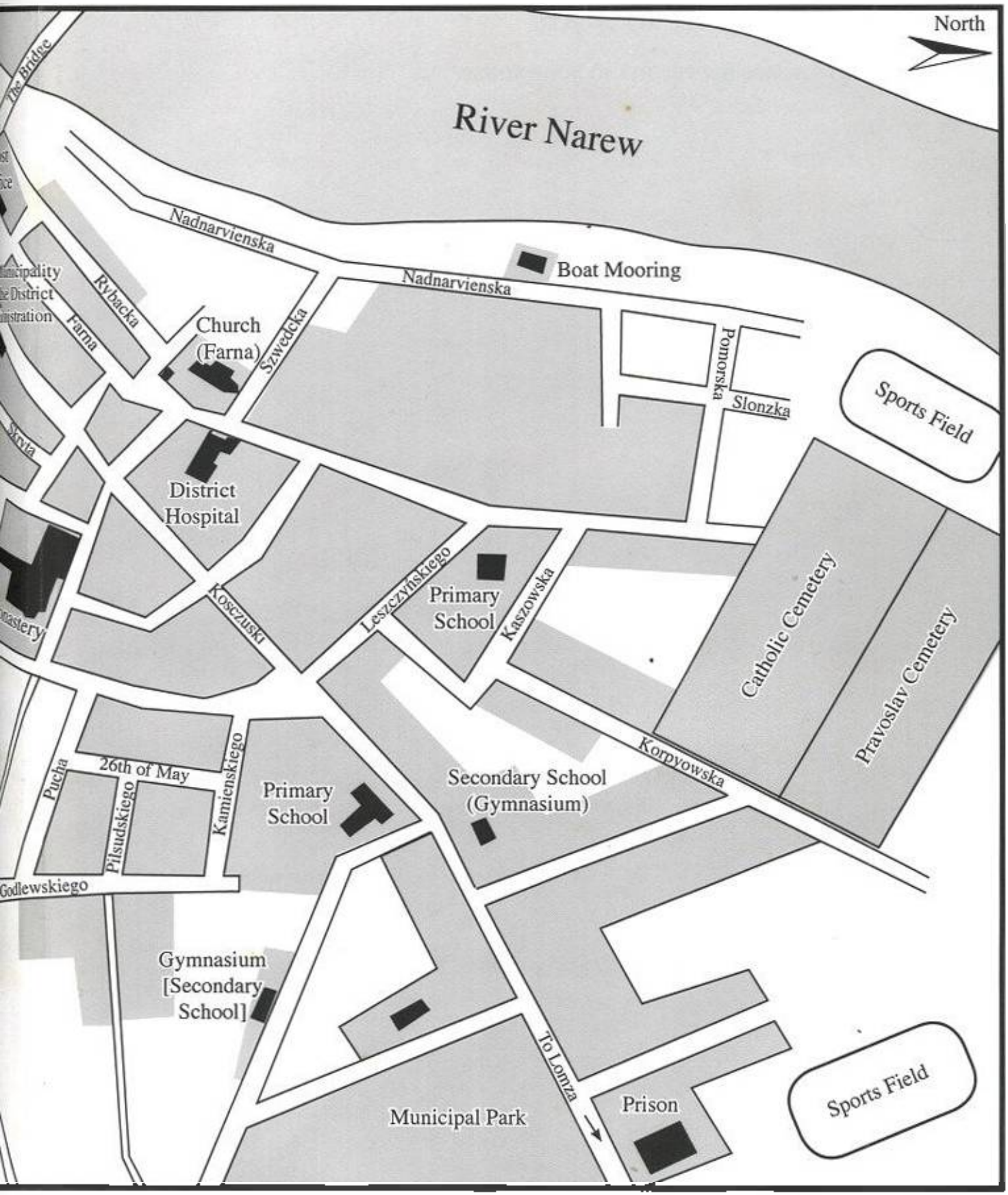


Israel – 2010

Ostrolenka During the Period Between the Two World Wars (1914-1939)



Scale 1 : 10000



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BOOK OF KEHILAT OSTROLENKA

YIZKOR BOOK OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF OSTROLENKA

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BOOK OF KEHILAT OSTROLENKA

YIZKOR BOOK OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF OSTROLENKA

Members of the Book Publishing Committee

Yehuda Chamiel



Yehuda Chamiel is the Chairman of the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel. He initiated the effort to obtain a contribution from Dr. Miriam and Mr. Sheldon G. Adelson for the translation of the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* into English and its publication. Since the first Book Publishing Committee was established, Yehuda has worked to publish the book. The first edition was published in 1963, in Yiddish and Hebrew. Yehuda supported and encouraged Dr. Zalman Drezner to translate the book into Polish and publish it. This second edition was published in 2001. Yehuda also initiated the project to publish the third edition, which was published in 2002, entirely in Hebrew.

Eitan (Levy) Levin, Advocate and Engineer



Eitan Levin is the Secretary of the Committee. He enthusiastically joined the project to publish the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka*. He donated his legal services to the Committee, served as the contact person with overseas contributors, and administered the funds donated, and the organization, translation and publication of this book.

Eitan is of the "next generation" of Ostrolenkans, and was born in Israel. His father, Reuven (Lewin) Levy (1919-1995) was born and raised in Ostrolenka. He was a member of the first Book Publishing Committee, which published the first edition of this book in 1963, in Yiddish and Hebrew (see photograph on page 286 of the English edition). Reuven passed away in Israel in 1995.

Eitan's mother was Charna (Zielinski) Levy (1919-1994), who was born in Pultusk and passed away in Israel. Eitan is the grandson of Israel-Mojzesz and Leja Lewin, both from Ostrolenka. Leja (Lea) was murdered by the Nazis in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943, at the age of 59.

Dr. Zalman Drezner



A member of the Committee, Dr. Drezner participated in committee meetings and contributed from his experience to the publication of the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka*. In addition, he translated the book from Hebrew into Polish, and had it published.

Shlomo Margalit



A member of the Committee, Shlomo Margalit contributed from his experience, with illustrations and drawings to enhance the book.

Editors and Members of the Publishing Committee
of the First Edition of the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka*
Published in 1963, in Hebrew-Yiddish

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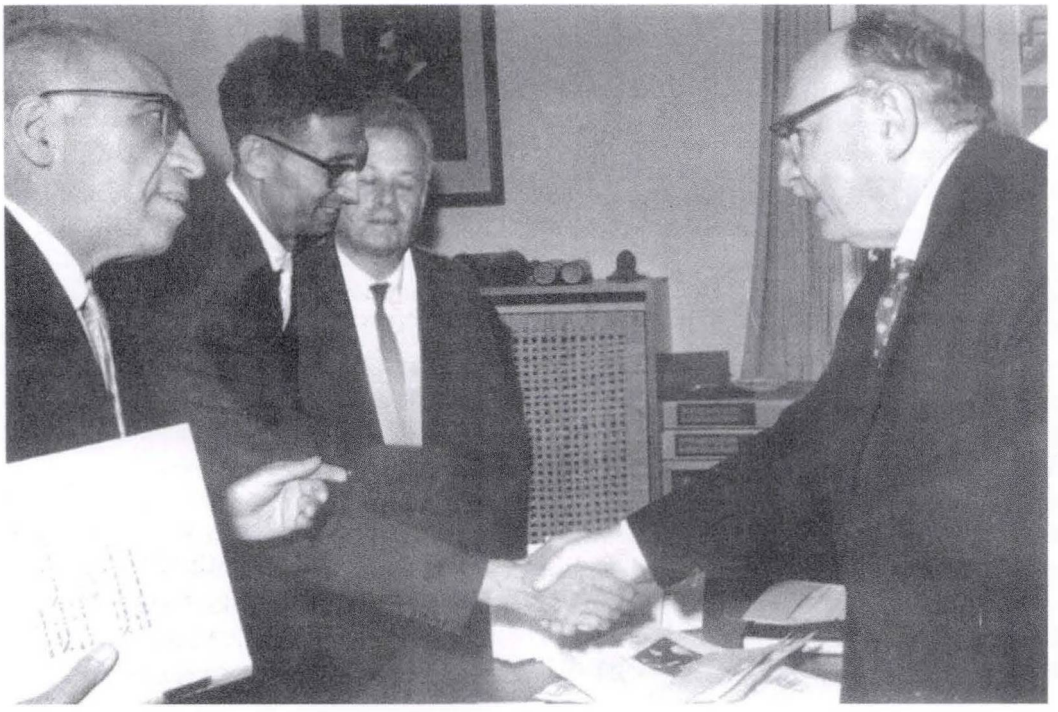
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The *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* was translated into Hebrew and published in 2002. This was made possible by a contribution from the Estate Fund of two of our townspeople, Mordechai Zeligman and his wife, Batya, of blessed memory, as administered by one of our townspeople, Amir Margalit, Adv.

The book was also published in Polish. This effort was directed by Dr. Zalman Drezner, assisted by the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel Committee.



Pictured: President Zalman Shazar receives the first copy of the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* from Yehuda Chamiel in 1963
On the left: Chief Editor, Yitzchak Ivri; on the right: Shalom Margalit, Member of the Book Publishing Committee

Introduction

In the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka*, you will meet and learn about a community with Torah and cultural institutions, its own way of life, synagogues, study halls, schools, Zionist and anti-Zionist youth organizations. Chassidim and Misnagdim, merchants and tradesmen, community workers, amateur actors, the wealthy, the beggars, the water carriers – all came together in a wonderful realization of life.

Among the townspeople were those who dreamed of Zion and Jerusalem, thirsty for the redemption. They arose, shook off the life of the Diaspora, and emigrated to the Land of Israel as pioneers, leaving houses and livelihoods, to build and put down roots in the Land of Israel. They participated in the wars of the undergrounds and in the War of Independence. Some fell in battle, and made the establishment of the State of Israel possible.

Those who emigrated before the World War II and became established in Israel – in cities, villages, moshavim and kibbutzim – supported and assisted the surviving remnant of our townspeople through charitable funds, and by finding them places to work and live. Thus, they helped to bring them some tranquility and comfort after the suffering and hardship endured during the Holocaust.

In the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka*, published in 1963, the articles and poems are written mostly in Yiddish, in consideration of both the Holocaust survivors, who spoke and read only Yiddish, and of our townspeople in the Diaspora.

With the decline of the generation of Yiddish-speaking Holocaust survivors, we must translate the book into English, the international language, for future generations of Diaspora Jews who do not speak Yiddish or Hebrew. It is important to us that they know and learn about everything that happened to their forefathers during the Holocaust. They must know about their roots – where they came from, how they lived and supported themselves. How they created a rich culture, despite the impossible conditions in which they lived. What happened to them during the Holocaust, how they fought and struggled for their lives. How many of them were murdered, destroyed by the German Nazi monsters. The book includes accounts written by survivors, those who remained alive to describe what happened to them in the Nazi hell. How each struggled with his remaining strength for each day, every hour and every minute of existence. About the abnormal deaths and horrible murders of their families, each member of which was a world of his own.

We must not forget what happened to our fathers, our brothers, our families. This book must be passed from generation to generation, to bear true witness to what the German Nazis and their helpers did to them.

This book includes pictures of memorial plaques put up in Ostrolenka in cooperation with the Ostrolenka Municipality, at the Holon cemetery, the

Chamber of the Holocaust in Jerusalem and the Martyrs' Forest on the way to Jerusalem.

In the translated edition of the book, some articles have been added that did not appear in the earlier edition. They are significant, as they complete descriptions of concentration camps and the partisans' struggles in the forests in what was then Russia (the former U.S.S.R.) and in Poland, and about the Ostrolenkans in the U.S.S.R. Of course, an introduction written by Poles living in present day Ostrolenka has been added to the book.

We wish to extend our grateful thanks and deep appreciation to the Miriam and Sheldon G. Adelson Charitable Trust. Its contribution made publication of this book in English possible.

Dr. Miriam Adelson is a granddaughter of the Zamelson-Byszko family from Ostrolenka. Born in Israel to Menucha Zamelson and Simcha Farbstein, she now lives in the United States with her husband, Sheldon. The couple are well-known as supporters of Israeli institutions such as Yad Vashem, hospitals, universities and Taglit-Birthright Israel, which provides educational trips to Israel for young Jewish adults.

I would like to thank the members of the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel Committee, whose efforts contributed to the publication of this book: Eitan Levin, Adv., Dr. Zalman Drezner, Shlomo Margalit and Hanita Maskit.

Yehuda Chamiel
Chairman of the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel

Preface

A Holocaust, unparalleled in any other generation or era, came upon the Jewish people. Six million of its sons and daughters were killed, dying all sorts of depraved deaths on the impure altar of German evil and the bloodthirstiness of two-footed animals of prey.

We, the surviving remnant of this deluge of blood, are still distraught and shocked. We demand and ask of a strange, cold Gentile world, emptied of Jews: "Why?!" . . .

This nightmare of the torments, humiliations and abnormal deaths suffered by our holy brothers strikes us with horror, as they died in unknown places and were not given a Jewish burial.

Memorial books, monuments to their way of life and "their march to death", stand out of the ruins of cities and ash-hills of bodies; they became cemeteries for the bones of our holy brothers and families spread elsewhere – our flesh and blood.

May Ostrolenka and its surrounding area, "a city and mother in Israel", be magnified and sanctified! Saying *Kaddish*, the mourner's prayer, in public, we, who have remained alive, stand in awe and reverence before this memorial book – an eternal monument to their souls which departed in holiness and purity, the holy ones of Ostrolenka and its vicinity!

We had one fate, although we remained alive. The ax of Amalek schemed to decapitate us, too, wherever a Jewish heart beat. We had one fate. Only the thwarting of the Satanic plot kept us alive! But life is hard for us, very hard, when we remember your deaths! . . .

Our God, as well, the God of Israel, turned aside from us during those days of horror and was silent on His heights. Oh, what happened to us! . . .

We have written this memorial book not only to tell the story. We have engraved mortal pain on it, as a monument to your exterminated lives, hovering somewhere.

Rest, dear holy ones, in this memorial book. It is your cemetery, to which we will always come. Here we finally bring you to Jewish graves, upon which we will pour our tears mixed with our hearts' blood.

Leafing through chapters of torture and death, we will hear your unanswerable question, which you took with you on your last march: "Why?!" Your last cry, "Hear, O Israel", on the gallows and in the gas chambers. Your fervent Will and Testament at the last moment of your souls' departure: "Remember and do not forget to overcome our torturers and annihilators!"

In these chapters, we will always feel the pulse of your lives, your sayings and jokes, your kind-heartedness and Jewish intelligence and wit. You were like one family, you clung to each other in love for Ostrolenka, for people of the town and the area. Your smile will shine out of this book as it did then, always

radiating faith in mankind and the future, even when the heavens were covered with heavy clouds, and the sun hid its face from you . . .

We promise you: we will live your lives that were prematurely cut off, we will continue your lost existence.

To our sorrow, many details of your lives and deaths are missing from this book. Not everything is known to us and we could not record it all.

We greatly regret that not every lost, holy family is mentioned in detail in this book. Most of Ostrolenka's Jewish families were completely eliminated in the ghettos and death camps, without leaving a trace behind. Those who could help to obtain complete material are also missing. Not everyone responded in a timely fashion to our public appeal to contribute to this memorial book, although we made repeated requests.

For years, we strode toward our holy goal. We did not stop midway. We did not flinch from difficulties and obstacles that stood in our way, or from the troubling doubt: "Will we reach our goal?" While we collected and compiled every word, line, report, picture and incident along our difficult road, we roused and called upon our townsmen the world over.

In parts of the book, we tried to include as much as possible of Jewish Ostrolenka's special character, its ways of life, its development, its religious and secular institutions, its political parties, organizations, and so on, even though things happened in much the same way in all the Jewish cities and towns, in the spirit and way of life of the time.

We know that our work is not complete. It is far from perfect.

But all those left of Ostrolenka, all over the world, felt that the book must be published at last. Every further postponement was a desecration of our debt to our holy ones.

May they be remembered favorably and for blessing, all those who helped us erect this living monument: our townspeople in Israel and the world over.

We pray that the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* will have a special place in the homes of each of our townspeople, and will shine there with an eternal flame.

May our book be a call for warm brotherhood and strong ties between all Ostrolenkans remaining alive all over the world.

Yitzchak Ivri

With the Book

The *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* is a book about a Jewish community, about all its experiences and existence. It was a community with institutions and a way of life – Torah and social institutions, prayer houses and study houses, schools and workshops, cultural halls and youth clubhouses. A Jewish community among others in Poland, which grew, declined and then shone again and flourished with the changing times and fates of nations, until the ax man rose against it and destroyed every trace of Jewish majesty, splendor and greatness, the beauty and modest life of the community of Ostrolenka. Look and see if there is any pain like my pain, which this has caused me.

*

The *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* is a book of Jews, Jews from a town in Poland who worked hard on weekdays and, on the Sabbath, became more spiritual beings. Men, women, infants, children and youths, rabbis and others who attended to the community's religious needs, teachers, community elders and simple Jews, merchants, laborers, public workers, the wealthy, the poor, property owners and beggars. From the heads of the community to water carriers, all were holy and pure, sanctified in their lives and their deaths, in blood and fire and burning winds. Covered in ancient glory, they were heroes, giants of the world and the nation – a legend.

*

The *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* is a book of survivors, grieving wretches, carrying in their hearts the sorrow of the world, the rage of bereavement and speechless anger. It is a book of orphans who say *Kaddish*, endowing the justice of their forefathers unto the generations, accumulating their right little by little, parts of life, echoes of childhood and youth, a scroll of days gone by. They unite in the memory of souls that have flown aloft, like the letters on a Torah scroll parchment set afire. The book is a collection and record of ways of life and events, experiences and occurrences, times of work and struggle, lives of spirit and action, small and great achievements, laughter and tears. The *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* is an eternal memorial on the graves of our forefathers, erected by children, brothers, relatives and friends whose lips, when communing with their memory, whisper a prayer – *Yizkor*.

*

The *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* is a book of the blood and tears of thousands, who in the treatise of life in the Diaspora wove a dream of Zion and Jerusalem. It is a book of the blood and tears of a generation thirsting for redemption, a generation that shook off the yoke of an exile of enslavement, that while yearning for freedom and striving with all its might to achieve it, was cut off: gone up in the flames of the furnace, devoured in the jaws of bestial nations. A book of blood and tears, marking the sins of nations and peoples, the wickedness of a world that ignored them, that closed off the ways of Zion to hand them over to the brutal *poretz*, that stood by as their blood was spilled and closed its ears to the cries of those who fled when there was no flight and no refuge – and were caught on the threshold. The *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* is a book of blood and bitter tears, now dried. Oh, what we had!

Chaim Chamiel



Ostrolenka Jewry celebrates the 3rd of May with the City Fathers: Moshe Margolis (President of the Community), the late Rabbi Izchak Burstein (Rabbi of the city), Leibel Cristal of Lomza (Secretary of the Community)

Introduction by the Poles

The Jewish community in Ostrolenka was established at the end of the eighteenth century, although Jews lived nearby even earlier. From that century and until 1918, Poland was not independent, but under foreign occupation. Ostrolenka was primarily under Russian occupation. Since the Jewish settlement began, the city was part of the independent Polish state for only 21 years. In 1939, at the outbreak of the World War II, the Jewish population numbered approximately 5,000 people, a third of the city's total population. For many generations, the record of the history of our lives was interrupted by historical events that occurred because of Ostrolenka's geographic location and the complex geopolitical situation of the population living in the Polish territories. For about 150 years, our common lives were played out on a background of regular, day-to-day problems. The special problems of the small city's environmental landscape were characterized by poor urban development, the organization of economic life in an undeveloped agricultural area without significant natural resources, establishing various houses of prayer and public buildings, and participation in decisions concerning the city and its inhabitants. It is may be said that, generally, we did not live in great material wealth. There was cooperation between us, as well as insularity of one degree or another.

These varied lives were marked by amity and mutual regard, but also by misunderstandings, attacks on market stalls or attempts to boycott Jewish businesses, especially in the final years; however, this never led to serious clashes or pogroms. Life continued until October 1939, when the Jews were expelled from Ostrolenka by the Germans.

The increased interest of the city of Ostrolenka and its inhabitants in its former Jewish residents began in 1988, when the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel Committee responded positively to the request of Mrs. Magister Jadwiga Nowicka, Chairwoman of the Association of Ostrolenka Friends, to be in contact with us. One year later, accepting an invitation from the Mayor, Mr. Stanislaw Zaczkowski, a group of 30 of our townspeople from Israel and the United States came to Ostrolenka for the first time since World War II. The group participated in a festive conference in memory of the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of the World War II on 1 September 1939, and in the unveiling of a memorial plaque dedicated to the memory of the Jewish residents who lived among us and who were murdered in the Holocaust. Since then, the friendly relationship between us has strengthened. In August 1991, a group of townspeople visited again, on the occasion of the erection of a large monument in memory of the Jewish residents who died or were murdered in the Shoah. The location chosen for the monument was where the Jewish cemetery had been, near the Janusz Korczak Orphanage.

In 1992 and 1993, organizations of natives of Ostrolenka and its vicinity, now living in Israel, extended invitations to visit that country to our

representatives: Mrs. Magister Jadwiga Nowicka, Magister Waldemar Zaluska of the Association of Ostrolenka Friends, and the Ostrolenkan District Manager, Magister Stanislaw Podmostko and his wife, Ewa. In 1994, the Scientific Association Ostrolenka Region, which I head, joined them. A few years ago, I was privileged to accept their invitation and visit Israel. As a result of all these contacts and visits, relationships strengthened and expanded even more, and the idea was born to translate the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* into Polish.

We are happy and proud to state that we have succeeded, after continuous efforts and together with the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel, to publish the Polish translation of the book. A ceremony marking the event was held in Ostrolenka on 18 June 2001, in the presence of a vast audience which included representatives of many institutions and the Israeli embassy in Poland, as well as a large group of natives of our city now living in Israel. In the near future, the book will be available for sale all over Poland.

For all this – our thanks and deep appreciation, first and foremost, to Dr. Zalman Drezner and Mr. Yehuda Chamiel.

We are very familiar with the book's contents, and are full of wonder and pride in the enormous effort and exacting preparation of the material, as well as the rare diligence invested in the book by the Jewish natives of our city. Such an effort could only have been made by those who love those dear to them, lost in their prime, from the depths of their hearts. Here, in this place and in the name of the city of Ostrolenka and its residents, we wish to express our share in the deep sorrow for the tragedy that befell our fellow Jewish townspeople, and the Jewish people in general, in the terrible, unique Holocaust.

What, then, does the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* mean to us?

First, it is a source book and an authentic, invaluable historical document, for several reasons:

1. The book describes the lives and destruction of the Jewish residents of our city. They were a large community, with a great share in the economic and cultural development of Ostrolenka as a city. After a common life shared by us for many generations, nearly all this community was suddenly murdered. It disappeared, with all its educational institutions and many prayer houses, with a large gallery of colorful personalities and leaders, and spiritual greats. The book gives us a faithful picture of the community's mindset, its value system, its spiritual affinity to cling to its traditions and ancient religion, its intensive and highly gifted economic activity, and the longings of many Jewish residents for the Land of Israel and their immigration there.
2. Of course, the book also contains not a little material about the entire city and the Polish-Christian residents of Ostrolenka and its vicinity, revealing facts and aspects of events not appearing elsewhere.

3. Almost no archival material remains about the city, since it was almost completely burned during World War I. Any material taken out at the start of World War II was lost.
4. When World War II broke out, most of us were only small children or not born yet. Therefore, we did not witness the lives shared with the Jewish population.

Reading certain parts of the book may point to instances of nobility of spirit among us, while others may bring hurt and shame, awakening deep sorrow. The book is a source of pride for us for two additional reasons: first, it is the first publication *in Polish* of a "memorial book" of the Jewish residents of a specific city in Poland. Second, this is the first time that close, continual cooperation between a Polish city and its former Jewish residents has brought about the joint publication of a memorial book of its Jewish inhabitants.

We must not forget that, for six generations, there lived in Ostrolenka two large communities, Polish and Jewish, of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, separated by traditions, cultures and, sometimes, even language. Although there were certain clashes of interest in the area of economic subsistence, the relationship between them was quite good. It sometimes even improved, in light of their common reality and fate, such as hard economic conditions, natural disasters and expressions of local municipal patriotism. Usually, Ostrolenka was a fairly quiet city, without extreme nationalistic manifestations, and blessed with independent, moderate public leaders. Interference and incitement by outside elements (such as foreign conquerors), wars and extreme ideological movements, prejudices and stereotypical thoughts were the primary causes of the deterioration of relations between us.

Let us return for a moment to the book and to present day Ostrolenka. We must admit that after reading and studying the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka*, the city seems, to our eyes, "a little different". While touring its streets, we stop here and there, pointing out the location of the large study hall, the Jewish school or the home of that noble-souled woman, Pesia Szereszewska Nasielski. We think of the thousands of Jewish inhabitants who also lived and strolled in its streets, who were – and who vanished forever. We ponder again and again on their deaths, which were not caused by some natural disaster and *force majeure*, but by people on the continent of Europe in the fourth decade of the twentieth century.

All of us must do everything we can to continue to extend the memorialization of our city's Jewish inhabitants and the cooperation between us, and to pass this holy message on to the young generation and our future generations.

It is our wish and greatest aspiration that the contacts and friendly relationships between us and the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel will serve as an example of breaking down prejudices and stereotypes, as a declaration, in all humility, of what was good and what was bad between us, and to forgive whatever possible injuries we caused each other in our common past.

Although we are aware that an honest dialogue between ethnic, religious communities of different generations may be unpleasant and controversial, in the somewhat longer run, it is always worthwhile. It may even add a small seed to the present worldwide aspiration to achieve justice and respect for every person for himself.

We present here a quotation of a young Ostrolenkan, who recently participated in an all-Poland competition on understanding the present day State of Israel. His words are a true reflection of Jewish-Polish relations in present day Ostrolenka. "I think that among Ostrolenkans, as among Poles in general, there is a special fear of talking about Jews. People are simply afraid that the reputation of an anti-Semite will stick to them and that, at the same time, they will be identified as 'Jew lovers'. While I believe that this tendency is lately changing for the good, we must help it to do so. More information about the former inhabitants of our city of the religion of Moses, may remove the remnants of anti-Semitism still dormant among us. We must not forget that the Jews are part of the history of Ostrolenka and Poland. It is simply a shame not to know about them."

Finally, we wish to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your positive response to our request of you, and for permitting us to add our Introduction to the new Hebrew edition of the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka*. We see this not only as our elementary obligation toward our Jewish townspeople, but first and foremost, as our humane and moral obligation of the first order toward them, most of whom were murdered in the Holocaust.

Sincerely yours,
Dr. Janush Golota
Chairman of the Scientific Association Ostrolenka Region
and in the name of the Association of Ostrolenka Friends
Ostrolenka, June 2002
Translated from the Polish by Zalman Drezner

Notes of the Editorial Staff

A. The *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* is not intended just as a monument of remembrance, but also for the surviving remnant of our people. Besides gas chambers and crematoria, there were also survivors. Besides the bleeding past, there was also tomorrow and the continuation they did not attain. Ostrolenkans were uprooted – those "of the city and of the family" all over the world – and because of lack of information, very little of the material was included in the book.

B. Some historical events recorded about the general development of our city Ostrolenka were translated, as written by their Polish authors, into Yiddish, in the style and mood of the past (such as: "Ostrolenka of the Past" – "Ostrolenka and Our Region", page ???). All this was done with the intention of bringing the gradual development of that period to the reader.

C. Every article in this memorial book was written and printed in the writer's language, in Yiddish or Hebrew. Some articles, dealing with history or the Holocaust, were translated and printed in both languages.

D. In the Yiddish text, we permitted ourselves to overlook all sorts of grammatical rules, such as, in expressions – how Ostrolenkan Jews spoke. For example, *Der Buch* ("this book"), instead of *Das Buch*, etc.

E. We apologize for inexact dates in written material, and for errors in names and nicknames, spiritual or professional, of those who were murdered and those alive today, as they were then called in the city. This was done for the sake of completion and the nature of the people in that situation, without any intention of offence, God forbid, or detracting from their worth. As to lineage (*yichus*), everyone is on the same level, the scholar, the simple carter, the merchant, the water carrier, the community leader. All worked with equal honesty. All are holy before God and before man.



**The large study hall rebuilt after World War I;
the Nazis turned it into a automobile garage.**

TO THE GENERATIONS OF OSTROLENKA
AND ITS JEWISH COMMUNITY

Ostrolenka in Ancient Poland

Ostrolenka, an ancient settlement on the banks of the River Narew, was elevated by the Polish aristocracy of the Mazowsze region to city status. Since then, it has developed and thrived. Ostrolenka was proclaimed an administrative district in the Kingdom of Poland, and was leased to Queen Bona for an unlimited period of time. In 1552, she settled a dispute between the city's citizens and the head of the district, Mikola Wilga. According to the settlement between them, these prohibitions applied to city dwellers: they were not allowed to work in villages, transfer letters, provide hay for the court, etc. On the other hand, the head of the district could not require them to provide him with beer. He was required to receive the shipment of chickens due him at a specified time only, that is, on St. Martin's Day. He was required to permit them to chop down dried-up trees that were not necessary for beehives, to use for heating. The function of collecting fines was transferred to mayors. A "barley tax" was imposed on every house. According to data from accountants in 1564, there had been 334 houses in Ostrolenka; the year before, however, a fire burned everything to the ground. As was written in an accounting of those days: "This city was founded by Duke Janusz Mazowietski. He granted rights to the inhabitants and determined their needs, such as a bath house, a barber shop and weighing scales. He declared that there would be two fairs a year, until 1472. In 1502, Duke Conrad granted special rights to the shoemakers' branch of the craftsmen's guild, according to which *not* the municipality, but the guild itself would impose a fine for defective shoes. In the event that the guild would not do this speedily, however, we will do it ourselves, or whosoever comes after us." So wrote the Duke. In 1578, King Bathori decreed new laws and regulations pertaining to the guild, and imposed a fee on those who learned a trade, as well as on those who became independent craftsmen.

In 1616, it was recorded in the chronicles:

> There are 230 houses and 50 empty plots of land. According to the old custom, taxes are not paid on houses and empty plots. Among craftsmen, only shoemakers pay tax. They must give a pair of shoes. Since there are now 27 shoemakers, and every pair is valued at 10 grosz, the total amount of tax is 9 florin. In addition, shoemakers pay 6 florins in exchange for the right to gather wood in the forest. Fishermen, 14 in number, pay tax at the rate of 6 grosz.
>
> Two market days, on Tuesday and Saturday, and two fairs bring in 15 florins. From the butchers, both from the city and the villages, we take one shoulder of beef from each animal. The inhabitants built a bridge, at no small expense. Therefore, they collect a toll from everyone crossing it. There is a fine imposed on beer brewers as well: they must give the mill 5 measures of grain out of every 10 measures they grind there. In addition, they are required to give

Queen Bona one jug of beer out of every brewing, or money (cenars) 15. It was also decided that every brewer will give a jug containing 3 pots of beer, worth 8 florins. 27 grosz per year. 61 flour mills were on the River Omulew. 7 on the River Narew.

In the big city called Zagajnica, between the rivers Zbojna, Torasz, and Omulew, continuing until the Prussian border, there are various animals. The lessee received into his possession the city and the animals in it. He presented a complaint, however, against the ruler, Lominski, for causing great damage to the animals and the plants in the forest. The bee keepers, 84 in number, were also required to pay tax. Half of the tax for those involved with the forest, and the second half for sale. Certain craftsmen, such as barrel makers and wooden ceiling builders, were required to pay for the right to take trees from the forest. Each of them paid 2 florins, which accumulate and bring in 36 florins a year. The villagers also paid for the right to take unused waste wood – wood broken by the wind or fires – scattered in the forest. In exchange for fishing in the ponds in that region, they paid 38 florins a year. The income of the municipality from flour mills and from the city totaled 1,007 florins and 25 grosz.

In 1622, King Sigismund III approved a work regulation for brewers, written in Polish. King August III, in a decree issued in 1745, declared: "Out of respect for the Christian religion and the honor of the Church, we forbid the purchase and sale of merchandise and foodstuffs before the end of prayers at 8:00 A.M. In the purchase of grain and food, preference will be given to local townspeople before strangers – in particular, Jews. For the benefit of the city, we establish three new fairs: on St. Anthony of Padua Day, St. Francis Day and on the Holy Virgin of Porziuncola Day." The wooden church built in 1399 by Duke Jan of Mazowsze, even before the founding of the city, was rebuilt in 1641, this time of stone. At that time, in the primeval forests around Ostrolenka, lived people called Kurpie, a sort of tribe of highly talented people, who especially excelled at hunting and bee keeping. Their marksmen killed not a few Swedes during the invasion of Charles XII. At the beginning of the reign of King August III (1734-1735), there were many clashes with them.

From the book *Ancient Poland* by M. Balinski and Lipinski, Warsaw, 1834

Ostrolenka and Its District*

Ostrolenka – an administrative district in the Plock [Plotsk] region, on the banks of the River Narew, on sandy land surrounded by thick forests, situated fifteen and a half miles from Warsaw. The city was known for the battles that took place in it in 1702 between the locals (Kurpie) and the Swedes, and for the battle near the city in 1831.

The city now has (according to statistics, we assume this refers to approximately the years 1855-7) 3,460 inhabitants, of them 2,330 Christians, 1,130 Jews. It has 192 houses and two churches. The local government: the district office, the magistrate's court, the municipality, the forestry office, the salt warehouse, the hospital, the post office, the primary school, the girls' school. Fairs are held six times a year.

The Ostrolenka district is part of the Plock region, and covers an area of 58 square miles. Its important rivers are the Bug, Narew, Barycz and Dozoga Rivers. The number of lakes in this district is small. They are located between the Rivers Bug and Narew. One lake, called Stari Bug, is in the village of Borow, a second lake, Zurawia, is in the village of Galina, and Lake Kolo is in the village of Odryn. Other lakes: Psirwa, Kupanka, Osola, Michalowska, Ogridzisk. Between the Bug and the Narew are Lakes Samocenta and Stara Rzeka.

The total population of the district is 83,967 people, divided according to religion: Catholics – 71,230, Prawoslawni – 3, Ewagelni – 1,694, Jews – 11,040. Distribution by place of residence: in cities: Christians 6,967, others 7,059 – total 14,026. In villages: Christians 64,960, others 3,981 – total 69,941. Brewers – 33, water mills – 12, windmills – 50, brick factories – 14, tar and turpentine factories – 10, heads of cattle – 39,831.

* (From the *General Polish Encyclopedia*, Warsaw, 1865, vol. 20, p. 165.)

Number of Inhabitants of Ostrolenka and the District

1897 (Region)			1921 (Region)		
Number of inhabitants	Jews	%	Number of inhabitants	Jews	%
80,430	10,121	12.6	73,836	6,631	9.0

1808	City
Total	2,036
Jews	99

1827	
Total	3,030
Jews	496
% Jews	16.4

1857	
Total	3,371
Jewish	1,128
% Jews	33.5

1897	
Total	7,965
Jews	4,564
% Jews	57.3

1921	City
Total	9,145
Jews	3,352

Waszyotinski "The Jewish inhabitants"
Poland in the X, XI – XX century
Warsaw – 1930 (pages 11, 36)
43915 Jewish historical institution

1931	City
Total	13,341
Jews	4,291
% Jews	32.2

M. Cynowicz

A Chapter about the City and the Jews in It

The history of the city of Ostrolenka is written about in the Encyclopaedia Hebraica, published by Masada (Volume 1, 1949): "Ostrolęka – a city in the area of Bialystok, on the River Narew. Founded in the 14th century. In 1807, the French defeated the Russians there. In 1832, the Russians, under the command of Field Marshal Diebitsch, gained a victory over the Polish army, under the command of General Skrzynecki. With this, the fate of the Rebellion of 1831 was sealed. In 1915, many battles took place there between the Germans and the Russians." The article adds that "Ostrolęka is known as a place where amber can be found." Regarding the Jewish community in this city, the article finds it necessary to inform us of the same things already found in the Israeli Hebrew Encyclopedia, published by Eshkol, as follows:

> It seems that there was no known Jewish community in Ostrolenka at the time of the ancient Polish kingdom. In the *Geographical and Statistical Dictionary of the Polish Kingdom* by Balinski and Lipinski, an old privilege is mentioned that was granted by the Polish king, Sigismund III, in 1622, and which was approved later as well, in 1745, by the Polish king, Friedrich Augustus, according to which Christian citizens of Ostrolenka were given preference over foreigners, and in particular Jews, when buying food products.
>
> In 1827, there were 3,030 inhabitants – considered quite a large town in those days – primarily in the Lomza District, among them 16.4 percent Jews. According to the special order of 25 April 1826, the Jews were allowed to live only in certain neighborhoods in the area of the city of Ostrolenka. Special individuals, however, who had special rights – particularly the wealthy, who paid high taxes – were given permission to live in any quarter and its streets. In 1862, this law was nullified and Jews were allowed to become propertied and purchase real estate in all areas of the city and its domain.

In the course of time, the number of Jews in Ostrolenka grew. They came from other small towns, especially from nearby small Jewish villages and settlements. In 1856, there were 1,129 Jews in Ostrolenka, 36.8 percent of the total population. In 1897, there were 4,564 Jews there (57.3 percent), and in 1909, 6,219 Jews (53 percent). In this period, until the outbreak of World War I, Ostrolenka reached the height of its quantitative (commercial-economic) and qualitative (spiritual-cultural) development. It became, after the Ostrovy community (which then numbered 7,279 Jews), the third largest Jewish community in the Lomza region.

An important factor in the development of Jewish Ostrolenka was the Russian army regiments that camped regularly at the gates of the city. Many Jewish contractors provided them with provisions.

As it was near the border of Eastern Prussia, Ostrolenka also served as an intermediate commercial station in the conveying and export area (in a non-official capacity). Its nearby train station also added to the development of commerce and traffic. Ostrolenka preceded the regional city by decades, as the railway did not come as far as the latter until 1915.

With the outbreak of World War I, a 'decline' began in Jewish Ostrolenka. During the first years of the war, the city was empty of its Jewish inhabitants for a time. Because of its proximity to the front, it was almost completely destroyed. In addition, an expulsion decree applied to the Jews. Many of them emigrated to the cities of Inner Russia, and others departed for nearby cities – Lomza, Ostrow, Warsaw and others. Despite the rebuilding of the ruins and the return of city life to normalcy, many of the Jews who left did not return, and the Jewish community did not reach its former standing.

In 1921, there were 3,352 Jews in Ostrolenka (36.7 percent of the total population). Due to worsened security conditions, and because of circumstances caused by the period and the economic pressure on the Jews in Poland in the 1920's and especially the '30s, the tendency to emigrate to other countries, and in particular, to America and Israel increased.

Ostrolenka (Bialystok Region)

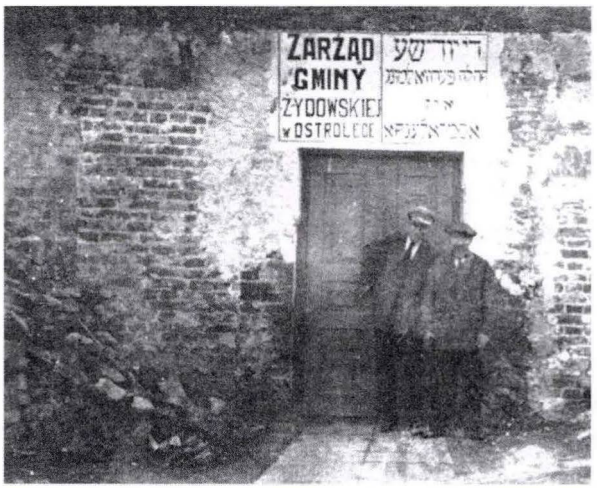
Ostrolenka, a district city of 14,000 inhabitants, of them 4,900 Jews, the community (*gmina*) was founded in 1794. At that time, a Jewish cemetery was established there, 40 kilometers from the German-Prussian border. Ostrolenka was one of the first towns destroyed during World War I. In 1915, the Russian Army, in its retreat from the city, evacuated all the city's inhabitants and set fire to it. Only 8-10 houses were saved from the fire.

Since 1916, during the German occupation, the city was built almost anew. Some ruins remained, among them the beautiful synagogue that was built in 1856, with the initiative and financial support of the Tikocziner family.

At the time of the German occupation, there were eight members of the Community Committee. In 1924, the community ranked among the large and important communities. There were 12 members in the Council. The last elections were held in March 1936.

The members of the Committee were: Chairman – Mendel Gedanken (General Zionist); his deputy – Wolf Lejb Barszcz (Agudah); members: Eli Bajuk (Rightist Labor Zionist), Notte Barman (Artisans), Icchak Rozonowicz (Mizrachi), Szlomo Rutsky (Agudah), Jechiel Szafran (Labor Zionist) and Awraham Piaseczny. Members of the Council were: Chairman – Mosze Lejb Skrobacz (Mizrachi); his deputy – Mosze Aron Edel (Agudah); members: Jakow Dawid Blumsztejn (Mizrachi), Mendel Cuker (Agudah), Motel Dolowicz (Agudah), Pesach Gercek (Rightist Labor Zionist), Nachman Nowogrodsky (Rightist Labor Zionist), Chaim Wolf Rozenblum (Agudah), Icchak Sapir (Agudah), Dawid Wajsblum (Rightist Labor Zionist), Josef Wonszak (Rightist Labor Zionist), Aron Wylozny (Artisans). Community workers were the Rabbi, his deputy, 3 ritual slaughterers and 6 clerks. Religious institutions, such as a *Talmud Torah*, a yeshiva, *Linat HaTzedek*, a burial society, etc., operated in the community.

Almanac . . . Warsaw 1939, pages 176, 201, 41
Jewish Historical Institute



The Jewish community after World War I

M. Cynowicz

The Rabbis of Ostrolenka

In the literature of all types of rabbinic essays, no information has been preserved from which we can discover who the Ostrolenka community's Chief Rabbis were.

Although we have no substantive proof of details, we do have traces. In the responsa of the Gaon, Rabbi Jeszajahu Jehuda Lejb Diskin at the time of his rabbinate in Lomza (for the first time, 1840- 1844), answers the Rabbi of Ostrolenka, called "Rabbi Icchak", in the matter of a community dispute regarding one of its ritual slaughterers. From this, it seems that the town already had a learned teacher (*moreh tzedek*), as well as the above-mentioned Rabbi.

I could not find any more detailed information about this Rabbi Icchak from any other source. We have more details, however, about a second rabbi in Ostrolenka shortly after, who served there as Rabbi-Av Beit Din (Father of the Rabbinical Court) for a few years until 1865, namely:

Rabbi Jechiel Michel Goldszlag

Rabbi Jechiel Michel was born in 1831 in Srensk. He came from a family of distinguished lineage. He was related to and named after the Kabalist and Gaon, Rabbi Jechiel Michel of Nemyriv, who was martyred under Chmielniski's decree in 1648. On his mother's side, Rabbi Jechiel Michel was the grandson of the well-known Chassid, Rabbi Zelig Srensker, one of the strong supporters of Rabbi Menachem Mendel, the famous Admor of Kotzk.

Rabbi Jechiel Michel was known in his childhood as a child prodigy. He studied Torah and lovingly served the Gaon, Rabbi Israel Jeszajahu Trunk, then the Av Beit Din at Srensk (later in Kutna). He studied for a while with the Gaon and Admor, Rabbi Icchak Meir, known as the *Chidushei Harim*, in Warsaw, and was ordained by him as a teacher. He was also ordained by Rabbi Chaim Dawison, the Rabbi of the Kollel of the Holy Community of Warsaw, and by other famous rabbis. He became known later on as an outstanding rabbi of his generation on all subjects of the Torah, as well as the Kabala.

In 1848, when he was only 18, Rabbi Jechiel Michel became Rabbi of Kikol (in the Plock [Plotsk] region), then in Podniewicz and Srensk. From there, he went to Ostrolenka and, from 1865, to Sierpc, a district village in the Plock region, where he was Rabbi of the city for 53 years. When he died at the age of 88, after being a rabbi and learned teacher for over 70 years, articles in his memory appeared in the Jewish press in Warsaw, in the *Heint*, the *Moment* and *Dos Yiddishe Vort*. Among other things, they mentioned this detail – that before Szraptz, this Elder Rabbi was the Rabbi-Av Beit Din of Ostrolenka.

Two books written by Rabbi Jechiel Michel are known in the rabbinic world: a) an exegesis on the Psalms called *Yerushalayim*, dedicated to an understanding of the depth of the text, as well as through kabalistic indicators of the names of holy persons according to initials and acronyms, and b) explanations of Ecclesiastes called *Lev Da'at* and *Einaim Lerot*, collected from the *Holy Zohar* and *Tikunim*. In his writings is an essay on the Song of Songs, according to the above-mentioned method.

In 1925, his son, Rabbi Jakow Chaim Zelig Goldszlag, published his father's book, *Imrei Emet*, which included the latter's new interpretations of Biblical verses, *halacha* and *aggadah*, matters of religious research, *mitzvot*, blessings and prayers, religious rulings and customs. In the writings of this Elder Rabbi, remain his interpretations of all subjects of the Torah, as well as many responsa in *halacha* and in practical instruction to those near and far.

His only son, Rabbi Jakow Chaim Zelig, mentioned

above, was born in 1853. Raised and educated by his father in Ostrolenka, he was also a great Torah scholar, and served as Av Beit Din of Lubranitz and then Rabbi-learned teacher in Warsaw. He became known in the world of Torah for his *Vayeche Yakov*, containing responsa and exalted interpretations of Torah. He published the essays of the Gaon Rabbi Jonatan Eibeschutz (from hand-written material), with commentaries and notes of his own. In pre-World War I Warsaw, he supervised a religious high school for ten yeshiva students, excellent Torah scholars, where they were educated in pedagogy, to become expert learned teachers.

Of this Rabbi's additional essays, the following should be mentioned: *Yareach LeMoadim* and *Kochav MeYakov*, about the holidays and the chapters of the Five Books of Moses; *Emet LeYakov*, *Yalkut Katan*, *Al Midat HaEmet*, *Marom Harim* – a eulogy of the famous, saintly Admor, Rabbi Jechiel Michel of Gustinin; *Chasdei Yonatan*, *Gevurat Yonatan*, *Da'at Yonatan* and *Birchat Yonatan* – four important books from the writings of the Gaon, Rabbi Jonatan Eibeschutz, with his own commentaries and interpretations and a pamphlet of the leadership of the synagogue. In his writings are also an essay on *Yoreh De'ah, Part One*, and on the book *Tana Devei Eliahu.*

Rabbi Nachman Dawid Hakoen

It appears that this Rabbi was Rabbi of Ostrolenka before the Gaon, Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski, and may have been appointed there as Rabbi immediately after Rabbi Jechiel Michel left Ostrolenka for Sierpc. While his predecessor was a rabbi in the style of Chassidic Poland, and was devoted to the Admorim, Rabbi Nachman Dawid Hakoen belonged more to the world of the Lithuanians, the "Misnagdim". He was a descendent of the Gaon, Rabbi Klonimus Kalman, Av Beit Din of Orly and Zabludowa near Bialystok, the son of the Gaon, Rabbi Nachum Hakoen of Orly, author of the book *Shevet Achim* – a descendent of the Gaon Rabbi Szabtaj Hakoen, author of *Siftei Cohen* (known as the *Schach*) on the *Shulchan Aruch.*

There is also no detailed information about him for this article. We only know that his name is mentioned in *HaTzfira* in 1893, regarding the operation of the *Ma'achal Kasher*, for kosher food for Jewish soldiers in Russian Army companies encamped near Ostrolenka.

We find new Torah interpretations by this Ostrolenkan Rabbi at the end of the book *Machane Kehuna* (responsa on the *Shulchan Aruch*, part of the *Orech Chaim* of his relative, Rabbi Nachum Hakoen Biskowicz, a learned teacher in Bialystok).

Rabbi Jeszajahu

At about the same time, Rabbi Jeszajahu was the learned teacher of Ostrolenka. This Rabbi was known in the pedagogical world for his essays: *Chomat Yehoshua*, *Avnei Yehoshua*, *Beit Yehoshua* – about the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De'ah* and *kashrut* [kosher food] laws.

Rabbi Jeszajahu was born in Lipne. He was a learned teacher in Plock [Plotsk], a Rabbi in Schrantzk, a learned teacher in Ostrolenka, Laszka and later, Av Beit Din in Zacharek. He died there in 1905. He had a strong, authoritative personality, was zealous of religion and openly opposed the Zionist movement. He wrote the book *Da'at HaRabanim*, differing strongly with those rabbis who agreed with this "dangerous" (in his opinion) movement. It appears that he was devoted to the Alexander Admorim, who had great strength in Ostrolenka.

Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski

(From 1899 to1902)

He was one of the great rabbis of the older generation. He was born on February 25, 1855, in the town of Brashad, in the Podolia region in the Russian Ukraine, to wealthy parents of distinguished lineage, descendents of Rabbi Dawid Halewi Segal (the *Taz*), Rabbi Joel Sirkis (the *Bach*), Rabbi Szaul Wahl, *Moharam* of Padua, the *Moharam* of Rotenberg and others. He was a blood relative of the saintly Rabbi Awraham Jeszajahu Hesczel of Apt.

From his youth, he was known in the region as a great prodigy. He gained greater fame later, during his stay in Austrian Galicia with two famous Gaonim, Rabbi Josef Szaul Natanzon, the Rabbi of Lwow, author of the book of responsa, *Shoel Umayshiv*, and the well-known Admor Rabbi Chaim Halbersztam of Sanz, author of *Divrei Chaim.* The latter wondered at the "prodigy from Brashad's" strong understanding of the entire Talmud and its commentaries, and knowledge of all its "secrets".

In 1880, Rabbi Mosze Nachum became Rabbi of Kaminka, in the region of Kiev. He remained in the

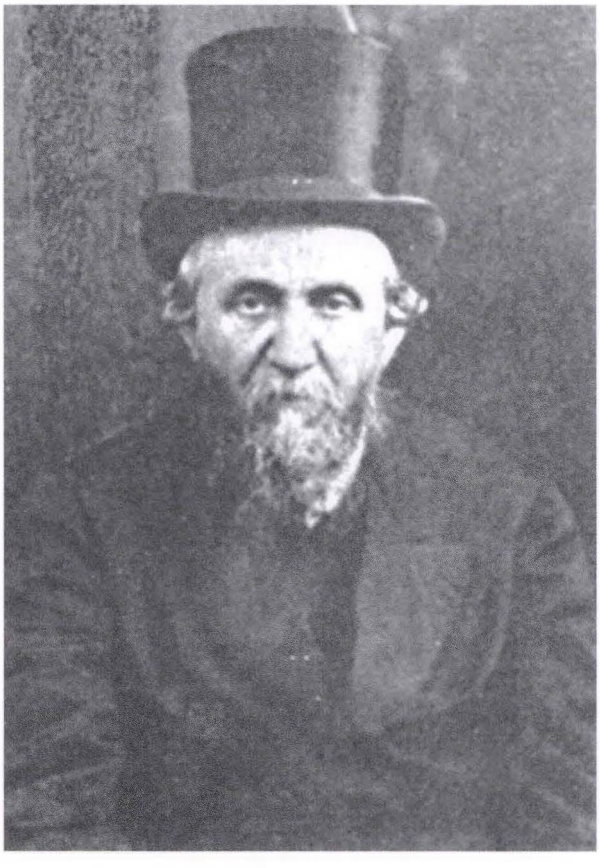
town until 1899. At the time, his economic status was good, as he had inherited a large fortune from his father. He did not wish to leave the quiet town, whose peaceful people did not divert him from his Torah studies.

In a period of two years, he wrote his two most important books, *Leshad HaShemen* (1881, Lwow), containing commentaries on the Rambam, and *Minchat Moshe*, containing responsa on the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orech Chaim, Yoreh De'ah* and Even-Ezra. This book earned a great reputation among the rabbis for its author. Two famous rabbis, Rabbi Chaim Berlin, the Rabbi of Moscow and the son of the Natziv of Wolozin, and Rabbi Szmuel Mohilover, Rabbi of Bialystok, extolled its virtues. The latter, at that time the Av Beit Din of Radom, wrote about the author: "The gifted famous Rabbi has created a lane in the sea of Talmud and the Jewish law adjudicators (*morei hora'a*) and has made all clear; so mighty is his in-depth study and expertise, that "valleys sink down and mountains rise". Large communities pleaded with him to be their rabbi. He did not want to leave his quiet town of Kaminka, however, and labored there in the tent of Torah to broaden knowledge.

After a number of years, he published his famous collection, *Bircat Moshe*, which included three important books in one volume: a) a *Responsa Pamphlet, Bringing a Collection of Recent Opinions* and an anthology of responsa on various matters of pedagogy; b) the pamphlet *Mishchat HaShemen HaTov*, about the Tractate Sabbath, which included *Likutei Shoshanim Hanechmadim Mezahav Verav Peninim*, from the words of our earliest rabbis and more recent great Torah scholars, dispersed among all their books in different places, as a kind of new method of compilation, with his own commentaries; c) the pamphlet *Yafe Lebedika*, which was "a large collection of some instructions and decisions of the greatest present-day rabbis, to be added to the laws of ritual slaughter and examinations of the lung for the benefit of learned teachers and examiners, with important notes, to clarify actual practice with a decisive Torah opinion, and with good taste and knowledge".

In 1893, Rabbi Mosze Nachum was selected as the representative of the Kaminetz-Podolsk region for the Fifth Rabbinical Conference (held in 1894 in Petersburg), together with the industrious minister, Baron Naftali Hertz Ginzburg, who was born in Kaminetz.

In 1899, he was chosen to be Rabbi-Av Beit Din in Ostrolenka. This selection aroused a great deal of attention in the Russian rabbinic circles of those days, as this was almost the only time that a rabbi from the Ukraine was chosen for the rabbinate in Congressional Poland. The change of place, from quiet southern Russia to Chassidic, extremist Poland, at that time, brought about a change in his public activities. When he was in Kaminka, Rabbi Mosze Nachum was known as loyal and devoted lover of Zion. In the book, *Shivat Zion*, to Rabbi A.Y. Slotzky, of blessed memory, he had published an article praising the Land of Israel. For many years, he served on the Odessa Palestine Committee. His home was open to the Hebrew and nationalistic intelligentsia (*maskeel*). After he settled in Poland, however, he withdrew from all Zionist activity. As "official Rabbi" on the part of the government as well, Zionist activity was forbidden to him, as it was forbidden by the authority.



Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski

In 1901 in Ostrolenka, Rabbi Mosze Nachum published his third book, *Be'er Moshe*, which included three important books: a) *Heshiv Moshe* in twelve

sections: the sections of Torah, the redemption, names, purity, holiness, knowledge, caution, the portions on the justice of the law, the rabbinic solutions of problems and the holiness of the Land of Israel, b) *Respect of Sages*, including three sections: the section of instruction, the section of the holiness of Israel and the section of prayer, c) *Binyan Yerushalayim*, including the sections: the building of Jerusalem, a ruling concerning *agunot* [women who cannot obtain a divorce decree from their husbands], "repairing the world", the *cherem* of Rabbeinu Gershom Meor HaGola – a great principle of the Law, notes and decisions clarifying comprehensive matters in practice with a decisive Torah opinion. It contains a special chapter on the matter of "The Unity of the Kollelim" abroad and in the Holy Land.

From his answers in his books, it appears that he exchanged responsa with famous gaonim – most of them when he was already in Ostrolenka. Among these rabbis are the famous gaonim: Rabbi S. Mohilover, Rabbi Josef Dover of Brysk, Rabbi Szlomo Hakoen, the Elder of the Rabbis in Wilan, Rabbi Mordechaj Gimpel Jafe of Rozinoi, who passed away in Israel, and other famous rabbis. Rabbi Szmuel Mohilover called him "the Gaon, the famous Rabbi who is sharp and expert in the Torah, angels of light are with him, 'the cunning binder of spells', who does wonders". Rabbi Josef Dover, Rabbi of Brysk of Lithuania, describes him: "The Gaon, the great famous Rabbi, sharp and expert". Great Torah scholars from different countries turned to him in matters of pedagogy, such as the Gaon Rabbi Awraham Palagi the Sepharadi – the Rabbi of Izmir, and Rabbi Szraga Fajwel Tobjasz of Yassi, and Ish Horwicz of Stari. A special matter, of great value for the importance of Ostrolenka in the rabbinic world, is the composition, *Birchat Chachamim*, which includes letters of greeting from famous rabbis, in honor of the selection of Rabbi Mosze Nachum as Av Beit Din of Ostrolenka. Among them appear these well-known gaonim: Rabbi Shalom Mordechaj Hakoen Szwadron of Brzezany in Galicia, Rabbi Cwi Hirsz Rabinowicz of Kowna, Rabbi Eliahu Chaim Meizel of Lodz, the Aderet (Rabbi Eliahu Dawid Rabinowicz-Teomim) of Mir and Rabbi Milchael Cwi Tenenbaum, Av Beit Din of Lomza, the Elder Gaon, Rabbi Josef Zcharja Sztern, Rabbi of Szavel, Rabbi Chaim Chezkiahu Medini, author of *Sede Chemed*, Rabbi Rafael Szapira, Rabbi of Wolozin, Rabbi Jechiel Michel Epstejn, author of *Orech Shulchan*, and Rabbi Icchak Halewi Horowicz, Rabbi of Stanislaw. Rabbi Milchael, Av Beit Din in Lomza, near Ostrolenka, wrote about its new rabbi in a letter of greeting to him: "The Gaon, the famous Rabbi who is sharp and expert in the Torah, keeper of the Torah and the fear of God", and wishes him well: "May he be blessed in his coming and may he succeed". In addition, he blesses him with "Good luck to his honorable congregation, for with his coming, he brings honor to their city. They will succeed and prosper, they will recognize and appreciate the value of his greatness, and will obey him." The greetings of Rabbi Eliezer Czulewicz, principal of the Holy Yeshiva of the holy community of Lomza, contains these words of congratulations and praise: Greetings to the great Gaon, on the day of his coming in peace to sit on the seat of the new rabbinate. It gladdens our hearts that the Rabbi will bring honor into our midst. It is our hope that he will spread his wings of justice not only over the holy community of Ostrolenka, and administer to them in the light of Torah and his wisdom, but that he will illumine the land and those residing in all its environs. Many will go toward his light, and will enjoy the holiness of his Torah and justice. He will be a fortress and a refuge to establish the word of God and to close the breaches that time has made in the wall of faith. In his days and ours, the light of our holy Torah and of our nation will be raised." At the same time, Rabbi Eliezer describes Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski as "The Gaon, the great Rabbi, the saint and righteous person, the splendor of our generation, and his famous glory radiates to the end of the world in beauty and honor."

A special congratulation, printed in the above-mentioned book, from the Admor, Rabbi Menachem Mamshinov, who had a large congregation of Chassidim in Ostrolenka, was sent to him by Rabbi Szlomo Irmijahu Dometz (*Dayan Umoreh Tzedek* [Judge and Learned Teacher]) of the holy community of Ostrolenka. In this letter, he blesses Rabbi Mosze Nachum: "May God grant him great success and may he be able to use his influence for the good of all the members of his house", and describes him as "the Gaon, the great Rabbi, who is famously praised for his splendid name".

Rabbi Mosze Nahum served as Av Beit Din of Ostrolenka for less than four years. His name was praised all over Poland. In 1902, he was chosen to be Rabbi-Av Beit Din of Kielc, a regional city in Congressional Poland, where he found broad leeway for public work. There, he was greatly concerned with

matters of the city and those of all of the Jewish people. In 1903, he appeared with the Gaon, Rabbi Eliahu Chaim Meizel, Av Beit Din of Lodz, and another two famous rabbis, before the Supervisor of Studies of the Warsaw region, Mr. Czwartz (who later became Minister of Education in Russia), in the matter of easing decrees concerning religious education in *heders* in Russia and Poland. They succeeded. Regarding Rabbi Eliahu Chaim Meizel, it should be noted that this Gaon and famous rabbi had a high regard for Rabbi Mosze Nachum, and when the latter became Rabbi of Ostrolenka, he called him "famous for good name, beauty and praise" in his congratulatory greeting.

In 1910, Rabbi Mosze Nachum was elected to the historic Sixth Rabbinic Conference in Petersburg. He was considered one of the most honored members of the conference. As Chairman of the Religious Committee, he did a great deal to unite the opinions of the two extremes: the Admorim and Rabbis, on the one hand, and the intelligentsia and community leaders on the other, who took his word and opinions into consideration in all matters on the religious and general public agenda of the Jews of Russia. The Russian government, uneasy about the decisions of the Rabbinic Conference, decided that they should be tabled; afterwards, World War I broke out.

During World War I, he sacrificed himself to save Jews from the Russian gallows. He stood in the breach and did a great deal for thousands of refugee families that poured into Kielc. It was his bitter fate to accompany innocent Jews who were sentenced to death. The many troubles destroyed his faltering health, and he was forced to leave his beloved city, Kielc, to rest in the city of Horol, in the Poltava region, where his sons lived – Dawid Jonah (the son-in-law of Rabbi Eliezer Mosze Megiowski of Horol) and Jeszajahu Hesczel (the son-in-law of Rabbi Awraham Mlynarzewicz of Kopisk, near Lomza).

After a short time, he became ill in Horol and passed away on June 30, 1916.

During his illness, with him were only his children and grandchildren, his student, Rabbi Chanoch Henach Flakser, and Rabbi Szmuel Frydman, who tended him day and night. His son, long may he live!, Szymon Dow Jeruzalimski, raised and educated in his childhood in Ostrolenka (and who later lived in Miechow, in the Kielc region) accompanied his father to the Rabbinical Conference in Petersburg and published interesting recollections about the conference in the Jewish press, both in Yiddish and Hebrew. He now lives in Tel Aviv, fulfilling an important position in the Tel Aviv Comptroller's office.



***Ktav Rabbanut* (Official appointment as rabbi of the city)**
(From the community of Ostrolenka to its rabbi, Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski, of blessed memory)



Copy of the *Ktav Rabbanut* given to Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski by the community of Ostrolenka
(See *My Ostrolenka*, by S.D. Yerushalmi)

About Rabbi Jeruzalimski in the Press

Ostrolenka (Lomza region)

"It is my pleasure to notify our readers that the Gaon Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski, the glory of our generation, Av Beit Din of the Holy Community of Kaminka, after being evaluated by the greatest officials of the regional city of Siedlce, excelling in comprehensive knowledge, and being certified to serve as rabbi on behalf of the kingdom in all Polish cities – will now hold a high position of honor in our congregation.

We cannot describe the great honor given to our Rabbi on his arrival: hundreds of people came out to greet him in the city of Siedlce and on the railway tracks near our city. Many visitors came to his home every Sabbath and *Motzei Shabbat Kodesh* (Saturday night) to hear his pleasant words, which made a strong, good impression.

In the name of all the members of our congregation, I hereby express my congratulations to the Gaon and Rabbi. May he, in his great wisdom, succeed in making peace between all political parties, for the good of our congregation which is content with its lot – that it has been privileged to choose this excellent Rabbi."

Y.M. Lewinsztejn, son of the Gaon of Serock
(*HaTzfira*, No. 3, 1899)

B

With deep sorrow of heart and souls full of longing, we have said farewell to our beloved Rabbi, the Gaon Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski, *Shlita* [may he live a good long life], who has been appointed Rabbi-Av Beit Din of the city of Kielce.

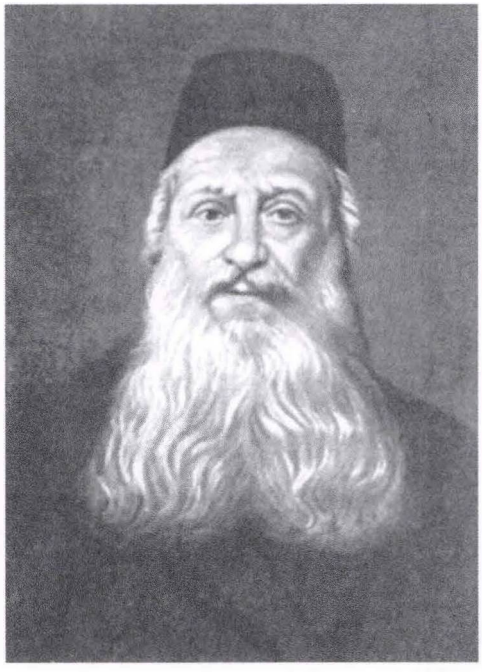
All the townspeople went to the Rabbi to receive his parting blessing, prior to his departure with the members of his family this week, to bring honor to the place of his new employment.

Indeed, during the four years of his tenure here, the Gaon Rabbi led his congregation with intelligence, understanding and leniency. May our shepherd be loved by all Jews, as well as by citizens and high-level officials, because of his greatness and lofty attributes.

Blessed is the congregation of Kielce, which has secured this exalted Rabbi. We bless the Gaon Rabbi, that he may go onward and upward, and succeed in everything he does.

Signed by
"The representatives of the Congregation of Ostrolenka"
(*HaTzfira*, No. 192, 1902)

Rabbi Icchak Bursztejn

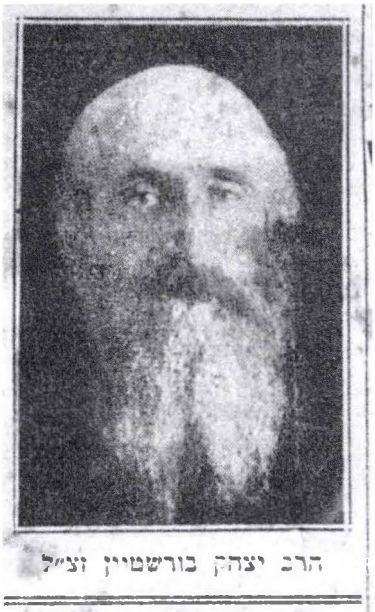


Ostrolenka was without a rabbi for a few years after the departure of Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski from Ostrolenka to his new rabbinate in the city of Kielc. This was due to factionalism and disagreements between the Misnagid *balabatim* (local heads of households) and the Chassidim, who, for the most part, belonged to Gur, Alexander and Amszinow. Although, at one point, Rabbi Cwi Pinczas was chosen by a large majority, the Chassidim and some *balabatim* complained to the minister of the Lomza region about his sympathy for Zionism. Because of "this sin", the minister did not endorse the appointment of Rabbi Pinczas as Rabbi of Ostrolenka.

The matter reverberated throughout the Jewish public in Poland. *Der Friend*, appearing in Petersburg at the time, responded with a sharp and stinging article.

After much hustle and bustle, the Rabbi of Piatnica, Rabbi Icchak Bursztejn, was approved as Rabbi of the community in 1905. He was Rabbi of Ostrolenka for

nearly thirty-five years, until he was killed in the great Holocaust of our days, together with his community.



הרב יצחק בורשטיין זצ"ל

היינט הספד נאך הרב יצחק בורשטיין זצ"ל

Picture from his last years (article from the *Morgen Journal*, New York, 1.11.1942)

Rabbi Icchak Bursztejn was born in 1869 in Lomza, the son of his esteemed, charitable father, Reb Szlomo. He received his Torah education from the erudite *lamdan*, Rabbi Szlomo Piotnicki, author of *Nachal HaAravim*, about the Tractate Aruvim. He taught Gemara, Rashi, *Tosfot* (glosses) and the commentaries to a group of talented, excellent students from good families. Rabbi Icchak was known in his youth for his outstanding qualities and great expertise, knowing many *Mishna* tractates with commentaries and *Tosfot* nearly by heart.



ספר
שאלות ותשובות
מטעמי יצחק
חלק שני
לקוטי תורה
יצחק בורשטין
אסטראלענקא
בהוצאת
וואַרשא תרח"ץ
PRINTED IN POLAND

Frontispiece of *Meta'amei Yitzchak* by Rabbi I. Bursztejn, of blessed memory

At the age of 15, he married the daughter of the well-to-do *lamdan* from Lomza, the generous Reb Cwi Dawid Gielcinski (who passed away at a ripe old age in Tel Aviv). After his marriage, he went to Kutno and served its Av Beit Din, the Gaon, Rabbi Israel Jehoszua Trunk. He continued to study Torah, and before reaching the age of twenty was ordained in pedagogy by the Gaon, Rabbi Icchak Elchanan, Rabbi of Kowna.

In 1894, when he was only 22, Rabbi Icchak Bursztejn was appointed Rabbi of Piatnica, near Lomza (in place of Rabbi Mosze Kotlowitz, who was appointed Rabbi-Av Beit Din of Jedwabne). He served in the Piatnica Rabbinate for 11 years, continually studying Torah. He was close to the great Torah scholars of the Lomza yeshiva and its famous *Ramim* [heads of its rabbinical academy], and would visit Rabbi Milchael, the local Av Beit Din and author of *Divrei Milchael*. Even then, he was already writing a complete book of his many responsa on the four parts of the *Shulchan Aruch* and his new interpretations of the Gemara, Rashi and *Tosfot*.

At the time he served as Rabbi-Av Beit Din of Ostrolenka, he was known as one of the greatest rabbis of Poland, and answered questions about matters of pedagogy and *halacha* for expert rabbis from near and far.

In 1840, his book, *Meta'amei Yitzchak*, on the *Shulchan Aruch* and *Orech Chaim* was published. It was widely disseminated in the yeshiva and rabbinic world.

Learned Teachers (*Morei Tzedek*)

Rabbi Jakow Szlomo Pizman

Born in Ostrolenka in 1871. Educated in Lithuanian yeshivas and in the Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies (*Kollel Perushim*) in Kowna. He was ordained to the rabbinate by Rabbi Cwi Hirsz Rabinowicz, Av Beit Din of Kowna, Rabbi Mosze Deniszewsky, Av Beit Din of Slobodka (near Kowna), and Rabbi Milchael Cwi Halewi Tenenbaum, Av Beit Din of Lomza. For a short time, he was a rabbi in the village of Sieradnik in Zamot (Kowna region), and in 1904 – rabbi and Jewish law adjudicator in the city of his birth, Ostrolenka.

During World War I, he was expelled as a refugee – as were all Ostrolenkans – to Russia, where he died.

Rabbi Szlomo Irmijahu Grynberg

In 1895, he was already the learned teacher of Ostrolenka, and served in that role for decades during the time of the Avot Beit Din Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski and Rabbi Icchak Bursztejn. Compared to the learned teacher mentioned above, who was a Misnagid, the "Rashi" was an Amszinow Chassid and frequently visited the Admor, Rabbi Menachem Kalisz. The Amszinow Chassidim in Ostrolenka consulted their Admor as to whether or not to support the candidacy of Rabbi Mosze Nachum as rabbi of their congregation. After the Admor give his consent, through the learned teacher, Rabbi Szlomo Irmijahu, they joined in accepting the Rabbi as Av Beit Din of Ostrolenka.

Through this learned teacher, the Admor of Amszinow sent a letter of congratulations to the new Rabbi of Ostrolenka, in which he wrote, among other things: "The great, well-known Gaon Rabbi – may the Blessed Lord grant him great success, that he influence the members of his congregation for the good."

Rabbi Szlomo Irmijahu became famous in the world of Torah when he wrote *Minchat Yishai* (published in Piotrkow in 1912). The book contains two parts: a. responsa about the four parts of the *Shulchan Aruch*, and b. homiletics in the in-depth study method (*pilpul*). At the end of the homiletics section, there is a special sermon that he preached in the *Chevrat Talmud Torah* in Ostrolenka. There are also two others: one that he preached on the Sabbath before Passover (*Shabbat HaGadol*), and another on the Sabbath before Yom Kippur (*Shabbat Shuva*) (when there was no Av Beit Din in the city).

Endorsements by great rabbis are to be found in the book: Rabbi Milchael, Av Beit Din of Lomza; Rabbi Eliahu Klatzkin, Av Beit Din of Lublin; Rabbi Josef of Amszinow, Av Beit Din of Ostrow (later the Admor of Amszinow); and Rabbi Jehuda Lejb Gordon, Av Beit Din of Ostrow. Rabbi Milchael wrote about this book: "And I enjoyed several issues in his homiletics touching on *halacha* and its practical application." Rabbi Gordon of Ostrow distinguishes the author as "sharp and expert

in Gemara and commentaries, beautifully and clearly penetrating in instruction."

The Rabbi-Av Beit Din of Ostrolenka, Rabbi Icchak Bursztejn, wrote about him: "A fortress and tower, sharp and expert in Torah; his writings are pure and clear."

In Section 14, there is an answer from the author to his son-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Meir, Rabbi in Lomzica (from the year 1911). It should be noted that this son-in-law, of the Grabie family, was later appointed Av Beit Din of Shiadowa, and died there in the summer of 1918, at a young age.

The book *Minchat Yishai* has many signatories from Ostrolenka, among them many *balabatim* of the town.

Rabbi Jakow Jehuda Hakoen

(Rabbi of Goworowo, Ostrolenka region)

He was the scion of generations of brilliant, saintly Chassidic rabbis, of a distinguished lineage of *Cohanim*, son after son, from the days of *Shimon HaTzadik*. His father, Rabbi Cwi Arjeh Hakoen, the *Ratzba*, author of *Tahaluchot HaMayim veHayabasha* and other essays, was known as a Gaon and Chassid, and served in the rabbinate of Niemirow. His [grand]father, the holy Rabbi Icchak Ajzyk, known as the *Cohen Gadol*, was a student of the holy Rabbi Mordechaj of Malkiewicz, and author of the book *Shaarei Yitzchak*, about the wisdom of the Kabala.

Rabbi Icchak Ajzyk was the son of the Gaon Rabbi Jakow Jehuda Kahana, Av Beit Din of Wolpa, who was the brilliant student of the Admorim, Rabbi Szlomo of Karlin and Rabbi Jakow Josef, author of *HaToldot*.

In 1879, in his youth, Rabbi Jakow Jehuda Kahana (the family name was Bocian) wrote a book called *VeShav HaCohen*. He set himself a goal of settling every point where the writers of glosses *(Tosfot)* on the Gemara encountered difficult questions and left them unresolved (*tayma*). In his great modesty, he did not publish his name openly on the book's cover, but wrote "that I prepared and investigated with my young, modest intelligence, working for our holy Torah and its advocates. From R.Y.Y., son of the Gaon Rabbi, the *Ratzba* Kahana." At the beginning of the book, which is very astute and profound, are two endorsements, from the Gaon, Rabbi Eliahu Ben Beniamin Szick (Av Beit Din of Lida, Zagra and Kobryn) and from Rabbi Szmuel Zanwil Klopfisz (chief learned teacher in Warsaw).

The second rabbi notes that the author, R.Y.Y. Kahana, is "my relative" and "I knew him several years as a great Torah scholar, an expert in Mishna and the Jewish law adjudicators." The first Rabbi wrote about him: "And I saw in him that '*shelo ishtabish kahana*', that is, that the Cohen was not mistaken and not confused (according to Tractate Passover 17), and his words are golden and direct homiletic, and the author, out of his great modesty, requested in (his) introduction not to rely on him, only to arouse those who study, who will delve in order to resolve contradictions of the holy Gemara."

Rabbi Jehuda Kahana apparently served as Rabbi-Av Beit Din of Goworowo after the death of its previous rabbi, Rabbi Aron Klopfisz (brother of the above-mentioned Rabbi Szmuel Zanwil Klopfisz of Warsaw), and served as rabbi of the community for many years.

Rabbi Jakow Jehuda brings us the matter of a special corrective ruling which was written in Goworowo on matters of ritual slaughter, in the presence of all the important *balabatim*. The banning writ states that "slaughters are not permitted to slaughter large animals independently, but (they) are required to be in one group at the time of the slaughter and the inspection, and to show each other their knives. When slaughtering small animals, they must show each other every morning. If a slaughterer is not at home, the second slaughterer is required to come before the Rabbi-Av Beit Din, to show him his knife before he slaughters, aside from the fact that he is customarily required to show his knife to the rabbi of the town." So each and every one of them must bring the lungs to the rabbi for inspection. The writ of the *Relag* (this may be Rabbi Jehuda Lejb Gordon, Av Beit Din of Ostrow, later Av Beit Din of Lomza), repeatedly stressed this "prohibition and fierce social ban" (according to the book *Be'er Moshe* of Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski, from the period when he was Av Beit Din of Ostrolenka, Warsaw, 1905).

Rabbi Jakow Jehuda Kahana is described in the book *Stirat Z'kenim* by the Gaon Rabbi Chaim Mordechaj Braunrot, Av Beit Din of Ciechanow and Rabbi-Av Beit Din of Tel Aviv (born in Ostrolenka in 1881) as a Gaon, a saintly man and an exemplary person. (The wife of Rabbi Braunrot was the daughter of a rabbi who was exalted in Torah and Chassidism, of fine character and beloved by all, the well-known Rabbi Szmuel Hakoen – *Szmuelke Sterdyner*, who was the son of the above-mentioned Rabbi Jakow Kahana and educated and raised by his distinguished father in

the town of his birth – Goworowo).

The second son of Rabbi Jakow Jehuda Koen was the eminent rabbi and Chassid, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Hakoen, who lived to a ripe old age. The Torah was his occupation all his days; he toiled diligently day and night on Torah, work and modesty. During World War II, he, his wife and their family fled for their lives from Goworowo, where they lived, to Bialystok. There they were murdered by the cursed Nazis (according to the above-mentioned book, *Stirat Z'kenim*).

By the way, it should be mentioned that the sister of Rabbi Braunrot and her husband, Rabbi Szmuel, the son of Rabbi Szabtaj Kuper, who were residents of Ostrolenka, fled from there at the outbreak of World War II and reached the city of Dabrowica in Wolin. They and all their family were murdered there during the Holocaust by the cursed Nazis.

M. Cynowicz

Rabbi Jossele the Sharp

Before Rabbi Jossele the Sharp was selected rabbi of the city of Ostrolenka, he went through a great deal. His parents lived in one of the villages in the area. When his father, the family breadwinner, passed away, he found his way to Ostrolenka. His clothes were shabby, his feet were wrapped in rags, his hair and beard were covered with the dust of the roads and all of his possessions were wrapped in a kerchief held in his hand. The young men who learned in the study hall asked him what he wanted, and he answered them: My soul yearns for Torah. From then on, Jossele sat in the study hall and learned day and night. His fellow creatures took pity on him and gave him "*teig*" ["days", that is, meals in rotation at the homes of affluent citizens].

You will find no city that loves Torah scholars more than Ostrolenka. Even the rabbi of the city noticed him and found him a suitable match, the daughter of a good family. In time, he became a great Torah scholar. When the rabbi of the city of Ostrolenka died, Rabbi Jossele was appointed in his place. His great reputation spread immediately in the entire area, because he was sharp and expert. Rabbis and scholars knew that when appearing before Rabbi Jossele the Sharp, one had to be very careful in biblical discourse, lest he examine them with acute questions. His fame grew so great that rich communities tried to get him to be their rabbi, but he refused to leave the city where he was drawn near to the Torah.

Rabbi Jossele's memory was keen and excellent. The great scholars of his generation said that the "angel of forgetfulness" had no control over him, and that everything he absorbed was held by him as if actually kept in a box.

Rabbi Jossele was also a Chassid. Once, the Rabbi of Gur, may his virtue stand us in good stead, passed through Ostrolenka and stayed with him for the Sabbath. The Rabbi of Gur usually gave a biblical discourse during the third Sabbath meal. This time, however, he asked Rabbi Jossele to tell him of his new Torah interpretations. The latter agreed, and the Rabbi [of Gur] was full of wonder, as he saw before him a gushing spring.

When he asked the Rabbi of Ostrolenka why he withheld such good from scholars and did not spread his words of Torah, Rabbi Jossele told him the following amazing story:

In my wintry days, I was used to debate with rabbis who came to our city. While I was absorbing great quantities of Torah, I wanted things to be clear and resolved. Once, there came to our city Rabbi Jerucham of Shiadowa, who already had a reputation near and far. Because he was concerned that he would be distracted from the world of Torah and wisdom, he refused to take upon himself the yoke of the rabbinate. He wrote a book called *Mesilat Chaim* and went from one rabbi to another with the manuscript, to get endorsements of his book. Rabbi Jerucham sat opposite me, and began to read from the manuscript. I was young then, and longed to show him my acuity and expertise. When he began to read his new interpretations of the Mishna and the writings of the Rambam, even though it was not polite, I said to him: "I see that Your Honor wishes to newly interpret such and such a *halacha*, such and such an innovation and that, in this tractate, he wishes to resolve such and such a difficulty with such and such a solution, and here in the *Tosfot*, he wishes to contradict the words of the Rambam in his book, *Yad Chazakah* . . ."

When he heard my words, Rabbi Jerucham said to me: I am now writing my book, *Mesilat Chaim* – but after I have heard your words of Torah and seen that all is already known to you, why should I publish the book?

After a year, Rabbi Jerucham passed away. I approached his heirs, and asked them to find his manuscript, which I would publish for the benefit of many. But it was impossible to find his manuscript. As

his heirs told me, Rabbi Jerucham had burned his manuscript out of great despondency of soul, and because he regretted the years he had spent writing his book. Therefore, because I saddened a Torah scholar and prevented him from publishing his book, I decreed silence on myself.

Since then, the Rabbi of Ostrolenka, Rabbi Jossele the Sharp, did not write any more new interpretations. The only remaining small sparks that flew from his anvil are the endorsements he wrote for other authors. Although Rabbi Jossele's Torah was buried with him, it is known that his spirit abounded like a burgeoning fountainhead, and that he was very sharp. This is clear from the responsa he exchanged with the giants of his generation.

Netta Grabie

Supporters of Torah and Learning in Ostrolenka

Among the important *balabatim* who supported the study of Torah in Ostrolenka in about 1839, there appear the signatures of these people on a list of "signatories" of the book, *Shvil HaYosher*, of the Gaon Rabbi Szaul Sziskes of Vilna: the philanthropist Tikocziner, Reb Cwi Jakow, the son of Reb Chaim Heisenberg, Reb Jehuda Lima, son of Reb Nachman of Tiktin, and Reb Jehuda Lejb Lifszitz.

★

Regarding the philanthropist Tikocziner of Ostrolenka, the following should be noted. He was known as Reb Nachman Tikocziner, who moved to Lomza. He was one of the wealthy persons of the city, a contractor and supplier of the needs of the army and the government buildings of the minister of the region and the district. His saintly and very generous wife, Fejga Rejza, was the daughter of the philanthropist, Reb Awraham Frenkel of Lublin. Except for her son, Szlomo Tikocziner, who married into the well-known Efron family of Petersburg, they had daughters: the wife of the industrialist, Adolph Dobronicki of Lodz; Dora, wife of the philanthropist, Faiter Beckerman of Warsaw; the wife of Ignatz Poznansky of Lodz; Alexandra, wife of the merchant, Rozenblat, of Lodz, and one other daughter.

★

Mrs. Tikocziner passed away in Lodz, when she was there in 1882. After a few years, her husband also came to Lodz from Lomza, and passed away there. The inscription on her tombstone was written by the Gaon Rabbi Eliahu Chaim Meizel, Av Beit Din of Lodz, who knew her from Lomza, and wrote about her: "Her modesty and saintliness were known in the gates/She clad the naked and satisfied the hungry without limit/May she be blessed above women in the tent/And may the honor of God shine on her soul."

★

In about 1895, these *balabatim* are found on the list of "signatories" from Ostrolenka in the book, *Z'chuta D'Avraham*, by the Gaon Rabbi Awraham Landa of Ciechanow (sermons for the Sabbath before Passover and the Sabbath before Yom Kippur, Warsaw, 1895), headed by: Reb Symcha Bunim Szapira, grandson of the holy Rabbi Baruch of Czyzewa, and Rabbi Szlomo Irmijahu, the learned teacher of Ostrolenka.

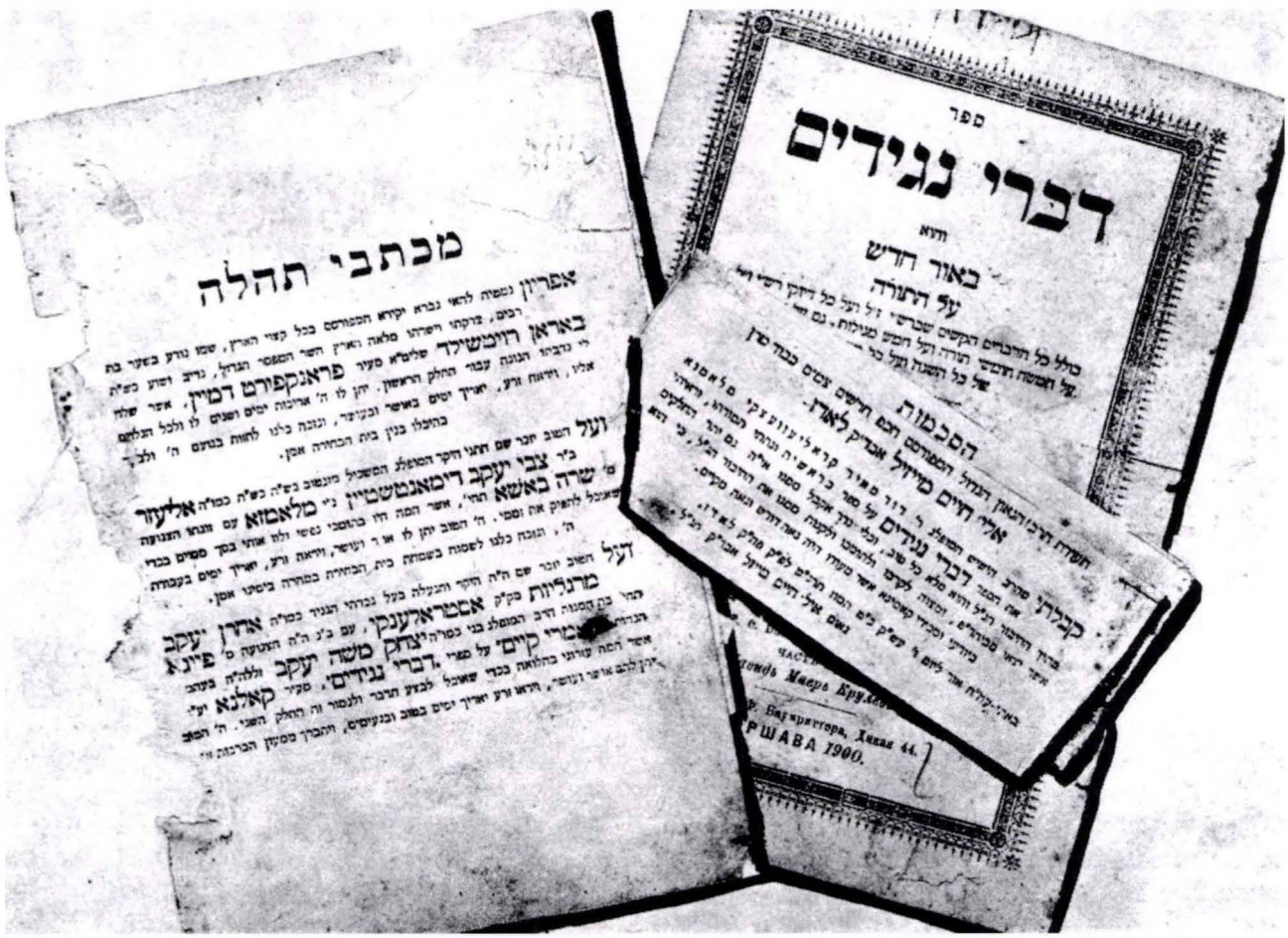
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It should be noted that in the beginning of the book *Divrei Negidim* (a new explanation of the Torah) by the exalted, elderly Rabbi Dawid Meir Krulawiecki of Lomza, published in Warsaw in 1901, we find "letters of praise", and in them expressions of special thanks to Reb Aron Margaliot of the holy community of Ostrolenka*, for his help in publishing the book, thus: "And may they be remembered favorably – the dear and exalted husband of my granddaughter, the philanthropist Aron Jakow Margaliot of the holy community of

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* One of this city's community elders.

Ostrolenka, with his wife, the modest Mrs. Fejga – Long live! – daughter of the late exalted Rabbi, my son, Icchak Mosze Jakow, of blessed memory, from the city of Kolno, author of *Maamarei Kayam*, commentaries on my book, *Divrei Negidim*, who assisted me with a loan so that I could carry out and finish this, the second part. May the good God give them happiness and abundance, and may they see their seed live long and well, and be blessed from the wellspring of blessings. Amen."



Ostrolenka and its Vicinity in the Press

A. His Majesty, the Emperor, in Ostrolenka

While this city does not excel in its many inhabitants, Jews or Gentiles, it is of very great value in the excellent chronicles and histories of this passing century. Many of our kingdom's great army officers excelled here and in the city's vicinity near the River Narew, in their war against the battalions of Napoleon I in 1806-7, in the Polish rebellion in 1831 and at other times.

Many readers of the *Chronicles of Russia* know its exalted worth in the history of its wars. Monuments to its memories still exist today. There also live among us dozens of people who remember a little or a lot of our armies' deeds and great acts – which were demonstrated in the fields of our city on the battleground.

Great was the joy of our townspeople a month ago, when we were officially informed by the regional government that, in not many days, the district will again become an impregnable hill for eventful and unique military exercises, to take place during the second half of the month of August in the Warsaw army region. Besides great army officers and important personages of the kingdom, who will come to command and see the camps march and our armies battle on the western and eastern flanks of the Warsaw region with Vilna – numbering 122,000 common soldiers and 4,500 generals and commanders – the ruler of our land in person, His Majesty, will also come, accompanied by great princes of his family and exalted guests from abroad, to see the great bravery of his army.

The preparations in our city to receive His Majesty, the Emperor, and the great princes, are coming nearer completion daily. Splendid pillars and an arc of honor, garlanded with plaits of flowering buds and glorious banners, have been erected at the entrance to the city in their honor, so that when they arrive at the gates of our city – Our Lord, His Majesty, the Emperor, and the great ministers who will stand before him – they may pass through them. The joy of all our city's residents, in general, and our brother Jews, in particular, has no end.

The members of the congregation, and the Av Beit Din at their head, have decided to welcome His Majesty bearing a Torah scroll, and with a greeting of peace in the name of all our Jewish inhabitants.

The streets, passageways and bridges of Ostrolenka are now paved and repaired. The city government, its officials and all its citizens will try to improve and beautify private and public buildings. The local authority will closely supervise the city government and its interests to realize the desires of His Majesty, our King, and the exalted ministers who accompany him on his way.

"A visitor from Brysk, Lithuania"
(*HaMelitz*, 1897, 27 August, No. 194)

B. The "*Shtebl*" of the Zionists

A few hours walk from the regional city is the district city, Ostrolenka . . . It has a synagogue and a study hall. In the attic of the study hall are the *shteblich* [prayer houses], a separate *shtebl* for the Chassidim of each rabbi.

The material situation of the townspeople is not bad. The presence of many army personnel creates opportunities to earn a living from different kinds of contracting and commerce. There are a Talmud Torah and a charitable organization; but the influence of the Chassidim is already recognizable, with all its virtues and faults. There is no public pulse: each is separate, each *shtebl* is only concerned with its own needs. Also, Zionism, which was at its founding an "Ashkenazi custom" association, has come under the influence of the Sephardic custom of the surroundings, and has become its own *shtebl*. In the attic of the study hall, near the *shteblich* of the Chassidim, a *shtebl* for the Zionists has also been built. And just as there is, according to the custom of Chabad, a *mashpia* [spiritual advisor] in every *shtebl*, so in the Zionists' *shtebl* there is "the teacher" in the town*, the Jewish *heder* teacher of the language of the State, which they are required to learn in *heders* in Poland, and Hebrew in the homes of the intelligentsia. And just as this teacher is alone in his teaching, so is he alone in his Zionism. Although there are other "Zionists" in the *shtebl*, and they pray in the *minyan*, they are only "*shtebl* Zionists" and no more. In the market, they do not at all "excel" in their Zionism, and do not even lift a finger for the benefit of Zionism. All of its work rests on the shoulders of the teacher, who, with all his devotion to our goals, cannot do a great deal, and sold only about thirty shares, and no more. I think that if the *shtebl* was in a Zionist organization city, and its members met from time to time on weekdays, and tried to

* This refers to Anshel Lev (Ed.).

sell a great number of shares and collect contributions of members for the support company, which had twenty people in it two years ago, everything would go well. And now, with the establishment of the *shtebl*, the organization is idle. The Zionists split from the rest of their brothers and withdrew into their four walls, and they do not meet each other except at prayer times. - - - But the Zionist teacher says that, on the contrary, if not for the *shtebl*, there would not even be a "*zecher leZion*" [a vestige of Zionism] in the town. The organization was idle anyway, because there are no workers. The *shtebl* gathers and unites them, and if there is a "Zionist body" in the city in the form of a *shtebl*, then it is hoped that the day will come and a "Zionist spirit" will be deposited into this body and it will live and stand on its feet and go out into the city to work . . . So he said. Who is right – I don't know. But it is clear that at the time that Morasha in Warsaw influenced it, it had a Zionist organization and worked a bit. Now, under the influence of Morasha, the organization is idle and it only has a *shtebl*! . . .

The influence of the Chassidim is known in Ostrolenka, and the Chassidim are total Misnagdim [opponents] of Zionism. Among them, there are Chassidim who are great in Torah, and their influence on the public is great. Among the Zionists, there is not to be found a diligent community leader whose influence on the people will be great and weaken the influence of the Chassidim.

The Rabbi of the city is one of the first *Chovevei Zion*. For many years, in his first city, he was a delegate to the Committee in Odessa, and I suspect that he was a Zionist. He has now has become a sanctimonious Chassid of the Chassid, he has traveled to their holy one and become holy. He does not set store by political Zionism and pays lip service to *Chivat Zion* [Love of Zion movement], but is not actively involved in it. He pays membership dues when they are demanded of him, but does not stir others to give.

***HaMelitz*, 1901, 147**

C. In *HaTzfira*, 1903 (68), S. Sapir Reports from Ostrolenka

"Our city is not large, but has been privileged to have many military personnel in it: the Twenty-first Regiment from Muromski, the Twenty-Second Nizgorodski, as well as the Gluchowski Cavalry Regiment. A large number of our Jewish brothers are in them. Not infrequently, it has happened that they were forced to eat *chametz* on Passover, until some of the important worthy persons of our city were stirred up. Through their efforts, a soup kitchen, licensed by the chief officer of the Regiment, was established for Passover for our Jewish brothers who are military personnel."

D. The "Illusion" in Ostrolenka

(In *HaTzfira*, 1914 (No. 105), in the article, *Views of Life*, signed by Y. Nisenbojm, the following article about the Jews of Ostrolenka appears, in connection with the Illusion (Cinema), which was opened there.)

Several Poles in the city of Ostrolenka opened an Illusion of "pure sanctity" [*taharat hakodesh*]. From start to finish, it was run by pure Poles, without any Jewish hands in the middle, so that, God forbid, no Jew would earn a cent . . .

The Jewish youths saw this and said: "In the measure by which a man measures, so he is measured." They refrained from being defiled by entering this "holy sanctuary". The owners, noticing the audacity of these young Jews, who did not offer their cheeks to be slapped, turned for help to "their old Jews", Chassidim and people active in the city, who had not yet worn out their lips singing *How Beautiful* (*Ma Yafit*), and asked that they find various means to increase visits by Jews to the patriotic Illusion.

The elders and the Chassidim, those compassionate children of compassionate ancestors, urgently ordered their young sons to visit the Illusion.

The sons pleaded with their fathers: Whenever we have a play to help the city's poor, you hamper us with all your might, and abuse and curse us as Jewish sinners. How has the Illusion merited this *mitzvah* [religious commandment]?

And the fathers answered their sons: Supporting the city's poor is really a "*mitzvah*". Producing a play for it is forbidden, an absolute violation, a "*mitzvah* brought about by a sin". Here, however, we admit that it is a "sin" to support the enemies of Israel. Therefore, it is permissible to visit the Illusion, as this is a "sin brought about by a sin" . . . But the youths were stubborn this time, and said: "Whoever eats garlic and the smell is spread, will eat it again . . ." – and we don't want this! Thus was ignited a wonderful war between the fathers and sons. When the fathers saw that their sons are rebellious and teach their fathers the law, and that outside, the boycotted are angry with the heads of the Jews because the Illusion stands empty, they decided that if the youths do not wish to enjoy themselves, the elders must enjoy the sights of the Illusion. Is it not true that "We support the Gentiles . . . and bury their dead . . . for the sake of peace" . . .? When the question arose, "Who will go?", it was decided to cast lots. He upon whom the die was cast must wear his velvet hat, silk kapote and Sabbath sash, and go . . . to the Illusion . . . The die

was cast, and the walls of the Illusion in Ostrolenka saw a "public" that no Illusion in the world had seen the like of . . . a real "*shtebl*" of Chassidim on a holiday. All that was missing were the *shtreimelich.*

Oh, how great and strong is the love of the Jews of Poland for the hand that strikes them!

★

Ostrolenka

A short time ago, the opening of the library near our Zionist Association was held in our city. A large crowd came to the opening celebration. The party was opened by Mr. Jeruhamson with a speech about the value of the Hebrew book and language in our history. Mr. Filar lectured about the Hebrew calendar. Mr. Rapaport recited Bialik's poem, *If You Wish to Know.* The closing speech was made by the Association's Chairman, Mr. Grynszpan. All the speeches were received with satisfied applause from those gathered.

Recently, the Association started giving Hebrew language evening classes in its hall. About one hundred and thirty people came to the opening. Messrs. Jeruhamson, Rozen, Milar, Grynszpan and Gliszinski spoke about the value of our national language. Those gathered thanked them with applause.

The Zionist Association organizes lectures in its hall every Sabbath about our nation's history and critiques of Zionism. Last Sabbath was the first lecture by Mr. Lew about "The Basel Program". Mr. Jeruhamson read a report about the Third Conference of Zionists in Poland, which took place in Warsaw. (He was the Ostrolenkan Zionists' delegate at the conference.)

In elections for the community government, the Zionists won a complete victory. Four community leaders were elected, Messrs. Y. Soko (National), Josef Litwer (Zionist), Margalit and Chmiel (non-partisan).

***HaTzfira*, 1917, 42, 10 December 1917**

★

Goworowo

On Saturday night of the intermediary days of Succoth, about one hundred people came to a Zionist meeting in our city. Mr. Jeruhamson of Ostrolenka opened the meeting with a speech about Zionist development and the value of our movement at this time. He called on those gathered to act on behalf of the idea of the revival of our nation.

Mr. Ciechanower was elected Chairman of the meeting. The Chairman proposed a decision to establish in our city, as well, a Zionist association, and to organize night classes for the study of the Hebrew language and lectures about Zionism and various national issues. [He also proposed] organizing a fete, the proceeds of which would be dedicated to establishing an adequate library, the lack of which is now felt in our city. All the suggestions were unanimously accepted.

Messrs. Ginzburg, Ciechanower, Fabrowicz, Mrs. Judyt Rozen, Alik Zlata, Frydman and Trahynowski were elected to the temporary committee.

Awrin and Bonim were elected to the inspection commission.

***HaTzfira*, 1917, (No. 34), 18 October 1917**

Zionist Quarters Seized Due to Informers

The Zionist organizations, *HaTikva* and *HeChalutz*, were located in the same apartment in Ostrolenka. In recent months, those of a "particular court", who are concerned with our welfare, became angered by these two organizations because of their successful activities. They did not look favorably upon the various campaigns of *HeChalutz*, such as collecting books for pioneers in the Land of Israel, fundraising for the *HeChalutz* Fund, etc. Therefore, they decided to hinder this activity. In the *shtebl*, there was a commotion, shouting and threats to break in and destroy everything to be found at the Zionist organization. In the end, they only threatened and did not do anything. The two organizations continued their intensive activity. But this "socialist" activity was also not to the taste of the government, and it stopped the activity, using various excuses. National Jewish Committee lobbyists and local representatives of the two organizations succeeded in persuading the mayor that his opinion was mistaken, and he permitted their activity to continue.

After a short time, someone informed again, and the government seized the building.

It should be noted that, a short time ago, the government seized the Jewish community building, without any legal basis.

It is not enough that there is persecution from without; destroyers also come from within our people, assisting those who do not wish us well.

***Neier Heint*, 25 January 1922**

*

In 1922, the sum of 17,600 Polish marks was collected in Ostrolenka for Ukrainian Jews suffering from hunger. This

was released for publication by the *Zeitweilliger Yiddishe Natzional Rath* in Warsaw (the Temporary National Committee of Polish Jews). The main collector was Mr. Pedowicz.

From the *Heint*, 1922, No. 234

Report from Ostrolenka

Heint, 1923:

On the 5th of this month, we held a meeting of representatives from all echelons of the Jewish population concerning future elections to the Sejm and the Senat. Zionists, Mizrachi, Young Mizrachi, revisionists, Shomer HaTzair, merchants, tradesmen, *balabatim* and nonpartisans participated. Unanimously, they decided to vote for a national Jewish bloc, affiliated with the national minorities bloc. An election committee was chosen, headed by Mr. Menachem Bialy, and his deputies: Icchak Ajzenberg and Icchak Rapaport. Beniamin Gutman and Mosze Litwer were chosen to be secretaries.

B. G-n

Heint, 25.3.1925

A delegation from Keren HaYesod recently visited our city – Rabbi Bard and A. Pyotrkowski. Thanks to them, the Permanent Committee for Keren HaYesod was organized: Y. Zylberglajt (Chairman), I. Rapaport, A. Chmiel, D. Chacek, S. Ben-Adam, A. Szperling, M. Sarniewicz, A. Lew, R. Wajsblum, Y. Dyskent, M.A. Kaczor, D. Srebrnik.

Heint, 24.5.1931

Results of the elections for the City of Ostrolenka Community Committee: Agudah – 4, religious tradesmen – 4, Zionists and Mizrachi – one mandate, Leftist Labor Zionist – one mandate.

The People of Ostrolenka Applaud the Opening of the Hebrew College [University] in Jerusalem

The list of those blessing the College, the Zionist administration and Lord Balfour by telegram –

The Greeting of the Keren Kayemet LeYisrael – Ostrolenka: Batja Lejzer, Awraham Nowinski, Izrael Esther, Cwi Szuman, Aron Jakow Margalit, Awraham Piaseczny, Mosze Matochomski, Sara Rywka Hochberger, Pesach Hochberger, Szymon Czapnikiewicz M. Holcman, R. Krymkiewicz, Mosze Aron Edel, Awraham Bagatz, C. Bloumenkranz, D. Wajncymer, Awraham Skrobacz, A. Kamyen, B.R. Asze, Kalman Wajnkranc, Lejba Skrobacz, Zalman Gorzelczany, Shiynak, M. Viszer, M. Nadborny, Efraim Chmiel (Chmiel), Z. Zyskind, S. Izrael, Fajwel Finkelsztejn, Y. Krymkiewicz, *Torah Vedaat* School (Mizrachi), Jakow Filar, Hersz Nadler, Chana Sztetner, Lea Pshenne, Nowinska, Chana Grodner, Markiewicz, Icchak Rapaport, Szafran, Mosze Aron Kaczor, Szlomo Bomasz, the Hebrew community: A. Milendzewicz, B.G. Rapaport, N. Jabek, Hertz Leszcz.

***Heint*, 1925, Warsaw, No. 78**

From the Activities of the Youth of Agudat Yisrael

Ostrolenka. The activities of the Youth of Agudat Yisrael here are expanding. The Youth of Agudat Yisrael Histadrut has developed well recently, and is working in all fields, especially in the field of self-completion. Different classes are taught every evening.

At every opportunity, we conduct discussions, lectures. Every month, we publish a wall newspaper.

On *Motzei Shabbat Mishpatim* [the Saturday night after the Sabbath when the Torah portion *Mishpatim* is read], a celebration was held upon the completion of learning Tractate Kiddushin and Seder Nashim. At the celebration were members of the Youth of Agudat Yisrael, the local Beit Din Tzedek, organization leaders, honored guests and others. The Chairman, the young man Awraham Chaim Cukierman, opened the celebration with an enjoyable speech of great content. The choir sang *Hekabzu*.

Mr. Chaim Szmuel Lewy completed the Tractate. In-depth declarations upon completion [*hadranim*] were made by the Gaon Rabbi-Av Beit Icchak Bursztejn, may he live a good long life, the rabbinical judge and learned teacher, the Gaon Rabbi Szlomo Irmijahu Grynberg, and the head of the religious high school, Rabbi Israel Dawid Szef, may he live a good long life.

At the end, another Chairman of the organization, Mr. Jakow Nasielski, and a member, H.S. Lewy, spoke about the role of Youth of Agudat Yisrael in the field of continuing education. The celebration ended late at night with traditional religious songs and dances.

***Bedarkenu*, 1934, No. 26**

The Last Report from Ostrolenka in the *Heint* Newspaper – 1939

On Monday, 22 May, on the protest strike day against the White Book, all Jewish stores and workshops closed for two hours, from two until four in the afternoon.

During those two hours, about 800 Jews gathered in the study hall, and listened attentively to speeches by Mr. Gorzelczany (Mizrachi) and representatives of the Agudah. After the speeches, all those present vowed "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning".

The rabbis of the community also joined the protest.

***Heint*, 18 May 1939**

In Ostrolenka, Labor Zionist caught up with the Bund in elections for the city council. The Bund received two mandates. The same number was won by Labor Zionist (Rightist), Zionists – one mandate; Andaks – 5, P.P.S., Azan – 6, independents – 3.

***Heint*, 12 June 1939**

*

The Expulsion of the Jews of Myszyniec in 1913

(During the first year of World War I)

A

The army entered Myszyniec (in the Ostrolenka district) to guard the nearby border. The Polish inhabitants pestered them, and proved to them indisputably that the local Jews were spies. The soldiers were pleased with this information: what they intended to do that was forbidden, they could now do with license! After a few days, a decree was announced, expelling the Jews within twenty-four hours. The Jews began to pack their possessions, and the inhabitants and the soldiers began reaching out their hands to plunder and rob. Once the Jew himself was defenseless, all the more so was his property.

At the appointed hour, all the Jews were assembled in the market square. The soldiers encircled them, escorted them beyond the river, and from there sent them to wherever the wind would blow them, warning them not to dare to return to the city.

One camp of soldiers returned to Myszyniec. A second camp made sure that the Jews went on their way. After the Jews moved on a ways, they ran after them, removed their clothing, searched their bundles and stole all their property that they had taken with them.

Later, the Jews dispersed, walking day and night on different roads: some to Wyszkow, some to Wingrow, some to Poltusk, and some to Makow. They reached their destination – "The mark of death is on their brows and their hearts are smitten with destruction".

Many of them went to Radzymin.

(From the article *People and Deeds* by S. Rozenfeld, in the *Ma'asef Haivri*, 1917, Petrograd, Jewish history and Judaism quarterly)

B

In the city of Myszyniec (Ostrolenka district, Lomza region), first, because of Polish informers, the rabbi of the city and several other prominent members of the community were arrested. Later, on the 29th of August, an expulsion decree was ordered for all Jews of the city, three hundred Jewish families. In the evening, all the men, women and children went out to the field where the Commandant was encamped. All night, they stood near his tent, shivering from the cold, reading Psalms and begging him to remove the evil decree. But the Commandant did not protect them. The Jews wandered and dispersed to nearby towns and villages.

After a few weeks, the regional minister obtained a license for them to return, but the city was already completely burned down.

(From the article of A. Litayi, *A Chapter from a Tale of Destruction*, in the listings, volume two)

The Trumped-Up Charges against the Jews of Goworowo in 1914

A delegation from the town of Goworowo (Ostrolenka district, Lomza region), the local rabbi and a representative of the local community, came to Rabbi Rubinsztejn in Vilna. They came to ask him to lobby on their behalf regarding a trial being held against them. The rabbi told this story: on a certain Friday, after midnight, when the entire town was fast asleep, the army general who resided seven kilometers from the village arrived, together with a company of his soldiers, and set upon a network of iron wires which had been pointed out, doubtless, by local gentiles. The trumped up charges were in connection with the *eruv* [a fence enabling carrying within its boundaries on the Sabbath], as "evidence" that the Jews were secretly in contact with the enemy, and passing on military secrets . . .

When they found the suspicious network, the general ordered that all the town's synagogue wardens (*gabbaim*) be woken, and demanded that they appear for investigation and questioning. Worried and frightened, all of them answered that the network was made according to the rabbi's instructions. The rabbi admitted that he did this according to a religious commandment, but the officer attacked him with threats: "You installed an underground telephone, and you are telling me stories about your religion! You can't fool me! You have not found a fool!"

Then, seventy Goworowo Jews were imprisoned and expelled in the dark night to the headquarters, seven kilometers outside the town. Because the place was too small to contain them all, they were held for a short time only and then released, but not before they were informed that they could not leave town before clarification of the legal prosecution submitted against them. The administration of the trial and others like it was turned over to the Count Tomanow, who ordered the general to accept Rabbi Rubinsztejn's explanations. Since then, all trials of this sort stopped.

According to the version of the rabbi from Goworowo, the next day, after the investigation, the general arrived in town to examine the matter on the spot. The rabbi, who was brought before him, trembling and fearful, repeated his explanation: "This is in accordance with our religion." The general answered: "I already know without you that this is according to the religion." He ordered that 11 of the 12 networks be returned to the rabbi, and that one should be sent to Vilna. Because of this single network, the worried delegation came to Vilna.

When it became known in the town that the trial was cancelled, there was much rejoicing – a real holiday.

***Vilner Zammelbuch* (Vilna anthology), Volume Two**
Vilna 1918. From the historical archive: Ben-Zoma

S. Ernst

At the Time of Napoleon's Reign in Ostrolenka

(A forgotten historical episode from the period of Napoleon's travels in Poland, by Y. Achi-Shem, in the Warsaw weekly, *Velt-Spiegel*)

Fifty years ago, a French historian compiled a collection of all the events that took place at the time of Napoleon's travels in Poland, Galicia and Russia. In this collection are rare stories giving us a broad picture, from the Jewish viewpoint, of the travels of the great Imperator.

Not much is known about what happened in the Jewish towns during that period. In general, even today, the history of Napoleon's journey to Russia and its reflection in Jewish folklore has not been investigated enough. Here, we find a miracle story about a rabbinical judge from Ostrolenka, Reb Mendele, based on oral sources. This story is connected to espionage activities carried on by Chassidic Jews.

From various anecdotes, a picture is created of how Napoleon was received in Poland's towns, and about opinions for and against the Emperor's victory that were prevalent then. The official history of Napoleon's campaign ignores Ostrolenka, which it does not mention at all. Despite this, stories with a romantic background are etched in the memories of old people of the city, from the period when Napoleon's armies camped there, when he chose Ostrolenka as the location of his general headquarters. (Ostrolenka appears on the Arc of Triumph in Paris, among the names of the cities captured by Napoleon).

This story has already been described by Y. Achi-Shem in the weekly *Velt Spiegel* (Mirror of the World), published in Warsaw. Despite this, we wish to relate it again here (because the above mentioned weekly is now hard to find). The story is connected to the situation of the Jews in light of Napoleon's victories, after he had already conquered half of Europe.

Napoleon established his headquarters in the center of the city, and also stayed there with his adjutants. In folktales, it is said that Napoleon was nicknamed "Sennacherib" in Ostrolenka. Reb Mendele, the judge and Miracle Worker of Shiadowa, had moved just then from Shiadowa to Ostrolenka. In his biblical discourses at the third Sabbath meal, he said that Sennacherib had a

great angel in heaven and, therefore, his soldiers were not afraid of the armies of the King of Prussia and of the Russian Tsar, and that no bullet would harm them.

The Miracle Worker of Ostrolenka convinced other rabbis to accept his opinion, including Rabbi Szlomo of Karlin and Rabbi Mendele of Rymanow. The three of them held "unifications", "rectifications" [kabalistic rituals] and prayers against the "Ruler of Greece" in Russia.

Also prevalent, however, is the opinion that Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Ladi, the author of the *Tanya*, conducted a mighty struggle against these three rabbis. In Poland, the Magid of Kuznitz, and the famous Chozeh of Lublin also joined this struggle.

And now there appears a Jew from Ostrolenka by the name of Chaiml Reb Hersz Jankels, the owner of a granary in Kadzidła (near Ostrolenka), who provided fruits and other goods for Napoleon's headquarters. At the same time, he also voluntarily served as a Russian spy. He listened to conversations of Napoleon's soldiers about the defeat of their lord at the Russian front, and immediately passed the information to the other side of the front . . . This aroused a suspicion in Napoleon that spies had penetrated his headquarters in Ostrolenka. Immediately taking action, he disguised himself as a farmer selling chickens and wandered around the markets. Thus, he noticed that Chaiml always listened to his soldiers' conversations about what was happening at the front. After discovering his whereabouts, Napoleon returned to his headquarters and his royal garb, and immediately decreed a death sentence against Chaiml. But the death sentence was not carried out, because of the miracle of Reb Mendele, the Judge of Ostrolenka.

In the evening, when the first stars appeared in the skies, a messenger from the Magid of Kuznitz came to the Miracle Worker of Ostrolenka, and told him that the Magid of Kuznitz, while reading the portion of *Yitro*, read the words "Thou will surely wear away" (Exodus 18:18) – Napoleon will fall . . . The same messenger also gave the judge of Ostrolenka a small note, on which was written: "Chaim will flee". The Miracle Worker quickly sent for Chaim Reb Hersz Jankels, and told him that he was in great danger, and that he must immediately go wherever his feet would take him.

Right after Chaim fled the city, the Polish Marshal, Josef Poniatowski, Napoleon's Chief of Staff in Ostrolenka, came to his house to look for him. He presented the death sentence against Chaim and imprisoned the entire family, who were later miraculously saved.

Chaiml Reb Hersz Jankels disguised himself as a farmer and wandered from city to city and from village to village. His intention was to reach Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Ladi, who was a "Chassid" of the "Ruler of Greece". A similar fate befell him, as well – he was also forced to hide from Napoleon, when it became known to the Emperor that he was awaiting his defeat. Chaiml had the privilege of meeting the Rabbi of Ladi the day before the latter died, in a village near the city of Poltawa, on 28 December 1812, when Napoleon fled from Moscow.

In Chassidic folklore, in the books: *Eser Orot* (tales of saintly persons) Piotrkow, 1899, 1900; *Niflaot HaYehudi* (tales of the Holy Jew of Przysucza, Warsaw, 1924) and in *Ravid HaZahav* (tales of the Magid of Kuznitz, Lodz, 1934), there are stories about the disagreements between the rabbis about Napoleon. In Martin Buber's book, *Gog and Magog*, these facts are presented, in part, in the guise of *belles-letters*. The miracle tale appears in a more successful manner in the description of Y. Achi-Shem, who tells of this amazing event in a realistic and detailed way.

The Settlement of the Jews in Ostrolenka

It is not known when the city of Ostrolenka was built. There are traces of it from the 16th century. Historical sources report that King Boleslaw II divided the area among his sons. From pictures which remain, it seems that the area of Ostrolenka fell into the hands of Zomobytan III.

In 1502, Konrad Mazowiecki established a craftsmen's guild. In 1563, a fire broke out that destroyed almost all of Ostrolenka.

Documents from 1826 indicate that Ostrolenka was a poor city of three hundred and sixteen houses, only fifteen of which were brick. The number of inhabitants

in the city at the time was approximately 2,562. Of them, 480 were Jews. One hundred and forty-two of them worked in agriculture. The rest were tradesmen and merchants. In the city, there was the factory of Bursztejn (amber).

Inhabitants by profession in 1826: 24 bakers, leather stitchers 3, carpenters 17, millers 3, tanners 3, milliners 2, shoemakers 33, butchers 17, tailors 17, tinsmiths 7, welders 3, barrel makers 3, engravers 2, watchmaker 1, rope makers 1, oil makers 8, glaziers 2, merchants 2, grocers 9, etc.

Ostrolenka developed greatly between 1878-1896, when construction began in the city on barracks for three regiments of the Russian Tsar, and additional structures for the army. The construction of the Ostrolenka-Malkin, Ostrolenka-Lomza-Warsaw railway caused even greater development.

According to records from 1860, there were only 192 houses. Among 3,460 inhabitants, 1,130 Jews were found. In 1895, there were 7,760 inhabitants. The number of Jews and the number of houses is unknown because records were lost.

From records of 1826-1860, we see that in 34 years, the number of Jews grew from 480 to 1,130 inhabitants. If these numbers are to be considered accurate, how can the increase in the number of Jews during that period be understood? Questions also arise as to the areas in which they lived and their influence on the building of the city.

There are several opinions about the number of Jews in Ostrolenka (Jews in Ostrolenka and compensation after the war from 1843 – Geographical-Mathematical Dictionary of M. Wizhowski: publication). Among all the data, there is no great difference in the numbers. From them, we derive that the influence of the Jews in the city was prevalent in two periods. A – until the Revolution. B – after the Revolution.

The period until the Revolution (in 1831) included a long interlude of a few hundred years, although we do not know the number of Jews and their condition at that time. It may be said that at the end of the 18th century, the situation of the Jews was strong, and they were an investment factor in all sorts of construction, dams, water mills, metal work, smithies . . . At the end of the 18th century, middle-class Jews having capital dealt in forest industries, such as tar, potash, coal, transporting wooden beams by river. There is no doubt that this type of Jew greatly influenced the economic life in the city and its vicinity, especially on the right side of the River Narew in the direction of Kadzidła. There were broad echelons of small grocers and tradesmen in Ostrolenka. Most of the Jews lived in the city. We cannot tell more, despite . . . the number of Jews that were there then.

Based on ethnographic material, it can be confirmed that, at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, the Jews' dealings were both within the city and in the country. Everything that was manufactured, all merchandise, was sold by wandering peddlers or bartered with country farmers in milk and honey.

The increase in Jews after the Revolution was a phenomenon of many forms, and was also connected to the capitalistic method. At any rate, I had particular guidelines, as a result of Ostrolenka's historical past.

It may be added that, after the borders between Prussia and Russia were determined, Ostrolenka was a major center for smuggling people, horses, fabrics and all kinds of industrial products. At the same time, local trade also expanded. Financial volume increased from 1830-1864, and proceeds from smuggling reached such proportions that they appeared in official statistics. It should be noted that during the same period, rustics did not throng to the city to add to the number of tradesmen, small merchants and market merchants. From this, we may derive an impression of the conditions that, in a short time, brought about the increase of Jews in the city.

How did the increase in inhabitants influence the city's construction plans? When a special area was allocated from the municipal area, a special quarter was set aside for the Jews. Was there then an intention to create a partition between the Jewish and Christian inhabitants? We do not know to what extent this was implemented. Relying on documentation of construction in the city at the end of the nineteenth century, and all the city's planning programs from 1878-1886, as well as construction plans today, it may be determined that the Jewish inhabitants lived in a crowded conditions in all the streets between the market and the square where fairs were held, along Kilinskaga Street and in the area of the milk market, except for the same street in the direction of the church. The eastern boundary of the Jewish residents was Warinsky Street. The southern side did not develop by construction, even after the construction of the Lomza-Ostrolenka-Malkin railway line, as well as after the building of the railway station 6 kilometers from the city (pages 32-33).

From 1917-1918, the city acquired an electricity network and a road to the village of Chodak. In 1915, the number of inhabitants was 14,000, among them 6,000 Jews (it is accepted that the number relates to the time before the transfer of Jews because of the battles). These settlements belonged to the city: Wojciechowice, Antonia, Lazy, Byalobel, Lang, Lazek and Pudziechna (page 32).

At the time of the German occupation during World War I, the following schools were in operation in the city: a three class school for Polish children (2 teachers). Another school for Jewish children, 30 *heders* (see page 33).

The years 1939-1945 brought tragic events in the history of the city's Jewish inhabitants. The murder of nearly all the Jews, the destruction of the economic system, the expulsion of part of the Christian inhabitants and the annexation to the German Reich (Scharfenwissa). The Germans gained control of buildings that served them for governmental purposes. Houses built of wood were all burned (page 33).

From the Polish, R. Palewski



In the new market (now "1st May" Square) **(Original from A. Katzina)**

CITY LIFE

Ostrolenka, Pre-World War I to 1939

A Look at the City

Before World War I, the population of Ostrolenka numbered approximately 13,000-14,000 inhabitants, Jews and Christians. In 1909-1910, the average number of Jews reached six thousand and a few hundred people. After World War I, when the city was almost completely destroyed, and only part of it rebuilt, and many inhabitants had not yet returned from their travels in foreign countries – the number of inhabitants decreased greatly. With time, when the city was rebuilt and aspired to reach its previous status, the number of inhabitants increased. According to the last population census, we assume in 1939, when World War II broke out, the number of Jewish inhabitants reached 5,000, and did not reach its previous promising development.

The Narew River and the forts around the city made it an important strategic point in wartime. Indeed, near Ostrolenka's forts, where the Poles held ceremonies on their national holidays, bloody battles took place, such as during the Polish Rebellion in 1831 and others. Ostrolenka is located approximately 100 kilometers east of Warsaw and 36 kilometers west of Lomza, which was the regional city at the time of the Tsarist Russian regime.

Around Ostrolenka are spread cities and towns, suburbs, villages and estates – Lomza, Ostrow-Mazowiecki, Rozan, Goworowo, Miastkowa, Troszyn, Czerwin, Rzekun, Kaczyny, Grabowo, Dylewo, Antonie, Olszewo, Kadzidla, Myszyniec, Kordowa, Nozowe, Zyraniec, Sadykierz, Lazek, Lenczysk, Wojciechowice and others. All these places (except for Lomza, then Ostrow, and Rozan) were connected to Ostrolenka organically, and for all the years belonged to its county (*Pobiat*).

Ostrolenka is surrounded by many forests, such as the Czarnowiecki Forest (about eight kilometers from the city), Chudecki Forest (approximately the same distance), Dylewo and Kadzidla Forests (approximately 15 kilometers) and others. It had two train stations: a primary station, Kaczyny (5 kilometers from the city), from which trains departed to Warsaw, Bialystok and other cities; Grabowo – primarily a cargo station, which transported goods and also passengers via Zabieleno and Nowo Wies to Chorzel. There was also a small train on a narrow track. Its station of origin was near the forts and it traveled via Lazek, Dylewo and Kadzidla. Its terminal city was Myszyniec. All these places had close commercial, cultural and social connections with Ostrolenka.

Every Tuesday, a market was held in the city. A fair was held once a month, and large fairs were held four times a year on Wednesdays.

Usually, the inhabitants supported themselves by labor and small trade. The city did not have factories or manufacturing workshops, except for two flour mills: one called Motor, owned by Icka Sojka (in partnership with Jankel-Dawid Leszcz and Menachem Czapnikiewicz), and the water mill of Kolanski in Olszewo. At Bialy's sawmill was a water mill and a few small wind mills. The Jews of Ostrolenka supported themselves mainly by trade – for the most part, retail stores and wholesalers, who brought train cars of grain, salt, flour and kerosene from Russia. At the time of the Russian regime, the city supported itself mainly from the army: in the Benedon army base there were encamped two infantry regiments, Muromski – Regiment 21 and Niznogorodzki – Regiment 22, as well as a cavalry regiment of an engineering corps company. In the days of the Polish regime, as well, Ostrolenka was an army city: the 5th Cavalry Regiment, the 12th Unit of heavy cannons, and the 22nd Infantry Regiment. The reason was the strategic location of the city near the border with eastern Prussia, and the crossroads between the Lomza and Plock districts, which branch out in the direction of the capital city, Warsaw. In the entire area, there were many places populated by the army.

Jewish life in the city was usually concentrated in the center, where most of the Jews, and only a few Christian families, lived. The non-Jewish population lived in the area of Lenczysk, Czarnowiecki, Borave, Wojciechowice and Kaczyny. The houses on the main streets, such as the Old Market, Lomza Street and the Ostrowy Road, were mostly stone houses; the others were wooden houses.

When Poland became independent, the Polish regime stabilized, and stone houses built on the ruins of old buildings appeared in these areas. The names of the streets were changed: Synagogue Street became Kilinskiego Street, Gypsy Street was named after Berek Joselewicz, the Old Market (Stari Rinek) became the 3rd of May Street, etc. The streets were paved with round,

unwrought stones. In Ostrolenka, there were Jews who paved streets with stone, among them Chaim Nowinski and Awraham Kugel, who worked in this profession until an advanced age, and others.

Popular places for strolling were Lomza Road, where the municipal garden was situated opposite the big prison house; Plantach in the area of Benedon; across the bridge, near "the forts", there the young people of Ostrolenka spun dreams of youth ...

On the Ostrolenka Road stood the Russian church, and near it, houses of Jews, among them the house of Eisenberg, the houses of the ice cream makers, the brothers Berel and Herszel Gordon, the house of Mordechaj the Baker, and others. After a time, the Poles turned the Russian church into an agricultural school. There was a water reservoir on Lenczysk Street, and the entire city drew water from it by means of two pumps: one in the old market, and the second in the new market, where daily commerce was carried on, even on days that were not market days. The water drawers brought water from these two pumps, and sometimes drew water from the river. Most of the city's people used water from the well of Motel Machlijesa, as it was known as clear, good-tasting water.

The water carriers were Chaim-Icze, Chaim Szrejter, Tall Beniamin and others. Near the bridge over the Narew River, the sale of fish was conducted every day of the week. On Sabbath and holiday eves, the noise and tumult of the buyers and the housewives mingled with the cries of the fishermen. The fishermen were Fajwel, Chackel, Reuwen Icchak and Szlomo Dorfman. Grain trade also held an important place in Ostrolenka, and was carried on, for the most part, in the pig market. The major grain merchants were Lejzer Nowominski, Berel Zabludowicz, Chaim-Dawid Zamelson, Awraham Chacek and others.

The textile trade, as well, was important. Until 1914, major textile wholesalers were Awraham-Nachum Lejberman, Chackel Kupferminc, Lejzer Mintz, Noah Karlinski, Naftali Cwi Iwri, Sojka; and later on, Josel Litwer, Mendel Cuker, Mosze Blachowicz, Mendel Gedanken and others.

Merchants with large or average-sized food businesses (1914) were Mosze Szafran, Nachum Tobjasz, Szmaia Bomasz, Awraham Mlynarzewicz (Awraham Giszes), and later on, Chaim (the son-in-law of Awraham-Nachum Lejberman), Menachem Frydman, Mosze Lejb Skrobacz, Herszel Szperling, Drewkowicz, Lejb Sredni.

Considerable leather, iron and wine trade was also carried on in the city. The main leather merchants were Motel Skornik, Chaim Elkes, Mosze Noske and Szlomo Jabek. The great iron merchants were Gerszon Makowski, Szmuel Tanchum and, later, Chackel Zylbersztejn, Motel Thylim, Chaim Szymon and others. Wine merchants: Welwel Chacek, Hercke Haltarz and others. Michel Sarniewicz, Lejbel Skrobacz and Mosze Sarniewicz owned large paint stores in Ostrolenka. The owner of the big gold and jewelry store was Noske Jabek. It should be noted that during the years between the two World Wars, some of the merchants mentioned here were thought of as the richest people in our city.

Among all the branches of trade, there was one called "*shpieliterei*". These were people who were given to the grace of God. That is, there was no obligation towards them. From businessmen in our city, the *shpielterim* received orders for merchandise from suppliers in cities, such as Warsaw, Bialystok, Lodz, Tomaszow, and other industrial cities. In exchange for this service, they received percentages from the factory owners, as well as from the merchants who placed orders. The *shpielterim* were Jechiel Rozenbojm, Awrejmel Calka, the son of Masza the teacher, and others. Small merchants did this work by themselves, and thus provided a livelihood for the owners of wagons and carriages, who transported them and their merchandise back and forth to the train station in Kaczyny. Who did no know these carters? There was Turek, Chaim Greger, Josel Pandry, Motel Jakres and Icze-Meir, who refused to drive to the train station in Kaczyny with less than a *minyan* [prayer quorum of ten people] of passengers. Once it happened, that until he gathered his "*minyan*", he missed the train. In time, when automobiles appeared, the carters' income declined. But there were yearnings for carriages. In comparison to traveling by bus, packed in "like herrings", with the unpleasant smell of gasoline, you felt like a king, gliding along in a quiet carriage with rubber tires, with clean, groomed horses and the rhythmic clip-clop of their hooves.

Because of Ostrolenka's nearness to Germany's eastern border, it served as a commercial meeting point, if not officially, primarily for export. The city's large fairs drew Jewish merchants from near and far, even from Kolno, Grajewa, Szczuczyna, Jedwabne, etc.

In times of war, as well, Ostrolenka was an important strategic point. It was destroyed more than once, but later rebuilt. Therefore, it always gave the

impression of a new, clean city. The population, which left it when battles took place in it, always returned, after undergoing hardship, suffering and wandering. There always remained, as a "*zecher le churban*" [a remembrance of the destruction of the Holy Temple], a few old houses here and there, and the barracks of Benedon. Most of the city was rebuilt. It should be noted that one of the places razed to its foundations in World War I, and not rebuilt, was the big synagogue. Only its brick foundation, a single wall and pillars remained. Before World War I, this synagogue was known as a very magnificent building. It enchanted with its beauty and aroused a special feeling of sanctity in everyone and, at night, it imposed fear. It was only used for prayer on the Sabbath. Prayers were held daily in the big study hall, which was rebuilt.

At the synagogue, mostly the common people prayed, those "of the people". Among them were warmhearted Jews, well-known public figures, and even the more erudite. I would like to mention the names of some constant worshipers here, as a memorial to their pure souls, all holy and departed: Reuwen Icchak Dorfman, Berel Garda, Aszer Goldfarb, Chaim Ber the Ritual Slaughterer, Szmuel Mosze Krymkiewicz, Jakow Krymkiewicz, Mendel Krymkiewicz, Melin, Josef Mejrann, Josef Dyskent, Chaim Ajzenberg, Aron Jakow Margalit, Welwel Benedon, Bercie Benedon, Ajzyk Benedon, Chackel Gilda, Chackel Rozan, Fajwel Finkelsztejn, Lejbcze Lazer Ajzenstejn, Icze Lazer, Pesach Hochberg, Chaim Nadborny, Jehuda Nadborny, Icchak Grynszpan, Josef Margalit, Israel Fish (tailor), Icchak Szmuelewicz, Icchak Jehuda Nadborny, Welwel Chmiel, Meir Chmiel, Israel Chmiel, Szlomo Perla, Mosze Dawid Calka, Mosze Rubinsztejn, Jechezkel Kupferminc, Jakow Welwel Rozenblum and others.

We cannot understand why, among the buildings serving religious and secular purposes rebuilt after World War I, the big synagogue was nearly the only one not rebuilt. Why?!

As has been said, Ostrolenka was a pure Jewish city. Christians were only seen in its streets on market days, or on Sundays and their holidays, when they came to the church to pray. On other days, Ostrolenka looked like a big Jewish family. The only Christians found in the city were officials of the municipality and the regional administration. But these, too, resided outside the city.

Ostrolenka was not a rich city, as it had no natural resources. The wealthy could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Despite this, its Jews maintained all institutions and organizations by themselves. As mentioned, the Jewish population supported itself generally by crafts and small trade. On Tuesdays and Fridays, merchants displayed their wares on stands, selling them to those who came to the city. Farmers from nearby villages brought their own produce for sale: butter, eggs, fowl and all sorts of vegetables. After selling their wares, they went to all the stores and stands and bought whatever they required.

Ostrolenka was usually a quiet city. Only on market days, in the fervor of buying and selling, the quiet was disturbed, the atmosphere became heated, and voices and arguments boomed. In the pig market, the Christians dominated the stands with their merchandise: statues of Jesus and the Virgin Mary and all sorts of other games and Christian ritual articles. On the other side were rows of tin and clay housewares, plants, etc. A bit further on – the stands of the Jews, and on them kerchiefs, socks, sewing notions and fabrics. Tailors displayed ready-made clothing in two rows, which formed a sort of boulevard; others – shoemakers in two rows, one of Jews, the second, Gentiles; further on – stands of fresh bread. And after all these – Gentiles with wagons full of pigs, as well as cows and calves for sale.

Ostrolenka's major commerce was always in the hands of the Jews. The Christians were primarily customers. Between the two World Wars, at the time of the Polish regime, and especially in the last years before World War II broke out, more and more Polish merchants appeared, opening large stores. Using anti-Semitic slogans, they tried to take the place of the Jews in their principal vocation – trade. As the war drew closer, the situation became more serious. The famous Polish slogan, "We – only our people!", acquired threatening dimensions. More than once it was connected with mortal danger, and sometimes with victims. In this area, wild competition raged, not only in lowered prices, but in malicious anti-Semitic incitement. The threat that hung over the Jews indeed descended upon them! The Nazi Satan erased the Jewish lives in Ostrolenka, together with the lives of Jews all over Poland.

Y.I.



The City Hall



3rd May Square, now General Bem Square
(the Old Market)



(Ostrow Street) 11 Listopada (now Glowackiego)



Lomza Street, now Kostuszko



A group of workers at the beer factory: from the right, Sara Zusman, Y.D. Grynberg, Mosze Aron Sojka, B.Z. Pianko, Perel Pianko, Chana Chmiel, Szlomo Zusman



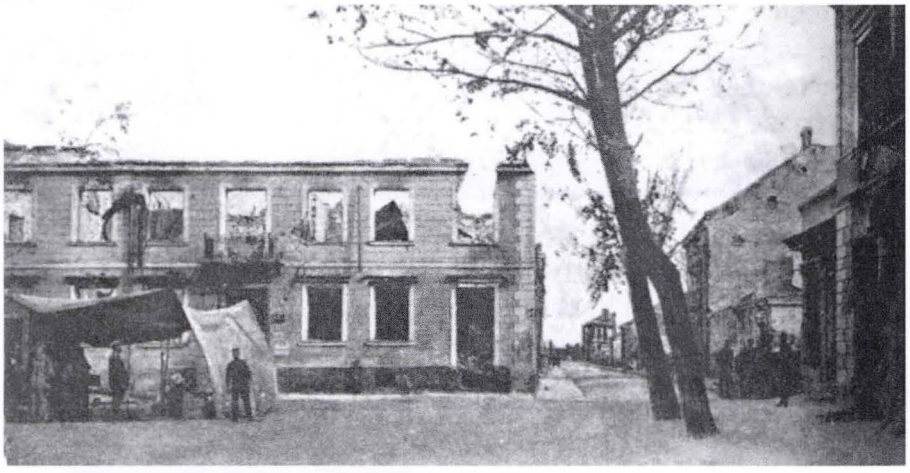
A group of workers at the soda factory, owned by Sztern, Zusman, Pianko



A group of Ostrolenkans near a passenger bus, "Ostrolenka – Warsaw", with the owner of the bus: Herzek Gerczak (fifth from the right)



A group of Ostrolenkans on the iron bridge over the Narew River



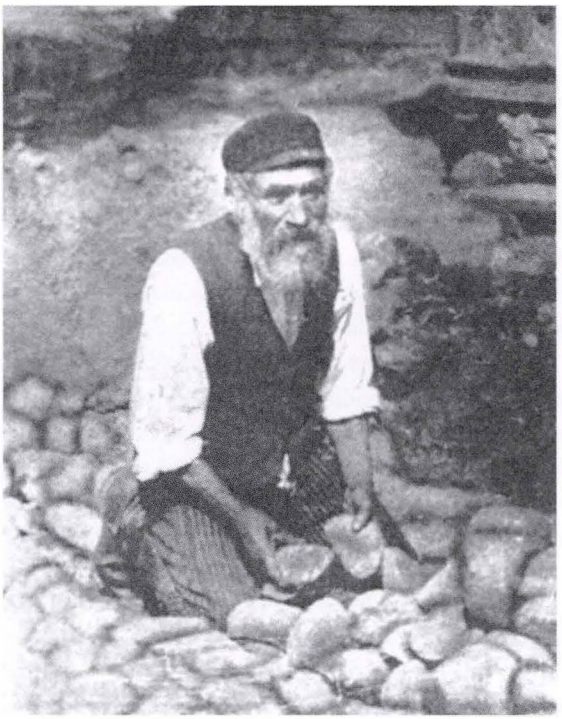
1915-6: A house on the corner of the Old Market, in the direction of Synagogue Street (now Kilinskaga), which was destroyed during World War I, along with most of the city's houses



1934: This house was rebuilt between the two World Wars. Near the house stand the Frydman and Lachower Families, among them the writer, Dwora Lachower, of blessed memory (second from the right, died in Israel)



Water supplier, the son of Chaim Szrejter (see: Ostrolenka Style)



Old street paver in Ostrolenka (original from Alter Kacyzna)



"Nierazgavarievy" *kappel* [skull cap] (see: Ostrolenka Style), drawing by Y. Chmiel



After the big study hall (original from Alter Kacyzna)

Chaim Chamiel, Jerusalem

Between Two Wars

In its knowledge, language and lifestyle, Ostrolenka was considered as standing on the border between Poland and Lithuania. It was always subject to the influence Lomza and Bialystok on one side, and the influence of Warsaw-Poltusk on the other. This was apparent in the Yiddish accent. The typical Ostrolenkan accent was a mixture of the two pronunciations – the Lithuanian and the Polish combined. The *shuruk* [Hebrew vowel, corresponding to a long u] became a *hirik* [Hebrew vowel, corresponding to a long e], but the *kamatz* [Hebrew vowel, corresponding to a short a] was not pronounced as a *shuruk*, and not the *tzerei* [Hebrew vowel, corresponding to a long a] – as a *patach* [Hebrew vowel, corresponding to a short a]. In the Ostrolenkan Yiddish, there was missing, indeed, the softness felt in the Bialystok accent (in the z and b sounds, for example).

In its spiritual life, too, Ostrolenka was influenced by Lithuanian erudition and by the spirit of the Misnagdim, as well as that of the Chassidim, which became more and more entrenched in time. Most of the young Chassidim came from outside – as bridegrooms and merchants. For the most part, they came from nearby towns, traded, dealt in good faith and worshiped God in their own way.

Chevra Torah

The oldest society in the city was the Chevra Torah. In the beginning, the society conducted its affairs from the home of Reb Motel Chmiel (Camiel), my grandfather, of blessed memory, and in the home of Reb Jakow Byszko. After a time, the society established a wonderful synagogue of its own. Its teacher and rabbi was Rabbi Mosze Natan Tejtelbojm, a decisive and God-fearing Jew. He taught the [commentaries of Rabbi Mosze] Alsheich to the members of the society on the Sabbath, and during weekdays read them lessons in Torah and Mishna. Veteran inhabitants of Ostrolenka assembled at the Chevra Torah. Most of them were simple workmen and small merchants, who gathered in the evening at the synagogue, after a hard day of work, to give their souls their due. The society celebrated three holidays in great splendor. A) The 7th of Adar – the date of death of Moses, of blessed memory. On the memorial day of the giver of the Torah, the society saw attending to holy matters as its sacred obligation. On that day, all the members of Chevra Torah freed themselves from their business and gathered at the home of the first *gabbaim* [manager of the synagogue]. (The society had three *gabbaim*, and for many years, Awraham Piaseczny served as first *gabbai*). Most of the day was devoted to study. At the end, they held a *seudat mitzvah* [a celebratory meal following the fulfillment of a religious commandment]. B) The Sabbath of the Torah portion of *Yitro*, containing a description of the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. All the members were called up to read the Torah. They made pledges for the benefit of the synagogue. Also, the *Kiddusha Rabba* [the great blessing] was properly conducted on that Sabbath. C) *Simchat Torah* – this holiday was celebrated with special enthusiasm. Immediately after Yom Kippur, the *gabbaim* combed the city for the finest and largest apples. On Simchat Torah eve, after the society completed reading the Torah and the rabbi gave a lesson concerning matters of the day, the red apples were placed on the table. A large barrel of beer was opened, to the joy of the rascals who clung to it, and large glasses of beer were meted out to the congregation.

The society also developed public activity among its members and created an assistance fund for the needy. The old melodies were the lot of those who prayed in their synagogue. Melodies were handed down to them from their fathers and were sanctified by tradition. Reb Jakow Byszko especially excelled in this. He recited the refrains of the High Holy Day prayers



Opening of the Popular Jewish Kitchen for the Needy in 1917. From the right: Mosze Margalit, Icchak Rapaport, Dimensztejn, the German Mayor, Rabbi Bursztejn, Deputy Mayor M. A. Kaczor, Menachem Frydman, 2 Jewish law adjudicators: Szlomo Irmijahu Grynberg and Jakow Szlomo Pizman, Icka Sojka and Lejbel Benedon, Welwel Chacek



The Popular Kitchen with its employees and active members (seated in the center: Icchak Rapaport)



The Popular Kitchen, with Pesach Hochberg (standing by the table)

with grace and warmth, gently and simply. He still led the congregation in prayer when he was nearly one hundred years old, and his voice was like a nightingale's, pouring out its heart before God. In the large synagogue, Reb Chaim Berel, the ritual slaughter, led the congregation in prayer with a strong voice and a chorus at his side. Chassidic melodies were not in the style of Reb Jakow Byszko; his praying was all only *rachamim ve'tachunim* [pleas for mercy]. But Reb Chaim Berel, who was a Chassid, was suited to the refrains of the melodies of Modzitz, Gur and others. Later, the center of these melodies was the Gur Chassidism. Merchants, magids [story-tellers], passersby and messengers brought new melodies with them. My father, who was not a Chassid, and was a member of the Mizrachi, took me to the Chassidim to hear their melodies and learned them later from me. In the last years, Jakow Dancyger was known for his pleasant voice and for his talent to adapt different compositions. His praying was pleasant: he was greatly influenced by the ritual slaughterer [and cantor] of Myszyniec near Ostrolenka, who composed his own melodies. They had a light cheerfulness from "the Kurpic" (named after the local people – the Kurpie), and from the Modzitz expressions of the soul.

There were other societies in Ostrolenka concerned with learning Torah, Mishna, Gemara and the Shulchan Aruch. These carried out their public lives together and extended help to friends whenever needed. Their activities were concentrated in the Talmud Torah's school rooms. There, they conferred among themselves about all the matters of the city, made known their protests against prominent members of the community, discussed children's education and the Zionism which captivated hearts. Another place for secular conversations on matters of the world was the "public *shtebl*" – a community hall near the large synagogue, built after the last war. A large crowd would push into the community house between afternoon and evening prayers, especially on winter evenings. Amid the great congestion were heard conversations, arguments and discussions mingled with the voices of those who prayed and said *Kaddish*. In the last years, Ostrolenka merited its own magid – Bartler – of the Nowardok *ba'alei musar* [masters of ethics], who worked diligently for the good of the poor and was concerned with family purity.

The Chassidim gathered in their *shteblich*. In the city were Gur, Alexander, Worka and Amszinow Chassidim. The Gur Chassidim, who took a specific stand on all public and political matters, were the most influential. Later, the activity of Agudat Yisrael, Bejt Jakow, etc., was concentrated around them. The rabbi of the city, Rabbi Icchak Bursztejn, was not considered a Chassid. His opinions did not always mesh well with the opinions of the Gur Chassidim, who acted according to instructions of the Rebbe (the matter of Cywiak, the ritual slaughterer, the position concerning Keren Kayemet, etc.)

The "Improved *Heder*" – Yavneh

The Zionist revival progressed slowly. At first, the number of Zionists in the city was so small, that one could not tell the difference between a General Zionist and a Mizrachi adherent. All of them were observant Jews and worked for the good of Zion. The organization of Zionist life in the city was caused, primarily, by the opening of a Hebrew school, the Improved *Heder*, which, after a time, was called Yavneh. Aside from a few private *heders*, there was a Talmud Torah in the city. There was an attempt to unite the good students in the city into one framework, but the education given at this school was not in accordance with the spirit of the city's intelligentsia, who studied Hebrew in their youths and joined the Zionist camp. Approximately thirty five years ago [in 1927], therefore, a group of parents gathered and decided to open a "modern" Hebrew school, operating according to the principles of the new pedagogy. To this end, they brought from Wojciechowice, where the Polish army in the area camped, the teacher Zalman Chanoch Gorzelczany, who established the Improved *Heder*. A small group of youths studied Hebrew, prayer, Torah with Rashi commentary and Jewish law with him. The school was headed by a parents' committee, which attended to expenses and found a room in the Talmud Torah, despite the disruptions of the Chassidim and the ultra-Orthodox, who opposed Zionism.

My father administered the economic side of the school, and took care that the studies met a high standard. Every Sabbath, he would come to the school, sometimes with a whole entourage, to appraise the students. Sometimes the rabbi came as well, to ascertain that studies were conducted in accordance with the purity of Judaism, and that the students excelled in the breadth of their knowledge and in their behavior.

The Improved *Heder* struggled hard for its

existence. It was attacked from all sides. Once its doors were locked shut, and it was necessary to use force to open them. Once, the Ostrolenkan magid burst into the "public *shtebl*" and stopped the prayers with the cry "*Gevalt* [emergency], Jews, it is on fire. . . Hebrew threatens you, Israel!" Slowly, the school became more established, despite all obstacles. A room was added to it and, later, it had three rooms in the Talmud Torah building. Jakow Filar was hired to be the advanced students' Hebrew teacher. Most of the youths studied Hebrew under this teacher, who sold fowls and eggs besides giving Hebrew lessons.

He was meticulous and irritable, and was strict with his students. He was also an exemplar in his pure, strong love for the Hebrew word. When he read a poem, story or chapter of Jewish history for us, his breath grew short, his eyes shone and his voice became deeper and turned into a roar, a sigh or a plea. His words were replete with romance and enthusiasm.

The teacher Zalman Gorzelczany, who was later the school principal, excelled in a sense of organization and a practical approach to day-to-day matters. Thanks to his vigor, activity and diligence, a large building was rented and the school had seven full classes, with full rights granted by the governmental schools supervisor. As a teacher, Z. G. excelled, with his pedagogical approach to students and parents. His words were heard with instructive decisiveness, his teaching was pleasant and his rebukes were gentle. He revived the school, introduced Hebrew poetry in it and roused the Hebrew and Zionist intelligentsia to take an interest in the fate of the school. So that the school could achieve government qualification, G. included teachers from the general school, who taught general studies in Polish.



The Yavneh School. Among the students sit in the middle the teachers of the school: from the right, Jakow Filar, Gedalja Rozenbojm, Chanoch Zalman Gorzelczany and Dr. Chaim Chmiel (now in Israel)

Bejt Jakow

Girls did not attend the Hebrew school. The principle: "He who teaches his daughter Torah, it is as if he teaches frivolity", was strictly observed. Only a few took care to teach their daughters Judaism, Torah and science. Then, a school for girls, Bejt Jakow, was established by the ultra-Orthodox Jewry, which opposed Zionist education and feared outside influences in general. The school earned the admiration of the entire Jewish public in the city. The daughters of ultra-Orthodox, Zionist and non-observant parents attended Bejt Jakow in the afternoon, when they were released from the general school. At Bejt Jakow, the girls received an ultra-Orthodox education and studied Yiddish, prayer, Torah and Jewish history. Bejt Jakow

students bore their Hebrew names with pride, and later became active members of religious youth organizations, whether in the framework of Agudat Yisrael, HeChalutz-Mizrachi or Shomer HaDati. Pesia Szereszewska, a Bejt Jakow student who went on to teach many girls, is worthy of praise.

The Culture School

The Yavneh School did not satisfy those parents who demanded more of an emphasis in the curriculum on secular Zionism, and were not particular about the religious side. They therefore established the "Culture School", and brought the teacher, Gedalja Rozenbojm, from Bialystok for this purpose. His father, Nehemiah, was known as a teacher of the enlightened youths of the city before the last war. His son was also educated in the spirit of the enlightenment. G.R. knew the new Hebrew, spoke it with a Sephardic pronunciation (at Yavneh, it was still taught with an Ashkenazi pronunciation) and was expert in the new Hebrew literature. He was known as a first-rate chess player in the entire Bialystok district. In public chess competitions, held from time to time in the city, he played against ten at once, and would usually beat them all. The Culture School, where the pedagogic level was high, did not last long. It was forced to close, and the teacher, Rozenbojm, went to teach at Yavneh. In the short time that the Culture School existed, it introduced a new spirit in the city. Zionist activity flourished, fetes, parties and plays were held, endearing the Hebrew language and the Zionist enterprise to the public.

Yeshiva

A yeshiva was established in Ostrolenka by the Nowardok yeshiva students. This Yeshiva was a center for ultra-Orthodox youths for a long time. The youths preferred to attend the great Lithuanian yeshivas. Most went to nearby Lomza. Others went to the Chafetz Chaim Yeshiva in Radon, and to the Klatzk and Kaminetz Yeshivas. Ostrolenka's yeshiva, however, gathered the youths of the area, who came to hear Torah from its teachers and *Ramim* [heads of the school]. The yeshiva acquired a good reputation for its gatherings and public celebrations on holidays. A committee of women attended to the yeshiva's needs. They divided the young boys up among the *balabatim* for "teig" [meals in rotation] and established a special kitchen for the older boys in the yeshiva's basement. In the last years, the number attending decreased, as the youths began to train more and more for work. In Ostrolenka proper, a larger number of boys attended the general school and even the secondary school. Others left for *hachsharot* [preparatory programs], in preparation for emigration to Israel.

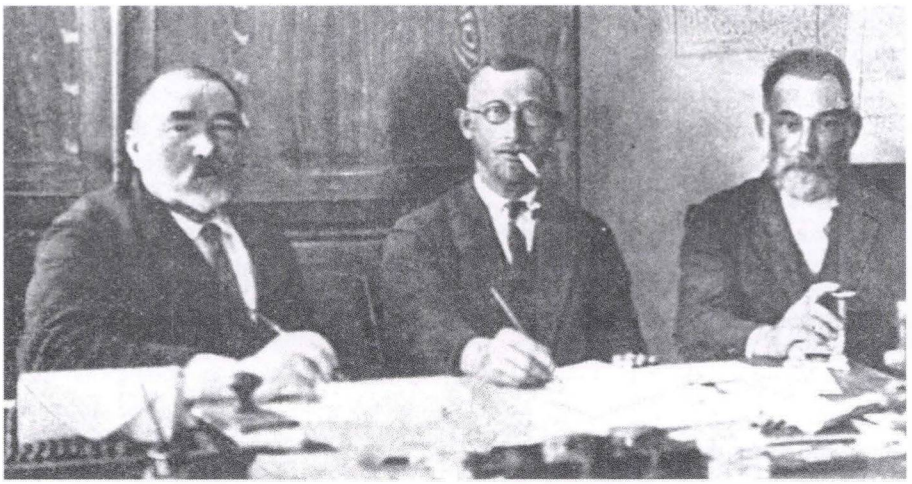
Communal and Economic Life

The chapter of Jewish communal and economic life in the city is a large and broad one. The city did not abound in wealthy people. Most of the inhabitants were tradesmen (primarily tailors, shoemakers, milliners and butchers) or small merchants, who sold sewing notions, and grocers. They brought their wares to fairs and market days in nearby towns, despite the dangers lying in wait on the roads. More than once, robbers and vicious farmers attacked them, stealing their goods and beating them bloody. There were even instances of murder, but the Jews could not give up this source of income. Some merchants in the city traded with large cities and exported merchandise out of the country. These were the owners of the flour mill and the saw mill, and leather, rag and iron merchants. There was no lack of grain merchants, who stood on the roads on market days to approach farmers bringing their produce to the city. Competition was great and earnings were meager and poor.

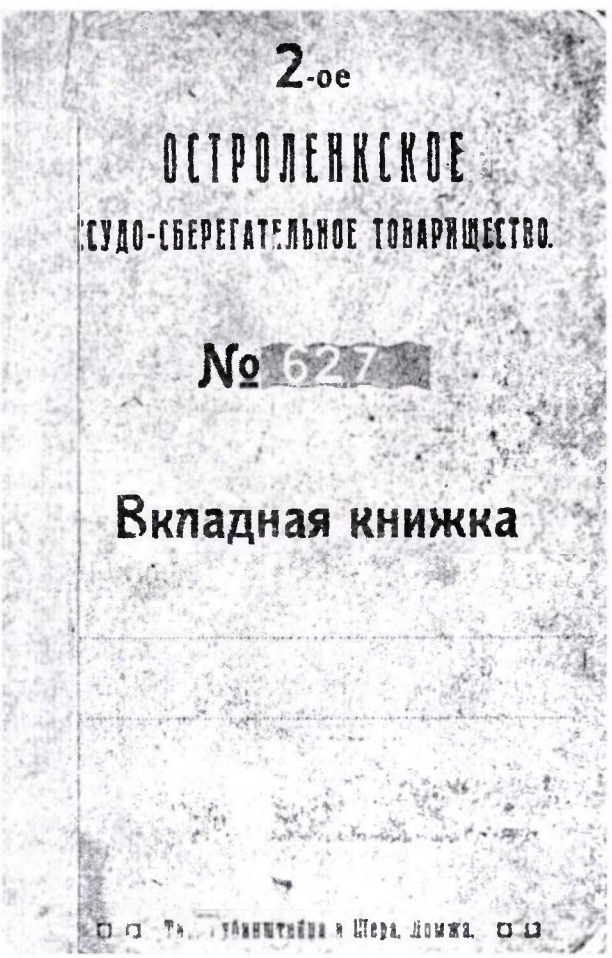
Communal life in the city was quite well-developed. All strata and, toward the end, even the Bund, were represented in the Jewish community. It concerned itself with religious matters, maintained a rabbi, two rabbinical judges and three ritual slaughterers. It helped support the poor and protect the rights of the Jews *vis a vis* the government. Representatives of the Jews also sat in the city council, and were generally accepted by the Gentiles. This acceptance was dependent primarily on the personality of the governor of the city, the *starosta*. Particularly during the last years, the *starosta* took a loyal position toward the Jewish population. The community was headed by Mosze Aron Kaczor, Chaim Pinczas Gingold, Mosze Margalit and, toward the end, Mendel Gedanken. They were devoted to the community and concerned with its well-being.

Linat HaTzedek

Of the communal societies, I will mention only two whose social-communal value was substantial and great.



The management of the municipal fund for loans.
From the right: Kosowski, Efraim Chmiel (Chamiel) and Anszel Lew



Account book for Ostrolenka loan fund
(during the time of the Russians)

Linat HaTzedek dealt with medical assistance to indigent patients, providing medical equipment and doctors' visits. Members of *Linat HaTzedek* visited the patient's home, took care of him and attended to his complete recovery. The head of this society, Icchak Rozonowicz, devoted himself to his task and succeeded in making *Linat HaTzedek* a first-rate social-communal institution.

The Jewish Bank

The Jewish Bank was established a few years after World War I, thanks to the efforts of Anszel Lew. He visited homes to gather support for the bank. The bank's value was discovered later, when the number of its members grew and it was placed on a cooperative basis. Hundreds of Jews in the city benefited from constructive loans and deposited their savings in the bank. In the last years, the bank was managed by Natan Jabek, who earned the trust of the general public. He increased the bank's return capital and the number of its loans. Many workshops and stores existed thanks to the effective assistance extended by the bank. Many were saved by the bank from the shame of actual starvation, when their income decreased because of heavy taxation. For all the years of the bank's existence, my father, Reb Efraim, was its driving force. He worked hand in hand with Anszel Lew and later with Jabek, as a volunteer, of course.

Zionism

With the strengthening of *aliyah* [emigration] to Israel, interest in Zionism grew. Youth and adult organizations appeared suddenly and flourished. Jews began to aspire to make *aliyah*. The Holocaust was felt in the air, the hatred of Jews grew. Sources of livelihood declined and were blocked, the yoke of taxes was burdensome. The Land of Israel appeared to be the one and only place of refuge. At the end, Zionist and anti-Zionist organizations operating in the city directed the lives of adults and youths. In the last years, the city's lifestyle changed completely. A radical and fundamental change took place in people's outlooks. The awareness of Zion grew, youths felt the ground burning under their feet and tried to find a haven. On the other hand, their ties to the place were too strong for people to leave in great numbers, and not everyone who wanted to leave had the financial ability to do so. The Holocaust came as a disaster and washed everything, everything, away in a torrent of blood and fire. The Jewish settlement was ruined, and its children destroyed and turned to ashes.

Mournful and Sad

We stand here today, mournful and sad, and count our losses. We were all orphaned, without exception. We lost parents, relatives, comrades and friends. We no longer await their coming. Those who nurtured the hope of a homeland in their hearts, whose eyes were raised toward Zion and who bore their nation's name in glory – are gone as well! Even their graves have disappeared. This Jewry was eradicated with a single blow, and with it many of our chances and aspirations were destroyed.

Ostrolenkan Jewry no longer exists.



The Chairman of the Ostrolenkan Community, with Jewish soldiers from the regiment in the area, who were provided with kosher for Passover food 2.4.1934

Institutions and Organizations

Yeshivas

Yeshiva or Concentration of *Heders*

Because I studied at the yeshiva in the *heder* of Tuwja Wolozin at the edge of the city, I knew it well. The way to the yeshiva led from Mlynarska Street (Mlyna Street), a sad, undeveloped street intersecting Cyganska Street, where a few single story buildings for soldiers stood. A Russian or Jewish soldier with a rifle stood guard there. More than once, I gave the soldier on guard duty some of the food my mother gave me.

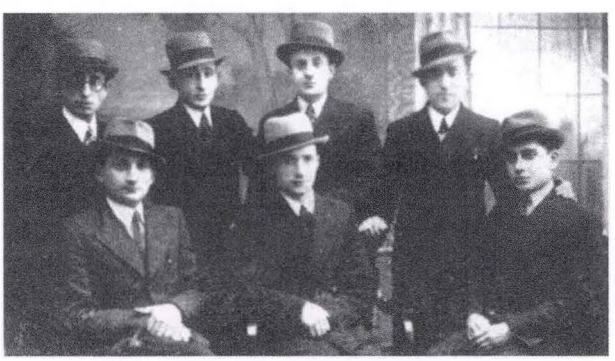
The way to the yeshiva always awoke dark fear in me, especially in the evenings. I breathed more easily when I reached the flour mill of Icel Sojka (which stood not far from the yeshiva). The echo of its machines' strokes did not cease all night. It was always lit by electric light, a new phenomenon in the city, especially on winter evenings when we went home late at night. The mill's lights guided us on our way.

Who established the yeshiva and why is not known to me. I remember it even before World War I, in 1912-13, when I studied there after I completed my studies in the *heders*. Mostly boys from the city of Ostrolenka, for whom a little bit of Torah from the *heder* was not enough, attended the yeshiva. There were also boys from the area who ate *teig* ("days") at the homes of the city's *balabatim*. There were a few classes in the yeshiva, and each class had its teacher.

Two people remain in my memory until this day: the teacher, Srul Drogoczynski, whose son was a student. He was a great teacher and clarified like no one else. He taught without *pilpul*, without casuistry. He instructed the upper class, where I studied, as did the head of the yeshiva. He was usually a quiet man, acting wisely, but sometimes he would get angry and shout, and would even slap a student's cheek. This kind of outburst came suddenly, with the force of a bomb . . .

Afterward, the students engaged in their studies enthusiastically, and this would last quite a long time. The second was Mendel the *Mashgiach* [spiritual yeshiva supervisor], a great teacher with a long yellow, tangled, shapeless beard, through which a comb could hardly pass. He went from class to class, ascertaining that the children were learning well and behaving properly.

[Mendel would] suddenly approach and examine, asking impromptu questions. . . to perhaps discover a hidden transgression. Thus he acted. The children did not hate him, but had reservations about him.



Young men from Ostrolenka in the Lithuanian yeshivas (after World War I)

One of the constant examiners was Rabbi Eliezer Mintz, of blessed memory. A teacher, a textile merchant, an enthusiastic Chassid, he examined the upper classes.

It is said that there was also another sort of yeshiva, with one class and many students, where one lesson was given to everyone. This place of Torah was in *Chovot HaLevavot*, in the large study hall. Others say that there

was a yeshiva like this in the *heder* of Krawiec, where Mendel Lomzer lived and taught.

There were many young men from Ostrolenka for whom the urge to learn was strong and their great talents brought them to high levels of Torah. They were not satisfied with the yeshiva in Ostrolenka, and left to study in well-known yeshivas. As is said, "Exile yourself to a place of Torah". Later, some of them became *gaonim* and famous rabbis, such as Rabbi Zindel and Rabbi Michel Ostrolenker, the two brothers (the sons of Chana Szejna-Gitel the Baker, who lived on Cyganska Street, near the house of Reb Josel Mejrann). Famous *gaonim* and students, who received a place of honor in the wide world of Torah; Rabbi Josef Ostrolenker, known as a great teacher and a genius in the yeshiva world, and others.

When the population was transferred out of the city in 1915, when World War I broke out, the yeshiva was burned down, together with the city's houses.



The Nowardok yeshiva, *Bejt Josef*, in Ostrolenka

Bejt Josef, the Nowardok Yeshiva

In about 1920, a *Bejt Josef* yeshiva was established in Ostrolenka, at the initiative of the Warsaw yeshiva center, with the famous yeshiva heads Rabbi Awraham Zalman, Rabbi David Budnik and Rabbi Hillel Vitkind (today, the head and principal of the *Beit Josef* yeshiva in Tel Aviv).

Between the two World Wars, all Nowardok yeshivas in Poland, Russia and other countries, including the one in Ostrolenka, were called *Bejt Josef*. They were named after the saintly Rabbi Josef Joizel Horowitz, of blessed memory, the founder of the Nowardok Yeshiva with its special method of *musar* [ethics]. In Ostrolenka or other places where *Bejt Josef* yeshivas were established, their students tried to appeal to the Jews, and inculcate in them their spirit of ethics and world view. For example: "Look around you, little man. Where are you going? To where do you hurry? Have you not seen the results of man's running? Have you not seen the last generation? Did your friend take with him everything he acquired in his life? Ethics asks that you also look at nature, at the life of the stormy sea, which rises in terrible high tides that attack with pride, pushing the earth, and breaking when they reach dry land, as if they never were, with no memory of them."

This summarized the Nowardok discourse of ethics*, intended to bring men to self-examination and deep subservience. There was great concern for the Judaism of the young generation, as the waves of the

* See: *LeClal Yisrael*, a history of the activities and importance of the Nowardok *Bejt Josef* yeshivas in the fatherland, by A.Z. Berezin, Jerusalem, 1932.

wars diminished the ethics of men, and threatened to spread hatred, the decline of Torah and anti-Semitism in the world.

With the establishment of the Jevseki and communist organizations in Russia – the period of the Denikim and the Kolczaki, from which the smell of Jew hate emanated, and the forced waste of Torah study time . . . Then these homes of ethics, the *Bejt Josef* Yeshivas, founded by Rabbi Josef Joizel, of blessed memory, arose like strong waves, sanctifying God's name, and standing against them with courage and iron tenacity, like fortified walls.

After his death, his heirs established about 80 yeshivas in large and small cities, such as Warsaw, Bialystok, Pinsk, Poltusk, Siedlce, Lodz, Riga, Ostrow-Mazowieck, Ostrolenka, etc. . . .

The heads of the yeshivas were Rabbi Chaim Gladsztejn and his brother-in-law, Rabbi Mosze Dawid Szarf from Lithuania. The principal of the yeshiva was Rabbi Chaim Bilinicki; the head *gabbai* was Rabbi Josef Nasielski, of blessed memory (the father of Pesia Szereszewska, of blessed memory, the community worker and famous personality in the world of Torah education). He, some *balabatim* in Ostrolenka and Rabbi Icchak Bursztejn, of blessed memory, supported and maintained the place.

There were four classes, in the yeshiva, with 80 students. The place of study was the large study hall. There was a kitchen which provided three meals a day for the heads of the yeshivas and the older students as well, who did not wish to eat *teig* at the homes of the *balabatim*. They slept at the homes of the *balabatim*, who set aside rooms for this purpose. The yeshiva also received financial support from the city's Jews and from the American Joint.

Later, the yeshiva moved to the Jewish Community Building on Kilinskaga Street. A committee of saintly women was also organized. They helped collect money, food and everything required for the yeshiva. This continued for years, until the Nazi ax man came, and uprooted everything.

Y. I.

Who comes from Ostrolenka and does not remember the *Bejt Josef* yeshiva in Ostrolenka, located between Kilinskaga and Gdanska Streets, in the Jewish Community Building, opposite the burned synagogue? Day and night, the voices of Torah and ethics of the yeshiva students were heard. I wish to dwell on the conditions under which the yeshiva operated. As is known, the yeshiva was supported by donations from townspeople. Young men came from all areas to study there. They received room and board. It may be said that in every second house, a yeshiva student boarded, and not . . . for payment. A comfortable bed and *teig* was given to the yeshiva student. The students safeguarded a *teig* place where they were shown friendliness and devotion. When a student left the yeshiva and went to learn at a larger one, he transferred his *teig* place to his brother or a good friend. The head of the yeshiva and the teachers ate in the yeshiva's kitchen, which was run by the saintly and merciful mothers who cooked there. They worked in rotation, instead of running their own homes. Sometimes, their children wandered around, waiting for their mothers, who were busy with yeshiva matters or community business. They were not only concerned with kitchen matters, but took care that there was something to cook and that salaries were paid on time. A meeting was held every month, and everything was arranged – who would take care of the kitchen, who would collect money.

The donation collectors combed the length and breadth of the city without missing a corner. Everyone contributed according to his ability.

I would like to mention here the names of the saintly women who contributed of their time for this purpose:

1. My mother, Sara-Rachel Iglewicz, the wife of the teacher, Alter Iglewicz
2. My grandmother, Chaja-Golda, the wife of Mordechaj the Painter, who spread Torah at large. All those years, she was sick and broken, and endangered her life to do charity and help yeshiva students. When someone commented that she was endangering her life, she answered: Who can understand things? When a yeshiva student wears torn clothing, he shames the honor of the Torah . . . I lay in bed when I am sick. When I solicit donations, it is a sign that I am well on that day.
3. Bejla-Rywka Chmiel, the wife of Reb Efraim Chmiel, the head of the Mizrachi and the chairman of the bank in the city.
4. Hadas Wajnsztok (the wife of the carpenter, Nachman Wajnsztok).
5. Mrs. Szlezynger (the sister of Icchak Rapaport).
6. Mrs. Harfa (the wife of the engraver).

7. Mrs. Edel (the wife of Mosze Aron Edel).
8. Mrs. Geluda (her husband was a tailor).

There were others, whose names I do not remember. Among the yeshiva students were talented young men, who excelled in theatrical acting on Chanukah, Purim and holidays. Plays were held in the synagogue, in the women's section. They presented *Ashmodei*, *Ahashverosh*, *Judith and Holofernes* and others. Of course, admission was charged to provide income for the yeshiva.

To our sorrow, everything was destroyed. There are no more Jews in Ostrolenka, and the voices of Torah that echoed in the city have been stilled forever.

We honor their memory. May God avenge them.

Brajna Iglewicz-Majrowicz, Tel Aviv

Bejt Jakow in Ostrolenka



***Bejt Jakow* with Pesia Szereszewska (the fourth from the right in the seated row)**

After World War I, when assimilation increased among the Jews, there was a woman in Krakow named Sara Schenirer (of blessed memory), a seamstress by profession, but of great spirit. One day, she declared "We have more than enough dresses for the body. From today on, I will begin sewing dresses for the soul, because they are not to be found." She began visiting rabbi's homes to recommend her program. Boys studied in *heders* and yeshivas. Girls learned in state schools, and studied only about Poland and Polish history. Because Judaism was completely forgotten, she decided to establish a school for girls called *Bejt Jakow* (based on the Sages' interpretation of the phrase: "Thus He said to the House of Jacob" – that is, speak in this manner to the women), so that young girls, too, would learn about *Yiddishkeit* (Judaism) and how to be punctilious in keeping laws and understand the study of Torah. Of course, they [the rabbis] liked the idea, wished her success and promised to assist her activities. In the beginning, there were a few girls in the school, and they learned in a small room where Sara lived. Then, more students enrolled. After a few months, she began to send them to other communities to spread the *Bejt Jakow* idea.

In time, girls from cities and towns came to Krakow, and from the small room there grew one of the largest seminaries in Poland. The *Bejt Jakow* idea penetrated every remote corner and came to Ostrolenka in 1928. Miss Schenirer came to us then, bringing a teacher with her. She gathered a group of religious



A group of students from the Agudat Yisrael Girls (*Bejt Jakow*) with the teachers in 1932. In the center: Szejna Kapusta (one of the first *Bejt Jakow* teachers)



The first group of *Bejt Jakow* students in 1928

people and began to explain the importance of *Bejt Jakow* to the Jewish home. Immediately, a committee was chosen and they began enrolling children. A one-room apartment was rented from Efraim Chmiel, of blessed memory, and every girl was tested to determine her level and place her in a suitable group. (Of course, they learned how to pray and write in Yiddish at home. Some of them studied with Masza, the teacher.) This was the order of studies: in the morning, they attended the primary school and, in the afternoon, *Bejt Jakow*. There, they studied prayers, the history of the Jewish people, Bible, laws, Torah – everything pertaining to Judaism, and also some Yiddish.

The first *Bejt Jakow* school did not operate for a long time. It closed after half a year. The students did not pay, and the teachers did not receive a salary. Because of a lack of this kind of teacher, new ones did not come, particularly under such conditions.

After about two years (during the intermediate days of Passover), the teacher, Pesia Nasielski, came to us from Poltusk, together with some of her students (she taught at the *Bejt Jakow* there). Once again the committee convened, a bigger place was rented, and a large meeting was called in the study hall. Pesia Nasielski appeared there with her students and explained the importance of this kind of a school for Jewish girls. The committee immediately contacted the center in Krakow and asked that they send a teacher. Meanwhile, the number of students increased greatly. The new teacher of the renewed *Bejt Jakow* school was Szejna Kapusta, who made a supreme effort to raise it to a suitable level. An administration was set up to assist her, consisting of Icze Sapir, Jakow Nasielski, Motel Kadzidler (Dolowicz), Chaim Eliezer Hendel and others. In addition, there was a women's committee. They all attended to the school's needs: teacher's salary, rent, electricity and any other expenses, including taking care that every Jewish girl attended the school.

During this period, approximately 150 students attended the *Bejt Jakow* school in our city. Near the school, an Agudat Yisrael Girls group was also established. Their teacher gave Bible classes and lectures on various subjects. On Sabbaths, the girls spent nearly all day at the school. In the morning, they came to pray. In the afternoon they divided up into groups: the girls were leaders and talked to the younger ones about the Torah portion of the week. In the summer, they studied *Ethics of the Fathers*. In the winter, after saying *Borchi Nafshi* [Bless, O My Soul, the Lord my God], they read to them from various works, such as the writings of Dr. Lehman or Samson Raphael Hirsch, etc. They also took trips and held conventions. The girls fulfilled all sorts of social commitments that the center delegated to them, such as collecting monies for *Keren HaYishuv* [an Israel settlement fund], explaining the importance of the Land of Israel and the meaning of the words *U'venai Yerushalayim* [And may Jerusalem be built . . .] and *V'techezehna ainainu* [May our eyes see . . .]. In 1934, when the Agudah established the first *Hachshara* [training program for settlement in Israel] for girls, Ostrolenka sent its first delegate to Lodz. After she took a six-month preparatory course there, she emigrated to Israel.

Bejt Jakow was an institution where girls continued in the way of their parents – the way of Torah and *Yiddishkeit*. "It is a Tree of Life for those who hold fast to it" – this is the source from which they drew vitality all their lives. To be a Jew and a human being was one of the principles of *Bejt Jakow* education, which bore the desired fruits. We saw how deeply the *Bejt Jakow* education penetrated the hearts of its students. In the most difficult situations, even in Hitler's concentration camps, in pain and superhuman suffering, they were imbued with the strength of *Yiddishkeit* and God's sanctity – so much so that they preferred death to giving in to the advances of the impure . . . They always sang "And you shall love your God with all your heart and all your soul – if only I could have the opportunity to fulfill this verse – I would". And indeed, in the camps, they fulfilled it . . .

Brajna Iglewicz-Majrowicz

The Yavneh School

Here I attempt to bring to mind experiences of my childhood. One clear morning, I wake up, open my eyes and see my mother, of blessed memory, standing nearby, urging me to get up and go to school. I quickly put on the clothes that had been prepared on the chair near my bed before I went to sleep, wash my face and hands, clean my mouth, take my satchel with my notebooks and run. I go out to Kilinskaga Street. Here, every day, I see the destroyed synagogue, where weeds now grow. It always reminded me of the destruction of the Holy Temple. We refrained from wandering near it at night, fearing the spirits and ghosts who resided there. Many tales were spread about them. Turning left, as usual, I see Reb Aron Jankel Margalit sitting on the wooden bench near his store, alone or with some townspeople, making jokes at the expense of someone, his face beaming with satisfaction. If he didn't sense my presence, I would succeed in passing without a pinch to some part of my body. Woe was to me, if I didn't sense when he came near me. I would scream in pain and he would chuckle with pleasure. I enter the lane of the Community House, pass the Nowardok Yeshiva, from where I hear the voices of morning prayers and, through the window, see the figures of young men adorned with phylacteries, swaying to and fro.

I continue on and come out on Cyganska Street. Then I see my school, with its big front courtyard and my friends, among the other pupils, playing all kinds of games until the teachers come and open the classrooms. And now I have joined them. The ball bounces up and down, the children chase it, fall on the ground, squabble – and suddenly the teacher and the principal of the school appear and all the pupils run to the classrooms.

We sit on modern benches, prepared according to examples in Polish schools. The teacher, Zalman Gorzelczany, comes into the classroom and we take out our prayer books and begin morning prayers. My friend, Dancyger, of blessed memory, begins *Ma Tovu* in his pleasant voice, and after him follow Sender Lubelczyk, Sokol and Tejtelbojm, of blessed memory. Yes! The echo of their voices rings in my ears. Here I see them at our lessons, be it Hebrew or history. Standing, gesturing with their hands, answering in pleasant voices. The bell sounds, and we burst outside. The studies continue morning and evening. We came to school as children, and completed it with satchels full of the treasure of knowledge, on the verge of adulthood.

Days upon days, between the ringing of the bells, we absorbed knowledge and ideas about our nation, our Torah and the world. Here was forged a new kind of Jew, a proud, nationalistic Jew, for whom the idea of Zion was a guiding principle.

The school was founded thanks to my father, Reb Efraim Chmiel (Camiel), of blessed memory, whose love for education, science and Zion were boundless. (The wooden house in which the school was housed was built for this specific purpose by Mr. Bloumenkranz.) My father did not spare his money to strengthen the school during the first months of its existence. He fought against all the conservatives, who saw the teaching of the Hebrew language and the study of the Bible as a desecration of the name of God and heresy. May God protect us . . .

The school principal, Zalman Gorzelczany, of blessed memory, an educated Jew and a good Zionist, gave us of his knowledge and perspective. He also tried to draw the youths of our city to our school.

The incredibly meticulous teacher, Filar, of blessed memory, zealously and tirelessly inculcated the knowledge of the Bible in us.

The teacher, Rozenbojm, of blessed memory, obsessed with the Hebrew language, Hebrew poetry and literature, inculcated Hebrew poetry in the youth. There was no end to his joy when I sang him a solo from the poems of Bialik, or from songs that he had written, which always throbbed with longing for a free Jewish people in its developed land.

The results of this education led the youths who completed it to establish Zionist organizations, such as *HaShomer HaDati*, *HaShomer HaTzair*, *Beitar* and *HeChalutz*.

This youth was aware of what was taking place in Israel, emigrated there and built and fought, when the time came, for a free Israel.

Yehuda Chamiel

Schools in the City



A group of older *Bejt Jakow* students



The Culture School, administered by the teacher, Gedalja Rozenbojm (the second from the right in the second standing row)



A class of students from the Powszechna Primary School in 1928, with the teacher, Nadler (in the center)



First class in 1923



A group of students from the Powszechna School in 1923. Teacher: Jerzy Lewizon and his wife Krymkiewicz



Powszechna School, last from the right, the teacher – Landau



Jewish primary school class



A class of students and their teachers. In the first row, the fourth from the right, the principal of the school, Mr. Hermankiewicz (a Polish Christian, popular and supported by the students and the parents)

Study Halls and *Minyanim* (Prayer Quorums)

During World War I, all the buildings in the city were burned down, among them the large study hall and the synagogue.

The ruins remained until the Jews of the city returned after the war from other places, like Russia, and until Poland returned to normalcy. The city's Jews rebuilt their burned homes in their original locations. They also rebuilt the large study hall, where they prayed and studied. The [large] study hall contained a study hall called the "community" *shtebl*. In the winter, when bitter cold prevailed in the large, unheated study hall, some prayed in the small one.

On the Sabbath, two *minyanim* prayed in the large study hall. The first was of the "common people". The second, it may be said, was for prominent people, who, before prayers, studied a page of Gemara, the Torah portion of the week or the Zohar.



The large study hall, before World War I

The city of Ostrolenka did not have a specific cantor. Unofficially, the position was filled by the ritual slaughterer, Chaim Berel . . . Throughout the year, on Sabbaths and holidays, he led the congregation in prayer. During the High Holy Days, he gathered a choir of small children with sweet, ringing voices, who accompanied him in singing and melodies. Chaim Berel was an imposing figure. When a Jew from another city met him in the street, he immediately realized that here was a Jew who attended to the community's religious needs. He was quick-witted, did not get angry and had a good word and pleasant smile for everyone. Everyone in the city, rightist or leftist, liked and respected him. Many did not know that his family name was Kachan. They said Chaim Berel the Ritual Slaughterer, and knew to whom they referred. He was the city's best-liked ritual slaughterer.

Opposite the study hall was a two-story wooden

building, and in it was the *Talmud Torah*. The Yavneh School was also there in the beginning. Later, it moved to Berek Joselewicz (Cyganska) Street, near Jakow Filar's house. A *minyan* prayed in one of the *Talmud Torah*'s rooms on Sabbaths and holidays. *Selichot* [prayers for forgiveness and mercy, recited during the month before Rosh HaShana] were said very early in the morning, before the children came to learn.

The Mizrachi-Zionist *minyan* was at first in the house of Pianko, and later moved to the Yavneh School. Many people who could be called the intelligentsia worshipped there, both the religiously observant and the non-observant. The main prayer leader [*baal tefilah*] was Jakow Dancyger, a young Torah scholar, thin as a rail, with a sweet, wonderful voice. During the High Holy Days, when "places" were sold, all were sold because it was known that Jakow Dancyger would lead the *Musaf* [the additional morning prayer]. He and his four children prepared for weeks before the High Holy Days. With rhythm and grace, they sang cantorial selections and most of the Modzitz melodies. On the High Holy Days, during intermissions in the prayers, lovers of song and melody would come to hear Jakow Dancyger, and to sing a new Modzitz melody. He was offered large sums to lead prayers in other places, but he refused to leave Ostrolenka during the holidays. The leader of the morning prayer was Reb Efraim Chmiel (Chamiel), who sometimes also led the *Musaf*. He had a pleasant voice, and knew how to use all the nuances. The boys also accompanied him during prayers. The Mizrachi *minyan* had the city's finest prayer leaders.



Fejga Frejda Zylbersztejn on her way to Selichot

The Gur *minyan* was the largest Chassidic *minyan*, before it divided because of a dispute over the new Gur Chassid ritual slaughterer. The Ostrolenka community refused to accept him and the matter almost reached the law court. Using the *Yoreh De'ah* and with the help of Advocate Grojsbard from the city of Lomza, they tried to prove that it was permissible to accept the slaughterer. As reinforcement, they brought Rabbi Dr. Rozenman from Bialystok, who was also expert in Polish language and culture. They even threatened a *cherem* [ban] . . . [The *shtebl* of the] Alexander Chassidim was at Lewtan the Baker's. As in all Poland, Ostrolenka's Alexander Chassidim were weak opponents of the Zionists, in comparison to the Gur Chassidim. Some of those who worshipped with them belonged officially to Mizrachi, such as Michel Sarniewicz and his brother-in-law, Blumsztejn, who contributed to Zionist funds.

There were also among them prominent people, such as Menachem Frydman, Jechezkel Zylbersztejn and Herszel Szperling, Jews of reputation in the city, generous property owners. As wealthy members of the city, they contributed considerable sums when there was fundraising for the impoverished or for communal needs. The Alexander Chassidim *shtebl* was a meeting place of intelligent Chassidim. They never fought among themselves, and did not become involved in the disputes which erupted from time to time in the city. They gave a free hand to those who prayed with them during elections for the city council, the community, Parliament and the Senate.

At the edge of the big market square, near the bridge, at the home of Reb Lejbel Skrobacz, was the Amszinow *shtebl*. Although the *gabbaim* were strict, the imprimatur on their behavior was given by Reb Lejbel Skrobacz, a Torah scholar who was not a member of any organization, who had sympathy for the Mizrachi, and who contributed and raised funds for the Zionist enterprise. Therefore, the Amszinow Chassidim were also sympathetic . . . toward the Mizrachi. Nothing was done or determined in the Amszinow *shtebl* without Reb Lejbel Skrobacz. There was a *minyan* in one of Pesach Hochberg's rooms. They removed everything and

brought in a Holy Ark, tables and benches. Meetings of the Keren Kayemeth LeYisrael were also held there. Pesach, the *balabayit* of the *minyan*, was a Zionist, and gave his all to the Zionist enterprise. The *minyan* was Zionist. In other *minyanim*, those who worshipped there had to make a monthly payment. They did not pay a cent for Pesach's rooms. All donations from those who worshipped there were contributed to the Land of Israel.

The wife of Mr. Pesach Hochberg was an exceptional woman. She never complained that her house was being turned into public property. In the winter, at Keren Kayemeth LeYisrael meetings or at the *minyan*, they brought in mud and snow, and soiled the polished floor. Not only did she not look unwelcoming – the opposite: her face shone. She received them warmly and also offered refreshments. Alas for those who are lost, and are not to be forgotten!

Chaim Drezner, Bnei-Brak, Israel

* Until World War I, all the Chassidic *shteblich* (except for Gur), were in the large study hall building.

The "Kolner" *Shtebl*

As in most of Poland's cities and towns, there were many houses of worship in our city. This was because there were many kinds of Chassidim. The divisions were great, causing competition and separation. The synagogue on "Synagogue Street" was especially designated for "common" Jews, tradesmen and workmen. The congregation in the study hall was mixed, and the place was known as the official house of prayer, because the rabbi himself worshipped there. In that building, right next door, was the "community" *shtebl*. Those who worshipped there were of no specific character. Prayers at the community *shtebl* began in the early morning hours. During the morning, several *minyanim* prayed there. It seemed that this *shtebl* primarily drew people who were always hurrying and busy with their work and trade, and who did not care for punctuality and set times of prayer. On the second floor, near the women's section, there were a few *shteblich* of different nuances: the *shtebl* of the Zionists, and those of the Amszinow, Otwock and Alexander Chassidim. Jews who prayed at the Zionists' *shtebl* had feelings for the Land of Israel. In our city, they were the most active in disseminating the Zionist idea. To the credit of Anszel Lew, of blessed memory, it is remembered that he was the driving force and main motivator of this group. We, the youth, absorbed this and were influenced by him. He always recruited us and gave us various tasks, such distributing shekels, placing Keren Kayemeth collection boxes in homes, putting "bowls" in different houses of prayer on Yom Kippur Eve, and so on. In the *shtebl*, we gathered for discussions about Zionism and to read many of the movement's books. Of course, all of this activity was camouflaged. Near each of us was a book of Gemara, as if we were learning Torah. In a far corner, we hid all publicity material and the Keren Kayemeth boxes.

The *shtebl* of the Gur Chassidim, who were of the greatest number and influence in our city, was located very far from this center, in a house at the edge of the river, not far from the bridge. The house was once a barracks, and was converted to a *shtebl* where all the Gur Chassidim prayed, among them many of our city's respected *balabatim*. In those days, new winds began to blow in our city. A revolution in the thought processes of many of our townspeople began. As far as the education of their children was concerned, they were once again dissatisfied with *heder* studies and began providing a general education for their children. The way of life and existence changed to some extent. This was also expressed in clothing. Youths slowly began to change their clothing, shortening their outer garments and dressing in the European-style. Many of the adults, as well, were no longer overly strict in their dress. They began to shorten their *kapotas* [frock coats], became punctilious about cleanliness, and wore white collars and neckties. The traditional hat also took on another shape, not in the style of the observant Chassidim. This change in clothing in the spirit of the time was a subject of continuous disagreement and quarrels during prayers.

The progressives appeared for Sabbath prayers wearing beautiful shortened coats, with slanted, not straight, pockets (a sign of heresy). More than once, their appearance caused a delay in the reading of the Torah and disturbances in the orderliness of prayers.

One Sabbath, a crisis broke out. The very observant and the fanatics decided to act, because "It is a time to act – for they have breached Your Torah" . . . What did they do? On their behalf, during the *Amidah* [the prayer recited standing], pranksters went out to the hallway where the coats were hung, and tied every two coats of the progressive worshippers together. They placed rotten eggs in the slanted pockets. At the end of prayers, when people went home, the crime was discovered. The scene and dispute that took place are indescribable. This was the straw that broke the camel's back. The progressives decided to establish a new *shtebl* and called it the "Kolner" *shtebl*, that is, the *shtebl* of those with collars. The heads of the rebellion and founders of the *shtebl* were Mendel Brin, Awi Jechezkel Kupferminc, Szmuelke Frydman, Zalman Kosowski, Zyskind and many other worshippers. They rented some rooms in the home of Szmuelke Frydman and set up the Kolner *shtebl* there. In time, a close connection developed between the worshippers.

I would not be fulfilling my obligation if I did not take this opportunity to tell about the central person and driving force of this *shtebl* – Szmuel Frydman, who was a special personality. In his soul and dexterity, he was an artist. Who knows if this man was not destined for greatness in the field of the arts, if he had lived elsewhere? He invested all his artistic talent to lend beauty and splendor to the house of prayer. The new *shtebl* required a Torah scroll and a Holy Ark, and here he found expression for his feelings and aspirations. An sufficient amount of money was collected and a Torah scroll was written. With his own hands, Szmuel Frydman made the "trees of life" [wooden roller rods], and decorated them with shells. The names of the worshippers were engraved on them. And what beautiful and breathtaking engraving he did on the Holy Ark! Indeed, he poured all his soul into this holy work. I will never forget the celebration on the day the writing of the Torah scroll was completed. How joyous and spiritually uplifted were the worshippers! Liquid refreshment was provided in full measure. With happiness and enthusiasm, they danced Jewish dances in a circle, hand on [the next man's] shoulder, singing with devotion and thanking God that this good deed had fallen to their share – to complete the writing of the Torah scroll. We, the pranksters, surrounded the dancers in an outer circle, moved with them to the same tempo, and sang "And purify our hearts, so that we may serve you in truth" and other Chassidic songs of the time. Reb Szmuel was also proficient in culinary matters. He was especially expert in the preparation of the famous punch with which he pleased the worshippers. Prayers in this *shtebl* were always pleasant, because we were not bound by superfluous stringency and prohibitions which were no longer in the spirit of the time.

Especially engraved in my memory are the *seudah shlishit* [third Sabbath meal] parties, held every Sabbath at dusk. Each worshipper, in his turn, brought food and drink. In the twilight, melancholy song would pour out of the heart, of yearning and longing for the day that is entirely holy and exalted. How hard it was to part from the extra soul [granted the Sabbath observer], return to bitter reality and say the *Havdalah* [prayer], separating the holy and the secular. In those days, our fathers knew how to create substance in their lives through prayer, and by spending time in a circle of friends. Especially on the Sabbath, they let go of all their cares and the burden of making a livelihood and, like sons of kings, lived the day that is all holiness and radiance, yearning and spiritual uplifting, communing with the longed-for Sabbath Queen.

Awiezer Drori (Kupferminc)

The Zionist *Shtebl*

In the large study hall building, connected to the synagogue in the same courtyard (when it existed), there was an entrance through a back door to the house of the Alexander, Amszinow and Otwock Chassidim. This is not the place to describe all the many ties that bound us, the Chassidic children, to those Chassidic houses of prayer (*shteblich*): on vacations or at prayer, on a memorial day for the Rebbe, or listening to stories with happy endings in the "About Good Jews" group . . . or a Chassidic trip out of the city on the Sabbath, or a new melody that the Chassidim snatched at the Rebbe's *tish* [communal festive meal], or when we sang Jewish songs to army melodies, or just happy events in the *shtebl*. I want to tell you about the *shtebl* located near the Otwock *shtebl* at the entrance, the first one in the hallway. It was called the Zionist *shtebl*. They talked a great deal about this *shtebl* in the city. The ultra-observant looked with disfavor on them and saw them

as sinners who lead others astray. A small thing: predatory Jewish-Gentile Zionists, who actually pray just like fervent Chassidim! We, the Chassidic children, were absolutely forbidden to look at them or walk by them. But how is it possible to restrain oneself and not, at least, take a peek when we were right next door? We *did* avoid going near them. Influenced by our parents, we were also afraid, and passed them hastily, like when we neared a church. We avoided playing near them and befriending the children of the parents who prayed there.

The door of the Zionist *shtebl* was always closed, as if against the evil eye . . . It was rare to hear their cries of prayer, which were without the fervor of "a market in heaven", like Chassidic prayers. For them, everything went on quietly and with restraint. Perhaps they themselves did not feel comfortable there? Sometimes I felt sorry for them, as if they were segregated, and no one wanted to come in contact with them. As a small boy, I did not understand the importance of that *shtebl* in those days. Even the faces of the worshippers were not etched in my memory.

I remember a morning when I passed near their *shtebl* with my father (on a Sabbath or a holiday). The door was open and as I peeked in, a Star of David was the first thing that caught my eye. I shuddered. An extraordinary feeling took hold of me, as if I had passed by a church and seen a cross, of which a Jewish child was always terrified . . . But the feeling passed and I felt the similarity to the Star of David that I saw woven in gold on the curtain of the Holy Ark in the study hall. I felt in all my childish depths that this was genuinely Jewish . . .

Today, I understand that the Zionist *shtebl* with the Star of David, which was then unacceptable and *treyfe* [not kosher] for the ultra-Orthodox of the city, served great Jewish goals and symbolized Zionism and the State today. Now I know and understand that *that shtebl* was also a kind of *shtebl* . . . with prayer, song and enthusiasm, like all the Chassidic prayer houses (*shteblich*), but that everything took place calmly, with pleasure and patience . . . in a circle of friends, in prayer to the Creator. Without a doubt, among the worshippers were serious and religious people, who prayed with *kavana* [spiritual focus].

Y.I.

★

The House of the Otwock Chassidim

Ostrolenka was one of the Jewish cities blessed with many *minyanim*, study halls and Chassidic houses of prayer (*shteblich*). In and of themselves, the Chassidic *shteblich* in Ostrolenka were special. The Chassidim there were occupied with studying Judaism, conducting themselves according to its ways, traveling to the Rebbe to ask his advice on small or large matters, and not dealing with the outside world, except in matters of livelihood. The city's shop owners were Chassidim. Among them were those of average means, as well as wealthy persons. They were involved in the city's public affairs. Many were represented in the Jewish community: they were members of the community committee, chairmen and also in the city council . . . Among them were people influential in municipal matters. While they sometimes took the law into their own hands to restrain the progressive youth, they did not always succeed. The tide of development and progress did not take into consideration the wishes of the ultra-Orthodox and the conservatives.

There were four Chassidic *shteblich* in Ostrolenka: Gur, Amszinow, Alexander and Otwock. Before World War I, all the Chassidic *shteblich* were concentrated in one place (Synagogue Street) on Kilinskaga Street, in the study hall building, except for Gur, which was located on Cyganska Street (today Berek Joselewicz), near the river. After Poland became independent, all the Chassidic *shteblich* dispersed all over the city. The Gur Chassidim influenced municipal matters. More than once, they let their strong arm be felt. The Amszinow Chassidim, as well, had not a little influence and certainly helped matters. The Alexander Chassidim were liberal. Their approach was minimalist, and they were inclined to understand and take the point in time into consideration. (They acquired a reputation with the Gur and Amszinow Chassidim as irresponsible and too liberal . . .) The Otwock Chassidim were less influential. Their *shtebl* had a few *minyanim* of mostly "common people", downtrodden workers who could barely support themselves, lacking a sense of municipal matters, very observant (dwelling enthusiastically on inconsequentialities), for example: making blessings on each fruit, praying aloud, not swallowing words, and saturated with a deep-rooted love of their fellow Jews, particularly toward individuals, which they took from the Otwock and Warki Chassidim. Therefore, they were completely devoted to the individual. They were not

great scholars. (Those who were could be counted on the fingers of one hand). Rather than scholars, the Otwock Chassidim were Chassidim and God-fearing. More of the heart than of the head. Dear, good Jews. They barely maintained the *shtebl* and prayed there only on Sabbaths, holidays and the High Holy Days. On other days, they prayed at the community *shtebl* and in the study hall.

Among them were glaziers, small poor merchants, cigarette makers, tinsmiths. They barely made a living. On the other hand, they were quiet, simple Jews with a great deal of faith, who went their own way and did not "stick their noses where they did not belong".

Some of the Otwock Chassidim etched in my memory to this day because of their uniqueness were Reb Dawid Szlafmic and Reb Chaim Notte Zuckerman (about whom I devoted an article), Reb Mordechaj Zuckerman and, finally, Reb Icze Sojka, who was the most exceptional of all the Otwock type. I remember him even as a youth, standing above the whole Chassidic world. First of all, he was a handsome and respected Chassid (he once hosted the Rabbi of Otwock, when he came to Ostrolenka, in his home), a wonderful musician and creator of new melodies for the Chassidim. And this must be noted: the rich man of the city, the owner of the flour mill in partnership with others, he was a Jew with a big heart for all, who did not follow the Otwock style. In time, this clever, liberal Jew became such an example of a representative of the city and a community worker, that everyone, without exception, believed in his honesty, loved him and treated him with great respect.

As a small boy, I had a special relationship and a blind love for the house that stood on Kilinskaga Street then, not far from our own. [A visit to the] house of Reb Icze Sojka was the first of my childhood visits to neighbors' homes. I had great feelings for this family. My father was also an intimate friend of Otwock Chassidim. I would bring him [Reb Icze] brand new melodies, which he adapted and endorsed. He was a great musician. Sometimes I helped him with *zmirot* [Sabbath and holiday songs] at the *shtebl*, such as *Lecha Dodi* or *Bnej Ejchala*. This gentle and pleasant Jew stood alone, in contrast to the Otwock Chassidim. When World War II broke out, he migrated to the Slonim Ghetto, with many Ostrolenkan Jews, and was murdered there along with his wife, son, daughter, son-in-law and four grandchildren, who were murdered in Bialystok and Treblinka. May God avenge their blood.

I wish to mention Reb Dawid Szlafmic, a glass merchant. He was unique in that, although he was not a great scholar, he had great magnetism for the city's Otwock Chassidim. He managed all *shtebl* matters high-handedly, without even considering *Mar Bar Ashi* [a rabbi who relied on the wisdom of the people], criticized everyone and apparently derived pleasure from it. More than once, he caused disputes and quarrels which reached the rabbi. He had a power of speech which succeeded in bringing many Chassidim over to his side. He performed his activities speedily, without unnecessary words. What primarily remains in my mind are his prayers on the pulpit. I will never forget the *Musaf* [additional prayer] on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. (My father led the morning prayer.) Like a lion, he stood on the pulpit and fought with Heaven. His prayers, *On Rosh HaShana Inscribe Us*, the *Yitgadal* before *Musaf* and *Hineni* surely made a large hole in heaven. His prayers captured many hearts; they also warned his listeners and demanded that they repent.

His dramatic voice surely shook the One in Heaven from the place where all the human creatures stand before Him on those Days of Awe. Whoever heard Reb Dawid pray was made to think deeply and repent. He had only to begin his first prayer on the pulpit, and a terrible flame was released in the *shtebl* . . . Because of his special prayers, he gained a universal reputation.

Mordechaj Mendel Szlafmic, one of his sons, was one of the Labor Zionist organization community workers in Ostrolenka. He emigrated to Israel and came back. He and his family were murdered by the Nazis. May God avenge their blood.



Reb Mordechaj Cukierkorn of blessed memory

Finally, I would like to briefly mention the best-known of the Otwock Chassidim, Reb Mordechaj Cukierkorn, with the patriarchal beard, who influenced everyone with his uniqueness, as well. He was tall and well-built, with a face that expressed goodness of heart and courage. Although he had staggering gait, he was dynamic and full of brilliant ideas. He was honest and sharp, and opposition to every injustice filled his Chassidic nature. He worked hard all his life. He was a tinsmith (building doors for ovens and bread boxes) and taught the profession to members of his family. Reb Mordechaj reacted quickly in matters concerning questions of honesty. He spoke the truth with all his heart, was completely honest, and full of humor and acuity. He could even throw the truth into the face of a king and, if necessary, would not yield to anyone. (He was a close friend of my father's.) He miraculously succeeded in reaching his children in Brazil at the height of World War II. A few years ago, he passed away in Brazil, of blessed memory.

Y.I.



Institutions and Associations

As in all Polish cities (especially between the two World Wars), so it was in Ostrolenka. Jews and community workers dealt with public and cultural matters, organizational activity, Zionist funds, libraries, loan and savings funds, etc. . .

As much as possible, I wish to briefly touch on my youthful realizations, the city's community workers and personalities, and the institutions and organizations I knew and worked for.

A. Keren Kayemeth

In 1929, I began to be involved with the Keren Kayemeth. Meetings were held in Pesach Hochberg's house every Sunday. He was Chairman of the fund. Every year, an exhibition was held by the Keren Kayemeth, including a fete held at the Jewish-state school on Lomza Street, at the home of Lejbel Sredni. The yearly fete brought in a great deal of money. In addition, revenues were collected through the blue Keren Kayemeth boxes and from fundraising. I remember that we took a great deal of money out of Nadborny the Butcher's boxes. There were large sums each week in the box of Mendel the Water Drawer (Tall Mendel). The committee was very active. All the Zionist parties were represented in it, for example, HaShomer HaTzair, Mizrachi, HeChalutz, HeChalutz HaMizrachi, Al HaMishmar, etc. The committee consisted of:

Pesach Hochberg – HeChalutz; Sarniewicz-Kaspi – Mizrachi (in Israel today); Herszel Skrobacz – HeChalutz HaMizrachi; Fejga Jagoda (Secretary of HaShomer HaTzair); Aron Szperling (Rightist Zionist Workers, in Israel today), as well as HeChalutz – Berel Zabludowicz; Josef Wonszak – Tze'erei Zion; Icchak Rapaport – Al HaMishmar, General Zionist, in Israel today; Malowany Josefa – HaShomer HaTzair, in Israel today (the wife of the Deputy Mayor of Tiberias); Jehuda Chomont – Icchaki (in Israel today), etc. . . .

On holidays, and especially on Yom Kippur Eve, bowls were placed in the synagogue for donations for Keren Kayemeth. Youths and adults performed community work with unimaginable enthusiasm, sometimes at the expense of their own personal business.

B. Keren HaYesod

The community work for Keren HaYesod took place at the home of its Chairman, Mendel Bialy, owner of the sawmill. All activities and preparations for the 18th Congress were assigned to him. (At the sales of shekels in Ostrolenka for the 18th Congress, 90% was given to the city's workers party.) . . . Every year, an emissary arrived from the center in Warsaw to receive a new commitment for the following year. Mostly youths were involved in this, because the adults were busy with their livelihoods. As a Zionist youth of 19, I worked with great success, with the help of Rabbi Berg from the center. Member Bialy was impressed by my activities and tried to convince me to become a General Zionist. He related that during World War I, when he was in Russia and wanted to be an honest socialist and make a living by labor, they told him: as a former bourgeois, you have no right to work . . . In this way, he tried to convince me.

C. Yesodi – Charity Fund

It happened thus: there was a Jew from Wojciechowice, by the name of Ajblum, if I am not mistaken, who lived in America and became very ill. He made a vow that if he recovered from his illness, he would contribute 5,000 dollars for an important and good cause. As soon as he recovered, he sent the promised amount in the name of two representatives in Ostrolenka: Herszel Szperling and Chaim Pinczas Gingold.

Thus, the charity fund was established.

The members of the fund's committee were Menachem Frydman, Michel Sarniewicz, Efraim Chmiel (Chamiel), Noske Jabek, Anszel Lew and Herszel Szperling.

The Chairman of the charity fund was Aron Zusman. It existed for many years and, later, merged with the municipal Jewish bank. In the beginning, the Chairmen of the bank were Menachem Frydman, Efraim Chmiel (Chamiel), and later on, Noske Jabek. The bank's founder and Secretary was Anszel Lew, who was responsible for all bank matters.

D. The Workers Organization

The Workers Organization was run by its Chairman, Member Zlocisty, and its Secretary, Aron Wylozny. From time to time, they organized fundraising. Fundraising for *Linat HaTzedek* was held annually. It should be noted that, to collect money for *Linat HaTzedek*, a play was held by amateur actors with Aron Wylozny. The presented *Ashmodei* every year, and Aron Wylozny always played Ashmodei. They actually had great success. The play was held at the Shofe, apparently a warehouse on Ostrowy Street.

Aron Szperling, Tel Aviv

E. The Professional Organization and the Sports Club "Morgensztern"

In 1922, the first professional organization was founded in Ostrolenka, in which there were representatives from all types of professions. It was founded in the building of Berel Nadborny, where the Bund hall was. At the time, the Chairman of the organization was Aron Zusman, and Szajke Aszer was Secretary. The Morgensztern Sports Club was in the same building. It belonged directly to the Bund, which was interested in attracting the youth to it, and offered them involvement in sports. It brought them a sports instructor from Warsaw, organized trips, etc. . . . It tried to raise sports to a high level. In this way, they wanted to please the youth, especially those in Shomer HaTzair. In the beginning, they "succeeded" in attracting in particular simple youths and also observant ones (it was said then that the Bund controlled the "Jewish market" in Ostrolenka).

The professional organization existed only eight months. Someone instigated an incitement. In the hall, they left Communist literature, which was then dangerous and *treyfe* . . . Therefore, its activities were stopped by the Polish government and its representatives were sent to the prison in Lomza.

A.L.

How the Library Was Founded

In our city, there were two active parties – the Zionists and the Bund. We, the Tze'erei Zion group, called HaKica, were the driving force in major activities and campaigns. The Bund was strong. Its people knew how to work and capture the workers' hearts. There was no real proletariat in our city, however, because it had no factories, but rather trade workers, such as tailors, shoemakers, carpenters and builders. Out of the blue, representatives of the two parties gathered and decided to establish a joint municipal library. It was easy to decide, but how to implement it? The Tsarist government looked with disfavor on all social and cultural progress. There was the threat of the Revolution, and no party could operate legally. Zcharja Nadborny saved the day. A confirmed bachelor, he lived all alone in a spacious apartment, dealt in trade and was involved in the local authority. He was educated, liked to read books and had a penchant for public activity. When we turned to him with our proposal to attend to the acquisition of a license for the library, he agreed immediately. After a short time, he acquired the license, and there was great joy in our camp. He was responsible for political legality *vis a vis* the authority. A special fund was established to found the library and purchase books. The library opened quickly. We purchased many books, and the number of readers grew daily. After the honeymoon ended and with it, the common joy of our success, the struggle began for influence in running the library. We, the Zionists, demanded an increase in the purchase of Hebrew books, while the Bund wanted Yiddish books. A war took place between the two camps, as to which would succeed in winning more readers, thereby increasing its influence and gaining the right to make decisions. The librarians of both parties met three times a week and exchanged books for readers. But the war for influence became worse every year. Zcharja Nadborny, who was in fact responsible, acted as a sort of conciliator and mediator, because he was liked and accepted by both sides. He was always elected to the library's administration, because, thanks to him, it existed.

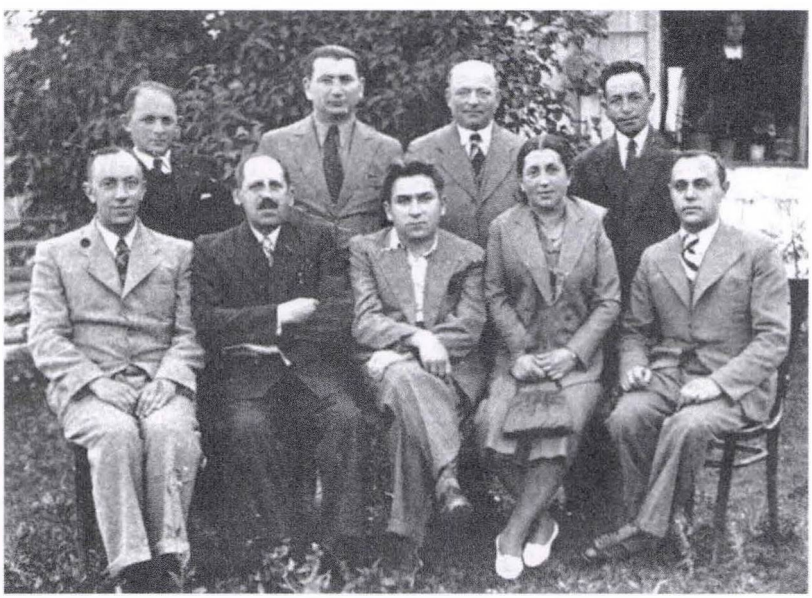
The library also served as a meeting place for

youth. After exchanging books, we went for walks outside of the city or spent time at someone's home. Thus, the city's library was a center for meetings of the two strong movements which operated then in Ostrolenka's Jewish community. Jewish comradeship and tolerance for the opinions of others was created there. We invested a great deal of energy and dedication in our work, because it embodied the dream of founding the independent cell structure of liberated Jewish society, built on democratic foundations.

Awiezer Drori



Taz and Centoz in Ostrolenka (children's health organizations); Centoz in 1936



The Taz management in 1937, with Aron Zusman (seated in the center)

Linat Tzedek

It was in 1915-1916, when Ostrolenka was under German occupation. The inhabitants began returning to the destroyed city, which then comprised about two hundred families. At the same time, severe epidemics broke out: intestinal typhus, typhus exenthematiecus, dysentery, etc. There was a sick person in every home, and sometimes more than one in a family. A number of young people, headed by Pesach Hochberg, met to discuss how to get out of this dangerous situation, and what could be done to help both the sick and the healthy, who were on the verge of becoming sick at any moment – especially those caring for patients.

We decided to call an urgent meeting of the townspeople, who came without delay. The meeting was held in Benedon's courtyard. (It should be noted that most of those who had returned lived in the Benedon barracks, which had been converted into private apartments.) A decision was made to establish a body called *Linat Tzedek*. Its purpose would be to help the sufferers as much as possible. A seven-member administration was elected: Pesach Hochberg, Welwel Bajuk, Rachel Benedon, Kalman Pianko, Szlomo Benedon, Josef Wonszak and Chaja-Rachel Flamenbojm. At the first meeting, Pesach Hochberg was elected Chairman, Szlomo Benedon Secretary and Josef Wonszak In-charge of Financial Affairs. Members Hochberg and Pianko took the organization's legal matters upon themselves. Wonszak and Benedon committed themselves to finding quarters and furnishings as soon as possible. At the same time, it was decided to call on the populace for financial assistance through monthly membership dues, as well as a special payment when purchasing fish. Members S. Benedon, Flamenbojm and R. Benedon pledged to do this. It was also decided to arrange overnight stays for two people at the home of a patient, from 9:00 P.M. to 6 A.M. It was suggested that we turn to the youth and ask them to volunteer for overnight stays, so that family members could rest after tending the sick all day. This task was assigned to Members Wonszak and Benedon. It was also decided to use the first monies collected by the fund to purchase essential equipment for the care of the sick: thermometers, enemas, hot water bottles, cupping glasses, bedpans, etc. The first meeting was held at the home of Pesach Hochberg. The pace of the committee's work is worth mentioning: already on the second night, a meeting was held in our apartment (on the Ostrowy Road, not far from the fire brigade cabin). All necessary furnishing were purchased immediately. An equipment cabinet was ready even before the equipment itself was. A place was given to us by the mayor, in one of the buildings that was not damaged during the war.

On that same night, the overnight stay project began. On the second night, we sent seven pairs. Each day the number grew, until it reached 18 overnight stays during one night. We were received everywhere with great enthusiasm. Everyone was grateful. After a few days, we had the necessary equipment, although in small quantities. Two members of the administration, Bajuk and Pianko, the owners of the city's only pharmacy, brought it from Warsaw and sold it at cost. After we had equipment, we established shifts at our quarters from nine until one in the afternoon and from five until eight at night. *Linat HaTzedek* was open to the public. In exchange for payment or goods, equipment was loaned for no more than seven days. Whoever needed more time had to come and extend the time period, or pay for every day beyond the period set.

About the matter of payment upon the sale of fish: every Thursday or Friday, near every fish stand, stood a pair who collected a negligible payment from purchasers. An official receipt, bearing the seal of *Linat Tzedek*, was given for every kilogram of fish purchased. It should be noted that the fish sellers themselves helped this holy work, moving things along, adding a word or a saying. I remember that Chaja, the fish seller (the wife of Icchak Dorfman, of blessed memory), would say: "Give, give children, whoever does not give to Jacob gives to Esau". Raszka, the wife of Fajwel Finkelsztejn, of blessed memory, expressed it differently: "Give, give women, if you have enough for fish, there will be enough for pepper." Other fish sellers as well, whose names I do not remember anymore, contributed sayings and jokes to promote the holy cause. But we have not yet said enough.

When we had collected a sufficient quantity of equipment and no special expenses were anticipated, we expanded our activities to the social area. If we came to stay over at a poor home, we brought foodstuffs with us for the patient's benefit, and made sure that he ate and

got stronger, to get him on his feet as soon as possible. Things progressed so far, that our organization was of consequence for the doctor and the pharmacist. It was enough to show them a note bearing our seal to receive a fifty percent reduction. As the remaining fifty percent was paid by *Linat Tzedek*, the patients received these services free of charge. When a patient received a certificate from the doctor to get baked goods made of white flour (at that time the sale of white flour was prohibited), he received the flour without charge, on presentation of our seal. The situation became much worse when the night watchers themselves fell ill, and there was nearly no one left to send. It was therefore essential to limit the overnight stays to urgent and severe cases only.

When the epidemics passed, many were no longer among the living, including those who had volunteered for overnight stays. In time, when life stabilized and the populace no longer required overnight stays, we moved our activities to another sphere, albeit in the same social format. We frequently visited the homes of the poor (of which there was no shortage), where the elderly, the sick and small children lived, all of whom needed medical and material assistance. However, our financial resources from two sources – the sale of fish and monthly membership dues – had greatly decreased. People maintained that with the abolition of *Linat HaTzedek*, they were exempt from continuing to pay. Therefore, we looked for new sources, like fundraising days and fetes, which we held frequently. Revenues from these events enabled *Linat Tzedek* to continue to maintain our important assistance project.

Josef Wonszak, Tel Aviv

* * *

After a few years passed, at the time of the Polish regime, in one of the rooms of the *Talmud Torah* stood a locked cabinet, in which there were various medicines. On it was a sign "*Linat Tzedek*". Only a small group of people was still active in this important institution which helped others (although in reduced proportions). I say "important", because in those times it was particularly important. Ostrolenka's Jews were not well-to-do. During World War I, they were expelled from their city, which was almost completely destroyed in battles between the Russians and the Germans. From 1920-1921, the Jews came back empty-handed and began rebuilding their lives. Under these conditions, any assistance was very important. Many of those who returned home after years of wandering afar, in Russia and other countries, were physically and emotionally sick and broken. The need arose to establish a body to extend minimal assistance to the needy. There were no expectations from the Polish community. Throughout the years, they saw the Jews as a superfluous factor.

The role of *Linat Tzedek* was to extend medical assistance, albeit in reduced proportions, such as cupping, taking temperatures, enemas and other minor treatments difficult for the average Jew to acquire. Another important task entrusted to members of the organization was to care for the sick when the strength of family members weakened. There were not yet many hospitals with professional nurses in those days, so mutual assistance was very crucial.

Linat Tzedek's activity continued thus, until they became aware that the treasury was emptying and that the means to purchase modern equipment was lacking. The financial situation of the townspeople was not bright and the number of contributors dwindled. Discussions and consultations began as to how to acquire additional income to prevent the organization's collapse. It was decided to "play theater", with performances by amateur actors. The plays were a great success. They were presented to achieve two ends: revenues were dedicated to supporting the continued work of *Linat Tzedek*, and cultural pleasure, so lacking, was brought to the townspeople. The first play presented was *The Sale of Joseph*, which met with success in and around Ostrolenka. *Shlomit*, *Bar Kochva* and other plays were later presented. I will mention a few of the drama circle's promoters: Arcie Wylozny and the brothers Mosze Symcha and Szabtaj Ma-Towu. The beloved member, Pesach Hochberg, is worthy of special mention. He turned over a room in his house for play rehearsals, which often continued far into the night.

Eliezer Ma-Tovu, Haifa

Jewish Doctors

Ostrolenka's two Jewish doctors, Dr. Karbowski and Dr. Gutman, were not born in the city*. Dr. Gutman, whose father worked as a medic-healer in and around the city, came there as a youth and was closely connected to the Jews of the city. He was considered an Ostrolenkan, as opposed to Dr. Karbowski, who came to Ostrolenka in the thirties, and did not become attached to the townspeople. There was no contact with him, except when he was called to a patient's bedside. He inclined toward assimilation, and never contributed to Keren HaYesod or to Keren Kayemeth. Even when Pesach Hochberg, may God avenge his blood, and a representative of the fund's center from Warsaw visited him during the yearly fundraising, he refused to contribute, contending that he did not believe in Zionism because it was utopian. As a doctor, he was widely accepted and popular among the Poles.



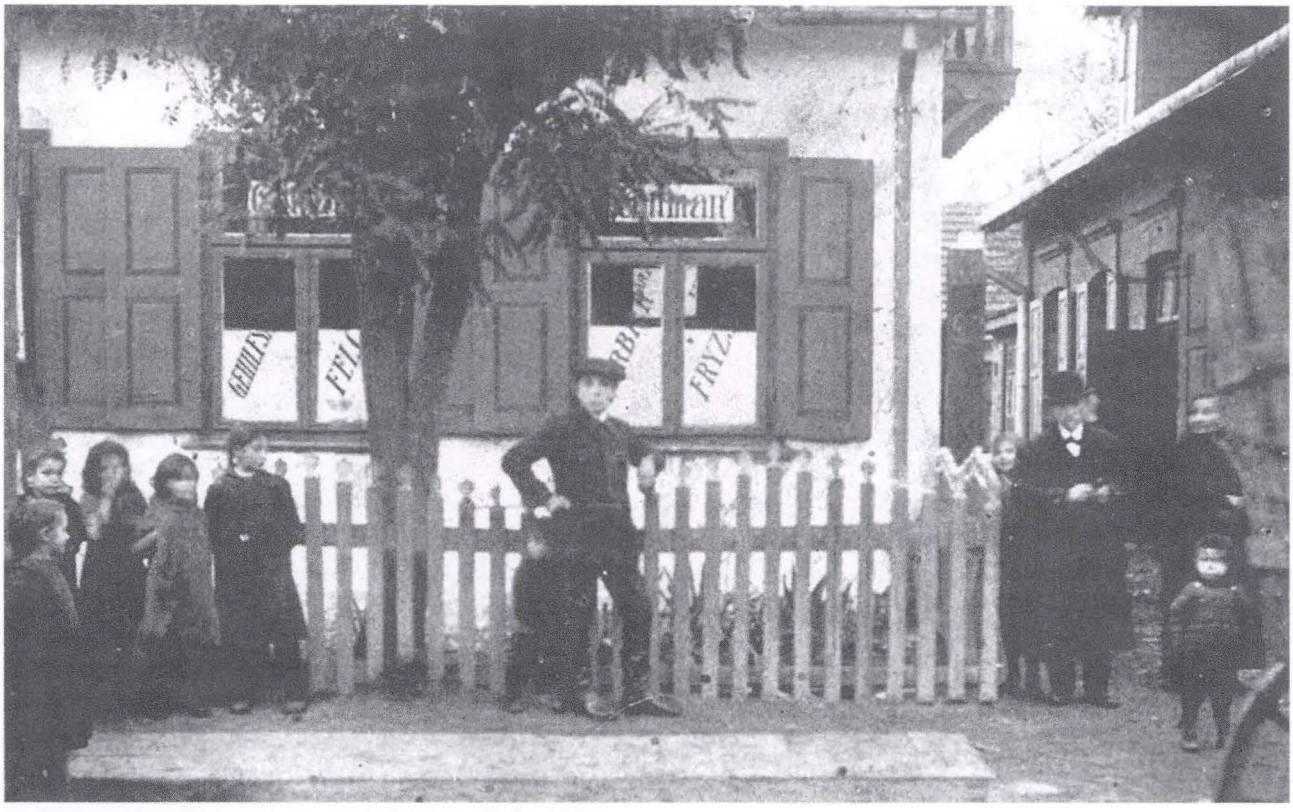
Gutman, the healer

His Judaism found expression on Yom Kippur Eve, when he prayed in the Mizrachi Zionist *minyan*, held in the building of the teacher, Filar. Almost every year, a farmer from the area appeared in a wagon to call him to take care of a patient. Returning from the house call, he would arrive exactly when Jakow Dancyger finished the prayers. Then he would say in Polish, "What a pity, I came late to *Kol Nidrei*." When Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, pogroms broke out in Berlin and other cities. Many Jews left Germany then. The city Zbaszyn, on the German-Polish border, filled with many refugees that streamed there every day.

In every city and village, and in Ostrolenka as well, all the organizations set up committees to help the needy in Zbaszyn.

When Dr. Karbowski was invited to the committee he came, to everyone's great surprise. He did not know how to speak Yiddish, but he understood it. He was active and worked with the committee a great deal. When an anti-Hitler conference of Poland's Jews convened later, Dr. Karbowski was among the representatives at the conference. As a representative from Ostrolenka, I sat next to him. After hearing all the speeches made by the Polish Jewry representatives, the doctor told me that he had been very impressed by the speech of Rabbi Rubinsztejn of Vilna. I thought to myself how true the saying was, that "What is not accomplished by intelligence will be accomplished by time". After the conference, Dr. Karbowski's attitude changed completely, and he began to contribute generously to Zionist causes. Dr. Gutman was his opposite. He was a man of the people in the full sense of the term. He was not ashamed to use the mother tongue, and did so everywhere. With patients, on the street or walking on the sidewalk, he was always accompanied by some community workers. He spoke with them in Yiddish about cultural matters, being expert in Yiddish culture and Yiddish classicism. When he visited patients, he talked to them about their illness and explained how it developed and what caused it. He knew everyone in the city and their tribulations. When he met someone from a patient's family, he would ask after his health. When he visited a patient whose difficult condition was known to him, not only did he not take money, but he even left money to buy the medicine he prescribed. He did not consider his profession as a means of advancement. He saw it as a humanitarian one, for helping people. He was a Jewish doctor in the full sense of the term, with a warm heart. He was proud to be a Jew, even though it sometimes harmed him professionally. He was pleased with the achievements of the working masses, because they were the poorest in Poland at the time. He saw himself more as a proletarian than an academic.

* It was said that, in the past, Reb Chatzkel Kupferminc brought a doctor to the city by the name of Kagan, who was the only Jew of his profession in the city.



The home of Gutman, the healer

It was hard to find a doctor in Poland who was as close to Jewish society as Dr. Gutman. He was gladdened by good news and worried during times of trouble.

When we write about Jewish doctors in Ostrolenka, it is impossible to omit a famous personality – Fajwel Lejb Herc, who eased the pains of Jewish patients, and was once an orderly in the army of the Russian Tsar. This Jew, with a gray beard, a long *kapote* and a Jewish hat, did not heal with modern medicine, but with folk remedies. Most of his patients were elderly. He was expert at cupping, enemas and spreading all sorts of ointments on the back. When he could not help, a doctor was called.

The young men, before they were drafted into the Polish army, wanted to give the townspeople something to talk about. They did clownish things. They took down Dr. Karbowski's sign and hung it on Fajwel Lejb Herc's door, or they brought the wagon of the purification room [where the dead are washed prior to burial] to the home of Dr. Karbowski. The people of the town enjoyed their clowning very much.

Today, there are two doctors, may they enjoy long life, who were born in Ostrolenka, Dr. Zalman Drezner in Israel, and Dr. Biezuner, the son-in-law of Litwer, who lives overseas.

Chaim Drezner

The Lives of Tradesmen

In 1920-21, tradesmen and merchants stood on shaky financial legs. The economy was not yet on a firm basis, especially in small villages and in Ostrolenka. Poverty was very prevalent. From time to time, tradesmen worked 24 hours a day with members of their families, and then went to the market to sell their goods very cheaply. This situation lasted a few years. Only after 1924 did it begin to improve, with the economic improvement in Poland. A tradesmen's organization was established, which set laws and regulations. All professional tradesmen united. They began to understand that work and sweat are necessary to support a family. It was also necessary to educate children so that they would grow and be healthy, proud Jews.

The wellspring of Jewish livelihood was the rural population. At the market on Tuesdays and Fridays, farmers from the area gathered with their fruits and crops. When they finished selling everything, they went to purchase various kinds of merchandise and whatever they needed. This was repeated every week. When the shoemaker, the tailor, the milliner, the carpenter and the merchant succeeded in accumulating a little money, they went out to sell their merchandise at fairs in neighboring villages, increasing output and thus, income.

An impetus toward improvement for tradesmen and small merchants was given by the Polish government when it settled two army regiments in Wojciechowice (three kilometers from Ostrolenka). Although this was a new source of income for the Jews of Ostrolenka, most had to work hard to make a living. Supported by the tradesmen's and merchants' organization, to ease the burden of the downtrodden, a delegation was sent to the central bank in Warsaw which was connected to the Joint (if I am not mistaken), with a request to authorize opening a bank for assistance in Ostrolenka.

After much effort and drawing on political connections, a decision was reached and the bank opened, to the great satisfaction of the townspeople. It was a holiday. The bank helped solve the financial problems of the tradesmen and merchants. A committee was democratically elected and the tradesmen's organization won five of the nine mandates.

The tradesmen's organization was represented in the committee by Awi Awraham, Zelig Nowinski, Alter Granowicz, Noske Jabek, Srolke Zlocisty and Josef Nowinski. I don't remember those from other organizations. The guiding hand of the bank was the well-known and beloved teacher, one of the city's first Zionists, Anszel Lew. The bank made long-term loans at low interest rates. Thanks to the easy terms, many Ostrolenkans with limited ability could support themselves with dignity. The tradesmen's organization also established an independent charity fund. They gave loans (sometimes in secret) only to tradesmen whose income had decreased because of illness or other reasons. They sent them a certain sum of money, so that they could stand on their feet and support themselves with dignity. They also helped widows and orphans who remained without a livelihood. They gave them a "pseudo-loan", as if they were expected to return it, but never asked for the money. The fund's budget was covered by monthly payments from members.

The organization also set up a drama studio, which gave theatrical performances in and out of the city. The actors were working people, who contributed of their time for the good of the organization. They also had *minyanim* where they prayed on Sabbaths throughout the year, and where they collected contributions to cover their budget. On holidays, they purchased places in the study hall (whoever could afford it, bought a seat on the *mizrach* [east] side, and whoever could not, at the entrance to the study hall). The organization had great influence in various municipal matters. In the Jewish community (*Gmina*) as well, they held an important position.

In the last years, before World War II, bestial anti-Semitism boasted a great deal. The saying "To each his own" brainwashed all anti-Semites and strangled Jewish economic and cultural life. Desirous of emulating the Nazi's anti-Jewish methods, the Polish government did not understand that with this type of conduct toward the Jews, it was tying a rope around its own neck. The boycott it declared pervaded all areas of Jewish life, including trade and labor. In any event, the Jews began to feel that danger was approaching. They tried to stand in the breach and fight for existence, until the Nazi ax fell on Jewish heads and destroyed everything that had been built over generations all over Poland, including in our city, Ostrolenka.

Arcie Nowinski

Ostrolenka – Economics and Culture

Work and Livelihoods

Economically, all Polish towns were similar to each other – pressured economically in the bed of Sodom and Gemorrah [where, if guests were too short, they were stretched to fit; if they were too tall, they were cut down]. There were specific Jewish trades, such as tailoring, carpentry and shoemaking. It was not possible for Jews to study a profession in school or, especially, to enroll for advanced training in a specialty. A few individuals excelled on a professional level.

It should be noted that there were two Jews in Ostrolenka who worked in a "profession of the *goyim*", Awraham Aron the Builder and his sons (among the first immigrants to Israel) and Tuwja the Carpenter and his sons. The tradesmen's condition was usually far from satisfactory. They worked from dawn until late at night. When Friday came, it seemed that an additional day of the week was lacking, to earn enough for the Sabbath. The housing situation was difficult, space was lacking. When children grew, they knew that worries grew with them. There was no possibility of setting them up financially, as necessary. After a hard day's work, the only break was in the evening, when they went to afternoon-evening prayers. After prayers, they sat around the table and learned Torah. There were all sorts of small study groups. At the head of each was a rabbi. The fullest table was the place where *Ayin Yakov* was studied. The beautiful legends helped them forget their troubles. They entered a beautiful world. A strong impression was made when an emissary arrived and described the wonders of the Land of Israel, or when a magid preached about this world and the world to come, about hell and paradise.

Most of the city's merchants were grocers. To open this kind of a business, a great deal of money and knowledge was necessary. Each tried to open a store near the barely-surviving store of his neighbor's, so that there was not enough business for either. Each store was like a small general store. You could buy everything there: groats, sugar, herring, oil, kerosene, all sorts of sweets, etc. In this kind of store, the only thing lacking was a livelihood. Trade in fabrics, leather and clothing was more complicated. There was a need for money, and money was scarce. So they wrote [promissory] notes – and the nature of notes is that they never get lost. Then things became really merry. When the note came due, they ran to look for a loan. When they didn't get one, they tried to change the due date. If it could not be changed, then there was no choice but to close the business. Most of the time, they reached a compromise and the business remained open. So the wheel turned back and forth. Of course, there were those who were quite well-to-do in the city, but most barely supported themselves. There was also employment that was both a profession and a trade, like watch making. The *balabatim* bent over backwards to make their sons simple tradesmen and sent them to learn watch repair. This was in accordance with Talmudic advice: "A man will always teach his son a clean and easy craft". There were also Jews without a profession, or commercial and financial abilities, who supported themselves from *luftgesheft* ["air business"]. About them it was said "It is as hard to support men as it is to split the Red Sea". These were *luftmentchen* [people who lived from the air, middlemen]. In the market, which took place twice a week, Jews like this walked around all day. When one of them heard, for example, what Lejbel or Berel wanted to pay for a purchase, he added 10 cents and sold it, as did a second and then a third . . .

Most of the merchants themselves were Torah scholars. In their childhood, they had learned. After a hard day's work in their wretched stores, they would sit in the *shtebl* in the evening, dwell on a page of Gemara and forget all the troubles of the day. Or, when the Chassidim sat and told miracle stories about the Rebbe, or tales of righteous men, they entered another world, a completely good world. (It should be noted that the merchants were mostly Chassidim. They gathered in the *shtebl* and stayed far away from the tradesmen, who prayed in the study hall).

Economic Institutions

The Polish government's sharp taxation system, the goal of which was to break the Jewish merchant and

tradesman economically, made their situation worse. The Jew had to give, but got nothing in return. There were no Yiddish or Hebrew-speaking state schools. The universities were closed to Jews. There were no Jewish clerks in government offices. It was hardest for the Jews when the boycott began on Jewish trade. With the approval of the Polish government, signs were put in front of stores: "Don't buy from the Jews".

The difficult economic situation, and particularly the tax problem, drove all forces to unite and repel the attack. A tradesmen's organization and a merchants' organization were established, which were connected with their Warsaw centers. Each organization had a charity fund to serve its members. They sent representatives to evaluation committees at tax offices. A bank was established in the city where interest was not paid. The center in Warsaw was supported by the Joint. The organizations were not satisfied with merely economic activity. They also ran political activities. When elections were held for the Jewish community, the city council or the Parliament, they were their official representatives.

Educational Institutions

Except for private *heders*, there was a municipal *Talmud Torah* for poor children. As opposed to *heders*, where only Torah studies were taught, at the Improved *Heder* – the Yavneh School – there was a synthesis of Torah and general studies. In the Improved *Heder*, the hearts of the children were implanted with the love of Hebrew and the Land of Israel. The founder of the Yavneh School was Zalman Gorzelczany. Two excellent Hebrew teachers are also worthy of mention:

a) Gedaljahu Rozenbojm, the son of the well-known teacher, Reb Nechemia Rosenbaum, who was very knowledgeable in Hebrew language and literature, as well as world literature. He was a well-known chess player and a friendly, gentle man.
b) Jakow Filar, of blessed memory. Although outwardly he did not look impressive, it could be said of him: "Do not regard the container, but its contents" . . . He had great knowledge and knew all Judaic sources. There was also a Nowardok yeshiva in the city. Most of its students came from the area. In all these institutions, only boys learned. Girls' education was neglected. "He who teaches his daughter Torah, it is as if he teaches frivolity." After World War I, a radical change occurred in this sphere. The organization opened a chain of schools for girls called *Bejt Jakow*, which was tied to ancient sources of Judaism, as well as general education. The girls were very proud and strong in their faith. We all know of the tragedy of the 93 girls who, knowing that the Nazi murderers were about to defile them, asked the bitter enemy to bring them to the ritual bath first. There, they all committed suicide without appeal.

At the head of the *Bejt Jakow* in Ostrolenka stood Pesia, the famous teacher, the daughter of the *lamdan* Rabbi Josef Nasielski. Her father studied Gemara with her. It was a pleasure to talk to her. Every conversation was related to the sayings of our sages, to *Aggadot* [legends], to explanations of difficult passages. She had a highly analytic mind and enormous will power. Her students were attached to her, full of knowledge and love for the Jewish faith and their nation. In the Polish state school for Jewish children, where they learned in Polish, the goal was to inculcate Polish culture into the children. They taught religious studies and Jewish history, but took care not to include Jewish nationalism. Most of the school's students were girls, because the boys were in schools of their own. The teaching personnel came from outside. Most of them were assimilated, without a strong connection between them and the parents. They only wished to find favor in the eyes of the Polish rulers.

Political Organizations

The maturing youth, without the ability to study and enter the economic sphere, used their time to walk on the Lomza road and talk about politics. Just as "doing something from the wrong motives may eventually lead to doing so with higher motives", at the end, this political philosophizing brought about the creation of a wonderful group of organized youths.

All the political groups had their own parties in the city. It was natural that each new party, small or large, had a chairman, a committee and even an evaluation committee.

The parties, which had large memberships, were: Labor Zionist (S. Z.) (one of them, Mosze Margalit, of blessed memory, community chairman for a time, emigrated to Israel in the '30s); the Bnei Akiva organization (and later, HaShomer HaDati) and Beitar, the revisionist youth organization.

The Bund socialist party ran intensive activities in

the city. They had a rich library (it may be said the only one in the city). They sometimes organized lectures on current events, bringing famous speakers. The Rozenblum brothers were very devoted to the party.

Religious Needs

All the sectors mentioned above had to come into contact with our Polish neighbors. Only one sector did not come in contact with the outside world. It acquired its needs from Jewish inhabitants. I will mention only a few here, for example: the rabbi of the city, Rabbi Bursztejn, of blessed memory, who was actually far from municipal matters. He was a great Torah scholar with a majestic appearance (the author of the famous book *Metamei Yitzchak*). Two judges: Rabbi Jermiah and Rabbi Jakow Szlomo, both of them great teachers and very devout. Rabbi Chaim Berel, the cantor and ritual slaughterer, also a Torah scholar, very friendly and respected by the inhabitants.

Saintly Women

On every Thursday of the week, women could be frequently seen passing from store to store, collecting donations. The money they collected was for various purposes. For example, for honorable families that did not have money for Sabbath expenses, and where it was necessary to keep their names secret . . . or for the groom of a Jewish daughter of an honorable family that did not have money for the wedding. These women gave assistance in a way that would not embarrass the needy.

This was a group of philanthropic women with a list of all the needy. Their help reached all the needy among the simple, common people.

Moshe Kamin, Netanya

Firemen

Times were hard for the Jews then. The Tsarist regime wished to rule the Poles and distract them from thoughts of rebellion and uprising. It adopted the method of "divide and conquer" and incited one nation against the other. The Poles, always gorged with hatred of Jews, distracted themselves from their ideal and their ambition to free the land from the yoke of Russian occupation. They recklessly grasped at hatred of Jews, declaring a boycott of them. The boycott's slogan found fertile ground in the Polish mobs, who were incited by the hatred and venom that the intelligentsia spread among them. The election for the all-Russian Duma served as a pretext for the boycott against the Jews. The Jews of Lodz voted for the P.P.S. (the Polish socialist party) candidate. They saw him as someone who would protect Jewish interests in the Duma. This angered the Poles. The N.D. (nationalist) party stood at the head of the boycott proclamation. Violently angry, these anti-Semites were active in their war – a holy war. They disseminated slogans, like "To each his own" (that is, Poles go to Poles) and "Don't buy from Jews and don't sell to them". The Poles were stricken with total blindness. They became addicted to this despicable task and paid dearly, because they distracted themselves from the essence. Only World War I ended the boycott of the Jews in 1914, because it no longer interested the Russians. One of their shameful deeds was setting fire to Jewish homes in cities and villages throughout Poland.

And so we awoke one suffocating summer night to the sounds of the alarm bell ringing from the heights of the city hall tower. Through the window, we saw red skies and understood that a fire had broken out on Ostrowy Street. We ran to the fire's location, and saw Jews running in panic from house to house, trying to save whatever they could from the devouring flames. The fire progressed very quickly from house to house, pitilessly and completely destroying the labor of the Jews and their property. Many houses were burned that night and many families remained without a roof over their heads. The next morning, the victims of the fire combed the ruins of their homes and rummaged through the still-smoking charred wood, hoping to find something of value and use. The "unmerciful" Jews, those children of the merciful, immediately organized a committee to help the fire's victims. First, they housed the families in public places, like the study hall and synagogues. Others squeezed in and brought their

relatives to their homes.

Of course, this did not yet solve the main problem of livelihood and housing. "Only after the horse is stolen is the barn door closed". Fearing that there would be a repetition and that a fire would break out again, special watches were set every night. We, the youth, were recruited for this work. We walked around the streets of the city in groups, with our weapons – thick sticks – in our hands, and so we guarded and protected the peace of the Jews. We saw ourselves as a special army, standing guard to thwart the plots of our enemies, so that no evil would occur. A regulation passed by the city elders and community workers gave special orders: near every house there must be a large barrel full of water. All householders must equip themselves with fire extinguishing equipment and tools necessary for times of trouble, such as buckets, axes and a long pole with a pick at its end for destroying walls. And this was not all. Although there was a fire department in the city, it was not much relied on, because there were no Jews in it. The Jews themselves did not rush to join the fire brigade, because they considered it a shameful thing. How could a self-respecting Jew take up such foolishness, which smacked of the army? It was suitable for the sons of Esau. In any event, the Poles were satisfied with this state of affairs. For them, the organization served as an underground for secret work against the Russian regime. Fire brigade work required some army-style training. Under this guise, they could gather and hold secret meetings. They had a band. Every Sunday morning, the fire brigade, in all its uniformed glory and with a military gait, marched through the streets of the city, led by the band. We, who were pranksters then, ran after them and accompanied them on their way to a grove near the city. Truth to tell, they got no joy of us. When they got out of the city, they chased us away contemptuously and, shamefully and enviously, we returned to the city. We asked ourselves what we had done to deserve this humiliation and why our fathers were not firemen. There was no answer.

After a short time, however, the city elders began to deal with this problem. Their request of the fire brigade management, that a few dozen Jews join their ranks, was turned down and the reason was known. The Poles were kind enough to agree to our joining their ranks only after they made a strong demand of the Governor-General in Lomza. And who went? Clearly, no respectable Jew would deem it proper to join the fire brigade, particularly because the Poles stipulated a condition that everyone had to bring a new suit, a copper helmet, an ax and other tools. These expenses were covered by monies received from the municipality, in which the Jews participated. The city elders understood that a personal example was necessary. The advocates of this idea, my father, of blessed memory, Jechezkel Kupferminc, and Henach Flexner, of blessed memory, were the first to volunteer for the fire brigade. After them came a large stream of volunteers from the "common people": strong men and tradesmen, who used an axe in their daily occupations. Because individuals could not find such sums, the community allocated the money needed for clothing and equipment from its budget. My father, of blessed memory, although he was too old – about 56 – wore the special uniform with joy. The copper hat was polished and shining on his head, as he marched every Sunday with everyone else, every inch a soldier. In his eyes, this was a matter of saving lives, not reduced dignity.

We, the youth, were content. We were no longer outsiders at a Gentile wedding, but equals among equals. The Jews excelled at fire fighting training, such as exercise, climbing on ladders and roofs, caring for various fire extinguishing machines and pumps and, especially, marching together in the city's streets every Sunday. We waited for Sundays. When the fire brigade marched, next to every father marched his children, while he beamed with joy. Once a year, the fire brigade held an annual training day and a big picnic in the grove near the city. A simple day of enjoyment in the grove, with demonstrations of different feats connected with its work. Later, they moved on to games and had a huge feast. Joy was boundless.

To relieve the suffering of the fire's victims, the community decided to raise money in different ways. Even before the fire, a cinema had opened in the city, but no one dared use it. Again, my father and Henach Flexner, of blessed memory, initiated a good deed. They decided to lease the hall for a week and show a film there. I remember what it was about to this day. It described the beginning of the settlement of Europeans in America, the wars against the Indians, and all the difficulties and misgivings along the way until they arrived at their land. Yes, it reminded us of our future, our aspirations to emigrate to Israel and the war with the Arabs. The movie enchanted and encouraged us, the youth, to dare to think of practical steps to fulfill our dream. Large notices on the city's streets announced that

the film presentation would take place for a week, and that its proceeds were dedicated to the victims of the fire. Of course, the price of a ticket was higher than usual. Special tickets were created for those who could afford them. These were distributed by volunteers of public status, certain that they could raise funds when people bought tickets at fair prices. Revenues exceed all expectations. With this [campaign], the townspeople were given public permission to visit the cinema. Of course, the strict and rebellious still argued against it. During that week, the hall was completely full: old people and young filled the hall every evening, and the queue was long. From then on, going to the cinema became acceptable.

The cinema hall began to serve us as a place for recreation and entertainment during days when happiness in the Jewish street was not great . . .

Awiezer Drori-Kupferminc, Kfar Yechezkel

Jewish Firefighters

The story of the Jewish firefighters in Ostrolenka who united with the municipal firefighters is very closely tied to the name of an important inhabitant of our city, Henach Flexner.

Although he was a *lamdan* and a refined Jew, whose reputation preceded him, he did not dwell in heaven. He had a sense of worldly matters and those of the city's Jews.

I am reminded of an incident: in the summer of 1913, a large fire broke out on Ostrowy Street. Many Jewish families suffered from the fire. A campaign opened in the city to support its victims.

In particular, suspicion fell on the fire brigade, comprised only of Poles, who did not intend to put out the fires as required . . . and so it was decided that Jews would be recruited to the fire brigade. And who, of course, ran the recruitment, if not Reb Henach Flexner? Everyone in the city respected and honored him.

One Sunday morning, bearded Jews in silk hats appeared and decided to organize a fundraising campaign for the families victimized by the fire, in cooperation with the Poles. So a party in the municipal garden, including a lottery, was announced. Musicians played, *L'Chaim* was toasted and, at the end, bearded Jews with silk hats danced with Christians and proclaimed "To unity!".

Reb Henach Flexner was also the founder of the city's loan and savings fund. Its salaried accountant was the teacher, Anszel Lew, who later established a small merchants' bank.

A. Szyman, Uruguay

Our Teachers . . . !

1. Szlojmele

The first teacher in Ostrolenka was Markl – in my time, he was already old. The famous Szlomo came later. He taught children who became fathers, and then the children of the fathers. He had no children and lived to a ripe old age.

2. Lazer Eli

He taught the Pentateuch, Rashi and a sermon for the Passover *Seder*. A terrible accident happened to him. His wife went to the river to draw water. It happened in the winter. The river was very frozen. She slipped and drowned. Her children said that she had several hundred Russian rubles . . . After a few days, she was found under the ice. Some of his children are in North America.

3. Mosze from Rozan

He taught Gemara and was a community worker in *Linat HaTzedek*. His home is in Uruguay.

4. Mosze Baruch

By heart, his blind son taught children the Pentateuch and Rashi.

5. Mosze Chaim

He had a pointed beard and was a Gemara teacher. He was a professional shofar and tobacco box maker.

This man's talent in the carving craft was wasted. He worked more for pleasure than for a livelihood. His grandson is in North America.

6. Mendel Lejb-Herc

He taught the Pentateuch and Rashi. He was a *gabbai* in the Alexander Chassidim *shtebl*, where his *heder* was.

7. The Thin Teacher

He was the son of Mordechaj Farber. He taught the Pentateuch and Rashi, and had a few other livelihoods.

8. Jaloszke Melamed

He was the son-in-law of Mordechaj Farber, with the family name of Malach. He taught how to read aloud from the Torah during synagogue services.

9. Julke Neszkesz

He taught Gemara. Two of his children are in Israel (a friend of Szlomo Dorfman in Israel).

10. Aszer Melamed

He taught in the Talmud Torah in Ostrolenka, where children were taught free of charge.

11. [The Teacher] from Kelczewa

The son-in-law of Lejb Blachowicz, he was a Gemara teacher who loved to argue with the secular. He quoted as often as possible "As inventions multiply in the world, so the believers and the observant multiply more . . . who pray here and God hears in Heaven". The secular never wanted to believe, but today we see that when they speak in America, they hear in Ostrolenka.

12. Japonczyk the Teacher

He was well-known in the city, really a household word. His wife was the cousin of Awiezer Kupferminc – Reb Chackel Kupferminc, the son.

13. Szmuelke Jajczar

Besides teaching, he sold eggs.

14. Mosze-Pesach or The Goworowoan

He was an excellent Gemara teacher, explaining well and translating, but he had "methods of punishment". He would strike students, especially on Thursday, examination day. It was important to him that they understand that what they learn should not be lost. Fear fell on students who knew they would have to start studying with him. He was the richest of the teachers. His wife ran a separate business. She had a table full of merchandise on the street. She baked bread for the Sabbath, prepared *cholent* [a meat stew traditionally eaten on Sabbath] and had other sources of livelihood. They had six daughters and one son, who was a member of the Bund. (They lived in Josel Mejrann's courtyard.)

15. Mendel Lomzer

He was a Gemara teacher and very hot-tempered.

16. Awrejmel Melamed

He was a Gemara teacher and taught individual young men during the morning hours only. During the rest of the day, they had to study on their own. He had a grocery store – but during the daytime, he was a merchant. For many years, he lived in North America with his entire family. Today he is in Israel.

17. Icze Josef

He taught Gemara to young men. His two sons are in North America.

18. Dawid the Redhead, the son-in-law of the glazier

He was a Gemara teacher. The father-in-law, the son-in-law and their families are in North America.

19. Fajwisz

He was a Gemara teacher. He was old even in my time. He lived to a ripe old age.

20. Gutman – Czak

He was a Gemara teacher, the son of Fajwisz. After World War I, he did not return to Ostrolenka. His daughter is in Uruguay.

21. Meir Jankel

He was a Gemara teacher. He supervised good behavior. He lived to a ripe old age.

22. [The Teacher] from Koluszyn

He was a Gemara teacher. He taught only two or three young men. He was sickly. His wife helped to provide a livelihood in her store.

23. Mendel Czerny (Czernes)

He was a teacher with a heart. Every child wanted

to study with him. When children's fathers signed them up for time with Mendel, they were overjoyed. In comparison to other teachers, he taught the Pentateuch, Rashi and beginner's Gemara.

24. Nachman Melamed

He was among the best-known teachers in the city. He was considered one of the best, and taught older students who were about to enter a yeshiva. He taught a page of Gemara with the commentaries of the Rasha [Rabbi Szlomo Ben Eliezer], delved into issues . . . and explained well and easily to his students. Sometimes he shouted or struck the students. In the worst case, he would call the father of a student who had difficulty learning, so that he could examine the student himself and shout at him, or give him a few slaps on the cheek. The students respected him very much.

25. Zalman Grala

An Alexander Chassid, he served in the army in Wojciechowice and Myszyniec before World War I.

26. Nechemia Melamed

He was a special teacher, unusual and very knowledgeable in Hebrew. He always dressed well and cleanly. His beard was nicely combed, all his manners commanded respect. Chassidim did not want to send their children to him, because they looked askance on his unique behavior. He did not teach Gemara, just Hebrew, Bible and reading aloud from the Torah at synagogue services to mature young men.

27. Anszel Lew

He gave classes in *heders*, an hour a day. He taught the Russian language and mathematics. He had the special function of teaching students the title of the Russian Tsar and his family, so that they would be ready when the district inspector visited the *heders*. This was required of all *heders* and places of study by the Tsar's government. He was an agent of the Jakar Insurance Company of Petersburg. He was the manager and head of the *Chevrat Zion* in our city. He was also the Secretary and In-charge at the bank of the loan fund in our city. . . (His son, Dawid Lew, fell in Israel as a Haganah fighter.)

28. The teacher from Rozan

His name was Azikzon. He was a teacher like Anshel Lew, but not a Zionist. His wife had a school for girls, where they were taught to write. She emigrated to Uruguay and lived to a ripe, old age. One of her daughters is in Uruguay; the rest are in Russia.

29. Women Teachers

The teacher, Masza Sztejnberg, taught girls to write letters. She herself wrote letters for women whose husbands emigrated to the United States or were in the army. Her daughter has been in Israel for many years (one daughter died in Israel), and the name of her husband is M. Medzowicz.

There were other teachers who were called "Rebbetzins". They came to homes to teach girls Hebrew, or the girls came to them. There were a few of these teachers, but I do not remember their names.

Alter Szyman, Montevideo, Uruguay

Cantonists in Ostrolenka

We had a few Jewish-Cantonists. These were children who were kidnapped during the time of Nicolas I and forced to serve in the Russian Army for 25 years. They went through a great deal of persecution and torture to force them to convert to Catholicism, and were later released. Many of them withstood the torture and remained Jews. I met them when they were elderly.

1. **Cyrulik**
   He was a barber and elderly Jews had him cut their hair.

2. **Herszele Fendel**
   That is what they called him. He baked black bread.

3. **Chajkel Barabanszczyk**
   He was a drummer in the army and remained so all his life.

4. **Awraham Kugel**
   He was a road stone paver. In the last years, he traded in old things. (There were also Cantonists who converted during their army service and lived in Ostrolenka as Christians.)

A. S.

The Porters

There were some of these in the city, 20 people, simple people, but with varied personalities: quiet,

"common people" and also others who had a "big mouth", as it was called.

They had their own *minyan*. Every Sabbath, Reb Mosze Noske, a leather merchant, taught them a little Pentateuch. They worked as a cooperative and divided each day's profits equally. Among them was Shalom the Porter, who was called Shalom of the Stories. He had a talent of telling about what he read. I think he was the most learned among them.

A. Szyman

Klezmorim [Jewish Folk Musicians]

As in all Jewish cities, Ostrolenka, too, had its *klezmorim*. They made people happy, played music and gladdened the weddings of Ostrolenka's Jews. They played before and after the wedding feast for the happy parents, the grandfather and grandmother, guests and in-laws on all sides, and especially for the groom and bride, who on that day took their first steps toward an unknown future of family life . . . The usual deep Jewish music they played was combined with trilling gypsy music, which tugged at the soul. Melodies of devotion touched everyone's hearts. This was especially true for the groom and bride, who would remember the sounds for many years to come. They believed that "they would succeed in life according to the way they played" . . .

Jewish *klezmorim* did not make much of a living, but they tried anyway. Sometimes a livelihood would "fall" from a wedding, from the completion of a book [*Mishnayot*, or the writing of a Torah scroll, etc.], from a Bar Mitzvah and so on (there were those who made a living "on the side"), and from communities outside Ostrolenka.

There was a group of four *klezmorim* before World War II. Mosze Aron played first violin, Szpielman (who always wore dark glasses) played second violin, Anszel Jagoda – clarinet and Lazer Icze – bass. To make the bride and groom merry, a *badchan* [entertainer] was always brought from Lomza – Reb Joel Wolowski, of blessed memory. They also called him Julke Badchan. He was an expert and had great talent in rhyming, excelled in improvisations and had acting talents. His son, Chaim Wolowski, besides being a talented impressionist, was also one of the best amateur actors in Lomza. He lives in Argentina today. The entertainer presented different types, comic and serious, for in-laws and guests seated at long tables. He masqueraded as someone else each time. He would sing a medley of songs, combined with sharp jests. The musicians accompanied him whenever necessary. The wedding guests enjoyed themselves, rolling with laughter.

For weddings of rich Jews, *klezmorim* were sometimes brought from outside. It did not find favor with Ostrolenka's *klezmorim* when they brought musicians from Lomza, led by the musician Anszel Jagoda, who was from Ostrolenka. It should be noted that the last *klezmorim* who played at weddings in Ostrolenka were the brothers Hone and Erszak (Czarben). The son of Krayers, Hercke the Wagon Owner, and a Christian who played the harmonica, played with them. The latter participated only in Jewish celebrations.

Someone who has remained engraved in my heart and memory was Mosze Aron, the *klezmer*, and especially his violin . . . an unusual violin, wonderful sounds.

Who of our time does not remember Mosze Aron and the savor of his playing? He was always first violin. When I was a young, he was already a gray-bearded old Jew. It seemed to me that he had red eyes (probably from late nights of playing at weddings). When he grasped the violin under his collar, hugging it with closed eyes like something he loved, he poured out his feelings through all its strings, up and down. This captured the hearts of all his listeners, including me, a small boy among them.

I loved to stand for long hours near the in-law's windows, especially when the group of *klezmorim* played the tune *Good Week* on *Motzei Shabbat* [Saturday night], or when they played the introduction for the in-laws and the groom and the bride, on the evening of a wedding. The introduction, as we called it, was the entrance to the wedding, bringing in the in-laws, the guests, and the groom and the bride, especially

during moments of self-examination before the ceremony under the wedding canopy. Treats were distributed and the entertainer rhymed rhymes. The main attraction was Mosze Aron with his violin. This was not just a violin, really not . . . He expressed his feelings with so many deep, touching pleas and prayers that it was impossible to withstand. Whenever I heard about a wedding or an "introduction" that was supposed to take place somewhere, I could not rest and tried to be there with the other children. We stood near the windows, listening and listening without end. It was interesting that during the introductions, Mosze Aron poured out his feelings through his playing even more than at the wedding canopy and the wedding (to this day, I don't know why). Those who assisted him honored Mosze Aron, "looked him in the eyes", and followed him according to his playing, his will and his requirements.

I remember that, since then, the violin has taken precedence for me above all other instruments.

May these lines be a shining memory of the Jewish *klezmorim* in Ostrolenka, the souls of people who gladdened Jews and are no longer. Those who died a natural death and those who were killed, murdered by the Nazi murderers, and who no longer hear their heartfelt playing in and around the city. Those, like them, who were murdered, destroyed and eradicated from the world of the living. May God avenge their blood.

Y. I.



Theater in Ostrolenka

A. Drama Circles and Guest Appearances

The establishment of our **city amateur circle** began with legal prosecutions and imprisonment in the great prison of Ostrolenka. (Our important townsman, the writer, Menachem Flakser, once described Ostrolenka thus: "It was a small city with a big prison!")

In 1921, shortly after the liberation of Poland, the Polish nation was still drunk, not just from drinking, but from exaggerated self-esteem . . . One evening, Police Inspector Firsa was strolling on Lomza Street. From Henjek Gutman's barbershop emanated strong sounds of singing, noise and tumult. He interpreted this as Jewish *chutzpah* and sent policemen there. They surrounded the building and arrested everyone inside. The "prisoners" were Beniek Gutman, the two Bajuk brothers, Meir Margalit, Gutman, Grosman and Chajka Gutman. They took the old healer, Gutman, with them as well, and determined that he was responsible for the "communist gathering" held in his house. (One of the policemen knew Meir well, and even more, his father. Therefore, he understood that he should be released, and as I recall – it paid him to do so . . .)

There was a serious trial, and everyone, except for the women, was sentenced to imprisonment for a few months in the big prison.

This was the first "rehearsal" of our drama circle, and also the main reason that Meir Margalit and others speeded up their emigration to Israel that same year.

As in a dream, I remember the first amateurs on Ostrolenka's stage: Awigdor Melin, Welwel Bajuk (later on), Aron Zusman, Fajcia Szpielman and others. Later on, Berel Bajuk and Mosze Aron Sojka joined, and then his brother Hercke, who was very talented and suited to the stage. Others came: Tobjasz, Chana Benedon, Cooper, Eli Chacek, and still later, Basia Melnik and the solo singer, Rywka Brum.

They began with skits, monologues and dialogues. At this point, they did not have the courage to stage an entire play. But, in time, this also happened. They staged serious plays with the help of guest directors from other cities, who also participated as actors, such as Jakow Vajslic, Klara Segalowicz and others. The amateur actor Icchak Mazor also came from Lomza. Their repertoire included *Chasja the Orphan* by Y. Gordon, *Moszka the Pig* by Berkowicz, *Nevila* by Peretz Herszbejn, *With the Stream* by Shalom Asch, *The Dybbuk* by Ansky, *Romance of a Horse Thief*, *Motke the Thief* and others.

Eli Bajuk, one of the most talented, excelled in every part he played. No one could compare with him in his genre; no one could compete with him. He portrayed a complete gallery of types and excelled in voice and movement. He understood stage language, never belittled a role and did not overact. In addition, he was handsome and well-built. In daily life, Eli was full of joy, easy humor and mischief, but on the stage, he was completely different – serious and arousing respect for his portrayal of different characters.

Hercke Sojka was loved by Ostrolenka's audience. He caused his listeners and acting partners to laugh, while he himself always remained serious. His roles were the rabbi in *With the Stream* and the beadle in *The Dybbuk*. He portrayed an important role in *Nevila* by Herszbejn. He was particularly successful in the role of Hacek in *The Village Youth*, which he performed with taste and charm, like his other parts. The moment he appeared on the stage, the audience received him with warmth and sustained applause.

Berel Bajuk, a handsome lad, strong and well-developed, with clean, clear diction, excelled in special roles in his genre. He was a successful "Jankel Bojle", the owner of a special music box in *Motke the Thief*, the chief and principal thief in *Thieves*, and portrayed many other special roles suited to his talent.

★



With Eli Bajuk (standing, first from the right), Hercke Sojka (standing, fourth from the right), Icchak Mazor (seated, third from the right), Basia Melnik (seated, fourth from the right), Berel Bajuk (seated, last from the right)



Drama Circle (at the play *Money, Love and Shame*)
With Aron Zusman (seated first from the right), Josef Kachan (seated, last from the right)

Bazke Melnik was a marvelous dramatic lover. Her roles were Chasja the Orphan, Natasza in *The Village Youth* and others. She was worthy of being an elite member of a professional troupe. Without any dramatic preparation, but thanks to her natural talent, she raised the roles she played to the highest level. And the proof – despite the many years that have passed since then, everything remains fresh and alive in my memory and the memories of all those who knew her.

It is worth noting that besides their participation in the company, Eli Bajuk and Hercke Sojka excelled in appearances as a duo; Hercke – in writing, and Eli – in performing. They wrote, sang, played, read and, if necessary, they also danced. Primarily, local current events served as the background of their creations, but they also used general world political events. Hercke was endowed with a sharp mind and eye and, in his writing, he always stressed the tragi-comic side of every city event. His rhymes succeeded with Ostrolenka's audience. All his songs and parodies were learned by heart and sung in almost every home. Everyone knew how to interpret them and at whom they were aimed. Both of them were loved by everyone for their closeness to people, and the simplicity and warmth reflected in all their songs.

Hercke sometimes contributed to the *Moment* newspaper, published in Warsaw – mostly in the humor and satire section in the Sabbath Eve edition, edited by *Der Tunkler* [The Dark One], who was his personal friend. From correspondence between the two, we may conclude that *Der Tunkler* greatly valued Hercke's humorous talent. (Hercke emigrated to Israel with his family in the thirties; in 1959, he died of cancer. Of blessed memory.)

Besides the directors, who were sometimes brought from outside, actresses were also invited to certain plays. Among those who came for guest appearances was the prominent Renia Glickman (Kolosznikow). A gifted actress, she was born in Bialystok. She visited us very often, so that, in time, she was considered a townsperson. Her great talent spanned the wide range of characters she portrayed. She excelled in acting, song and dance. A real prima donna. She aroused tears of pity in the audience when she played a young girl betrayed by a rich man. She was astounding in the roles of a mother full of longing for her children, or an elegant society woman. She floated on the stage and carried everyone away with her. Sometimes we forgot that we were standing on a stage before a hall full of spectators. At every appearance, she was different, renewing her performances and awakening general excitement. On stage, she performed differently than in rehearsals. I think that her beauty and alluring femininity also contributed greatly to her immense success.

In all of her visits to us, Renia Glicksman brought new songs and provided us with spiritual food from the pens Jewish writers and poets. She revived the songs of Gebirtig, Manger and others, and enchanted all her listeners with them.

After the war, she arrived in Israel from Paris, with her husband, Zalman Kolosznikow. [She came] to her parents (he also had parents in Israel), with the intention of settling there. They appeared in some Yiddish plays in Israel with great success. The hardship of the war, apparently, had an ill effect on the state of her health, and she went back to Paris with her husband, to their only son. There she returned her soul to her Maker. Honor to her memory.

The Amateur Circle of the HaShomer HaTzair Youth Movement, a disciplined youth movement, regarded the stage with sanctity and respect. At rehearsals, they conferred seriously and debated each role, learned the texts by heart, supplied props and made necessary technical preparations.

Participants changed from time to time, except those in the circle's fixed core group, who stayed in the "nest" for many years.



Drama Circle with Renia Glickman

Certain plays left an ineradicable impression, such as *Hero in Handcuffs*, known today as *Les Miserables*

by Victor Hugo. The director was Icchak Mazor, who also played the principal role of Jean Valjean. The bishop was played by Mosze Gedanken. The police inspector was Shalom Margalit (the writer of these lines). The secretary – Luba Zylbersztejn; Cosette – Szejtel Makowski. Those who participated in *To Our Faith*, by Shalom Asch, were Member Szojb from Krynek, a Hebrew teacher who worked in Ostrolenka and was especially talented in roles of mothers; Sender Bachrach in the roles of fathers – he was a member and representative of the "nest" and ran activities (and had already studied in every dramatic school in Warsaw); the writer of these lines; Chacek, Chomont and others. We felt a special closeness to the play *The Hero from the Galilee* (Samson), which described life in Israel during World War I. From afar, we felt and breathed the difficult daily lives and the struggle of the builders of the Jewish Land. Their pioneering and dedicated heroine instilled inspiration in us . . . Czarny Zeligman, Shalom Margalit, Eisenstein, Piaseczny, Gedanken, Chacek Chmiel and others participated in this play. We staged it several times. Because of the closeness of the subject to the audience's heart, it was received with great enthusiasm. Czarny Zeligman especially excelled. She did not just act, but really lived the role. Her beauty and shapely figure also added to her success. We received the play from the *Haganah HaRashit* in Warsaw and appeared in it in other cities.

Our dramatic circle also performed skits, pictures that were turned into plays, etc. – mostly with great success. As most of our appearances were connected with the Land of Israel, the city responded with appreciation. Batja Eisenstein, Wajnkranc, Ester Eisenstein, Lachowicz and Wylozny also participated in the plays.

The Tradesmen's Amateur Circle was also very active, although they appeared only twice a year, on Purim and Succot. They worked on [drama], however, during the entire year. Their repertoire was *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, *Ahashverosh*, *The Sale of Joseph* and *Bar Kochva*. The most active among them was Arcie Wylozny. He had a rare sense of humor, a wife and children, ran a prosperous business – but excelled in mischief, like a child. He used to say, "The most important thing is a good theater prompter." People thought he was wrong and asked, "And what about the director?" He would explain, "It is impossible to learn a role by heart. If one repeats after the prompter – the acting goes well. A director is meant only for unsuccessful actors, no more." Arcie entertained the audience. His favorite role was Vajezatha in *Ahashverosh*.

I remember that they sometimes staged *Bar Kochva*. The principal role was played by Mosze Bar-Tow, a powerful, tall man (because he was a professional tailor, Bar Kochva was magnificently dressed). Once, Arcie played Paphos and their director was Malach, the rope maker. I remember that the play ended and the curtain came down. Suddenly, the light in the hall went out and to great amazement, the curtain went up again. On the stage appeared Paphos with the yellow beard. He began to dance and leap the *kazachoc* [Cossack dance] like a real Russian Cossack, while his coat was lit from the front and behind. The audience received the unexpected encore enthusiastically, and responded with thunderous applause. We asked him, "Arcie, can it be? After Bar Kochva, the *kazachoc*?" He answered, "Theater means entertaining and making people happy. Why should the audience return home sad?" Nu, and where did the light come from? Very simple: he prepared two lights and hid a battery in his pocket. When he pressed the battery's switch – the lights went on . . .

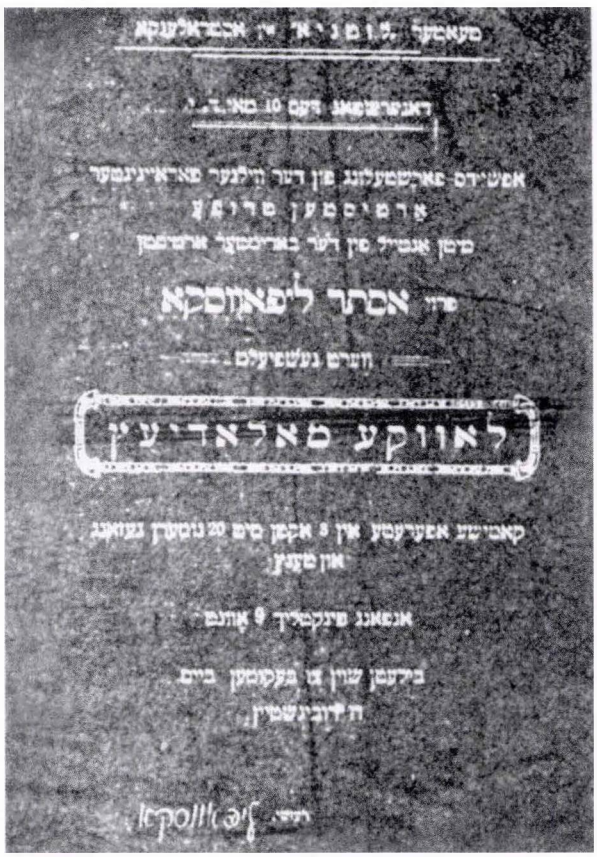
"I saw how the audience went crazy when I appeared", he crowed, "I know what people like."

The tradesmen's dramatic circle always drew a large crowd of a special kind, which waited only for their plays.

The appearance of guest artists in Ostrolenka. The people of Ostrolenka were known as art lovers, and therefore many Jewish artists visited, convinced that they would succeed there. Among the frequent visitors were the brothers Zygmunt and Jones Turkow, Ida Kaminska, Blumenfeld, Awraham Morawski, Klara Segalowicz, Jakow Vajslic, Josele Kolodni, Renia Glickman and others.

I want to relate an interesting episode, having a personal character in a certain way, but quite instructive:

The famous actor, Samberg, once came to Ostrolenka for an evening of artistic readings. His repertoire included *Passing the Bread* (an impressive monologue) and his famous bear dance from *Kiddush HaShem* by Shalom Asch, in which he played the role of the community elder, Reb Mendel. At the end of the evening, which was very successful, he was invited to



A notice of a play with guest actors in Ostrolenka

the home of my brother, Mosze Margalit. Many of our amateur actors were there. Late in the evening, the guest had to be escorted to the train station in Kaczyny. As the youngest of the group, this task was given to me. Despite the very cold weather, I received the mission with great joy, because I had a secret intention. Like every young man in those days, not yet certain what they want from life, I also had dreams, that is – I often thought about a theatrical career . . .

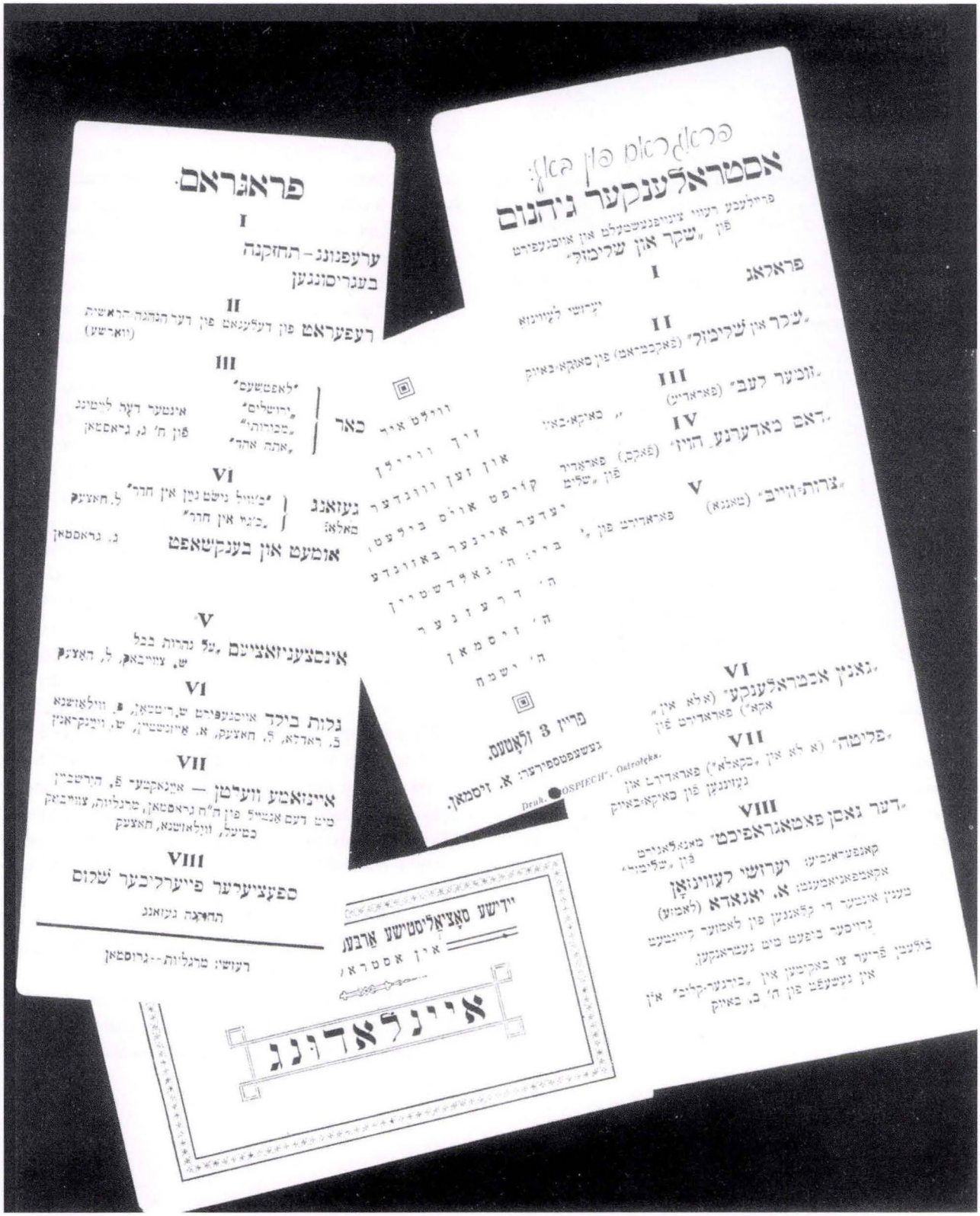
When the sleigh began to move and there were just the two of us, without any interruption – I immediately got to the point. Even though I spoke in a roundabout manner, he immediately understood my intention . . .

His answer was (as it is etched in my memory): "I will tell you about myself . . . I came to the theater of Ester-Rachel Kaminska. Hoping to get the part of an extra, I agreed to do all the donkey work on stage and also backstage. Anyone who wants to act in the theater does not think about making a living. The main mission is to get a role, even to appear for a minute. Because I was diligent, ready for all donkey work and very brief performances, they included me in plays in cities in the field. In those days, we traveled in wagons hitched to horses. If there was not enough room in the wagon, I walked alongside it, because the most important thing was to go."

Here he asked me how many Jewish actors I knew in Poland. I started to count, and barely got to ten. "You see, the ten fat ones are already nearly sitting on the wagon. But there are another hundred running next to the wagon, often in torn shoes and on an empty stomach. A tough group, these actors. An actor will be ready to give you his bread and his clothes, but not his part. Whoever starts with the stage, enters a maze. All his life, he goes around the stage in the expectation of a role – and it never comes. Sometimes it happens that a sick or deceased actor (may the same thing not happen to us) has to be replaced. Then, a miracle occurs, but with it also comes disappointment. You make do with much less than you expected. You understand, if you want to keep an audience in suspense for two hours or more, you must give them something. Whoever does not succeed in doing so may have many talents, but not in this field. Let him search for his luck in another honorable place. But most of them stay here already . . ."

Samberg the actor. The sleigh slid easily on the frozen snow and the bells jingled in the rhythm of the horses' steps, in a musical accompaniment.

When we arrived at the station, Samberg parted from me with a double expression of thanks: both for escorting him and for the memories I awoke in him.



Program and invitation to local theater "Evenings"

B. Icchak Iwri

Aside from professional theater troupes, circles of amateurs visited us from different cities; for example, Gilarina (Gila – joy, Rina – gladness) from Bialystok, a troupe of amateurs from Lomza with good dramatic talents, and others.

In a play staged in our city by those from Lomza, I saw Icchak Iwri, a participant in the company (now in Israel), for the first time. I diligently followed his acting, which was a combination of laughter and tears. It was as if the comic side covered the tragic. He did not only act his role, but also created it and lived it in the depths of his soul. His acting was unique, especially the way he spoke and moved his eyes – lyrical, agreeable and convincing.

He was the grandson of Josef Mejrann. The yard of their house on Synagogue Street bordered on ours. Despite this, I did not know him personally, because after World War I his parents stayed in Lomza. However, I heard a great deal about him. His father was a great Torah scholar and his mother was a righteous woman. Fate decreed that of their many children, he was the only child who remained alive. Therefore, they were strict about his education. Until a certain age, they dressed him in white cotton clothes (like a talisman against the evil eye), and in addition to his long earlocks, they hung amulets and talismans on him, most of them from rabbis and holy men.

His grandmother, Chana Mejrann, of blessed memory, and his mother concerned themselves with his physical needs, while his father, the teacher, took upon himself control of the spiritual. In the beginning, he hired the city's very best teachers for him and, later, famous teachers and heads of yeshivas, with the intention of bringing his son to a rabbinic chair. Icchak Iwri (or as they called him in the family, Symcha-Lazer) had a good head. He studied diligently and walked in the ways of his father. The way to achieve the goal was paved . . .

In an atmosphere of holiness and under white garments with an abundance of amulets and talismans, beat a young heart, full of yearning and longing for another life, for freedom of movement and broad horizons. The restrictions made it hard for him every step of the way.

Inevitably, a "war of fathers and sons", as it was known in those days, was bound to break out. Even though he dearly loved his parents and was afraid to cause them grief by changing his traditional way of life, he was unable to prevent the future from happening. There came the moment when he severed himself from the past, put on European clothes and drank thirstily from the well that had been forbidden to him. Feverishly, he delved into the ocean of secular literature and began to write poetry. His clever, mischievous eyes "photographed" everything around him, although his soul was still full of deep faith. Nevertheless, his faith in man and life grew.

His first poems were published in the periodical *Velt Spiegel*, which was published in Warsaw. In 1928, his first book, *A Bichel Lieder* (a book of poems), was published in Vilna. At the same time, he began to act in the theater and also to write for the stage, as well. In plays, creations of Peretz Herszbejn and Goldfaden, he portrayed impressive authentic characters. He founded a troupe, appeared with it in cities and towns, and was warmly and fondly accepted. Invitations quickly came to him to appear as an actor in serious theaters in Warsaw.



Icchak Iwri and his wife

In 1932, Icchak Iwri came to Israel. There he married Sara Berger, who was from Lomza. His faithful wife helped him to bear the yoke of his creativity and followed his efforts with appreciation and love.

When I came to Israel, I met him at the editorial staff of the large workers' newspaper, *Davar*. His poems were translated into Hebrew and published in various periodicals. Later, he began to write in Hebrew. He

published his book of poems, *Before Day*, in Hebrew and Yiddish. In it, he mourns Ostrolenka, which was destroyed.

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Icchak Iwri set a holy goal for himself: publishing the memorial book of the Ostrolenkan community. Whenever you visited him at home, you found him at his desk, hunched over his papers. Heart and soul, he was sunk in this work. He wrote. He corrected the works of others. He sorted, edited and prepared for printing. He carried on an extensive correspondence with our townspeople all over the world, asking and demanding that they write their recollections for the book. He also participated in recruiting the means for its publication in Israel. He was active in organizing annual commemorations, and enriched them by his participation and his writings.

We must point out with pride that, thanks to all this, after a long hard journey, we arrived at the publication of our *Yizkor* book, of the sacred remembrances of our city Ostrolenka, which was destroyed, and of our holy relatives and dear ones.

We take this opportunity to wish him and his dear wife long life and productive years in his literary activities.

Shalom Margalit, Tel Aviv

Our Amateurs' Circle
(Recollections)

The desire of Ostrolenka's youth for the Yiddish theater, and for theater in general, reached proportions of "cultural aspiration", although in partisan matters, there was no agreement between them. We had two parties with extreme views, the Bund and the Zionist movement. Each had a rich library. Jewish youth rallied around these two main causes. Except for polarity of political opinions, there was peace between them; scorn or quarrels did not arise. If it happened that a certain lecturer disparaged the rival camp by pointing out its errors black on white, they would argue with him heatedly, but defend their positions matter-of-factly. Each side even customarily participated in parties and receptions in honor of lecturers from the rival side. Literature and party membership were considered international or general matters. We took party membership for granted. In us, writers and lecturers found blessed ground for discussions and the exchange of opinions. As to matters of theater – here we were all united. The craving for theater grew in us, beyond all differences. To watch theater, we were ready to relinquish all worldly pleasures. Whenever a Yiddish theater company came to our city, the atmosphere became really festive. Not just the youth, but also the adults – the workers, the intelligentsia and the merchants (except for the Chassidim, of course) – looked forward to Saturday night with curiosity and impatience to visit the theater.

During the last period, the theater was different from years gone by. In the past, entertainment was provided by entertainers who appeared mostly at weddings, reciting rhymes and aphorisms written by writers of dramas and operas. If an in-law or the host of the occasion was well-to-do, the much-praised Julke was brought from Lomza. He immediately grasped the tastes of the wedding guests. In a minute, he would put on a wig, add a goatee, smear charcoal on his face and present the character of the suffering, despondent Eternal Jew. At the end, he served "dessert" with the song *On the Way Back Home*. The *klezmorim* accompanied him with the proper melody. The audience enjoyed itself and "licked its fingers" from the "art" segments presented to it, like *Amarszalek* . . .

Sometimes the Chassidim greatly disturbed us, contending that the theater was a desecration of the Jewish religion and mocked Jewish leaders and dress. Thanks only to the intervention of Mendel Nadborny, an important community personality and a sworn theater-lover, the disturbances stopped and the wandering troupes appeared before audiences without hindrance. I remember an episode connected to the wandering company run by Kolotkin (if I am not mistaken). They presented an operetta called *The American*. It was on a Saturday night, after *Havdalah* [the prayer separating the holy Sabbath and the secular week], and the women began preparing for a visit to the theater. They spread

clean, white handkerchiefs, covering the food left over from the Sabbath meal – pieces of chicken and roast goose, gefilte fish, *challah* and fruit – all this they took with them to the theater as "provisions for the way".

The Jewish theater never began at the appointed time. The curtain did not go up before ten o'clock. Those who sat in the gallery stamped their feet. The audience began to stuff itself, mouths discharging pieces of food in all directions, landing on the clothes of those sitting in the front rows. Shouts and protests disturbed the progress of the play. From the last rows, singing was heard – the people of the gallery who knew the words of the songs "helped" the "stars". The manager's requests and his explanation that the actors did not need help of this kind were to no avail. Whenever the actors began to sing a song – the entire gallery joined as a chorus. The "storm" began right after the first act. Bundles were opened and the head of the family distributed food. The loud chewing of delicacies could be heard in the entire hall and reached the stage, as far as the hungry actors. The smells of garlic from the roast aroused their appetites, and they immediately sat down near the God-fearing "aunties" to partake of the leftovers.

The condition of the wandering Jewish theater was bad and unstable then. They did not often leave the city during the daytime. Most of the time, they ran away at night, in the darkness, without parting from their patrons, because they could not pay their debts. The next morning, the town was in a hullabaloo. Nevertheless, they forgave them the crime. The youth organized a fundraising campaign among theater fans and the debt was paid to the hostel owner to the last ruble.

The idea of starting an amateur company of our own in Ostrolenka arose when Dr. Gutman (the son of Gutman the Healer), who had directing talent and was admired by the youth, established an amateur circle and began to stage various plays. The first play was *The Brothers Luria*, with the participation of H. Benedon, the brother and sister Melin, Goldfarb and Wierzba, the owner of a brick factory (now in America), Awraham Hofman (now in America), and a few others whom I do not remember by name. We, the youth, were given very small roles, or we were used as extras. Our pride was immeasurable: I am an actor! But when the hour neared to ascend the stage, we shook with fear . . . our teeth chattered.

The Member Wierzba was an excellent character actor. He played the role of Tuwja the Milkman so well that Shalom Aleichem himself would have been satisfied. He met with Menachem-Mendel (Benedon) and saw the catastrophe, when all his savings went down the drain. This scene aroused thunderous applause from the audience.

After the amateurs' circle broke up, we, the young, "captured" the field. We suffered not a little until we learned the right technique. More than once, the director swore at us for "erroneous intonation". We were then in the midst of rehearsals for *King Lear* by Gordon. The women's cast was composed of Naomi Melin, H. Szpielman, of blessed memory (who passed away in Israel), and others. Among the men, I remember Welwel Bajuk, Aron Rapaport, Mosze Bomsztejn, Aron Zusman and H. Wolowicz, who was brought especially from Lomza for the role of *Shamai*, which he was supposed to act in that play.

Here I must relate an episode that caused us great anguish. The role of the wife of Mosze Chassid was played anonymously by a Chassidic girl. She was very talented and acted her role superbly. Her father, a butcher and a Gur Chassid, did not know anything about his daughter's misdeeds. Precisely on that Sabbath, among those who prayed in the *shtebl*, someone who wanted to cause her father grief shamed him before all the worshippers, demanding his expulsion from the house of prayer because his daughter "plays theater". The Chassid went home, and the first thing he did was to gave his daughter two resounding slaps on the cheek. When he repeated the news he had heard in the *shtebl*, an atmosphere of *Tisha B'Av* [the date of the destruction of both Holy Temples] prevailed in their home. To ensure that his daughter would not participate in the play, the father locked her in the barn with the calves and hung the key in the kitchen.

There was a general rehearsal on that Sabbath and everyone waited for Peszka – but she didn't come! We sent a friend to call her, and she came back with the sad news. What do we do? How do we extract her from her prison? After secret consultations, it was decided that her friend would steal the key to the barn, release Peszka, put on her clothes and stay there, confined with the calves. And that is what we did. After the *cholent*, the Chassid, as usual, went to bed and fell into a deep sleep. At the same time, the friend stole the key, released Peszka, put on her clothes and locked herself in the barn. The Chassid woke up, peeked into the barn and saw "Peszka" there. His heart was calmed, and immediately he hurried to the *shtebl* to tell his friends

about the trick he had played on his daughter. The mother, a righteous woman who agreed with her husband's actions, went to her relative to pour her bitter heart out.

Fate decreed that that day was the *yahrzeit* of the Rebbe. The Chassidim held a *Melave Malka* [Saturday evening meal to accompany the Sabbath Queen's departure] at the home of the *gabbai*, which continued until late at night. I don't know for whose sake it occurred, but the most important thing is that the play took place with great success. In the end, it was made known to the father that his daughter participated in the play, after neighbors praised her excellent acting to her parents. The father swallowed the bitter pill. The important thing was that the Chassidim would not find out! (The mother got the whole "pour out your wrath" for supporting the daughter's abandoned behavior, although she was innocent of all blame . . .).

Our amateur circle existed for years, and was always received with enthusiasm by the Ostrolenkans.

Welwel Bajuk, New Zealand

The HaShomer HaDati Drama Studio

Among the drama circles established in various parties and institutions when cultural life in our city developed after World War I, the HaShomer HaDati drama company should be mentioned. It was under the direction of Mr. Patalowski and excelled in its acting. I participated in it as well. "The drama studio of HaShomer HaDati, under the direction of Mr. Patalowski", was quite popular in the city. One of the company's successful plays was *The Travels of Benjamin III*, by Mendele. We also presented original plays that we wrote ourselves, particularly about the lives of the pioneers in Israel.

Having raised the matter of presenting plays, I must mention the members of *Linat HaTzedek* and *Gemilut Chassadim*, who were honest, simple Jews. Their entire purpose was to help the sick and those who needed charity. To do this great good deed, they had to raise money in many ways. One of the main means was plays. On Purim, for example, they presented *The Book of Esther*. This play also met with success. To this day, the actors portraying their roles stand before my eyes, especially the shoemaker, Wylozny (Arcie Sznobak, who lived on Cyganska Street), who portrayed Vajezatha, and Malach, the rope maker, a fan of "the boards" who liked to appear before the audience and was really crazy about it. . . If he had had the opportunity, he could have been an actor, as well as an excellent director. He organized most of the plays and also participated in them. He also helped us to advance in this direction a great deal. Yeshiva students in our city were also enthusiastic about stage acting. During Chanukah, *Tu B'Shevat* [Jewish Arbor Day] and Purim, the yeshiva students organized plays such as *Graf Potocki*, *Samuel the Prophet* and the like. They performed in the women's section of the synagogue. The whole town was in turmoil, everyone came to see the play and how boys perform women's roles . . .



The HaShomer HaDati Drama Studio, under the direction of S. Patalowski; from the right, among those seated (the third): Rachel Weis-Chmiel, behind her: S. Patalowski, Dr. Chaim Chmiel, Chaja Sapir and Jehuda Chmiel (the last on the right, among those standing)

The urge to act was deeply rooted in our townspeople. Indeed, talented amateurs and actors grew from among us, some of outstanding theatrical ability. There were excellent actors, popular in and around the city, such as Hercke Sojka, the brothers Eli and Berel Bajuk, Melin, Melnik, Chancia Ben-Adam, Grosman, Kuper, Tobjasz, Icchak Mazor (from Lomza, who directed plays in our city) and, long life to him!, our townsman, the poet, Icchak Iwri (now in Israel). He appeared in our plays in Lomza, where he lived, in cities in the field in Poland, sometimes in the city of his birth, Ostrolenka, and others. Meir Margalit was an actor of great reputation, a native of our city (now in Israel – lead actor of the Ohel Theater).

I do not remember a great deal about Patalowski himself. As far as I know, he was a barber and studied theater arts in Warsaw. Later, he participated in plays in various theaters. I remember that, once, when we went to visit his uncle Wajnsztok, a Mizrachi member, in Ostrolenka – the idea arose to create a drama circle in the HaShomer HaDati "nest", under his leadership. The idea was quickly realized.

Yehuda Chamiel, Tel Aviv

Ostrolenkans on the Stage

Among all Ostrolenka's weaknesses, such as establishing institutions, youth organizations, yeshivas, *Gemilut Chassadim* funds, we had a special "weakness" for the theater. The city amateur company performed primarily for charitable causes. Before World War I, it was made up of the Members Awigdor Melin and his sisters, Weevil Bajuk and others. Later (between the two World Wars), Hercke Sojka, Eli Bajuk, Melnik and others joined. Besides that company, in almost every party, institution or youth movement (even in Ostrolenka's yeshiva . . .) there was an organized drama circle, which presented plays or held musical evenings for its own benefit. Every drama circle prepared its appearances on its own premises, with the help of more experienced amateurs. For the purpose of direction, or even to fill the leading role, a popular amateur actor was often invited from another city. Sometimes a professional actor was brought from Lomza, Bialystok or Warsaw, as well. The amount remaining after covering all expenses was set aside for the needs of the institution or the organization that had ordered the play.

Artists, the Kolosznikovs from Bialystok, or amateur actors from Lomza like Chaim Wolowski (in Argentina today), Icchak Iwri (Israel), Icchak Mazor, may God avenge his blood, and others visited Ostrolenka often. They joined local companies or staged their own repertoire.

Because of the wars, there were also theater people in Ostrolenka who left for nearby cities. They remained in those places permanently and developed their theatrical activities. The writer of these lines was one of them. At this opportunity, I would like to bring my memories to light, and relate a number of episodes from my theatrical life and my artistic aspirations.

My First Performance

Even as a small boy, and then as a youth, I displayed a talent for imitating different types – how they stood, walked, talked and contorted their faces. My first "appearance" was at the age of four or five, when my father was not at home. I put on my Sabbath clothes and a *shtreimel*, and went over to my mother to wake her from her afternoon nap, imitating my father's voice and way of speaking. Mother woke up, recognized me and smiled . . . After this "play", I continued imitating familiar people at the homes of neighbors as well. My entertaining gestures caused people to burst out laughing. For my part, I enjoyed entertaining adults. I imitated not only people, but animals, birds and instruments, like the violin, the clarinet and others.

My "Appearances" at the *Heder* and the Yeshiva

Whenever the end of the school term neared, both at the *heder* and at the yeshiva, children with dramatic talents began to congregate around me. They knew about my "dramatic" talent, and my initiative in staging

plays. I remember that at the end of every school term, at the home of Tuwja the Builder, where the yeshiva was, we staged different plays, such as *Saul and Agog* (I always played the role of King Saul, and of course, I sought not to have compassion for Agog, the bitter enemy . . .), *The Sale of Joseph* and others.

In one of the yeshiva's rooms, we put up a sort of "stage", and sent notes of invitation to the students' parents. On vacation days or at a *seudat mitzvah* [celebratory meal] for the students, given by the *balabatim* and heads of the yeshiva in honor of the end of the school term, we always staged a play in the midst of the *seudah*. The audience enjoyed itself and laughed. I remember that once, on such an occasion, Joska Kachan and I made those gathered laugh a great deal. Among them was Chaim-Berel the Ritual Slaughterer, of blessed memory. After the play, he came over to us and, turning in particular to me, predicted a shining artistic career for me ... It may be that he said this only from politeness. After all, he was an observant Jew. But I, a youth, received his words at face value. Since then, I did not stop aspiring to public appearances.

In Lomza

At the end of 1915, the "first" Germans – those before Hitler – conquered Poland, including our city of Ostrolenka, which was destroyed and burned. Like others among our townspeople, we settled in Lomza. It was very hard to get used to the way of life in a strange city, although there was something new and refreshing in it. We got used to the static situation of war, and thus, our peace of mind returned. At the time, new ideals enraptured the entire Jewish populace. Young and old rolled up their sleeves and felt a new "beginning". The German conquerors, who played the role of "liberators" then, treated the local population (and particularly the Jews!) with false German courtesy. Their polite "Good morning", and the cigarettes with the gilded mouthpieces which they distributed left and right among passersby in the morning fog, when they captured towns – aroused hope in us for a better tomorrow, and the beginning of new lives. . . Indeed, we breathed with relief after the burdensome Russian exile.

All the Jewish institutions that feared for their futures during the oppression of the Tsarist regime, now revived: the Jewish school, the [political] parties, the library and the theater. I think the awakening of the theater was felt more than any other. The longing for theater was felt by young and old alike. Everyone thronged to the theater, the way of our actors' stardom. Personalities like Ester-Rachel Kaminska, Julius Adler and others were especially prominent. Even the comedy and operetta companies of Anna Jakobowicz-Moster captured the minds and hearts of spectators during that blessed period.

I will never forget how I – still quite a young man then, still in Chassidic dress, with thick earlocks – would drag "Chassidic" requisites for the actors from the house, in exchange for attending rehearsals. The satisfaction and joy that flooded me was endless. The more theater plays I saw, the more my desire grew to appear on the stage. I created plans to fulfill this aspiration. I thought, Who can help me? My appearance alone distanced me from the world around me, particularly the environment of theatrical acting. Certainly, I could not expect anything from my strictly observant Chassidic home.

My First Public Appearance

In the house where we first lived in Lomza (with Pianko, on the long street), there also lived a young man, a watchmaker, who was always unemployed. He was a little older than me, but still very young, and enjoyed talking with me. Apparently, my Chassidic appearance interested him. Once I revealed what was concealed in my heart, he immediately agreed to "cooperate", but on the condition that I would put the program together. He was ready and willing to participate in "the play", and also to act as "business manager". Good! But from where does one take a repertoire and, above all, a place for the "appearance"? He looked at me and I at him – and we both burst out laughing.

After this meeting, I could no longer rest. With great effort, I put together a program that included three parts: 1. a few cantorial selections, for which I always had a soft spot; 2. a few theater songs that I had heard and memorized; 3. a monologue that I wrote by myself, called *An Only Child Bound in Chains* – a kind of cry of pain, hinting of my life, which was intended to close the program. Between each appearance, my neighbor was supposed to sing or recite something. With boundless joy, I presented the program to him. We immediately set a place for "the play".

One day, we two set out on foot (we had no money for traveling) to Nowogrod, a small town near Lomza,

having determined to present our program there. After continuous walking and feeling guilty for having slipped away from a typical Chassidic home to do something disgraceful, we arrived in the nearby town towards afternoon. As I said, my neighbor promised to take care of the "stage", the notices and other matters for the appearance. My job was to sit in the house where the play was to be held, which my friend got through connections, and sell "tickets". No one had invited us here, so everything was our responsibility. My friend wrote notices in a special style and hung them in several places in the city, and I sat for hours near the "box office". Young people came in to buy tickets, saw me in my Chassidic clothes – and ran out the way they came. Although I stamped the tickets with my father's personal seal, which I had taken with me, only a few old women and a group of children came to our "theater". The "stage" was placed in a corner of the room, where there was room for only the two of us; the "curtain" was a flowered curtain in a variety of colors; and the "set" was a small table, with a vase holding a few flowers on it.

The play began. My neighbor came out and introduced me with warm words, but the children demanded that the show begin immediately. After I sang the cantorial selection, I wanted an intermission, but because of the noise the children made – we decided to move on to theater songs. The young audience went crazy – they joined me in song and things were lively! Now the old women got involved and began to impose order. Meanwhile, my neighbor sang something and announced the third and last part, which was the most serious. Silence prevailed in the "hall".

I began my monologue in the most dramatic tone. This had an influence. The women burst out crying: "Oy, oy, an only child" . . . At the end of the monologue: "I must tear the chain that binds me as an only child. I don't have strength anymore! I have to! I must!" – a howl burst out among the women. But the children responded in the opposite way: they yelled, made noise, were drawn to "the stage" and set upon it. Without the help of my partner, who knows what would have been my end . . .

The "play" ended. We stayed in the same house. They gave us dinner and suggested that we stay for the night. The next day, we left the town with a profit of a few German marks in our pockets. Going back, we did not go by foot this time, but rode, like *pritzim* [Polish noblemen].

I had a feeling that my ambitions were being fulfilled, and the hope that I was nearing my goal has not left me since then.

My *Aliyah*

Since that event, I decided that I must change my entire existence. I must change internally, as well as my outer appearance, which distanced me from the world I yearned to enter with all my youthful fervor . . .

To this day, I do not remember how I was accepted to Lomza's amateur stage circle. I only remember that I watched their rehearsals frequently. I hungrily swallowed all their movements and left happy. The leading roles of this amateur circle were always played by Chaim Wolowski (now in Argentina), who also directed the plays. I became very friendly with him, and learned a great deal from him. There were other talented amateur actors, like Jakow Mlynarczyk, Munja Chinicz (especially talented), Lejbel Jesinowski, Mosze Chen, Icchak Mazor, and the women: Ester Wolowicz (America), Alte Fersztenberg (Israel), Hinda Rotszchild (she excelled in the roles of mothers), Gitel Jakubinska, Gitla Rotszchild and others. Rehearsals usually took place at the home of the Fersztenberg family, and also at Hinda Rotszchild's.



After "my first appearance", With my face toward the theater

I admit that I left every rehearsal or play (that took place at Ciechanskiego or at the Mirage Cinema) with feelings of jealousy and the ambition to become one of them, and as soon as possible.

I got lucky. The actor who played the role of Nachumche in *The Village Youth*, by L. Kobryn, suddenly became sick and they chose me to take his

place. My acting then was quite unimpressive, but it was adequate for membership in the company. I played several parts: Pinczasel in *Two Kuni Lemel*, Szmelka Kolektor in *Grass Widower*, Motje Sztrajchel in *Chasja the Orphan* by Gordon, Jankel Szyker in *Czipke Fire*, to serious dramatic roles. Later, I also began to direct, and got leading roles in musical plays orchestrated by the well-known conductor Zyskind. I traveled outside the city for one-man performances, wrote plays and different skits, and won the admiration of audiences.

My success grew daily. I founded another troupe, made up of talents like Tuwja Wolowicz, Mosze Kachan and Jakow Rabinowicz – successful in comic roles – (now in Israel) and others. In our program were serious plays, musical plays and special evenings for children that I directed, presented especially for charitable purposes – for day care centers for poor children. These performances, performed by the children of the home themselves, became known as the most successful of the amateur circle plays.

As an example of my fast and successful advancement in the field of theater, this interesting episode, that I called "Two Nights in One Night", will serve.

For various reasons, the amateurs split into two camps. I stayed with my company and the conductor Zyskind. We were supposed to stage a new play in the Mirage cinema hall. The participants were Tuwja Wolowicz, Mosze Kachan and Lejbel Jesinowski, who was makeup artist and master of ceremonies, and the writer of these lines. In addition, there was a large choir, conducted by Zyskind. On the program: skits, dialogues, duets, impressions and folk songs sung by the choir.

The second camp staged the play *Motke the Thief* by Shalom Asch in the Reduta Theater, and to ensure its success, they brought the famous actress, Klara Segalowicz, from Warsaw.

That same night, the "battle" began between the two camps. In our Mirage Hall, applause and calls of "Boo!" echoed. This is not to say that *Motke the Thief* and the gifted actress, K.S., failed. Of course not. But it is a fact that our side rose to unexpected heights.

Many of Lomza's inhabitants witnessed our success and knew how to spread the word. More than once it happened that famous artists passed through our town by chance, and came to our play. They expressed their wonderment and appreciation of my achievements and the talents that were being wasted in a small city.

With all this, I did not forget the beloved city of my birth, Ostrolenka. I went there sometimes to perform with the Lomza troupe, full of special feelings. I tried to integrate local current events from Ostrolenka into my program, as if I wanted to say to them: See, I am still alive and with you! Our success was immeasurable!

At the end, I wish to mention two episodes, one happy and the second sad, which I cannot forget.

I once came to Ostrolenka to present a play I had written, called *Baal T'shuva* [a secular Jew who becomes observant], at the Lutnia Theater. Many Ostrolenkans came to meet me (among them a friend of my youth, Joska Kachan, who filled the job of prompter). Chaim Wolowski played the leading role and I was Josele Szyker, a silly old man, whose role amounted to only the words "Besides me." I felt the friendliness of the Ostrolenkans, both during the performance and after. I cannot forget the festive occasion and the elevated spirits of those moments of reunion.



(At a performance) From the right, Y. Iwri, Deregent Zyskind, Lejbel Jesinowski

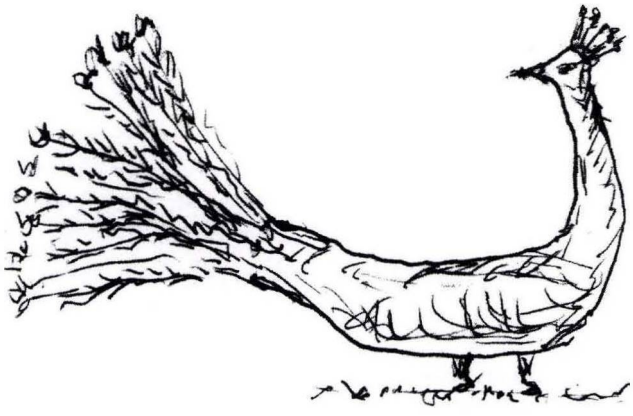
On the other hand, my last appearance in my native city was not a success. I came to Ostrolenka to do a one-man performance of readings, with the participation of the amateur singer, Dwora Lucka (the daughter of the cantor of Lomza). We arrived late. The piano accompanist was not the best, and it could be sensed that I lacked enthusiasm. The audience was uneasy from the beginning, and someone even threatened to throw a chair at me, not to mention the continual whistles that

could be heard from all sides . . . The fact that I was an Ostrolenkan, and my many successful performances over the years there did not stand in my stead. In fact, my partner performed her full program: cantorial selections, folk songs, and many songs of Bracha Tzifira, and received applause, which I also enjoyed . . . I regretted what happened, but saw it as a "step backward in order to take two forward". Thus, I parted "theatrically" from the city of Ostrolenka. I learned from this that the theater, besides having people come to a play, must have a suitable performance: studying, preparing and rehearsing until one's role becomes part of one's personality, and [the proper] mood before every appearance. But it is also a matter of fate and luck, and time does not always play into the actors' hands.

In the beginning of 1932, I was recommended by my friend, the poet Szmuel Zaromb (may God avenge his blood), and received an invitation from the famous composer, Chanoch Kahn (now in Israel), to join a company that had organized near the Yiddish Writers Association in Warsaw. It was suggested that I sign a contract for appearances for an extended period – but by then the idea of emigrating to Israel had ripened in my mind.

I arrived in Israel that same year. There I found an Ostrolenkan, known to everyone, on the stage. It was the Ohel Company actor, Meir Margalit, one of Ostrolenka's pioneers, who already had many years of theatrical activity behind him.

I. Yitzhak



Federations and Parties

About the Parties in Ostrolenka

With the appearance of Dr. Herzl in the "Jewish street", echoes of organized political Zionism also reached Ostrolenka, where it found enthusiastic supporters for the idea of national revival. Only a few were captured by the Zionist idea, but they were very devoted. Who did not know Anszel Lew, Bialy and others like them in Ostrolenka? At every opportunity, they told young people about the great difficulties encountered during the first days of Zionist organization. They encouraged them to act, arguing that the many obstacles should be disregarded and that, to realize any new idea, one has to devote oneself unconditionally, heart and soul. Does the Jew in the Diaspora have a more exalted or more vital idea than the Zionist idea and Jewish revival? Their arguments were convincing. Not a small number of youths began to understand them. Zionist organizations in the city, such as K.K.L., Keren HaYesod and others, motivated many youths. Political parties and institutions from other streams also had a base of support in Ostrolenka. And every party had a loyal and dedicated staff, which did not work in order to receive prizes.

Poalei Zion (Z.S.S.) did great political and cultural work in the grim reality of Jewish towns in Poland, and in our city in particular. The library established by the party was a great blessing. The populace and the youth drew culture and knowledge from it. Dedicated visionaries, devoted heart and soul, were not lacking in our city. Every night, even in the winter cold (there was no wherewithal to buy wood for heating) members and community workers sat in the party's apartment on Lomza Street, spending many hours sorting books for the library, discussing current events and deliberating about the situation in Israel. Everything was done voluntarily and with enthusiasm. Who does not remember the community workers Motel Zutkiewicz, Berel Zabludowicz, Szafran and – May they live a long life! – the Lachowicz brothers, Arjeh Szperling, the writer of these lines, and others. The party and organizational work took up most of their free time. More than once, they absented themselves from personal matters because of their great devotion to things paramount to the party.

HaShomer HaTzair. From it, thousands of "organized" youths received "improvement" and a purpose for their small town, ordinary lives. From school age, the "nest" [local branch] provided them with education and knowledge, and bequeathed the Hebrew language to them. It became the major agent in establishing the Culture School in our city. With their attire, celebrations, trips and folk songs, the lively youths captivated hearts and brought relish to the hard lives of the masses in the small, poor city. Thanks to the movement, many of its founders and members, such as S. Margalit, Y. Chomont, C. Piaseczny, S. Goldsztejn, S. Chmiel and others, emigrated and live in Israel. Above all others, an outstanding man from the ranks of the people, who had a warm Jewish heart, led the "nest": Pesach Hochberg, of blessed memory. It was he who took the trouble, strove and gave of his soul and his money for the movement. He regarded its young members as his own children. His house was open for meetings, celebrations, lodging for important leaders and counselors who came from the capital, Warsaw. There was no limit to his generosity and dedication. Who does not remember Pesach Hochberg, of blessed memory, on traditional Lag BaOmer [the thirty-third day of the period between Passover and Shavuot] trips, in the march to the forest and back through the city, at major conferences of the movement and at its meetings, where he demanded of himself and others limitless devotion to the Zionist idea. His contributions to the institutions in which he was an active member were made generously, out of great love. The heart aches,

remembering this grand, big-hearted man, who did not get to emigrate and see the State of Israel, although he exerted himself so much on its behalf. May his memory be blessed and preserved in our memories, together with those of all our holy townspeople. We, the survivors, who live in the State of Israel, will not forget this man. Perhaps we reached a safe haven because of him.

The Bund Party. This party fought with fanatic obstinacy against every idea connected with "Zion". It must be admitted that the Bund did wonders for the education of the populace and proletarian youth, endowing them with culture and knowledge. The Bund library was large and rich. It was open to the general public every evening, and many came to exchange books. It was an incomparable cultural site in the city. The Bund had devoted community workers, such as Aron Zusman, and – Long life to him! – Y. Gutman, who lives in Israel. They took pains and labored to strengthen the city, brought well-known lecturers, organized cultural fetes, etc.

HaPoel. The HaPoel branch existed for years. Its young members purchased wind instruments with their own meager funds and founded an orchestra (they had a permanent conductor), bringing happiness to the city's life and to nearby towns. There were also sporting activities, such as soccer competitions, etc.

Keren HaYesod and Keren HaKayemet. At the head of our city's Keren HaYesod committee stood an outstanding man: Mr. Bialy, of blessed memory, who owned a sawmill. He was a Torah scholar and, in his unique way, devoted to the Zionist idea. He exerted himself and visited the city's inhabitants for annual fundraising. Although in poor health, he never complained of weakness. His always worked joyfully. Among the devoted active members were Pesach Hochberg, Zalman Gorzelczany, Efraim Chmiel, Zabludowicz and – Long may he live! – Icchak Rapaport, who lives in Israel.

The parties – not all of which were mentioned in my list – their community workers, people and loyal members, stimulated public life in the pleasant town of Ostrolenka.

Everything was destroyed, ruined and burned by the bitter enemy, may its name be erased. As for us, those who grew up and were educated in that city – nothing is left but to safeguard its memory forever in our hearts.

Yehuda Yitzhaki (Chomont), Haifa

The Founding of the General Zionist Organization "HaTikva"

When Ostrolenka's inhabitants began to return to their city during the World War I years of 1916-1917, the first municipal library (which later became the largest library in Ostrolenka), named for Y.L. Peretz, was founded in the home of Joska. It had no party or political character. In time, they rented a place on Goworowskie Street, at Awraham Rozenblum the Carpenter's, and the library was moved there.

On one of the intermediate days of Passover, at the time of the annual gathering (annual gatherings usually took place on holidays), a sharp disagreement was revealed between youths with Zionist views and young people who tended toward Bundism (as is said, the parties were still "in their diapers"). The main reason for the conflict was that the Zionists hung a picture of Herzl in the library, greatly offending the supporters of Bundism. This was the beginning of a rift among the youth. The factions also divided the library between themselves. The Zionist youth established a general Zionist organization called HaTikva, and a separate library of the same name.

The administration of the Zionist organization, HaTikva, included the members Icchak Rapaport (Chairman, now in Israel), Szlomo Benedon (Secretary), Josef Wonszak (Assistant to the Secretary, now Israel), Berel Zabludowicz, Mosze Aron Sojka, Szejna Czapnikiewicz, Rachel Benedon and Alter Grynszpan.
Yosef Wonszak, Tel Aviv

Dates and Personalities in the Zionist-Religious Parties

In approximately 1918, the Tze'erei Mizrachi party was established in Ostrolenka. The founders and first members of the administration were Dawid Kaspi-Sarniewicz (Israel), Eliezer Skrobacz (Israel), his brother Herszel Skrobacz (may God avenge his blood) and others. Activities were held by the funds (Keren HaKayemet LeYisrael and Keren HaYesod): distributing shekels, Pentateuch study courses and evening classes in Hebrew under the instruction of the teacher, Jakow Filar. Other cultural activities were also carried out. From time to time, speakers, such as Rabbi Rapaport, Rabbi Hager, Rabbi Icchak Pines from Bialystok and others, came to instruct and guide the activity of these religious youths.



HeChalutz HaMizrachi in Ostrolenka



It was located in the New Market, at Alter Szlomo the Baker's (I don't remember its former location, which was also in the New Market).

In about 1922, the Mizrachi party was established. The founders were Reb Efraim Chmiel (Chairman), Dawid Kaspi-Sarniewicz Zalman Gorzelczany, the teacher, Michel Sarniewicz, Dow Chacek, Chaim Drezner, Izrael Wylozny, Chaim Rozonowicz and others. We also organized a special prayer *minyan* at the Yavneh School apartment in the study hall courtyard, where I was a teacher. Dow Chacek was the Torah reader and led the *Musaf* prayer on the High Holy Days. Reb Efraim Chmiel led morning prayers and the *shofar* [ram's horn] blower was Dawid Sarniewicz. The Yavneh School later belonged to the Mizrachi, and existed because of it. When the school moved to its home on Cyganska Street, the Mizrachi moved there, too, and next to it HeChalutz HaMizrachi and HaShomer HaDati. Together, they became known for organized cultural Zionist and Torah activity. They sent pioneers for HeChalutz HaMizrachi *hachshara* [training program for settlement in Israel]. A few succeeded in completing their preparation and emigrating to Israel. But we were not satisfied with this. We fought for significant representation in all municipal matters, too. We also fought with Agudat Yisrael, which was established some time after Tze'erei HaMizrachi (in about 1923) to "save" the souls of young religious people captured by this "heretical" party. Among the first founders of Agudat Yisrael were Reb Chaim Pinczas Gingold (who was later made Chairman of the Ostrolenka community), Mosze Noske, Lazer Mintz, Lejbel Mlynarzewicz (the son of Awrejmel Giszes) and other fanatical Gur Chassidic young people.

It should be mentioned that quite an important part of the Ostrolenkan community was observant and ultra-Orthodox. In the city, there were many societies of friends who sat and studied Torah together, such as Chevra Torah, Chevra Tehilim, Chevra Mishnayot, *Tiferet Bachurim*, etc. These societies also had their own prayer *minyanim*. In our city, there were also charity-benevolence institutions, such as *Linat HaTzedek*, *Hekdesh* for the poor and for hospitality for visitors from outside the city, charitable funds, etc.

The fact should be noted that Mendel Gedanken, at first a religious Zionist, became an outstanding general Zionist and, as such, was appointed head of the community.

I want to mention here a Mizrachi adherent,

Zyskind Zusman, a fine Jew, a community worker, a Torah scholar and a pleasant man. He worked on the municipal charity fund and was among the assistants and advisors of Reb Efraim Chmiel, one of the first administrators of the fund. In partnership with Symcha Pianko, he had a beer brewery. He was killed by the Nazis, together with his family (he left behind a son in Israel, Szlomo Zusman, and a daughter in Argentina – May they live a long life!), and most of the people mentioned above.

Reb Eliezer Eli Zusman (the brother of Aron Zusman) will be remembered favorably. After his marriage to the daughter of Reb Mosze Noske Tejtelbojm, he became an active member of Mizrachi and one of the Yavneh School's honorable supporters. He was active in organized and financial projects of the Mizrachi and of the Zionist Federation in the city.

David Kaspi (Sarniewicz), Tel Aviv

HaShomer HaDati

When I returned home from the Lomza Yeshiva for the Succot 1933 holiday, I found a HaShomer HaDati group already in the city, organized by Gorzelczany and the brothers Cwi and Szlomo Skrobacz. I was asked to lecture on the afternoon of the holiday, before the members of HaShomer HaDati. HaMizrachi and HeChalutz HaMizrachi people also attended. This was my first lecture in public (except for my Bar Mitzvah sermon . . .). Since then, I became interested in HaShomer HaDati and was its head for a few years.



HaShomer HaDati, Ostrolenka



HaShomer HaDati members at a Counselors' Conference

In 1938, the number of HaShomer HaDati members had already reached 120. The "nest" leadership consisted of the Dancyger brothers, Wajnsztok and Chaja Crempach (who emigrated to Israel after the Holocaust and passed away in Tel Aviv). Among the heads of the groups were my brother, Jehuda, and my sister, Rachel (now in Israel), Mosze Gerber (now an attorney in Montevideo), Mosze Serok (now a clerk in the Jerusalem municipality) and Gedalja Gorzelczany (who emigrated to Israel through the Youth *Aliyah* and was killed in Israel). HaShomer HaDati's "nest" developed diverse educational-cultural activity: it conducted classes in Hebrew and Judaic studies, sports training and camping; a Hebrew library was established, a wall newspaper was published, and plays and public appearances by the dramatic circle were held. During the last years, HaShomer HaDati took first place in collecting money for Keren HaKayemet. The nest moved to a large hall, enabling it to hold activities for groups and for large crowds. The members participated in summer camps and went to *hachshara* [training for settlement in Israel] programs, but only a few succeeded in emigrating to Israel. With sorrow and pain, I mention these one hundred youths, who were enthusiastic about Torah and work, sang the song of revival and took the first steps toward salvation and redemption until the ax man rose up and cut them off – May God avenge their blood!

Chaim Chamiel

About the Pioneering and the Labor Zionist Movement in Ostrolenka

In memory of friends and comrades, Zionists and national-pioneers, who gave of their time and strength for the fulfillment of Zionism and building the homeland. With feelings of honor, I note the names of Menachem Bialy, Pesach Hochberg, Anszel Lew, Rozenbojm, the Bajuk brothers, Mendel Szpielman and Mosze Aron Sojka, who were killed in the Holocaust, May God avenge their blood!; Awigdor Eisenstein (who passed away in his youth in Ostrolenka); Dawid Lew, Awigdor Kupferminc, Wylozny and Szaczar Finkelsztejn (who fell for the sake of the homeland); Mosze Margalit and Herc Sojka (who passed away in Israel) and others. May their names be engraved in our hearts.

A.

I visited many towns in Poland, and always compared them to our town. In my eyes, Ostrolenka remained one of a kind. The beautiful landscape of our town: the Narew River that ran through it and the long, beautiful bridge spanning the river, the lakes around it, the beautiful streets, the market, the houses, the city park with its many trees and flowers, the youth – full of life. Indeed, life in town was rich and full of meaning. There was concern for the poor and for passers-by. Everyone who came to the town felt himself at home. How sad that all this was destroyed and has gone from us so tragically.

The pioneer movement developed and grew in this life: the Poalei Zion party, HaShomer HaTzair, Histadrut HaNoar and others. Despite all that was good and beautiful, the place was confining for our Jewish youths. We always felt that we were second-class citizens in Poland, which was only recently freed from the yoke of strangers and had achieved its independence.

This was preceded by the bitter years of the World War and the Russian-Polish War.

The day of the outbreak of the war between Russia and Germany in 1914 was a black day for the world, and especially for the Jews and our town. It was *Tisha B'Av* [the date of the destruction of both Holy Temples], and the Jews went to the synagogue to pray and lament, and immediately thereafter shut themselves up in their homes. The Cossacks spread out in the city, and began to go wild and break into houses. All passageways in Ostrolenka were closed. The first was the bridge. The city became an army base. Soldiers were placed in private homes. Exiles from Myszyniec and Kadzidla came to the town. Some of them stayed with relatives and friends, some at the synagogues and some traveled on. The Russians arranged a small train in town, pulled by horses. The train came from Lomza, traveled along Farna Street and over the bridge to Myszyniec. The Jews were forced to keep their stores open on the Sabbath. During that period, tailors, shoemakers and carpenters were fully employed, supplying the army's needs. After a few months, however, the German advance began and, in a short time, neared our town. The Jews were ordered to leave the city. A problem arose: how to leave the city and from where to get wagons, as there was no other transportation. The Jews had to pay a great deal of money to the Gentiles for transportation to other towns. The Jews' suffering was very great. The city had to be vacated within a few hours. The deadline for leaving the city was 4:00 P.M. Whoever failed to get a wagon by that time was forced to leave on foot. At four o'clock, no Jews were left in the city. When we got to the village of Laskowce, we saw flames rising from the city. We remained standing a few minutes and watched our city burn before our eyes. We reached Lomza during the morning hours and did not know where to go. Some ran to the synagogues to find a place. Some turned here and there to look for an apartment, among them our family. At eight o'clock in the morning, my grandfather and father came to tell us that they had found a basement, but that we would have to clean it first, because it was neglected and dirty. We ran there right away, fearing that someone else would occupy it. Out of pity, we added a few other families to our group. When we finished cleaning and organizing the basement, it turned out that there was not enough room for all of us – not just to lie down, but even to

stand. But still, with all this crowding, we somehow worked things out. During the first days, we slept in shifts. The refugees' condition worsened, because we suffered not only from housing problems, but from a shortage of food. We wandered around hungry.

In a short time, the Germans captured our town and Lomza, too. On the day we heard about the entry of the Germans, a group of people, my father among them, turned to the German military government and asked that we be allowed to visit Ostrolenka. The delegation left early in the morning and promised to return on the same day, but our prolonged hope was in vain. The delegation returned only the next day, and told us about everything that had happened in the city. We heard that the city was burned by the Russians, and that only a few houses were left around the city where the Gentiles lived, as well as Ben-Adam's houses. Despite this, we decided to return to our burned city. The community in Lomza did not spare efforts, and provided wagons and a little food.

The returnees managed with great difficulty in the houses, two or three families to an apartment. Life began anew. The Germans appointed Mosze Aron Kaczor as Mayor and Aron Jakow Margalit as Chairman of the Jewish community. Pesach Hochberg was appointed In-Charge of Security and became a policeman, and with him Josel Aszer, Berel Bajuk and others. Meanwhile, a municipal kitchen was organized. We had to stand on line for hours to get a little soup. After a short time, a large quantity of used clothing was received from America.

Because of the crowding and difficult sanitary conditions, typhus spread, striking entire families. There was hardly a family that was not stricken with typhus. Our family was also severely stricken by typhus and, within a week, my grandfather, my grandfather's father and an uncle passed away. But life demanded its due. The Jews slowly recovered and began to travel to Warsaw, despite huge difficulties. A special license was required to travel to Warsaw. Anyone who got a license had to undergo quarantine, but the possessor of a license also succeeded in earning a bit for his sustenance.

So life began anew. Houses were built, the bridge was repaired, the study hall was built, a school was opened, and teachers came from outside our city, among them the Landau Brothers, Lewizon and others. A family called Sztokman also came from Warsaw, despite the great difficulties. One of its older sons was appointed Secretary of the city. He was an educated man and knew German well. The other children began to live the life of the city and befriended local youths.

Rehabilitation of the city was carried out at an accelerated pace. The German government granted mortgages, primarily through American companies. There was a great deal of work. The Takson family, who were builders, became contractors and employed dozens of workers. Tuwja Wylozny and his family chiefly did the work of roofing the houses. Professionals came from the area and, thus, life began anew in the city.

Building the synagogue* was an important event for the city. Every Jew from the age of 14 was required to contribute a day or two of work to cleaning the rubble. Rabbi Bursztejn should be praised and with him, all those who gave a great deal of time and supervised the construction of the synagogue. A special committee was chosen. Its members were Aron Jakow Margalit, Icel Sojka, Menachem Frydman, my grandfather, Nechemia, Zysman Zyskind and others.

The year 1917 was a year of light and happiness for the Jews. On the 2nd of January 1917, the great news of the Balfour Declaration arrived. Joy was great. Although the construction of the synagogue was not complete, we congregated in it to pray. Sunday was declared a holiday in our city. The synagogue was decorated with flags, special lights were installed, and all the townspeople gathered to celebrate the big day. In the morning, hundreds of worshippers gathered for the holiday prayer. In his usual manner, Shalom Michel the Tailor pounded once strongly on the table and announced: "We will now recite Psalms on this great day." His voice was heard in the entire synagogue, as with great enthusiasm he opened with "Blessed is the man". After Psalms, Efraim Chmiel began the prayers. After the Torah reading, veteran Zionists ascended the platform, including Aron Rapaport, Welwel Bajuk and dozens of other members. They gave enthusiastic speeches and burst into singing *HaTikva*. After the speeches, my grandfather read from the Torah and then *Hallel* was recited. Youths from all the *heders* enthusiastically sang Chassidic tunes. Representatives of the city came, among them many Gentiles. At the end of prayers, we exited with the song *Bear the Banner and Flag to Zion*. It was a holiday in every home in the city. Although there were Jews who did not accept the

* This refers to the study hall that was rebuilt. The synagogue remained destroyed.

Declaration – among them Agudat Yisrael and the Bund, as well as a small group of Folkists, headed by Menachem Frydman – they were a minority. In the same year, Zionist federations began to develop. Zionist youth arose, headed by the Landau brothers and Sztokman, Eli Bajuk, Meir Margalit and others.

B.

In 1918, Poland gained its independence. For the Jews, this date did not symbolize the end of their days of trouble. The Poles' great concern was how to embitter the lives of the Jews, despite the fact that in the Polish Legion there were many Jews who made an enormous contribution to freeing Poland.

It should be mentioned that the minute that the Germans ordered the evacuation of our city, these "heroes" were revealed in all their worthlessness. Until then, two or three gendarmes controlled the entire city. And lo, in a moment, all the Germans became wretched, and when any Gentile approached them and slapped their cheeks, they did not react. They removed their shoes and took off their clothes, and they were silent.

The great hopes that the Jews hung on the freeing of Poland were disappointed. The economic situation became more difficult and the Poles began to impose inflated payments on the Jews. Government ministries, municipalities and governmental workplaces were barred to them. High schools and higher education were also closed to them. In places where Jews served in government offices, great efforts were made to dismiss them.

In 1920, the war broke out between Poland and Soviet Russia. From Polish Prussia, the legion commanded by General Haller came to our town. He was a great anti-Semite and his legionnaires abused the Jews. Their pleasure was to cut off half a beard and one earlock, or to draw a circle and force a Jew with a beard to dance the Moszka dance before them. In many instances, they threw Jews from trains. Their anti-Semitism, however, did not prevent the Poles from recruiting Jews into the army. The town emptied of its youth.

With most of the youth in the army and the strengthening of anti-Semitism, the town's economic situation deteriorated and there was a great shortage of food. In a short time, however, the Russians conquered the city and new life began again. Immediately, Jewish Communists were discovered in the city. At the head of the Communists were Juzek Gutman, Barasz the Carpenter and others, none of whom were ever known as Communists. They called an explanatory meeting, and made efforts to prove their devotion to Communism. To prove their loyalty, they gathered respected and Chassidic Jews of the city one Sabbath, and forced them to clean the streets. There were those who were taken with their prayer shawls, including Motel Thylim, Chackel Zylbersztejn, Menachem Frydman, Litwer, Sojka, Herszel Szperling, Chaim Pinczas Gingold, the head of the community and others. Everything was according to the instructions of the Jewish Communists. This affair caused the population a great deal of suffering and shame.

The war of the Poles with the Bolsheviks did not go on for long. The fall of the Russians came near Warsaw. If they had advanced rapidly, their retreat from Poland was even faster. Some of the Jewish Communists and active community workers fled together with the Russian army, but out of "love" for the Jews, the Gentiles began to inform on them to the Polish government. Thus, an innocent and poor family that was never involved in political affairs became a victim. Neighbors told that, when the Russians were about to enter the town, they saw the daughter, Chawa Skalka, who was perhaps 16 years old then, signal to the Russian Army from the roof. They also informed on Awraham Takson, a contractor who employed many Gentiles, saying that he also was among the Russian collaborators and oppressed the town's Polish citizens.

Trials began and the affair continued for some time. Thanks to the involvement of persons from outside our city, they succeeded in completing the trials. But Chawa Skalka sat in jail for some time. Takson was a Zionist and at the end of the trial, he left the city with his family, and emigrated to Israel in 1921.

Even after the war with Russia ended, the Poles did not leave the Jews alone. Jewish soldiers were not released from the army. They were accused of helping the Communists, and were assembled in the town of Jablona, near Warsaw. Among those arrested were soldiers from our city. The situation was grave, and there was a concern that things would become unpleasant and not good. The intention was to humiliate the Jews and prove that they were disloyal to the Polish government, and that the Poles were right not to give Jews access to all government institutions. The Jewish leadership in Poland understood this conspiracy. It called on world Jewry, and American Jewry in particular, since Poland was dependent on America at

the time. Our boys in the detention camp were not silent as well. There were among them those who had decorations for excellence from the Polish Army. The matter became a major military affair. The Jewish soldiers composed a song in Polish called *Me Pierfsza Brygada* (*We are the First Brigade*), and the song was popular all over Poland.

This unstable existence was the background of the growth of the great Zionist movement, and in particular the Poalei Zion-Z.S. movement. It was not by chance that the Jewish youth felt that it had nothing to do in Poland. At the head of the party stood members such as Berel Zabludowicz, Josef Finkelsztejn, Mendel Szlafmic, Mosze Aron Sojka, Chaim Ismach and Fajwel Kachan. During the same period, a large Chalutz group also consolidated, and emigration began from our city. The first emigrants were Awraham Aron Takson, Icchak Welosznik, the Kupferminc brothers, Awiezer and Awigdor, Alter Bursztejn, Awraham Lew, Meir Margalit, Filar, Awraham Finkelsztejn, the Wylozny family and others. Letters arrived from the members, full of enthusiasm and hope.

C.

During the same period, the Polish regime began to interfere with public life, including the life of the Jews. Although the government had authorized the Poalei Zion-Z.S. party, it did not view the latter as free of a suspicion of Communism, which was forbidden in Poland. Therefore, the party's educational work in our city was done under the name of the HaTikva Library. The party's clubhouse was on the street near the big synagogue, on the second floor. One fine day, the police appeared and arrested Dow Ber Malkin. Malkin, who was then a member of the Poalei Zion Central Committee, had come to our city to speak at a meeting. The police searched him and found the passport he had received in our town. Malkin was not born in our city and had never lived there; however, because all documents had been burned in our city, it was possible to acquire passports "for a few gold coins". In this way, we succeeded in supplying passports for many Poalei Zion Central Committee members, who fled from Russia at the time of the Revolution and could not remain in Poland as citizens. During the search, the police looked for the names of members. The party's Secretary, Josef Finkelsztejn, caught on. Stealthily, he went to a drawer, took out the protocols notebook containing all the members' names and hid it. Miraculously, he escaped without anyone noticing and fled.

Life in the party and in HeChalutz carried on as usual. HeChalutz was then headed by Dawid Lew, Mosze Litwer, Awrejmel Szlezynger, Chajka Gutman, Herc Sojka, Baruch Karlinski, Jechiel Szafran, Eli Bajuk and others.

Public activity was very diversified. It manifested itself in activities on behalf of Keren HaKayemet, the Fund for the Workers of the Land of Israel, Keren HaYesod, Keren HeChalutz, and by participation in the city's public life. Poalei Zion began to publicize and their representatives were elected to the community committee. In those days, the Bund was a strong party, which had appointed itself the guardian of the Jewish worker in the spirit of the tradition of 1905. Meanwhile, however, HeChalutz grew and new members joined: Icchak Sztejnberg, Chaim Filar, Brysker, Jakow Frenkel and I. HeChalutz held lectures, meetings and various group activities, primarily a Hebrew studies group and a drama group, headed by Eli Bajuk and Herc Sojka.



Berel Zabludowicz

Wherever we appeared outside our city, at conferences and conventions, we aspired to set a good example for others and we earned great esteem. We were approached by one of our townspeople, Pesach Hochberg, who was 50 years old, but full of life and vigorous. A believer in Zionism, he saw Zionism and pioneering as a purpose in life. He became the father of the youth. In our city, people would say: "Pesach with his children." His house was a large and rich one, and he opened it wide to us. Jews such as he were rare in all of

Poland. He truly earned great honor for himself and esteem for his character. When Israel's gates opened in 1925, a great emigration began from our city, including many active members of the party and HeChalutz. Their emigration greatly encouraged the youth.

On the other hand, the emigration hurt the movement's operations and vitality, because leaders and chief spokesmen were lacking. During that period, many Poalei Zion members emigrated, led by the head of the party, Berel Zabludowicz and his family, Berel Bajuk and his wife, Mendel Szlafmic, Josef Finkelsztejn and his wife, and Mosze Aron Sojka. Chajka Gutman, Dawid Lew, B. Bursztejn, Karlinski and others emigrated from HeChalutz. Of the many farewell parties held for emigrating members, one of them, which took place at the home of Pesach Hochberg, should be mentioned. This farewell party was held on Saturday night. By chance, a member of the HeChalutz Central Committee, Raszisz, had come for a meeting and a lecture. Members had to be certified for emigration. I remember that they assembled in a room in Pesach Hochberg's house, where the HeChalutz Committee, headed by Raszisz, sat. In those days, they tested the knowledge of members about to emigrate about Zionism. The members who were called, one by one, to be tested at that meeting had devoted most of their lives to Zionism and had educated many members. Among them were Josef Finkelsztejn, Berel Bajuk, Kachan, Lew and others. The questions they were asked seemed to them superficial and insulting; they answered them ironically and sarcastically, and a disagreement nearly broke out because of this.

Later, a farewell party was held at the home of Pesach Hochberg for the members about to emigrate. All of us gathered with great enthusiasm – we sang and danced. A new committee was elected that evening: Mosze Litwer was elected Secretary, and Towa Israel, Chaja Gingold, Herc Sojka, Awigdor Eisenstein and I were also elected. The Poalei Zion committee also changed over during that period, and they began to reorganize the party. At the time, the party was headed by Awraham Slazenger, Brysker, Sara Edel, Frankel, Eli Bajuk, Ismach and others. We began to strengthen the library. We bought new books. Some of the members devoted themselves to work at K.K.L. and all the institutions. During the same year, we celebrated the opening of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus. The celebration was headed by Menachem Bialy, Pesach Hochberg, Icchak Rapaport, Israel Rubinsztejn, Israel Kachan, Anszel Lew, Efraim Chmiel, Mosze Margalit, Berel Zabludowicz, Litwer, Bajuk and Finkelsztejn. The celebration was held at the Zionists' hall. It was on Lomza Street, in Leszczinski's building. The hall was decorated with flags and pictures of Herzl, Weizmann, Sokolov, Ussishkin, Borochov, Sirkin, Brenner and others. In a short time, the hall was completely full, and hundreds of people remained in the street. Out of consideration for those gathered, the stage was moved to the balcony. The street was decorated with flags, pictures, greenery and many lights. From the balcony, many members spoke, led by Menachem Bialy. The celebration left a huge impression on those assembled. An honor guard from HaShomer HaTzair and HeChalutz stood alongside the flags.

At the end of the celebration, all the members gathered for a big fete at the home of Menachem Bialy. This was the first time I visited his home, which was a very patriarchal one, arranged in good taste. Mr. Bialy's study was decorated with pictures from the First Zionist Congress, as well as pictures from the Second Congress (I think he was one of Congress's delegates).

D.

At the same time, they began to think about preparing young people for work in Israel. HeChalutz announced summer *hachshara* [a training program for settlement in Israel] in Polish villages to learn agricultural work. As always, we, the Ostrolenkans, were among the first. A group of seven members, we left for *hachshara* on the 15th of May, with work clothes and with rucksacks on our backs. The slogan at that time was to put an end to "Menachem Mendelism" and to begin to work and create. HeChalutz in our city then numbered approximately two hundred members. They held a fete for us, the *hachshara* pioneers, which lasted until one o'clock in the morning, when two wagons came to take us to Lomza. Those who went to *hachshara* were the Members Awigdor Eisenstein, Awraham Segal (he was previously a member of the Bund), Lewkowicz (a soccer player), Jakow Frenkel, Cwi Zylbersztejn and I. Many members escorted us to the edge of town, and we all walked from the HeChalutz chapter until the end of Cegelna. At Cegelna, we parted from the members who had carried us on their shoulders with great joy. They wished us success, and that we would serve as an example for others. Pesach Hochberg raised a toast and said to us: "So, my children, go and succeed, and be an example for HeChalutz."

We went on our way to Lomza happy, invigorated and in high spirits. We traveled all night. Waiting when we reached Lomza were members from other chapters – Zambrow, Kolno and Rutek, members of the Lomza HeChalutz chapter, who were also supposed to join us, and others from Nowogrod. At the HeChalutz chapter on Rzondowa Street, we were met by members of Poalei Zion, HeChalutz and HaShomer HaTzair. After speeches were made, we were given breakfast. From there, we continued to Szczuczyna. When we arrived in Szczuczyna, we already numbered about 100 members. Additional members joined us from the area, including Grajewa, Stawisk and Vizna. We all gathered in the firefighters' hall. Two members of the HeChalutz Central Committee appeared, Members Funt and Tanchum from Degania Alef, as well as Member Szejnberg from Szczuczyna, who was the Galilee Coordinator and responsible for *hachshara* locations as well. Some HeChalutz members from Lomza escorted us: Zuckerman, Lewinsky, Wacek and Kremer. Awigdor Eisenstein and Sara Strinkowska spoke in the name of those going to *hachshara*. After the meeting, we ate lunch and each of us was immediately assigned the place we would go to for *hachshara*. Down in the street, land owners' wagons waited for us.



HaShomer HaTzair members with a soccer team on trips to Czerwoni Bor and Lomza in 1925

We, the Ostrolenkans, joined the group from Warsaw, and students and members from Lomza. In all, our group numbered approximately 60 members. They sent us to a remote village between Szczuczyna and Grajewa, called Bialaszewa. When we arrived there, evening had already fallen. We were housed in ruined buildings, in which people once resided. For a number of days, we were busy with repairing the buildings and making them fit for occupation. We did not work on Sabbaths and Sundays. On those days, members gathered, talked and wrote letters. At the first meeting held by kibbutz members, a secretariat and a five-member committee were elected. From among our members, Awigdor was elected to the secretariat, Frankel to work schedules and I to the members committee. Thus, life at *hachshara* began.

We made very good friends with the Gentile workers there. We calmed them and explained that we did not come to steal their work, but so that we could support ourselves by doing agricultural work in the Land of Israel. In many places there were difficulties, fistfights started and they did not let our members work. Luckily, our place was the quietest. Despite this, we sometimes clashed with people of the village who did not want to understand us.

Kibbutz life was fraught with difficulties. We did

not get enough food and the female members who worked in the kitchen did not know how to cook. A large problem was the communal laundry. At one meeting, the female members stood up and announced that they would not wash the clothes of the male members. The meeting lasted all night, and at the end the female members threatened to leave the kibbutz and not become laundresses. The decision in this matter was passed on to the HeChalutz Central Committee.

Among those in the group, I became very friendly with Awigdor Eisenstein, who was a bit older than me. Precisely because of that, I learned many things from him. More than once, members told us that it would be very worthwhile for the two of us to emigrate and become friends. *Hachshara* created many ripples at the chapters and, every Sabbath, dozens of people came to visit us. Although we were far from our city, we were also visited by two committee members, Dawid Lew and Awraham Slazenger. They came by bicycle. When they arrived, they were weary and exhausted. We immediately arranged a place of rest for them. They became so enthusiastic that they stayed with us for a few days, instead of one.

We stayed in Bialaszewa about four months. On the Shavuot holiday, we were given a vacation and everyone went home for three days. When we reached our city for the holiday, our friends organized a big party and a recreational evening for us. The drama circle appeared at the party with short songs – *Szajke and Shlemazel* – performed by Eli Bajuk and Hertz Sojka. After the holiday, we returned to *hachshara* and continued our work. On Rosh HaShana Eve, envoys came from the Central Committee, a meeting was held and all of the members were certified for emigration. We were warned, however, that the emigration situation was getting worse, that the Mandatory Government was not issuing immigration certificates currently, and that we should be patient. This explanatory speech of the Central Committee member was received coldly and with skepticism. In spite of everything, we hoped and believed that we would emigrate. We parted from the members and each one returned to his chapter.

When we returned to the city, we found that HeChalutz lacked people and was in a difficult organizational situation. Mosze Litwer was chapter coordinator at that time. We immediately began to work actively in the chapter. A similar situation prevailed at Poalei Zion, since, after the emigration of active members, the party was also a great deal weaker. The HeChalutz Central Committee found a new way to maintain local chapters, by establishing a HeChalutz House in every city. Here, too, we were among the first. It was winter. We looked for a place suitable for a HeChalutz House, which would be established to prepare people for professional work as well: carpentry, shoemaking, tailoring, building and so on. We established the HeChalutz House at the Sztern House. In the summer, the place was a factory for carbonated fruit drinks and soda water, under the partnership of Zyskind Zusman and Sztern. They did not ask us for rent. Zyskind Zusman especially treated us well. He was a clever and wise man, and was then a member in the city's community committee. Chmiel and Hochberg taught us carpentry.

E.

When summer arrived, we returned the workplace to its owners and began looking for work in the professions we had learned. We took it upon ourselves to build a barn and to fix a barn for a Jew who owned a large dairy. Pesach Hochberg was in charge of costing and getting work. The work was done perfectly and we earned a great deal of praise. We also got a big job – clearing out a lot that belonged to Fajwel Finkelsztejn on Ostrowska Street (he later built a big house there). Our work was to remove an old building that stood on the plot. We needed a wagon and horses for this. Since Fajwel Finkelsztejn was a Zionist and a friend of Pesach Hochberg, they took it upon themselves to provide us with a wagon and horses. They turned to a blacksmith, named Notte, and told him about the matter. He became enthusiastic about the idea, and said that he was ready to work with us and supervise our work. He built a wagon for us from material he had lying around in his yard and did not take a cent from us. We called the wagon "Notte". And from where would we take a horse? This problem was also solved. There was a Gentile near us who was an animal skinner. All horses were brought to him before they died. Notte and Finkelsztejn came to an agreement with him that he would supply us with horses. Every few hours, when a horse dropped, it was replaced by another, and thus the work of clearing the area continued. Members of the party came to our assistance: Zelinger, Zylbersztejn, Noske, Szperling, Chaim Dorfman and others.

When they heard about this in the city, people came to see the miracles we were working. We, the members of the group, ate lunch and dinner together at the

chapter on Cyganska Street. There were a few rooms there, and we turned one of them into a dining room. Food was prepared by the chapter's female members, headed by Mrs. Hochberg. One evening, when we returned to the chapter from work, we found Mrs. Finkelsztejn there with Fajwel Finkelsztejn, and understood that something was happening. Turning toward the dining room, we found tables well and festively set with gefilte fish. In short, they had prepared a party for us. Meanwhile, all the members gathered and, as always, long speeches were made about work and about a new life and pioneering. Life at that time was not so happy, because we had not undergone *hachshara* for this purpose. Our wish was to emigrate to the Land of Israel as quickly as possible, but emigration did not depend on us. Meanwhile, a crisis broke out in Israel, and members who did not make out well began returning to the Diaspora. Most of those who returned to us were those who had had great hopes. Their return from Israel created a very bad impression, especially since some of those who returned, in order to justify themselves, told all kinds of stories. This situation brought about the weakening of the parties and the chapters.



Motel Zutkiewicz

Nineteen twenty-seven was a year of difficult change. Few remained in the struggle. Instead of the two hundred members in HeChalutz, only about twenty members were left. A similar situation prevailed in Poalei Zion. The Bund saw our ruination and tried to build on it. Its members organized a large library and brought lecturers, thereby drawing many members to themselves. Some individuals also moved to the Communist party. We did not have the wherewithal to pay rent, and were forced to stop activity in the HeChalutz apartment. We turned to Rapaport, the General Zionist Chairman, with a request that they admit us to their apartment. We were permitted to use their apartment because all their activities had also nearly ceased. We organized a course with classes in the evening, which was successful. The teacher was Kamin, a very intelligent and social man, who tried to influence and encourage the members. Some of the course participants began working in our library and maintained a duty roster for returning books. At that time, Aron Szperling, a loyal and devoted young man, began to be active. He took tasks upon himself and fulfilled them faithfully and completely. Also worthy of mention are Sztejnberg and Brysker. Poalei Zion members also woke to action, among them Ester Zabludowicz, Chawa Skalka, Frydman and Malka Cuker. The burden was very heavy. We wanted to continue to work, but our resources were insufficient.

One day, at the end of 1927, a member a bit older than me appeared, asking questions about the development of Poalei Zion in the city, about HeChalutz and about the library. It turned out that he was an active member of Poalei Zion in Lomza, and had just moved to Ostrolenka. He promised that, as soon as he got a little organized, he would join in and help us to the best of his ability. This was Motel Zutkiewicz. We found out later that he was the son-in-law of the Sojka family and that his wife was Chaja Sojka. It should be noted that he fulfilled all his promises.

In time, he arranged a meeting with us. A group of members met with him, and gave him a report on what was being done and on our plans for the future. We explained to him that the source of the stagnation of our work was the cessation of emigration, as well as members who returned from the Land of Israel and no longer wished to take an interest in our work. He calmed us, however, and explained that this was not the first crisis in the Land of Israel. There had been crises and we overcame them. We would overcome this crisis, too, and emigrate to Israel. He asked us to introduce him to Zabludowicz, Szafran and all those who had returned from the Land of Israel. He succeeded in bringing members back to the party. Slowly, they began to take an interest and to work in the party anew.

The meeting was held in the presence of fifteen or sixteen members, with the participation of M. Zutkiewicz, Zabludowicz, Jerucham Przystanczyk, Jechiel Szafran, Aron Szperling, Sztern, Frenkel, Zyskind Lachowicz, Chawa Skalka, Ismach, Finkelsztejn, Slazenger, Goldszlak and Symcha Gedanken.

The meeting went on with great interest. We discussed many items. We honored Zutkiewicz with the running of the meeting. On the meeting's agenda were connecting the disconnected electricity, paying the rent, attending to the *Befreiung* newspaper and purchasing new books for the library.



The HaShomer HaTzair local leadership in 1929
From the right (seated):
Szoszana Blachowicz, Eliezer Lachowicz
(head of leadership), Genandel Kaplan.
From the right (standing): Chaim Piaseczny,
Szlomo Goldsztejn, Hanan Eisenstein,
Jehuda Icchaki (Chomont)

At the meeting, it was decided to conduct a fundraising campaign among members and friends. A fundraising committee was elected, comprised of the Members Jerucham Przystanczyk, Brysker and Szafran. A committee was elected to attend to the library with vigor. In the group were Frydman, Lachowicz, Aron Szperling, Sara Edel, Frankel, Krawiec and Sztern. It was decided to arrange an artistic evening with the Lomza drama circle. Zutkiewicz, Szafran, Eliezer Lachowicz, Sztern, Brysker, Sztejnberg and Bajuk were elected to the preparations committee. The committee included the Bajuk brothers, Herc Sojka and Rejzka Margalit in the dramatic evening. It was crowned with great success and also brought in a great deal of money, which covered part of the party's deficit. After the fete, a party was held in Mosze Margalit's house, with the participation of the Lomza drama circle, as well as participants from our city. Here, I met my friend, Icchak Iwri, who directed the evening. We were extraordinarily impressed by his appearance and he received thunderous applause. On that same evening at the home of Margalit, I had the opportunity to become well-acquainted with Mosze Margalit, a good man, who knew what he wanted, and was a friend to every honest and loyal person. In his work as Chairman of the community committee in our city, he excelled in two things: speaking little and doing much. He well remembered those he represented, and from whom he had received his mandate to head the community in the city. We often heard great praise of him. When help was urgently needed, he did not rely on anyone, despite the fact that he was handicapped because the decisive role of running the city's community matters was in the hands of the Polish rulers. To make things easier for the weak and deprived, he did much more than he was authorized to do.

F.

We continued our work of courses with the teacher, Kamin, and also began buying books for the library. An entire group of fresh and ambitious members joined us, including Alter Malowany, Chaim Piaseczny, Shalom Margalit, Zyskind Lachowicz, Hanan Eisenstein, Jehuda Chomont (nowadays, his name is Yitzhaki), Chajka Gutman, who returned from Israel, and Szoszana Blachowicz. We began searching for a way to the youth. Every year, youths finished school and roamed the streets. We decided to seek ways to the hearts of the youth. At a meeting, we decided to invite school graduates to a youth gathering. Dozens of youths came, whom we had never seen or known. We announced the establishment of an independent youth movement. We

worked with them for a few months, but we did not have explanatory material and did not know how to proceed. Finally, we concluded that we would have to turn to Warsaw, to the Trumpeldor Youth Histadrut [Union]. We asked K.K.L. to give us the union's address. The reply was that that movement was no longer in existence, and that all its members had moved to the HaShomer HaTzair Histadrut. We therefore decided to establish a HaShomer HaTzair Histadrut in the city. HaShomer HaTzair was then headed by Shalom Margalit, Chaim Piaseczny, Hanan Eisenstein, Szoszana Blachowicz, Genandel Kaplan, Jehuda Icchaki and others. Other active workers joined Poalei Zion and Chalutz. Here, too, things began to move. New members joined the party, and Chalutz and a youth union called Dror were founded. At the head of the youth union stood Zyskind Lachowicz, Aron Szperling, Esther Zabludowicz, the Goldszlag sisters, Gedanken, Symcha Ajzenstejn and Mordechaj Karlinski.

In Israel, the events of 1929 broke out, and news came that one of the loyal, good and active members had fallen while protecting Jerusalem. It was Dawid Lew. Although the news had a hard impact, it was clear to us that without sacrifices, we would not build the Homeland. While the pain might be great, we must continue to prepare for good days and for building the Land. Meanwhile, the British closed Israel's gates completely. When we heard this, all the parties gathered in the city for a large protest rally in the synagogue courtyard. Almost all the youth assembled. Members Zabludowicz, Finkelsztejn, Rapaport and others spoke. Zutkiewicz and Hochberg headed the gathering. It was decided that we would not yield, that we would fight to the last drop of blood and open Israel's gates for all Jews. At the gathering, the picture of Dawid Lew was held high.

After the rally, a consultation was held among the members. In light of the situation, it was decided to establish a library in the name of Dawid Lew, to disseminate his picture and to organize a fundraising campaign in the city for the library fund. The task was assigned to a few members and, in a short time, the library was enlarged. Meanwhile, Dawid Lew's brother returned from Israel. He, too, joined the library activity and contributed of his time to its building and expansion. The HeChalutz Central Committee, like all the other parties, took upon itself the strengthening of the *hachshara* kibbutzim. They took on real substance, with a purpose in life. In every city, it was determined that workers should go to *hachshara*. This was also true of HaShomer HaTzair. HaShomer HaTzair was connected then to HeChalutz in matters of *hachshara*. From HaShomer HaTzair in our city, Chaim Piaseczny, Jehuda Icchaki and Sara Granowicz went to *hachshara*. I went to the HeChalutz *hachshara*. We were at *hachshara* for eight or nine months. Sara Granowicz left *hachshara*, and if I am not mistaken, so did Icchaki. Piaseczny was in Wierszawnik and I was in Suczedniow. After a long time, I met Chaim Piaseczny, when he visited me at the kibbutz.



The Tzofim Scouts organization in Ostrolenka, 1924
From the right: Eliezer Lachowicz,
Zlocisty, Dorfman

G.

In 1930, there were discussions at HeChalutz and in chapters in our city about the *hachshara* situation. There were no chances for emigration, and we were tired. I received a call-up order for the Polish Army and Chaim Piaseczny came back to the city. When we were released from the army, although emigration had

already begun and the situation in Israel had improved, there were not enough immigration certificates. Members who had already been to *hachshara* were required to go again.

At the end of 1931-1932, a revival began in the ranks of HeChalutz. The Central Committee demanded that active chapter members go to *hachshara*. From our city, a large number of members went to *hachshara* in all parts of the country. Zyskind Lachowicz, Lubi Lewin, Chmiel, Gingold and others went to Lodz. Jehuda Icchaki, Dorfman, Zamelson and Szlomo Zusman went to Vilna. Hanan Eisenstein and other members went to Baranowicz, and Chaim and I went to Brysk. Chawa Zabludowicz, Ester Eisenstein, Yafa Jagoda, Szlomo Goldsztejn and others went to HaShomer HaTzair kibbutzim.

We remained in contact with each other. Chaim and I immediately went into action at the kibbutz. We were elected to the kibbutz committee and I devoted myself to activity in the party in Brysk. We had it quite hard in the kibbutz management in Brysk. In addition to all the activities at the kibbutz, which had about 200 members then, the HeChalutz Central Committee demanded that we establish *hachshara* units around Brysk. We succeeded in establishing a few units, among them a unit in Terespol, which was very close to Brysk, about 5 kilometers. Most of the work on the kibbutz was agricultural. A person was needed to coordinate kibbutz activity. Chaim and I turned to the HeChalutz Central Committee, requesting that it transfer Hanan Eisenstein from Baranowicz to us, because he was needed to manage the kibbutz in Terespol. Otherwise, we would be forced to close the kibbutz.

The Central Committee responded to our request and, in a short time, Eisenstein was sent to mange the kibbutz. Kibbutz life was not easy. The responsibility was great. There was an assemblage of members from all sorts of places, from small towns and big cities. Under the circumstances, it was necessary to create a social atmosphere, as well as opportunities for subsistence. Brysk was not an industrial city. Most of our work was chopping wood and housework. At this point, I want to mention a conversation with a rich Jew, whose children were members in Gordonja. I once asked him why he did not want to employ some of our members at his wood warehouse, as he was a Zionist. He replied: "I feel sorry for our young men and can't stand to see them working so hard, and in the winter, too . . ."

There were many similar instances, not just in Brysk, but in all Polish towns. Parents did not want to accept the idea that we had to become a working nation. Despite this, and under these conditions, we continued to work and live at the *hachshara* kibbutz.

After a time, a Poalei Zion conference was held. A delegation of three kibbutz members, as well as a large delegation from the party in Brysk traveled to the conference. On the way, members from the entire region boarded the train. We knew most of them, and a sort of internal convention was held in preparation for the conference. The conference opened magnificently. A large delegation came from Israel. At the head of the delegation were Tabankin, Ben-Dori, Loyta, Shazar and others. The opening was very festive, with greetings from all kinds of parties and, primarily, speeches by the delegates from Israel.

When we returned from the conference, we organized a members' assembly. We gave a report about the conference and our impressions of it. Thus, we continued to work at the kibbutz until the day came when we were certified for emigration as well. We returned to our homes with immigration certificates. Each of us thought that we would go home, rest a bit, and wait for the day of emigration. But this was not how things turned out. At all the institutions in the city, as well as at the party, they were already waiting for us to become active again. We could not refuse and went into action. We succeeded in bringing in new members and strengthening the fundraising for Keren Kayemeth, the Fund for the Workers of the Land of Israel, the HeChalutz Fund, the library, etc.

H.

At that time, a revival began again. The Maccabiah took place in Israel and many used this as a means to emigrate. The situation improved in Israel. Many of those who had returned began to think about a second emigration to Israel. The Poalei Zion party rose again and became a large party. Mosze Margalit, who was also Chairman of the city's community committee, went into action, adding great honor and strength to Poalei Zion. The party became an important factor in our city. One of our members was elected to the city council. In time, the HaOved [Worker] organization arose. Its members were tradesmen, workers, simple people, convinced that their future was in emigration to the Land of Israel. These members met every Saturday night for discussions and sing-

alongs. The Poalei Zion party began to seek connections with various groups in the city. During the same period, elections were held for the Zionist Congress. Poalei Zion and HeChalutz achieved great success in the elections. We received hundreds of votes in the city, making a big impression at the Central Committee. This was Ostrolenka – a Zionist-pioneer city, true to Zionist ideals.



Members of Poalei Zion (Z.S.) in Ostrolenka



Kibbutz Kolosowa for pioneering *hachshara* in Brysk, which had approximately 300 members in 1933, led by Chaim Piaseczny and Hanan Eisenstein. (In the center of the picture: David Ben-Gurion)



Kibbutz HaMishmeret (a HaShomer HaTzair *hachshara* kibbutz in Ostrolenka) with Pesach Hochberg (in the center)

Later, a sports club called HaPoel was organized in the city. It should be noted that we were the first in Poland to establish a HaPoel club. We organized a good soccer team, headed by Arjeh Bajuk, Chaim Piaseczny and other members. We set up a band and a drama group. The heads of HaPoel were people with great energy, such as Jakow Lew, Grosman, Hochberg, Zyskind Lachowicz, Symcha Gedanken, Gutman Beniek and dozens of other members.

Poalei Zion in our city began to prove itself as a representative of the workers' interests. Three weeks before Passover Eve, a gathering was held at the clubhouse for all the matzo bakery workers, who worked under difficult conditions and for a very inferior wage. Their situation was explained to them, and they were encouraged to strike to improve their condition. While the workers gladly accepted our interest in them, the matter became known to the Bundists, who came to hinder us. An altercation broke out, and the news reached the police, who came and arrested me and a few other members. The matter was very serious: first, we did not have a license for the meeting and, second, strikes were forbidden at that time. The remaining members elected a committee of workers from all the workplaces, and appointed Mosze Margalit to be the mediator between the bakeries and the workers.

Mosze Margalit continued the mediation as Chairman of the community committee of the city, inviting a few community workers to join him. Pesach Hochberg took upon himself securing our release from the police. As usual in these instances, Pesach knew how to get along with the police. He invited the Supervisor of Police to his home, plied him with food and drink, and said to him, "I want you to free our members immediately. They are not Communists. They have done nothing wrong." Of course, things worked out, and we were immediately freed.

The matter made waves everywhere, especially thanks to wide coverage of the party's successful strike in *Dos Vort*, the party's newspaper, which was published in Warsaw. The event made a big impression, especially on workers in our city. They began to

understand that we were loyal and devoted to the concerns of the working man.

I.

At that time, Meir Margalit arrived from Israel for a tour in Poland with the Ohel [Theater Company]. When we discovered that Margalit was in Warsaw, a delegation was sent to invite him to come to our city for a few days. He expressed his surprise that we had come to invite him to his own city, where he had parents, brothers, sisters, other relatives and many friends and acquaintances who had not seen him for many years. Was there any doubt that he would come to see them? We knew how to take advantage of Margalit's visit to our city. We organized an artistic evening in the city's largest hall. Within a few hours, all the tickets were sold, although the prices were very high. Even the anti-Zionists attended, in order to see Margalit. The evening took place with great enthusiasm. Hundreds of people could not get into the hall due to lack of space and waited outside until the end of the performance. When the performance was over, all those who could not get into the hall received Margalit with enthusiastic applause. The anti-Zionists went over to him and shook his hand. It may be said that he was the greatest Zionist propagandist of anyone who ever visited our city.

The idea of the Land of Israel penetrated deeply into the hearts of the youth. Dozens of members went to *hachshara*. People who were indifferent to Zionism began to hold discussions with active workers. Many began to understand that the Land of Israel had become the center of the life of the Jewish nation.

★

In conclusion, I would like to apologize to those members and friends whose names I may not have mentioned or have not placed in context. They are all beloved and dear to me. I have done my best to mention them all, but it is not always possible to overcome Pura, the spirit of forgetfulness . . .

I emigrated to Israel in 1935. I parted from our town, from Zionist comrades, pioneers and other Jews whose homes I had visited, and whom I often bothered with requests and demands that they contribute to the Zionist enterprise.

I parted from my grandmother, from my parents, from my brother and sisters, my uncle and my cousins. When I parted from them, I believed that the day would come when we would all be together in our land. The terrible thought never occurred to us that we were parting forever, that a bitter day would soon come when they would all be destroyed by the murderers.

Their dear memory will never be forgotten, nor will we forget what a bestial people did to the Jewish nation and to our townspeople.

Eliezer Lachowicz, Tel Aviv

Dodatek do tygodnika Bafrajung—Arbetersztyme № 13 (70).

יידישער ארבעטער וואל-קאמיטעט
פועלי = ציון
(פארייניקט מיט צ. ס.)
אין אסטראלענקא

2

שטימט
פאר דער ליסטע
נומ. 2

צו דער יידישער ארבעטנדער באפעלקערונג אין אסטראלענקא

זונטיק דעם 3-טן אפריל 1927 גייט אויר צו די וואלן צום שטאטראט אין אסטראלענקא.

אין א שווערער צייט פאר די בריסטע יידישע פאלקס-מאסן קומען איצטער פאר די וואלן.

ניט אין ארעמקייט, ארבעטסלאזיקייט און דחקות, הונגער און עלנט באגלייטן דעם יידישן פאלקס-מענטש:

דעם הונגעריקן ארבעטער, דעם אריסען בעל-מלאכה, דעם עלנטן קליינהענדלער, דעם אונטערדרוקטן יידישן האַרפּאשניק.

דער שטאטראט האט גרויסע מעגלעכקייטן צו פארליכטערן דעם לעבן פון דער באפעלקערונג. באפעסטן דעם יקרות, בילליקער מאכן דירות, ארבעט געבן פאר ארבעטלאזע פארקלענערן די שטייערן פון די אומפארמעגלעכערע קלאסן, פינאנסירן די שול-אינסטיטוציעס פון בילדונגס-אנשטאלטן, זארגן פאר געזונט פון דער נאנצער באפעלקערונג.

דאס אלעס קען טאן דער שטאטראט, ווען אין אים זיצן נעסרייע פארטרעטער פון דער בריסטע פאלקס-מאסן.

דאס ווערט אבער נישט טאן דער שטאטראט. ווען ער ווערט באזעצט ווערן דורך קשפיטאליסטן, וועמען עס גייט נישט אן דער אינטערעס פון דער אריסקייט. ווער עס לעבט אליין זאל אין רייך און דאנהם נישט טאר דעם אריסאם נוטן.

קיין אייגן שטים טאר דערפאר נישט אפנעגעבן ווערן טאר די סוחרים אין צינים, וועלכע קומען צום פאלקס-מענטש נאר בעת וואלן. ווען מען קען כאפן א בכבודיקן בענק אין שטאטראט!

אויך ווערט אויער שטים נישט אפנעגעבן טאר די בונדאוצעס, וועלכע זענען גלייכנילטיק צו דער נאציאנאלער באפרייונג פון די יידישע ארבעטנדיקע מאסן, וועלכע באשפייען אין באשטוצן די העלדישע ארמעס פון פראלעטעריון יידישן ישוב אין ארץ-ישראל!

שטימט פאר דער ליסטע נומ. 2 פון דער י. ס. א. פ. פועלי-ציון
(פארייניקט מיט צ. ס.)!

שטימט פאר די מסיקע פארטיידיקער פון די יידישע פאלקס-אינטערעסן!

שטימט פאר א פרייען, גליקלעכן ארבעטס-לעבן!

שטימט פאר אן אפרדענונג פון נעזעלשאפטלעכן יושר אין בריידערלעכער צוזאמענ-לעבונג!

שטימט פאר א פריין לעבן אין פוילן!

שטימט פאר דעם ארבעטנדיקן ארץ-ישראל!

שטימט פאר דער ליסטע נומ. 2

וואל-קאמיטעט

Red. N. Szrajbaum.
Sklad. w zecerni „Bafrajnug", Dzika 11.

Wyd. inż. Baumən
Druk „Radjo", Nowolipie 22

The HaShomer HaTzair Movement

When HaShomer HaTzair was established in Ostrolenka, we did not imagine that the birth of this youth movement would mark a great turning point in creating the image and ways of Ostrolenkan youth, in its integration into the redemptive Zionist action of all branches of the Working Land of Israel movement.

Like bountiful rain on thirsty land, HaShomer HaTzair burst with young strength into the soul of Ostrolenkan youths, in which there lay dormant a strong yearning for a change of the values of the depressing and withered life in the Diaspora. HaShomer HaTzair rallied the youth to a free Jewish life, to an upright Jewish stature and to a new life in society based on the principles of equality and justice in our old homeland. The movement awoke a new spirit in us. Possibilities in the great world were revealed by the continuous contact with the HaShomer HaTzair central leadership in Warsaw, and by frequent visits of its envoys to the Ostrolenkan "nest" [chapter]. It is impossible to write about the history of HaShomer HaTzair in Ostrolenka without mentioning the name of Pesach Hochberg, who was devoted to it with all his heart and soul. With limitless paternal love, he concerned himself with the success of the movement in our city. I will write separately about this wonderful figure.

With great respect, I attempt to put on paper the HaShomer HaTzair period in Ostrolenka and its spiritual light, which instilled great Jewish and humane values in us. This was a great and glorious period in our lives, one of unshakeable faith in the possibility of creating a better and more exalted life for our anguished nation.

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The establishment of HaShomer HaTzair is connected to two dates.

The first date is from 1924 to approximately 1926, under the leadership of Awigdor Eisenstein (my brother, of blessed memory). For him, at that time, HaShomer HaTzair had the nature of scouting, pure and simple, without a clear and consolidated political path. It made a very great impression on the lives of our city's youths, especially due to the external effects of its sporting activities. Before it succeeded in taking root in youth circles, however, a crisis broke out in Israel. This left such a grave mark that the nest's activities stopped. Confusion and helplessness reigned in the Zionist street in Ostrolenka. Those who left Israel began to come to Ostrolenka. The Bund immediately took advantage of the situation; nor did the Communists hesitate to plunge their hands into the pot. There was a feeling that all hope was lost. But we, a small group of HaShomer HaTzair senior members, about 17 years of age, could not reconcile ourselves to the situation. We, who had tied our personal futures to HaShomer HaTzair, and had hung all our hopes and ambitions on *Eretz Yisrael HaOvedet* [a Working Land of Israel] – we felt that our world had been destroyed. Because the nest had closed, we met in the street to consult about what to do. I remember the day that HaShomer HaTzair's fate was positively decided in our city, as a great day in my life and the lives of all my friends who merited being educated by the movement.



Members of the HaShomer HaTzair "nest" [chapter] leadership in the '30s

It was on a Sabbath afternoon toward the end of 1927. Autumn had passed and winter was about to begin. A few friends, we strolled to the municipal park: Alter Malowany (the brother of Josefa, who is in Tiberias), Jehuda Chomont, Chaim Piaseczny, Eliezer Lachowicz and I. (There were other friends, but it is

difficult for me to remember, and I ask their forgiveness.) While walking, we began to talk about our painful subject again. What will be? Someone said: "Take Rozan, a town much smaller than Ostrolenka, and it has a good nest. Krasnosielc is a tiny town, and it has a nest, too. And in Kolno and others." We were all of the opinion that we must stand up and do something. Someone suggested: "Let's rent an apartment, contact the central leadership and begin." Eliezer Lachowicz said, "There is a vacant apartment at my grandmother's. Let's rent it." Someone asked, "And money. . .?" Another said, "Let's collect money among those of us who are walking and rent the apartment." On the spot, we collected money for a month's rent, and the next day we had a HaShomer HaTzair nest. Our joy was boundless. It was as if we had been born again. Of course, we immediately contacted the central leadership in Warsaw, and they promised us a visit.

From among ourselves, we elected a nest leadership, composed of Members Shalom Margalit, Jehuda Chomont, Chaim Piaseczny and myself. (To be exact, it is difficult for me to remember at this time who else was part of the leadership.) When the revival of the nest became known in the city, youths streamed to us from all groups and ages, and we began to work. After a short time, the apartment became too small to hold such a great number of youths (about 300). Unable to function properly within the walls of the small nest, we turned to the committee of the Rightist Poalei Zion, which had a hall over Leszczinski's coffee shop. We asked them to let us use their hall for a short time and hold some of the nest's activities there, until we could rent a suitable larger apartment. We received a positive reply. Shalom Margalit moved over with his battalion (the Young Lions Battalion) to run battalion activities in the hall. Meanwhile, the longed-for visit from Warsaw took place. The name of the inspector was Szlamek Szytko (now Shlomo Elan, a member of Gan Shmuel). To this day, I have not forgotten Szlamek's visit. With his youthful tempestuousness, he won our hearts. He was a tall young man, from an assimilated family, about 18 years old. At a nest leadership meeting, he spoke to us in Polish, which was his mother tongue, and outlined for us a plan of action for the nest. His words were sprinkled with mischievousness and seriousness as one, as he lectured us on the role of HaShomer HaTzair among Hebrew youth. We were deeply impressed by his broad knowledge of painful and specific Jewish problems. After his visit, we felt a deep responsibility for the nest's fate. It seemed as though we had grown up all at once. With the strength of youth and great faith, we attacked the mission we were given.



"Beniamin", a group of youths at HaShomer HaTzair, with the head of the group, Shalom Margalit (center, among those standing)

After a short time, we moved to a larger apartment in the center of the city, at Frenkel's, on Lomza Street, opposite Krymkiewicz's big house. According to the central leadership's instructions, we also established seminars for educators in the nest. A teacher named Abel, from Ostrolenka's Culture School (now a member of Kibbutz Ein Shemer), participated in the seminars. I remember that he lectured on the history of education and knowledge of the land [Israel]. I lectured about subjects from Hebrew literature, the history of Zionism and Hebrew history. (It is hard for me to remember who else was among the lecturers at the seminars.) We were blessed with success. We trained many educators, heads of groups and heads of battalions thanks to these seminars.

We made a great mark on the Jewish street in Ostrolenka. Youth groups in the city respected HaShomer HaTzair, as it instilled Jewish and humane cultural values in Ostrolenkan Jewish society. At our initiative, a new HeChalutz chapter was established in Ostrolenka, to which all senior members of HaShomer HaTzair from the age of 17 belonged automatically. We joined the committees of Keren HaKayemet, Keren HaYesod and the Working Land of Israel League. We were in the Patronage of the city's Culture School; almost all its students belonged to HaShomer HaTzair. We were also among the founders of the city's HaPoel, which became well-known in the entire region. In all the

institutions mentioned, our representatives aroused respect and esteem because they fulfilled their roles with great responsibility and earnestness. A new type of Hebrew youth was created in Jewish society in Ostrolenka, possessed of cultural values and great ideals.

We went to summer farms for leaders and farms for younger echelons. We met youths from Rozan, Poltusk, Mlawa and others. We went to national conferences in Warsaw. New horizons opened before us. In 1930 or 1931, some of our members were at the conference in Warsaw for a Working Land of Israel. Ben Zvi from Israel – now its President – and Shprinzak participated in the conference. Vandervelde and his wife also came from Belgium (he was then Secretary of the Second International). This was a deep experience for us. There was a great holiday at the nest when we presented a report on the conference. We relayed speeches of Ben Zvi and Shprinzak word for word. We also reported Vandervelde's criticism of the Bund for its negative attitude to Zionism. The conference remains in my memory to this day.



"Laor", a group of young girls, at HaShomer HaTzair

I remember one other highly impressive conference in Warsaw. This was the Eighth National Conference of HaShomer HaTzair, which took place in the winter of 1930. Bialik appeared at this conference and captured all our hearts. The conference opened in the hall of the Conservatory in Warsaw. The envoys from Israel who participated in the conference were Emma Lewine, Awraham Rawicki, Ben Ami Gordon, Jakow Hazan and others. Icchak Greenbojm was also among those who greeted us. We drank in their words thirstily, and with devotion and the joy of youth we reported all these deep experiences to the nest's members. Thus, from nest to nest, a new image of Hebrew youth was created, proud and erect, imbued with the knowledge that it had been appointed to fulfill great and lofty missions in the life of the Jewish people which was being renewed in our land.

The nest's development was also greatly influenced by visits of leading personalities to the city. I remember the visit of Moshe Breslavsky (from Naan). With the fullness of our lungs, we breathed in the atmosphere of the Land of Israel and his song, *Rabbi Dovidl from Vasilkova*, which he taught us. Nachum Ben Ari from Ein Harod also visited our city and participated in a fete we arranged on the 11th of Adar, in memory of Trumpeldor. How proud we were of him, one of Trumpeldor's friends . . .

Icchak Greenbojm's visit, when he was a representative to the Polish Sejm, made an unforgettable impression on us. His visit symbolized Jewish honor, which had been raised from the dregs. Among the visitors to the nest was Icchak Hillel Grabie from Mlawa, Jechiel Harari – on behalf of the central leadership, Awraham Lipsker and Awraham Moskowicz. Among those who stayed at the nest for more extended activity were Sender Bachrach, Yakov Eitan from Beit Alpha and others.

In particular, I wish to stress that all events in the nest, its creativity and activity, and all incidents related

to Zionist activity that occurred in the area – all these began and ended at the home of Pesach Hochberg, of blessed memory.



A group of senior youths of the HaShomer HaTzair nest in Ostrolenka

With reverence, I attempt to write about the memory of Hochberg and his home. He was Chairman of the fund that redeemed and purchased the Holy Land for the Jewish people. It pained him with all his heart when someone failed to finish emptying the charity boxes in our region, for whatever reason. Anyone who failed could not look Hochberg in the eye. He would be furious, emanating reproof. It was as if this failure caused Hochberg personal pain and great sorrow. For Hochberg, Keren HaKayemet was a purpose in life, a lofty and holy ideal. The "Hochberg spirit" adhered to all Zionist parties that participated in Keren HaKayemet activities. We all admired and respected the man, despite his angry outbursts at meetings. We knew this came from his constant concern that the holiness he attached to the Fund's activity should not be desecrated, God forbid. He was the father of HaShomer HaTzair. His large, spacious home belonged to the movement. For every envoy who came to work at the nest – Hochberg's home was his. We felt warmth in that home. The relationship of his wife, Sara-Rywka, toward us was like a mother's. The housekeeper behaved as if her only function was to serve us. It was so natural and simple. We were connected to that home, which was always at our disposal. It was the committee-house and center of all Zionist work activity. When any personality visited the city, his first stop was the Hochberg house. Hochberg loved the HaShomer HaTzair movement with all his heart. He believed with all his might that a Shomer member was a man of truth. Therefore, he demanded more Zionist activities from us than from any other party, and was proud of our accomplishments. The nest's flag stood in Hochberg's home, in an important corner of its large room. Anything required for the nest's long trips – various utensils and the like – could be found at the Hochberg house. He concerned himself with all the little and big things for the nest. His ambition was strong to emigrate to Israel, but he did not realize his dream. The impure hands of the servants of the great enemy subdued him. May his memory be blessed. Alas for those who were lost and will not be forgotten.

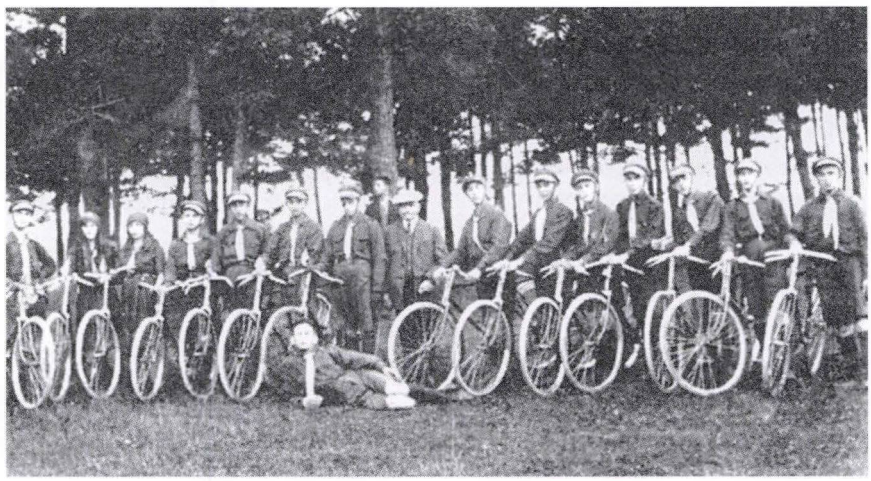


Members of HeChalutz emigrate to Israel in 1934 (in the center: Pesach Hochberg)

We will remember the HaShomer HaTzair movement in Ostrolenka with glory and heartbreak. We drank from its springs with the warmth of youth. We will remember all those who did not realize their dreams of emigrating to Israel, the land of great hopes. Our sons after us will remember our deep ties to the region of our childhood and youth, the Jewish Diaspora in Poland, the great contribution of Polish Jewry to building the Land of Israel, and the Jews of Ostrolenka among them.

Hanan Eisenstein, Ramat Yitzhak

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**The first Shomrim organization (a HaShomer HaTzair nest) 1923.
First from the right: Awigdor Eisenstein (Secretary of the nest). Last from the right: Mosze Gedanken (Head of the "nest"). In the center: Pesach Hochberg**

The HaShomer HaTzair Members' Hike to Myszyniec

About 36 years have passed since then, but I remember everything as if it were today.

From the moment we began to plan the trip to Myszyniec, each of us waged a hard struggle with our parents, who under no circumstances would agree to the trip. How could they possibly allow young children to walk 40 kilometers through fields and forests? When we explained to them, however, that a group of responsible adults would accompany us and, in particular, that Pesach Hochberg would be at their head – they finally agreed.

We packed our rucksacks, and early in the morning marched through the old market toward the big iron bridge, on our way to Myszyniec. After a march of seven kilometers, we stopped in the big city of Ladzisk, for our first rest. We opened our rucksacks and ate breakfast with great appetite. Our spirits were high. After a short break, we continued on our way. We sang songs of the Land of Israel in Hebrew all the time, and our enthusiasm grew. The farmers in the area listened to our song and said among themselves that these were the future soldiers of Palestine (they were not wrong, because most of the young people of our group did achieve this . . .).



Members of the HaShomer HaTzair at a conference in Wingrow in 1935

And so, after a few breaks for rest, we finally reached Myszyniec. I remember the first "reception"

with which Reb Icchak Meir, the well-known fanatic, favored us, accompanied by a torrent of cursing and swearing: "Why are your girls wearing blouses with short sleeves?! Why have you come here, abominations? To spoil our children? Get out of here!" But none of us paid attention to his words. We were literally drunk with the success of our hike. The local population, Jews and Christians alike, received us with warmth and friendliness. We finally got a break of a few hours and went to see the town. In the afternoon, we had a soccer game against the Polish scouts. I do not remember the result, but the impression remains that we won after scoring some goals. Almost all the townspeople were present at the game. For them, this was a big sensation.

Shimon Chamiel, Tel Aviv



A group of girls joins HaShomer HaTzair after finishing their school studies



A group of youngsters in the Tzofim and Beit Alpha movements in 1932



The Bnei Midbar [Children of the Desert] HaShomer HaTzair echelon in Ostrolenka in 1936
In the top row, standing first from the left, the head of the nest, Shalom Chmiel, who lives in Israel on Kibbutz HaMaapil
In the top row, standing second from the left, Beniamin Karlinski, passed away in Israel
In the top row, standing fourth from the left, Fruma Margalit-Yuvan, who lives in Israel
In the bottom row, seated in the center, is Shlomo Margalit, who lives in Israel
All the rest were killed in the Holocaust

HaShomer HaTzair as a Scouting Organization in 1921

With the return of the Jews to Ostrolenka after World War I, and especially after the war between Poland and the Soviets in 1920, new winds began to blow in the Jewish street of Ostrolenka. The Balfour Declaration and the famous slogan of Herzl, "If you will it, it is no dream", excited many Jews and awakened in them the hope of a social, economic and cultural revival. The brave deeds of the HaShomer people and, later, Tel Hai, where Trumpeldor and his comrades fell defending the Yeshuv [the Zionist community in Palestine], became a ray of light in the tractate of the revival of the Jewish people in the Land of Its Fathers. All this brought about the establishment of a scouting organization called HaShomer HaTzair in Ostrolenka (in addition to other Zionist organizations) in 1921. Members Sztokman, Awigdor Eisenstein, Mosze Gedanken and Eli Bajuk were in the movement's leadership. In contrast to other cities, where the ranks of HaShomer HaTzair were filled by aristocratic families – HaShomer HaTzair of Ostrolenka opened its gates to youths from the working class, something that aroused in us the hope of real Jewish life. Besides this, there were meetings and trips to cities and towns in the area, like HaShomer HaTzair's march in Ostrolenka, the famous bicycle trip with our sports group to Lomza and Czerwoni Bor in 1925, Lag BaOmer celebrations run by Pesach Hochberg, of blessed memory, comradely outings to the country and our return towards evening, when crowds of Jews came to meet us near the bridge. All these gave serious impetus to the flowering of Zionist activity in the city. A Zionist library and a drama circle were established and, in the municipal theater, a play was presented called *HaShomer*. Happiness and faith filled our hearts.

To our sorrow, the Fourth Aliyah brought bitter disappointment with it. In Israel, a crisis broke out and almost all the Ostrolenkan pioneers who had emigrated to Israel returned home. Black clouds covered the blue skies of the Land of Israel. This was the hour of the Bund, which rose up and openly expressed its pleasure at the Zionist "failure".

I remember how one of the Bund's most important functionaries expressed himself at one of their mass meetings: "I come now from the country called Eretz Yisrael, which is supposed to be the solution to the Jewish problem. I traveled its breadth and length, and searched for industry, work and workshops. I wandered on the sands of Tel Aviv until I reached a brick factory. I climbed to the top of the chimney, I stuck my nose in and tried to smell smoke – and there was nothing! Zionist bankruptcy!"

In addition, the migration of some active members of HaShomer HaTzair to Cuba and other South American countries led to the temporary paralysis of the organization in Ostrolenka. People became indifferent, depressed. But in the depths of our hearts there dwelled a strong will for revival, for renewal! We knew that there was no place in the Diaspora for Jewish youth. Under absolutely no circumstances! We felt that it was in our power to make the idea of the Zionist and socialist Land of Israel come alive.

One Sabbath in 1927, a group of Shomrim and veteran members sat in the park, sang Land of Israel songs and decided to establish the HaShomer HaTzair movement anew. Of course, we got "first aid", that is, money, from Pesach Hochberg, of blessed memory. He was a veteran Shomer, a patron and the person responsible, together with Eli Bajuk, *vis a vis* the Polish government.

HaShomer HaTzair renewed its activity, not just as a scouting movement, but also to implement pioneering. We began preparing members for a new life and hard work in Israel. We also renewed other dormant activities: Keren Kayemeth, Keren HaYesod, the library, etc. Already in 1928, two members, Jehuda Chomont and Chaim Piaseczny, went to the HaShomer HaTzair *hachshara* in the town of Rosz.

The events of 1929 and the fall of our comrade, Dawid Lew, in the battle to protect Jerusalem, led to agitation in the ranks of the pioneer-Zionist movement in our city. All the Zionist organizations came to demonstrations against the British Mandatory Government in Israel. A protest meeting took place in the study hall's courtyard, with a great crowd in attendance and the participation of youths and adults as one. The HaShomer HaTzair ideal penetrated more and more into the gray lives of Ostrolenka's working masses, and became a serious competitor of the Bund. Keren Kayemet and Keren HaYesod charity boxes made their way into inhabitants' homes and became something holy. Pesach Hochberg's great efforts should be mentioned here. His house became a center of

Zionist activity in Ostrolenka. He received the "Be strong and of good courage" gold medal from the central leadership for his devotion to the organization. This award was given only to very special individuals who excelled. Evening classes were established under the direction of Gedalja Rozenblum, the well-know Hebrew teacher. The Culture School was founded. It existed in Ostrolenka for only a number of years and then closed, because of financial problems and also because of the opposition of extremist religious groups in the Jewish population. Despite this, we continued holding evening courses, bringing the Hebrew language to the Jewish street.

In time, we founded *hachshara* kibbutzim. The first *garin* [a small group of people planning to establish a new settlement] of Kibbutz HaMaapil met in Ostrolenka. A *hachshara* point was founded in Chmielnik (in the region of Kielc). Twelve members went there, among them four Ostrolenkans: Jehuda Chomont (Icchaki), Fejga Granowicz, Szejna Calka and Chaim Piaseczny. We learned about life and about the insipid difficulties of the day.

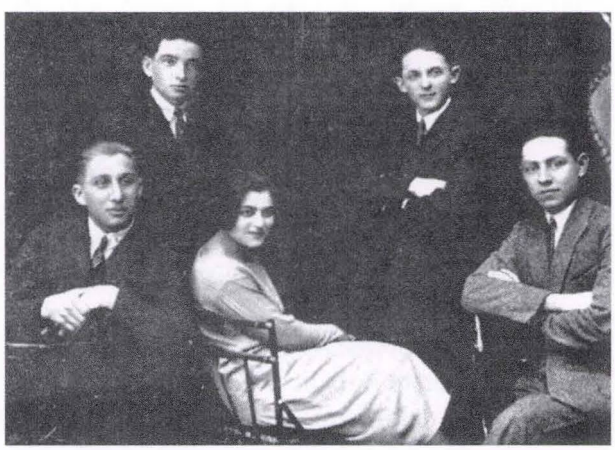
Brisk, 1934. The last stop on the wandering, pioneering way before emigration to Israel. A new generation with a different way of life took the place of the veteran members who continued to spin the thread of their ideals . . .

Many of the Shomrim and pioneers who went to *hachshara*, and were on the verge of emigrating to Israel, did not get to fulfill their dream, which was tragically cut off by the hands of the German murderers. They will always be remembered by Ostrolenkans in the State of Israel and will live in their hearts forever.

Chaim Piaseczny, Tel Aviv

HeChalutz

In the beginning of the '20s, HeChalutz was founded in Ostrolenka. Its first location was on the Lomza Road, at Walc, in a former factory. Members of the first leadership were Mosze Litwer (Chairman), Jechiel Szafran (Culture), Awraham Slazenger (Treasurer and Accountant) and Ester Izrael. Dawid Lew joined the second leadership.



The HeChalutz leadership, from the right, seated: Mosze Litwer, Ester Israel, Awraham Szlezynger; from the right, standing: Jechiel Szafran, Dawid Lew

The first HeChalutz members were Mosze Aron Sojka, Szlomo Benedon, Hersz Leszcz, Welwel Gedanken, Jechiel Szafran, Chana Kupferminc, Eli Bajuk, Awigdor Kupferminc, Grosman, Awraham Slazenger, Hercke Sojka, Chaja Gutman, Ben Zion Pianko, Josef Aron Leszcz and others. It should be noted that the following were very active in founding HeChalutz and strengthening its ranks in our city: the Secretaries of the Central Committee from Warsaw, H. Funt and Mr. Raszisz, and in the beginning, the well-known writer and Zionist community worker Josef Haftman, of blessed memory. They revived this Zionist youth movement. Our HeChalutz kept in close contact with the first two mentioned.

HeChalutz participated vigorously in all Zionist activity. It members were represented in every local Zionist committee, such as Keren Kayemeth, the Committee for a Working Land of Israel, the Jewish Agency, Keren HaYesod, etc. HeChalutz sent young members to *hachshara* in villages and on farms to work the land, with the goal of preparing them for life in Israel.

In 1925, a group of members, among them Dawid Lew and others, went to *hachshara* at Kibbutz Yosef HaGalili, near Szczuczyna, organized by the Lomza HeChalutz group.



The HeChalutz leadership in 1922 with the Member from (the Central Committee) in Warsaw: H. Funt (3rd from the right, standing) and Pesach Hochberg (2nd from the right, standing)

It was not easy for the HeChalutz Central Committee to allocate the certificates it received, even among members who excelled at *hachshara*. Among Ostrolenka's members, Meir Margalit and a few others received their certificates.

As is known, HeChalutz was a non-partisan movement. It was influenced, however, by the leftist Zionist parties, although among them were HeChalutz founders and members who favored the General Zionists. As time passed, the HeChalutz Central Committee also founded the HeChalutz General faction.

In 1924, HeChalutz of Ostrolenka moved to a new location at the General Zionists, in Leszczinski's home on Lomza Street.

A. Slazenger, Tel Aviv



The first members of HeChalutz

At the HeChalutz conference in Nowogrod





Dawid Lew in the center, with friends (last from the right: Awigdor Eisenstein)



A group of pioneers from different towns at *hachshara* in Bialaszewa (a village near Szczuczyna), among them HeChalutz members from Ostrolenka, such as Dawid Lew, Awigdor Eisenstein, Awrejmel Slazenger, Eliezer Lachowicz, Segal, Lewkowicz, Perkal, Zylbersztejn



"Flower Day" for HeChalutz with Pesach Hochberg



"Give land to a Jewish pioneer" – a "Flower Day" in 1922 with Icchak Rapaport (in the center), the Chairman of the General Zionist party in Ostrolenka, HaTikva

HeChalutz in 1932

After several years (approximately three years) of the complete paralysis of its activities, HeChalutz General of the Working Land of Israel in Ostrolenka renewed its activities in 1932 at my initiative, and with the help of the Members Jehuda Icchaki (Chomont), Wolfke Rubinsztejn and others. The long break was caused by several reasons: a. The bloody events in Israel in 1929 and their results halted emigration almost completely. The opposite occurred: many returned from Israel, among them Ostrolenkans such as the brother of Dawid Lew (may God avenge his blood), one of the first victims of the events, and others. b. At that time, serious candidates for *hachshara* and kibbutz life were members of HaShomer HaTzair, the only youth movement in the city that succeeded in attracting many youths to its ranks. The youth division of the Poalei Zion-*Freiheit* party had no luck. It had a small membership. Many members thought seriously of going to *hachshara* and to kibbutz, but they quickly discovered that, in this movement, the way to Israel was very, very long. Most of them left HaShomer HaTzair and, in any case, there was already no way to go to kibbutz and *hachshara*. Although they did not leave the Working Land of Israel movement, everyone became reconciled to the situation that was created. The hope of one day fulfilling the Zionist ideal did not weaken in them; they remained loyal within the camp, but without the burden of kibbutz and emigration. Because they lacked a meeting place in which to spend time together, they found a welcome alternative, that is, HaPoel, which had been recently founded. When they joined HaPoel, they all breathed easier. The trips with the soccer team to games, or with the band to dances in nearby towns, sports events, sailing, parties – all this came as a temporary alternative to fulfilling the weakened Zionist-pioneering ideal. This situation did not last long, however; the revival came immediately after the first call by some members, who took it upon themselves to reorganize and rehabilitate the HeChalutz General chapter. This was the impetus to *hachshara*, to kibbutz and to emigration.

I often met Jehuda Icchaki (Chomont) then, and we talked a great deal about HeChalutz and the possibilities of emigration. At those meetings, we decided and agreed between us* to rehabilitate the movement. I asked a few members to come to Wolfke Rubinsztejn's home. According to a list we prepared in advance, we sent invitations to a meeting with a brief agenda: 1. rehabilitation of the city's HeChalutz chapter and 2. miscellaneous. We distributed the invitations by ourselves, giving them to everyone by hand and asking them to try to come, because their presence was very important. And indeed, on the appointed day and time, about thirty people gathered in the hall we rented with the organizers' money. The meeting ran according to the planned agenda. There was a festive atmosphere and complete understanding. Everyone took the matter seriously and with enthusiasm, as if they had waited for this occasion. At that very place, a committee of three members was elected: Chawa Zabludowicz, Szlomo Zusman and Member Jasza from the *hachshara* kibbutz in our city (*HaMishmeret*). Chawa, the HaShomer HaTzair representative, took on the role of Secretary, because she was skilled at this work. She also had HeChalutz's seals, the archive and all the secretariat's material. She even did all this during the period of lack of HeChalutz activity. She remained in touch with the HeChalutz Central Committee and reported from time to time on what was being done and said at the HeChalutz General chapter in Ostrolenka, to which senior members of HaShomer HaTzair and *Freiheit* belonged.

The number of members was very small then, nearly zero. The only ray of light at the time of the HeChalutz rehabilitation actually came from the *Freiheit* youth movement (which did not know how to attract youths to its ranks). Two *Freiheit* graduates were at the *hachshara* kibbutz in Lida-Niemen, the only ones from the entire Working Land of Israel camp in Ostrolenka. Indeed, Poalei Zion-*Freiheit* took pride in them, during that period of lack of HeChalutz activity. They were Jakow Gercek (may God avenge his blood) and Cwi Dorfman, long may he live! At the beginning of 1932, even before the HeChalutz rehabilitation, they went to the kibbutz-*hachshara* together and, after a half a year, they were certified for emigration by the kibbutz. Cwi Dorfman emigrated in February 1933, with a HeChalutz certificate. He was the first HeChalutz member to reach Israel from Ostrolenka after the break caused by the events of 1929. After a short time in Israel, he brought all his family there: his parents and two brothers. They all became citizens, integrated into life in Israel and are there now. Jakow Gercek, may God avenge his blood, encountered financial problems and

* This was at the gate of the house of Mosze Sredni, may God avenge his blood. Jehuda came and went there freely, and had business connections with them.

could not raise the amount necessary for the expenses of the trip. He postponed his immigration for this reason. Meanwhile, the certificate was given to someone else. Gercek still hoped to immigrate, but he did not succeed in doing so, and was killed by the Nazi murderers, together with all the members of his family. May their memory be blessed.



"Gush Grochow" (kibbutz-*hachshara*) battalion in Ciechanow 1935. Szlomo Zusman (the 5th from the right in the row of those sitting), Jehuda Zamelson (the 8th from the right in the row of those standing)



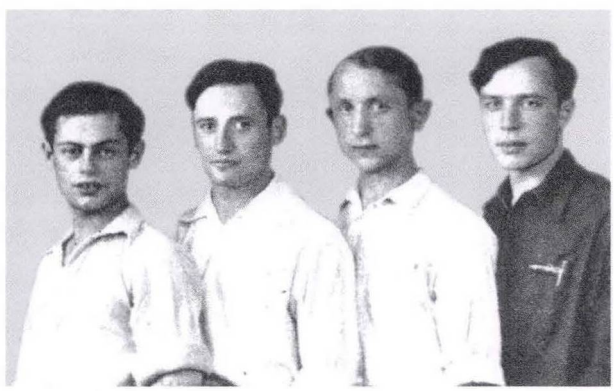
"Woodcutters" at Gush Grochow
The 2nd from the right (among the woodcutters): S. Zusman; the last from the right (standing): Y. Zamelson

There was a great deal of work to do in the rehabilitated HeChalutz chapter. We organized Hebrew evening courses, Sabbath evenings, lectures on literary subjects, sing-alongs, a general meeting once a week, etc. We participated in K.K.L., Keren HaYesod, Working Land of Israel Fund and Keren HeChalutz fundraising. We were active in all the city's Zionist camp organizations. HeChalutz General was a household name in the city, and it had a good reputation. In a very short time, HeChalutz numbered more than a hundred people. Among the devoted and active members in the Working Land of Israel camp in general, and HeChalutz in particular, Member Wolfke Rubinsztejn, may God avenge his blood, was especially prominent. He was a good friend and loved by all, modest, honest and humble. He was always among the first to answer every call and directive; he worked tirelessly for the Zionist enterprise until his last days. From a young age, he worked in his father's factory. After the latter's death, he bore the burden of supporting his family alone. For this reason, it was hard for him to go to kibbutz and *hachshara*. He hoped that some day he would succeed in joining those who did, but he could not. He was killed, together with his family. May his memory be blessed.

The establishment and success of HeChalutz General exceeded all expectations. People who were completely distant from the Zionist-pioneering ideal joined it, were quickly integrated and became inseparable from its veterans and activists. Work at the chapter went on in an orderly manner. Participation was great. Members were ready to go to *hachshara* and kibbutz. The list of the first ten members was prepared.

Since the HeChalutz rehabilitation, the first group was ready to go to *hachshara*, as an introduction to launching the next groups. I remember that when I showed the list to the committee, Chawa and Jasza (committee members working on behalf of HaShomer HaTzair) opposed including the members on the first list. Despite their opposition, I completed the questionnaires, signed them secretly (I did a daring thing, because they had the seals) and sent them to the HeChalutz Central Committee in Warsaw. After a week, certificates of approval arrived from the Central Committee for all the members included on the above-mentioned list, together with the allocation of places of *hachshara* all over Poland. . . When the matter became known in the chapter, there was great happiness. Everyone wished those going success and an easy absorption. Many envied them and wished that they themselves would be in the same position soon. . .

In January 1933, dozens of the first members went to *hachshara* kibbutzim: Jehuda Icchaki (Chomont) and Szlomo Kaczor – to Vilna, Becalel Markowicz – to Lodz, Szlomo Zusman and Jehuda Zamelson – to Grochow, Chaim Piaseczny and Lazer Lachowicz – to Brysk, Mosze Hersz Piaseczny, Beniamin Malach and Chana Eisenstein – to Baranowicz. The continuation was in the spring of that year. Lubka Lewin and Zyskind Lachowicz went to Lodz; Awraham Chmiel and Chanoch (Henach) Gingold joined them later. Groups came to the *hachshara*-kibbutzim in wave after wave. Anyone who wanted to and was ready could join the big pioneering camp, which worked in *hachshara* locations and prepared for emigration to Israel.



At kibbutz-*hachshara* Borochow in Lodz, 1934. From the right: Zyskind Lachowicz, Becalel Markowicz, Awraham Chmiel, Lubka Lewin

I want to add to the above list the names of HeChalutz members in Ostrolenka who went to *hachshara* kibbutzim in Poland (those who are not preserved in my memory and whoever I have omitted will please forgive me). They are: Cyrl Frenkel (may God avenge her blood), Rachel Blachowicz (Israel), Nechama Cukierkorn (Israel), Chana Glowacz (may God avenge her blood), Syma Szapira (Israel), Israel Ostynowicz (may God avenge his blood), Jehuda Arjeh Zlocisty (may God avenge his blood), Chana Dojf (may God avenge her blood), Necha Jetka Czapnikiewicz (may God avenge her blood), Szejna Dorfman (may God avenge her blood), Chawa Zabludowicz (Israel), Josefa Ryc (Israel), Josefa Malowany (Israel), Gita Rubinsztejn (may God avenge her blood), Szejna

Jagoda (Israel), Ester Eisenstein (Israel), Rywka Wajnkranc (Israel) and Chawa Wajnkranc (Israel).

We did not succeed in identifying the names of those in the last groups before the Holocaust. I am certain that the number of pioneers who lived and worked in the *hachshara*-kibbutzim in Poland from the Ostrolenka chapter was much bigger. Many of those I mentioned above were certified to emigrate by the kibbutzim and did not succeed in doing so because of the war. Many of those in the first group that went to *hachshara* in 1933 emigrated to Israel in 1935-36.

In our hearts, we will remember all those pioneering youths from Ostrolenka and the area. They were pioneers in their hearts and souls. They dreamed of Zion and yearned to emigrate to Israel. With terrible cruelty, however, the impure hands of the Nazi murderers ended their preparations for their dream and the object of their desire.

May their memories be forever blessed.

Shlomo Zusman, Tel Aviv

Freiheit



The Socialist Working Youth organizations – *Freiheit*, Ostrolenka chapter, 30.6.1933

In 1928, we – a group of friends – decided to establish the *Freiheit* organization. It was made up of former members of HaShomer HaTzair, and as well as supporters who were regular visitors at the HaTikva library, which was controlled by Poalei Zion (Z.S.) and the General Zionists – under the leadership of Icchak Rapaport, the brothers Szlomo and Eliezer Benedon, and others. The founders of *Freiheit* were Berel Zabludowicz, Motel Zutkiewicz, Jechiel Szafran, Josef Finkelsztejn and others. It was not easy to recruit new members, because the civil youth faction and the students were concentrated in HaShomer HaTzair, which had great influence in the city. Despite this, working class youths were organized in anti-Zionist



"Flower Day" for the League of Workers in the Land of Israel

parties, such as the Bund and the Communists. The Bund, in particular, was a strong factor in city life. The rich Peretz Library and the extensive cultural activity it conducted captured many youths. Despite this, we succeeded in gathering around us a group of high-quality youths with Zionist-Socialist outlooks.

Our Activity on Behalf of Keren HaKayemet

As members of *Freiheit*, we also participated actively in our daily work for the Zionist funds. The Chairman, Pesach Hochberg, of blessed memory, loyally served K.K.L. goals, and included us in all campaigns. He placed special emphasis on emptying charity boxes, "Flower Days", etc.

The Working Land of Israel League

After the establishment of the League, I served as its Secretary for a long time. Member Aron Szperling was the Treasurer, and Chawa Zabludowicz was the HaShomer HaTzair representative. We recruited a large number of members, collected membership dues regularly and succeeded in our activities. I particularly want to mention our mass protest in 1929 against the events in Israel, which Ostrolenka did not forget for a long time.

In HeChalutz

We were among the builders and founders of HeChalutz. In the beginning, work was conducted in different apartments. Later, when we were a recognized group, we found a suitable location and worked independently. We concentrated primarily on preparation for *hachshara* and the study of Hebrew.

Our members who went to *hachshara* continued to be active there: Eliezer Lachowicz, Hanan Eisenstein and Chaim Piaseczny – at Kibbutz Kleszv in Brysk; Jehuda Icchaki (Chomont) – at Kibbutz HaShachar in Vilna; and I – at Kibbutz Borochow in Lodz, where I served on the kibbutz committee and as its delegate in the *Freiheit* organization.

Zyskind Lachowicz, Tel Aviv



The *Freiheit* group



HaPoel, the Jewish Sports Club

The organizing committee of the HaPoel Jewish sport club in Ostrolenka, in 1931. (See those on the right) Standing from the right: Z. Lachowicz, Y. Icchaki, Y. Szafran, A. Lachowicz, H. Eisenstein. Seated: B. Zabludowicz, M. Zutkiewicz, Y. Lew, P. Hochberg, B. Gutman, G. Grosman

In 1931, the HaPoel club was founded in Ostrolenka. At the head of the organizing committee were Pesach Hochberg and Jakow Lew, the son Anszel Lew, who was well-known in town as a Zionist activist. At his initiative, a wind instrument band with splendid instruments was formed. In time, we succeeded in training an excellent soccer team that competed with strong teams, such as Maccabi from Lodz, Poltusk, Wyszkow and others. We beat them quite often.

Ostrolenka's HaPoel team played quite often against HaPoel Warsaw, which was one of the strongest teams. The late Member Hercke Sojka especially excelled in our team. Due to his influence, even a few members of the Bund joined HaPoel.

This is the place to stress once more that the extensive activity of all the Zionist organizations in our city was crowned with success thanks to the leading Poalei Zion members: Berel Zabludowicz, Motel Zutkiewicz, Jechiel Szafran, Mendel Szlafmic, Pesach Hochberg and others. They themselves, to our sorrow, did not realize their dream of emigration to Israel and see the founding of the Jewish State. Because of them, however, many pioneers and Zionists were saved from the inferno and live in the State of Israel today.

Zyskind Lachowicz, Tel Aviv



HaPoel, the Jewish workers sports organization, in Ostrolenka



HaPoel Ostrolenka at a soccer game with Maccabi Wyszkow





3





4

Four pictures of the HaPoel Ostrolenka soccer team (see two pictures on page 157). In picture 1, from the right, standing above: Jakow Lachowicz, Kugel (the instructor), Lejbel Perkal, Arjeh Bajuk, Hercke Sojka, Berel Bajuk, Roszeniak, Icchak (Tataleh). Below, from the right: Felhendler, Baldy, Chaim Piaseczny. In picture 4, in the middle row, second and third from the right, seated: Pesach Hochberg and Dr. Gutman.



The HaPoel band at a recreational evening in the town of Myszyniec

The Bund

In the mid-'20s, the wave of incarcerations against the Bundists and leftists in general (who were subject to the influence of the Polish-Soviet War) stopped. The Bund in Ostrolenka began its political-social activity simultaneous with its cultural activity around the Peretz Library.

During elections for the Polish Sejm (Parliament) in 1922, the Bund developed an energetic elections campaign, with the participation of speakers-guests from Warsaw. At the time, the Bund did not yet have an organizational staff to run the work. After two years, there were already many members and supporters in our city's Bund chapter.

A strong organization, including a developed youth movement, participated in the municipal elections. Two Bund members, Aron Zusman and Szaje Aszer, were elected to the city council. In the next elections, Meir Krymkiewicz was also elected.

Aron Zusman served in the municipal administration for many years. Thanks to his involvement and efforts, the distress of the poor and working class populations was alleviated; there was a grant for a Jewish kindergarten and evening courses for youth and adults interested in completing their education. For several years, the municipality took upon itself the complete maintenance of a night school in the hall of the Powszechna School, with the participation of local teachers. During that period, a department of CISZO (National Center of Yiddish Schools) was established, sponsored by the Bund, which ran a high level kindergarten with superb teachers. At the same time, they carried on vigorous propaganda, preparing the ground for the establishment of a secular primary school with Yiddish as the language of instruction. Because of financial constraints, the program never bore fruit.

At the end of the '20s, professional unions were founded. Among them, the leather and needle professions were active. They had a place of their own, where they held meetings, lectures and cultural evenings.

The Bund established a sports club of its own, called Morgensztern, with an excellent instructor brought from the Warsaw center. He organized highly successful festivals and showcase performances. The Bund's youth was the backbone of the Morgensztern Club. The adults' group was called Zukunft (Future) and the young people's group – Kif. The movement developed organized political and cultural activity, and participated in election campaigns, contributing much to their success.

* * *

The Bund's cultural-public activity was primarily concentrated around the Peretz Library. They attended not only to the purchase of new books, but organized regular weekly lectures on the subject of literature. Lecturers and speakers of the first order were invited from Warsaw, among them Jakow Pat, Aiserowicz, Mejlech Rawicz and others, who truly captured the audience. Political leaders were also brought, like Henrik Erlich, Victor Alter, Josef Chmurner, and not only Bund members, but also Y. Zrubavel, Dr. Josef Kruk, and writers such as Aron Zeitlin, Baruch Shaffner, Dr. A. Glicksman, and last but not least – our townsman, Yisroel Shtern (I write about him separately in this book). Leo Finkelsztejn was very successful when he visited us, as was Peretz Markish in particular. The lecturer, A. Abramson, an expert in the natural sciences, came to us for several Sabbaths in a row and conducted his talks, accompanied by pictures, in full halls.

We felt a thirst for culture and knowledge in all subjects. Every Sabbath, hundreds of adults and youths sat (and often stood) and learned "for the Torah's own sake". Breathless, in total silence, they swallowed every word that came out of the lecturer's mouth. Is this not reminiscent of the legend of Hillel the Elder?

Not everything that the lecturers said was understood by everyone. After the lectures, we searched for explanations of words in dictionaries and books, to better understand their thought processes. The youths of the *shtetlach* were often the butt of jokes and jests,

because they garbled strange words and unfamiliar concepts, or used them in the wrong place or the wrong context. But if we consider the matter seriously – a beautiful youth arises before us, full of ideals, searching for a purpose and meaning in its life. These young people were full of longing for the great world. Because they knew about it only through books and lectures, they perceived it in their imaginations and dreams as something wonderful. As some sort of compensation, they made do with the impressive appearance of famous writers. I remember a beautiful improvisation, combined with the words of the writer Peretz Markish in "Twelve Literary Masks", or Yisroel Shtern's delineation of the subject "Art and Poetry". A festive atmosphere pervaded the hall then, and the holiness of the Sabbath hovered in the space. During the weekdays, the Jews were prostrate under a heavy political and economic burden. Therefore, they breathed deeply when a speech of vision tore them away for a few hours from their gray reality and transported them to lofty worlds, to aesthetic and artistic heights, where eagles nest!

Few remained alive after the great destruction. To our city's dreamers, who had faith and ideals, who were drawn to the great world – when the world truly came to them, it was not one of great spirit, but a world of man-eaters. They raised the bloody ax over the heads of our beautiful and flourishing youth, and over Jewish existence in general.

May these lines be an eternal light for the lives that were so cruelly annihilated.

Yitzhak Kachan, Melbourne, Australia



The "Medem Group" (from Medema) in Ostrolenka
Above, standing: Lejbel Filar, Szajke Flamenbojm, Israel Symcha Chmiel, Ela Gutman, Szepsel Kachan, Lazer Lewy, Cyrl Bonciak
Center, from the right, sitting: Welwel Gilda, Gitel Zusman, Zelig Lachowicz, Icchak Kachan, Lazer Zlocisty, Chawa Szafran, Jehuda Mendel
From the right, below: Fejga Kowalski, Fejga S. Beck, Fruma Segal, Lea Toporowicz, Dora Blum

The Working Class and the Y.L. Peretz Library

At the time of the Polish regime, mostly working class people from the city gathered around the Y.L. Peretz Library in Ostrolenka. It is said that in the years of the Tsarist regime, the library, which was at the home of Herszel Rozenblum, was boycotted because of the contention that revolutionists aspiring to overthrow the Tsar met there. Herszel Rozenblum was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. After various incarnations, the library was reestablished, this time in the home of Zcharja Nadborny. As it was officially proclaimed his private library, the Tsarist regime did not touch it. The best youths of the city gathered around it, such as Awigdor and Awiezer Kupferminc, Herszel Rozenblum, Alter Szymon, Zysel Chacek, Icze Lew, Icchak Mest and others.

During World War I, the library burned down, together with the entire city. At the time of the German occupation, new winds began to blow. The government was more moderate, and this was exploited immediately by youths who aspired to new values. Various institutions were re-established in the city, such as the study hall, which was newly built, the Talmud Torah and *Linat Tzedek*. A city amateur circle and a professional union were established, and the Peretz Library was rebuilt. Revenues from the drama circle were dedicated to purchasing books. The Rozenbojm brothers, Szlomo Benedon, Herszel Rozenblum, Alter and Chawa Szyman, Chaim-Zalman Nadborny, Josel Wonszak, Aron Zusman and others integrated into library work. As people of different outlooks, they held discussions and exchanged ideas. When the regulations were formulated, two different camps were created: one Bundist – which was the majority, and the second Zionist – which was in the minority. The Zionist camp left the group and took the cash box with it (because the Treasurer was a Zionist). Thus, the Bundists were left with the books, that is, they controlled the library. The Zionists established a separate library called "HaTikva".

The lives of the city's youths were concentrated around these two cultural institutions. Each tried to organize cultural events, lectures, etc. Near the Peretz Library, a chapter of the Bund party was founded, with a division for youths called *Zukunft*, and *Kif* for children. Later, the Morgensztern Sports Club was established, as well as a professional union. Icchak Kachan, Judel Gutman, Chana Meir, Krymkiewicz, Dawid Segal, Szajke Aszer, Rojzka Zusman, Welwel Gilda, Gitel Zusman, Bercie Spokorny, the Jagoda brothers, Szmuel Toporowicz, Lazer Zlocisty, Zelig Lachowicz, the writer of these lines, and others were active workers.



The Bund – the HaTikva group



Aron Zusman



The Groser Group, with Szajke Aszer (in the center)

The activity of the Bund party, under the leadership of Aron Zusman, was intensive. It had a cultural-educational character. The best lecturers from Warsaw came to them. *Zukunft* activity was run by Icchak Kachan and Judel Gutman. They tried to delineate their political way for the youth. For the *Kif* children, who came from the poor classes, they provided the basics of the Hebrew alphabet. From early childhood, they became proletarians. The professional unions dealt with the protection of their economic conditions. This did not come to them easily, because their employers were also often penniless.

I remember the strike of the shoemakers' apprentices, which lasted several weeks. The "Children of the Proletariat" literally went hungry, dividing among themselves a single bun, and all to increase their salary for a day's work to 50 or 80 grosz. With this money, among other things, they had to maintain the movement's institutions, purchase sports accessories for the Club, new books, etc. Considering all this, one can appreciate the spirit of the youth of those times. Ostrolenka was not an industrial city, even though there were many working class youths in it, most of them tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, bakers, milliners and a few watchmakers – all Jewish professions.

The established *balabatim* also needed protection, economic as well as political. Anti-Semitism was rampant in Poland and searched for new victims to strike with disaster. This included raising taxes and the allocation of municipal work. Therefore, the Jews tried to elect Bund members as representatives in the city council. The poor turned to them with requests to alleviate their distress, to lobby in the municipality or even for help in writing requests, because even the pennies to pay for writing requests professionally were not to be found.

The Bund faction in the city council included the following members: Aron Zusman, Chana-Meir Krymkiewicz and Szajke Aszer. Later on, Krymkiewicz was replaced by Dawid Segal.

Aron Zusman was the mainstay of the Bund party. For all intents and purposes, his private home was sometimes like an office for writing requests. He recruited his sister, Gitel Zusman, to help. In time, she acquired a reputation as a skillful and efficient request writer. Usually, the requester was granted a tax reduction at the rate of fifty percent. Therefore, the poor from the Lenczysk neighborhood and from Benedon's Barracks were drawn to his house. During those hours, Aron Zusman would take off his dressing gown, leave his clients and run to the municipal secretary or to the mayor himself, in order to submit the requests and mitigate the evil decree.

A few episodes of Aron Zusman's activity are worth mentioning here. They did not always happen because of his political outlook, but because of the warm Jewish feeling that dwelled in his heart. Although his many friends warned him that this or that step might be to his detriment, Aron Zusman always acted according to the dictates of his conscience. As will be recalled, at the time of the Bolshevik invasion (1920), there was no lack of people who made a Communist career, in order to

find favor in the eyes of the city's Commissar. Because of informing by "types" like these, honorable citizens were expelled from their homes and forced to sweep and clean the city's streets. At the same time, their keys were taken from them and their shops robbed and plundered. There were also incidents where houses of well-to-do Jews were given to poor Gentiles, as if in the name of "doing social justice". If a poor Jew submitted a request for support, however, he was not even allowed to reach the Commissar. Aron Zusman could find no peace. He organized a delegation of Bundists, including, besides himself, Mosze Markiewicz and Awraham Nankin. They intended to protest before the Commissar against the unjust acts of those who carried out his orders. When the Commissar refused to receive them, they went to Lomza and demanded the intervention of higher authorities.

That very night, taps on the window of Aron Zusman's house were heard. To the question of Reb Icze, Aron's father, "Who's there?", came the reply "We would like a little water for a wounded soldier." The moment Reb Icze opened the window to fulfill the request – a rifle was stuck into the house and the demand was heard: "Aron Zusman is to come out immediately!" At the same time, a group of municipal militia men burst into the apartment and began a search. Aron Zusman was not at home at the time, and his parents immediately sent him a message to refrain from returning to the city.

As is known, the "liberators" were soon forced to retreat from Poland and the Polish government attended to the Bolshevik collaborators properly. But the bullies wanted to revenge themselves on Zusman, and therefore informed the Poles that Zusman, of all people, was working with the Bolsheviks. He was imprisoned and brought before the court of the Gendarmerie in Wojciechowice. A Jew by the name of Berman (not a resident of Ostrolenka) was a close associate of that field court martial. He knew Aron Zusman well and protected him vigorously, contending that the man was never a Bolshevik. Aron was released on bail until the civil trial. With the help of certain people, the entire file, with all its documents, was destroyed and the trial never took place.

Another interesting episode: as we know, there was a cooperative bank in our city, which used two rooms at the home of Josel Jalowicz (the son of Judel the Baker) on Ostrowa Street. As is customary in institutions of this kind, an administration and a bank chairman were elected. In the beginning, Efraim Chmiel was elected Chairman and, later, Aron Zusman. Needy people were not scarce then. Thousands of hands were extended for every amount loaned. Therefore, running such an institution was not easy. The next Chairman was Noske Jabek. Aron Zusman retired from his position as Chairman, but remained a member of the administration. As the saying goes, "A new head – new decrees". The new Chairman ordered that a statuette of Pilsudski be placed on the table at meetings. Aron declared that as long as the "idol" was not removed from the table, he would not come to meetings. The matter reached the Secret Police, and Aron was arrested and accused of throwing the statuette of the leader into the garbage can.

The court sentenced him to three months in jail. The verdict aroused a storm wherever Aron Zusman was popular. The party and his personal friends pressured the malicious informers, so that when the appeal took place in the court in Lomza, they backed down from the accusation. The deputy mayor, formerly a commander in Pilsudski's regiment, gave sympathetic testimony, so that finally Aron received a minor punishment of only ten days imprisonment.

An additional episode: this happened during the infamous days when a member of the Polish Parliament, Mrs. Prysterowa, proposed a law banning the kosher slaughter of animals. The Andaks in Ostrolenka (members of the Polish Fascist party) latched onto this as a "real find", and rushed to present a similar bill in the city council forum. Aron Zusman was not observant, but, as a socialist, he understood that the decree was aimed at the entire Jewish people. He launched a struggle against the proposal with all the means at his disposal. The Bund's Central Committee sent instructions about the matter to every division and to the factions in the city council. Aron Zusman, a member of the city council, made a fiery speech in which he ridiculed and "praised" the Andaks as so-called humanitarians. His words so infuriated them, that they flew off the handle and began throwing chairs at him. Of course, the meeting stopped. The Bund movement called for a general strike in the entire country. Due to the influence of the Bundists in Ostrolenka, for the first time in history, all Jewish stores in the city closed.

During the last years, Aron Zusman was on a strong financial footing. This was exploited not only for local needs; his address was also known far from our city's

borders. Party representatives were frequent guests at his home. He supported Jewish secular schools generously. The *Folkszeitung*, the Bund's daily newspaper, which often felt the hard hand of the Polish censor, also knew Aron's address.

When the Y.L. Peretz Library was closed by order of the Polish government, it reopened after a short time under a new name: "The library near Ostrolenka's cultural organization". Although this was the largest library in the city, it could not maintain itself financially, Aron Zusman gave over the use of two rooms in his house for the library, and it was forever free of the need to pay rent.

This unusual cultural institution was barbarically destroyed when the city was occupied by the German murderers – as if, in this way, they wanted to extinguish the torch of Jewish Ostrolenka. They packed thousands of the books into sacks and burned them, to the very last, in a huge bonfire in the market square.

Later, they did the same to the good sons and daughters of the city of our birth.

May the sign of Cain, of a curse and shame, be stamped on the barbaric murderers to the end of all generations.

Yisrael-Simcha Chamiel, Montevideo, Uruguay



A group of Bund members in Ostrolenka in 1934

Beitar

The year 1933 may be seen as the year of a fateful turning point in the life of the Jewish people in the European Diaspora, and particularly in the lives of the Jews in Poland – the greatest ingathering in Europe at the time.

There were several reasons. In 1933, anti-Semitism celebrated its first victory, as Hitler rose to power in Germany and the entire Nazi doctrine, with its various characteristics, changed from theory to practice, from vision to reality. The Nazi's venomous hatred of the Jews penetrated and took root in the nations of Europe, and poisoned the atmosphere wherever Jews were found.

The Polish population, which did not excel in love of the Jews, was encouraged by its German neighbor. Anti-Semites of all sorts rose up and carried out pogroms and attacks on Jews at different opportunities, at universities, on the streets of cities and towns. This came to a peak in the town of Przytyk, when Poles attacked the town's Jews on market day, and then – the well-known trial, which echoed all over the Jewish world, when the Polish government revealed its true face, pronouncing minor punishments on the rioters and heavy sentences on the Jews, who were protecting

themselves and their lives.

Things were not limited to physical attacks alone. At the same time, disinheriting the Jews of their economic status, a process which had begun gradually a few years earlier, increased. Various branches of trade and production that had been the domain of the Jews for generations were taken out of their hands by monopolization. The tax steamroller worked at full steam and the economic condition of the Jewish masses worsened daily.

Simultaneous with this deterioration from the outside, a storm began in the Jewish street itself. Nineteen thirty-three was an election year for the 18th Zionist Congress. The fervor of disagreements between various Zionist parties reached its high point.

At the same time, Revisionist Zionism developed, as did the Beitar (Brit Yosef Trumpeldor) national youth movement. The movement's foundation, the national Zionist ideal, captivated many Jews and won their hearts. Revisionist Zionist chapters and Beitar "nests" opened everywhere.

Youths who belonged to Beitar came from the echelons of pupils of government schools, where the language of instruction was Polish, and from the common people, whose language was Yiddish. It was necessary to merge them into one organization. Great attention was therefore devoted to the youths' spiritual training and to the use of the Hebrew language as the spoken tongue.

This spring-like spirit of renewal and revival also penetrated the city of my birth – Ostrolenka. It occurred in 1933, when the teacher, Mr. Peker, came to teach at the Hebrew Culture School, which had opened that year. He founded Beitar in our town.

The organization began with honorable and well-known families of the town – the families Byszko (now in Israel), Chmiel, Cohen, Kaplan and Gedanken. After them came many others. In the beginning, the Beitar "nest" numbered more than 40 youngsters. Over the years, their number grew and reached 80, a respectable number in a town like ours. Educated and intelligent youths belonged to Beitar. The only student in town, Idel Gedanken, joined Beitar and was the commanding officer at headquarters.

The officers were Byszko, Mosze Bejlis, Szmuel Koen and Chaim Wajnkranc. Eliezer Kaplan, Idel Gedanken and others were at headquarters. The Beitar "nest" in Ostrolenka developed extensive activity in all areas of Zionist and public life there. It was a factor of great importance for the local youth. The nest's work was varied: military and cultural preparation, summer camps, gatherings and lectures suitably marking all national holidays with impressive performances that brought a spirit of life to the town.

Together with the founding of Beitar, HaTzahar was established. The fact that the Brit HaTzahar Honorary Chairman, Mendel Gedanken, was Chairman of Ostrolenka's Jewish community for several years, testifies to HaTzahar's influence in our town.

In time, the Brit HeChayal organization was also established in our town. It marched for the first time in 1936, on a national Polish holiday. Commander Wajnkranc led the parade. The city's Gentiles stood stunned at the sight of Jewish boys marching under full military regimen, erect and with heads held high – something they had never seen before, and which was surely praiseworthy.

Meanwhile, the international situation grew worse, due to Hitler's great demands and threats against world peace. As a result, the situation of the Jews in Europe deteriorated, especially in Eastern and Central European countries. Jabotinsky tossed out to the Jewish world the slogan "Evacuation", that is, transferring a maximum number of Jews from Eastern Europe to Israel in the minimum amount of time.

Beitar headquarters in Ostrolenka turned to all the youths in town, without regard for party or movement affiliation or for viewpoint. It called on them to take advantage of illegal emigration, which the movement had arranged, and to emigrate to Israel. Many Ostrolenkans followed this thorny path of illegal emigration, actually reached a safe haven, put down roots in Israel and established homes and families. They included townspeople from other parties, such as Szejna Lachowicz (a member of HaShomer HaTzair), Mrs. Sara Dina Sobor, Berczak Finkelsztejn (from among those who opposed Beitar) and many others.

The fate of Beitar, Tzahar and Brit HeChayal members who did not succeed in emigrating was the same fate of all of Poland's Jews. The fate of our town, Ostrolenka, was the same as dozens and hundreds of cities and towns that the ax man rose up against.

Chanoch Chacek

My Memories of Beitar

I remember when Jabotinsky visited big cities in Poland to lecture and explain to the Jews that the time had come to think about a home of our own, and a kingdom in the land of our fathers. Many young Ostrolenkans came to hear his speeches and his prediction that black clouds were darkening over Polish Jewry. When they returned home, imbued with the Zionist spirit and love of the Land of Israel, they organized and founded the Beitar movement. The first founders of Beitar in Ostrolenka were Meir Byszko, Jakow Granowicz, Lejbel Czapnikiewicz, Mosze Rozonowicz, Szmuel Garda (all of whom were killed in the Holocaust) and other members who are in Israel. Meir Byszko gave over his room for this purpose. Later, a leader was brought from Bialystok, and they were joined by Members Szmuelik Kachan, Beniamin Kaplan, Awraham Falgan, Jakow Gedanken and Jakow Gorzelczany (one of the few who survived and is in Israel).

After a time, the members discovered that something was lacking in Beitar, that is, female members. They began to convince young women to join the movement. The truth is, at that time, the differences between the parties were not yet clear to me. I was a young pupil and getting involved in politics was not on my mind. My brother, Chaim, now in Israel, was already one of the leaders of HaShomer HaDati. I asked him to explain the political points of view and goals of the parties to me. After he explained the goals and points of view of each party to me, the idea of an independent Jewish State, without a foreign government dictating its life, was the one I favored, of course. My father, of blessed memory, did hinder me in this. On the contrary, he himself was an ardent Zionist (a Mizrachi leader) and wanted all his children to go to the Land of Israel to help to build the land. His usual saying was "Go, youngsters; we, the elders, will come there after you . . ."

When I joined Beitar, the chapter was run out of Filar's home. I remember a festive Chanukah party we held. After this successful evening, many female members joined Beitar, among them Bejla Klejnman, Chana Rzepka, Lejke Lewin, Cypa Szlafmic, Rojza Dow, Z. Gilda and others.

Our leader, Pajkowski, ran all the movement's affairs and was also the Hebrew teacher. He worked as an accountant for Mendel Gedanken to support himself. At that time, the Beitar chapter in our city expanded and many members were added. We rented a hall from Benedon. After Pajkowski, Member Szmuklarewicz became the head of Beitar in Ostrolenka. We were in the Beitar movement during the best years, from 1930 to 1935. During this period, I was appointed Secretary and leader of the girls. In Beitar uniforms, we marched with pride in the streets of Ostrolenka on Sabbaths. Often they shouted at us: "Rifles, swords, Fascists", but we paid no attention and continued to march left-right, left-right . . . The hardest of all were our confrontations with the Communists, the Bund and the leftist parties, especially when we were invited to participate in a parade in the city's streets as representatives of a rightist-nationalist party. The "war" began when we reached Benedon's yard, when a shower of stones, rotten onions and anything that came to hand was thrown at us. We got out in one piece, thanks only to our sister-party – Brit HeChayal. Its center was located near ours.

The plays we held were directed by Member Szucarewicz, who came to us from Zambrow. They are pleasant memories for me. We rented halls in various cities in the area and appeared, with great success. It is also hard to forget the large Beitar conventions in Czerwoni-Bor. We arrived there in horse-drawn wagons and met members of the movement from the entire region. Hoarse from singing, we went to Lomza after roll-call to listen to Member Isaac Remba from Kolno. After his speech, we got into the wagons again and returned to Ostrolenka. We had a holiday feeling of real happiness which remained with us all the way for many years thereafter.

Batya Byszko-Chamiel, Kfar Chasidim, Haifa

The Parties in Ostrolenka after World War I

In 1915-1916, the Germans occupied all of Poland. Our family and many others had already returned to Ostrolenka, which was shockingly burned. Fear gripped us when we saw the destroyed city. We got an apartment which once belonged to a Russian officer, on the street where the church was. The Lutnia Theater had been there. In this building, there were different wings and a garden in the courtyard. The "Japanese" Melamed and his family lived below, and he ran the *heder* there. Above, on the second floor, lived his brother-in-law with two children, a mute boy and girl. Another son who could talk, Motel Cycowicz, became a socialist community worker and a Bolshevik commissar in Ostrolenka. They smoked herrings for a living. The poet, Yisroel Shtern, who later became very famous, also lived in this building. A special chapter of this book is devoted to him.

The German occupiers treated the Jewish population with greater trust than the Christians. They even appointed a Jewish mayor, Mosze Aron Kaczor. "Those" Germans felt close to the Jews because of a similarity in their languages and for other reasons. What Jew did not know German? A famous Jewish saying was "What is German, after all? – faulty Yiddish . . . " There were also Jewish policeman, such as Pesach Hochberg, Josel Aszer, Noske Jabek, Berel Bajuk and others. Some of them took their roles altogether seriously, saw themselves as government representatives and treated the city's citizens, by comparison, as if they were occupiers.

In 1918, the Germans left Poland, the government passed into the hands of the Poles and, with the help of other countries, the war against the Bolsheviks began. The general situation in the city became harder than ever, because young Jews were drafted into the army, to the war on the Polish front, and many families were left without grown sons and without their support.

During that period, the only sources of sustenance for Poland and for the Jews came from America. An assembly was established; its role was to attend to all the needs of the Jewish population. Democratic elections were not yet customary, so respected and energetic *balabatim* were chosen for the community committee, such as Reb Welwel Benedon, Aron Jakow Margalit, Icel Sojka, Welwel Chacek, Zyskind Zusman, Srolke Chmiel and Josel Litwer. Their job was quite difficult. They had to raise the city from the ruins and take care of the Jews, most of whom were poor. In addition, they took care of refugees from distant places who filled our city (I especially remember the homeless who came from Pinsk and its vicinity).

The Jewish community did not have a home of its own. Meetings were held at the home of another member each time. None of them officially represented a defined political point of view. Despite this, each took care of those of his own class and his associates; one – the merchants, a second – tradesmen, another – Orthodox or Zionist Jews. I remember that Rabbi Icchak Bursztejn, of blessed memory, had already returned to Ostrolenka and also lived on the street where the church was. A difficult problem arose concerning kosher for Passover wheat. Armed with a special government permit, my father, of blessed memory, Icel Sojka, and a Jew named Keller went to Plotsk to buy wheat.

Later, when city life became more routine, libraries began to open. The first was the library of the Zionist workers: Anszel Lew, Jakow Bajuk, Israel Rubinsztejn, Jankel Kaplan, Mendel Bialy, Jakow Filar and others, as well as the young people among them, such as Szlomo Benedon, Icchak Rapaport, Icchak Lew, Bejla Gitel Rapaport (Zylbersztejn), Mendel Gedanken and others.

The youth did not follow their footsteps.

At the same time, a Poalei Zion library was founded. Wonszak, Chaja Margaliot (Rubin, today in Israel), Reuben Brysk, Ismach, Zabludowicz and others worked in it. A Culture School also opened. Among its founders were Calka Bursztejn (Colombia), Mosze Litwer, Chaim Awigdor Eisenstein, Szmuel Frydman and others. In the eyes of the government, the Culture School was the most "kosher" Jewish institution of learning. From then on, the Poalei Zion party began to develop in the Jewish street with lightning speed. At its head stood Berel Zabludowicz, Jechiel Szafran, Josef Finkelsztejn, Mendel Szlafmic, Mosze Aron Sojka and others.

During that period, the great emigration to Israel began. Almost all those mentioned above left their homes in Ostrolenka and emigrated to Israel. After they left, party activities weakened. Those who came after them were unable to continue at the same pace.

Meanwhile, bad news came from Israel: lack of work and confrontations with Arabs occurred daily – and everything under the "supervision" of the British Mandatory Government.

A townswoman of ours, Chaja Sojka (today Jablonka, in Israel), married Motel Zutkiewicz, a Lomzan. The couple settled in Ostrolenka. Zutkiewicz, a member of Poalei Zion in Lomza, was very experienced. Together with Mosze Margalit (who was at one time head of the community), he was recruited to work in the party. In a short time, they made it flourish as in the past.

Because of the depressed situation in Israel, the Bund in Ostrolenka became very strong. The Bundists spoke not only to the mind of the youth, but also to their stomachs, to the practical sense. It explained to them that the idea of establishing a Jewish State in the chosen land was bankrupt, that there was no reason to leave warm, secure homes, and that it was better to fight here for a better tomorrow. They pointed to the number of those who had returned from Israel, although they had not returned because of ideological disappointment, but for family reasons.

Those who returned were uneasy and felt a certain despondency. In time, they returned to their party activities. It is interesting that none of them changed their political outlooks. On the contrary, everyone who returned found comfort in working for the realization of the ideal of the Land of Israel. This work gathered impetus daily and was wonderfully organized. The goal was to achieve status in the Jewish community, and strong representation in the city council and all other municipal institutions.

Representation of Jews in Polish institutions always depended on the view of the government at specific periods. When the Andaks (the Polish Fascist party) ruled, they made sure that the Jewish population was represented by Agudat Yisrael. Indeed, the community chairman then was Reb Chaim Pinczas Gingold and, at his side, his close associates, Jakow Nasielski, Barszcz, Dancyger and others. They attended to the needs of the religious fanatics, brought in the famous community worker, Sara Schenirer, who founded *Bejt Jakow*, and made radical religious demands.

As soon as the government in Warsaw changed, there was also compensation for the Jews. Mendel Gedanken and his associates governed the community.

On the other hand, when the Polish government, headed by Pilsudski, came to power, Mosze Margaliot received the majority of the community committee votes. A former junior officer in Pilsudski's army, he was friendly with many of the ruling Polish elite. He was also an activist in Poalei Zion – a party that already had many prerogatives among the city's Jews, had won elections and carried out an uncompromising struggle against the well-organized Bund party, against Agudat Yisrael and against the General Zionists, who represented the merchant class. The tradesmen organized themselves, because they did not want to place their fate in the hands of others.

On Election Day, the Zionist youth movement – HaShomer HaTzair, HeChalutz and *Freiheit* – placed themselves at the disposal of the Poalei Zion party with great enthusiasm, and helped win the election. Mosze Margalit was elected community chairman and, with him, Members Motel Zutkiewicz, Berel Zabludowicz, Szlafmic and others.

When elections to the Polish Parliament (the Sejm) drew near, Jewish personalities who saw themselves as potential representatives began to come to various cities for propaganda visits. Among them were Icchak Greenbojm, Rabbi Rubinsztejn, Anszel Rajs, Szczupakiewicz, Mejlech Najsztad and others.

When they were about to visit Ostrolenka, the problem of finding a hall suitable for a mass gathering arose. The only suitable place was the Lutnia Theater, which belonged to the church. Its custodians were representatives of the Polish Andaks party. Of course, they usually refused to rent it to Jews. Instead, we held gatherings in the large study hall, which could hold a large crowd. The community's representatives never refused to grant use of the study hall for such purposes. The Zionist circles organized groups responsible for keeping order, so that assemblies would not be disturbed by opponents. Indeed, every meeting took place with great success and without disturbances.

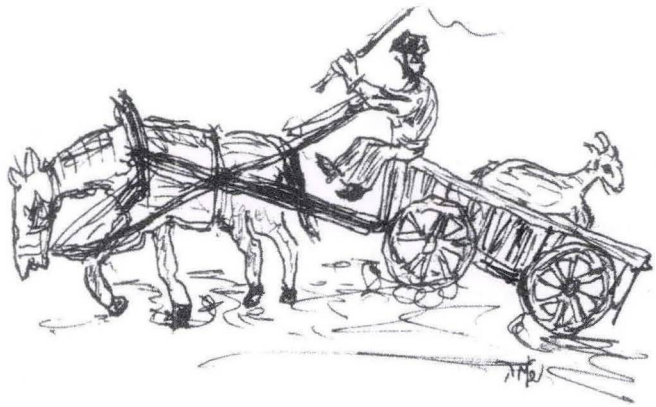
* * *

In the State of Israel, we meet members who went to *hachshara* at that time in Ostrolenka, Wyszkow, Mlawa, Poltusk and other places before emigrating. There was no industry in Ostrolenka. Bialy's sawmill and the large municipal flour mill were some of the few places of work. Another kind of work was woodcutting. Jewish mothers, however, would not allow their sons to do this kind of work in the snow and frosty weather. It

was only suitable for Gentiles. They did not consider that their "good heartedness" might hurt their children, especially those who aspired to emigrate to Israel.

Poalei Zion representatives in the Jewish community and in the city council helped financially, as well as in preparing immigration documents according to the government's demands. Many of our members, I among them, succeeded in reaching Israel. Most, however, did not. They were killed by the German murderers. Their bodies and their dream of free and productive lives in the Land of Israel were burned and turned to ashes.

Shalom Margalit, Tel Aviv



Personalities and Community Workers

Henach Flakser (1878-1943)



My father, Reb Henach Flakser, was brought to Ostrolenka as a young prodigy. After becoming the son-in-law of Efraim and Frejdele Goldbruch, they supported him permanently in their home. He had rabbinical ordination and was supposed to be the rabbi of the town of Kol, in the Kalisz region.

He organized the first loan and savings fund in Ostrolenka, which helped many storekeepers and tradesmen when the Poles imposed a boycott on Jewish businesses during World War I. He even organized a group of Jewish firefighters when the suspicion arose that the Poles not only refused to save Jewish property, but that they themselves were the arsonists.

My father was elected as an "elector" to the Duma, the Russian Parliament. The voters in the *shtetlach* assembled in Lomza, the district city, to elect their representative to Parliament. His election was a great victory for the Jewish population, because the anti-Semite, Dr. Psarski, ran against him.

All this extensive activity did not prevent Henach Flakser from learning Torah every morning with a group of young men from the city's elite. Among them was also Yisroel Shtern, who became a famous poet.

The destruction and expulsion during World War I brought him to the town of Chorol, in the Poltawa district, where Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski lived. The latter was the rabbi who had ordained him, and who served earlier in Ostrolenka and later as the Rabbi of Kielc. When the war ended, he [Flakser] settled in Warsaw, from where he was sent to Treblinka, with all the Jews, by Hitler's emissaries.

Menachem Flakser

Mendel Bialy



Outside the city, on the way to the village of Lenczysk, sprawled a large plot enclosed by a fence, which belonged to Mendel Bialy. Here stood his sawmill, which supplied boards to all the Gentiles in the area. He also sold wood to Jewish merchants in our city and in towns in the area. At the entrance to his yard lay thick logs, the age of which only real professionals knew. When it seemed as if they would lie there forever, they were suddenly loaded on carts that took them by a track straight into the sharp teeth of the saws. In a short time, the logs became long, straight boards. Piles of boards, newly sawn, sorted and arranged lay in the yard, ready to be transferred to the train, loaded on rail cars and sent to different places, to merchants who had ordered them.

The house of the owner, Mendel Bialy, stood among the piles of boards. In contrast to the sawmill's noises and sounds, which could be heard from afar, rare

quiet and serenity prevailed in the house, as was proper in one of the most beautiful homes in Poland before the war. The Bialy family was one of Lomza's most respected families.

Motel Bialy from Lomza, also a sawmill owner, was a member of the wealthy echelon, a Bund adherent and supported the organization with advice and deeds. His brother, Mendel Bialy, who owned the sawmill in Ostrolenka, was an ardent Zionist and actively participated in work for the Land of Israel funds. He was Chairman of the city's Keren HaYesod committee. All meetings concerning the distribution of monies, in which representatives of the Center in Warsaw participated, were held in his home. The host influenced those gathered by his refined and modest behavior. Everyone tried to refrain from unnecessary comments and to suit himself to the host's character. He espoused the motto "It is not the talk that counts, but the deed". All Keren HaYesod documents and correspondence were administered by him in an exemplary way, with no less attention than his private business. He was gladdened by every success. Due to his unstable health, he was unable to participate personally in the collection of monies, but he took care that no wealthy person was missing from among the donors.

Because of his poor health, Mendel Bialy was not involved in community matters in the city, except for his Keren HaYesod activity. Indeed, his gentle character was unsuited to participation in matters that often required vigorous struggles and demonstrations of stubbornness and audacity. The entire city's population, Jews and Christians alike, treated him with honor and respect. He was a generous philanthropist. At every fundraising campaign, even for non-Zionist purposes, he contributed the highest amount. He received fundraisers warmly and gave them his donation with a smile. They left his home proud and encouraged.

Alas for those who were lost, and will not be forgotten!

Chaim Drezner

★

He was from Lomza, from a distinguished family. His family lived outside the city, among the Christian population, and was greatly respected by the latter. He was not a *"Ma Yafit"* Jew and did not like flattery, God forbid. He was a proud nationalist Jew. His was, I think, the only house in which a map of the Land of Israel was hung on the wall. For years, a teacher came to his house and taught Hebrew to his children. Mendel Bialy was a Zionist in his heart and soul, and worked on behalf of Israel and the funds. His personality may be summed up as one of "gentle ways".

Moshe Kamin, Netanya

★

As already mentioned, he was an affable man. A quiet man, gentle and refined in his treatment of everyone around him, with humane sensitivity toward opponents as well.

While Mendel Bialy was modest, he changed completely where any Zionist matter connected to the Land of Israel was concerned. He was a zealous Zionist, uncompromising, as if the love of Zionism and the Land of Israel were the sole foundations of his existence. In his eyes, anything without affinity to Israel was not "glatt kosher".

The story of the *etrog* [citron], which I will never forget, proves his love of everything connected with the Zionism rooted in his heart, and his yearning for the Jewish State. Mendel Bialy heard that the *etrog* we bought to use for the blessing in the synagogue on the first day of the Succot holiday was not from Israel. (There was also an *etrog* from Israel that was sold at a very high price.) He took a pocket knife out of his pocket and, in our presence, cut the *etrog* into four parts. Then he said, "Here you are. Now, each of you can make a blessing on your own part . . ."

As a Mizrachi activist, I once met with him regarding the Zionist funds. I can testify that he was one of the most refined and gentle figures in our city, devoted to Zionism.

David Kaspi (Sarniewicz)

Mosze Aron Kaczor



He was born in Ostrow-Mazowiecki in 1870. In his youth, he studied at the yeshiva in Ostrow. Later, he married Rejzel, the daughter of Welwel Benedon of Ostrolenka. When he came to Ostrolenka, he worked with his father-in-law in the wood trade and was active in the Mizrachi movement. In time, he became involved in municipal matters, primarily, committees for the welfare of the general population.

At the time of the German occupation during World War I, he was appointed mayor by the German regime. In 1918, the government passed into the hands of the Poles. Although they persecuted those who cooperated with the Germans, they permitted my father to continue in his role as mayor. During that period, anti-Semitism was rampant in Poland. Pogroms against the Jews were daily affairs. Certain anti-Semitic leaders, who knew about my father's good deeds on behalf of the Polish population, saved him from serious danger and harm during the pogroms. From this, one can understand how great my father's influence was in general municipal matters.

My father served as mayor until 1922.* The Poles then suggested that he continue as deputy mayor. In time, he also became very active as head of the Jewish community, and helped rehabilitate Jewish organizations that did not function during the war.

My father, of blessed memory, devoted much of his time to Zionist activity in various funds and committees. He was also one of the organizers of the soup kitchen, which distributed free meals to Ostrolenka's poor families. Later, my father was a member of a delegation to the governor in Warsaw, together with the Jewish leaders Icchak Greenbojm, Rotensztreich and others, regarding urgent matters that concerned the Jewish population.

It is appropriate to mention the following incident: when my father was appointed mayor during the German occupation, he received a congratulatory letter from Fon-Papen, the Interior Minister at the time. The latter expressed his readiness to protect him at any time, and recommended that he contact him in the event of any trouble or danger. During World War II, when the Nazi murderers rampaged in our city, my father did not want to exploit this favoritism, and said, "I am going with all the Jews!"

My father was killed in the Vilna Ghetto, together with his wife, Rejzel, their sons Lejbel and Azik, and their families.

May God avenge their blood.

May their memories be blessed.

His son, **Shlomo Kaczor**, Haifa

★

Chaim Pinczas Gingold

One of the most interesting and respected figures in Ostrolenka. A learned man, among the intelligent Gur Chassidim and, in addition, a noted community worker, a *gabbai* of the synagogue, a member of the city council and, later, Chairman of the Jewish community. Reb Chaim Pinczas was an honest man who did not know what flattery was. He was unwilling to accept anything unjust. On the other hand, as to things that were right and true, he zealously protected them with all his Chassidic soul, and was proud of being Jewish.

During that period, the *Halerczy* attacked Jews in the streets and cut off their beards. Once, an anti-Semitic bully attacked him. He did not surrender, but grabbed a brick, ready to throw it at the bully's head. The Gentile froze in his place, mouth agape. Thus he saved his beard and his Jewish honor.

Once, the question arose of accepting two new ritual slaughterers in the city. (Cywiak and Meirel, who wanted to become slaughterers when they did not succeed in business.) Chaim Pinczas, as head of the community, strongly opposed this. He saw this as

* According to Polish sources, the city council chose the Pole, Wladyslawa Banacza, as mayor of Ostrolenka in 1919.

injurious to the incumbent slaughterers, because the community could not promise a livelihood to more than three slaughterers. The dispute became worse, sides for and against were created, and an intransigent struggle was carried on using kosher and not-so-kosher means. . . The *shtebl* of the Gur Chassidim divided into two camps. Reb Chaim Pinczas, who led those opposed, won the struggle. The two new slaughterers were not officially accepted; however, those who favored them enjoyed their services "on the quiet" and used their meat. (It is said that later on, the community accepted Cywiak as an official municipal slaughter.) Since then, however, there was no "domestic peace" in the Gur Chassidim *shtebl*, even after the Rabbi of Gur, in person, became involved in the matter and stopped the war between the sides.

His wife, Judyt, was among the righteous women and excelled in good deeds. She was the daughter of Meir Chassid Kajmowicz from Lomza, one of the Sokolow Chassidim and a great *lamdan*. While she did not always agree with her husband's position on public matters, she was of the opinion that his work for the general good was not sufficiently appreciated in the city. She cooperated with him in particular when he collected money for giving charity secretly to the suffering and the needy, and for the lending bank, with a weekly payment of one zloty.

After World War I, when his glass factory was burned with all the other buildings in the city, he opened a sewing notions store where his wife, Judyt, ruled. The store was in the building he owned in the old market square.

Reb Chaim Pinczas was very active in the operation of the American soup kitchen during the German occupation. Together with Lejbel Korman (Trocky), he participated in supervising the construction of the municipal *mikveh* and was also a member of the committee which administered the municipal loan fund.

Reb Chaim Pinczas Gingold was born in Opocznie, near Lomza, and lived all his life in Ostrolenka. He passed away in 1938, a year before World War II broke out. His sons and daughters, Chanoch, Lazer, Herszel, Lejbel, Chaja Gingold and Tanja Cuker, live in Australia today. May his memory be blessed.

Y. I.

Lejbel Barszcz



He was from Makow-Mazowiecki. He married an Ostrolenkan and became an inhabitant of our city. After a number of years, he was elected head of the community. In the beginning, people were skeptical: so young and relatively new in our city, and already elected Chairman?! But all these questions were answered when Lejbel began running the community. He took his position seriously and filled it responsibly. His principle was to work faithfully for the public's needs. He was supported by Agudat Yisrael. They hung their hopes on him as a future politician, because he was from the Gur Chassidim and had a sharp mind. He acquired the trust of all circles, however, because he knew how to treat people. He was punctilious about good manners and tried to prevent disagreements. Before I went to Australia, he talked with me more than once and consulted about his problems. He had a visa to Australia, but here, in Ostrolenka, "I dwell among my people". And what would happen there concerning Sabbath observance and Jewish laws in general? No, he preferred to stay where he was. "What will happen to three million Jews – will also happen to me."

He was killed in Molczat, where he ended up, together with many Ostrolenkan Jews, and shared the fate of not three, but six million Jews . . .

Yitzhak Kachan

Icel Sojka



In a sense, Icel Sojka was unusual among community workers. He was born in Ostrolenka to a Chassidic family, and married the sister of the famous Hebrew writer from Chorzel, Fiszel Lachower. After the wedding, he opened a fabric store, but his temperamental disposition of a community worker did not permit him to stand quietly in the store and measure meters of material. He brought material from Warsaw and his wife and, later, his children, worked in the store. Icel concerned himself with public matters, often until late into the night.

Although he had not studied in schools, he knew how to speak and write in Russian and Polish. Even later on, when he became Leszcz's partner in the big flour mill and in the large building at the corner of Lomza Street and the market, he was at the mill very little. Even in the bosom of the family, he did not have peace. Every day, embittered and needy people turned to him, airing their requests and complaints, some about excessive taxes, some about other matters. Icel Sojka was a member of the evaluation committee, and had great influence in this area. Icel and his wife were affable and never got angry that people were disturbing them and taking up their time.

Icel was a Worka Chassid, and among those who prayed morning prayers on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur in his *shtebl*. He loved Jewish tradition with his heart and soul. Every morning, he walked along with his big prayer shawl bag and was punctilious about communal prayer.

Although he did not belong to any party officially, he was a member of the city council for a long time, representing the entire Jewish public. The extreme leftists also supported him, because they knew that Sojka would honorably and honestly protect the interests of all Jews, without exception. He came to council meetings prepared, equipped with all necessary information, even if it concerned the general population's problems, and not only the Jews'. The Gentiles also liked to hear his wise opinions about the city's economic problems.

At a time when many Jews exchanged their long *kapotas* for modern suits, Sojka was not ashamed of his Jewish attire. He was modest and did not look for honors. He saw himself as one of the people. He went his own unique way, without irking or humiliating anyone. Although he never wanted to fit into a narrow party framework, because he favored building the Land of Israel, he supported this enterprise with all the means at his disposal. He was the most suitable representative in the city council of all Jews, and of the observant in particular. All echelons of the Jewish townspeople respected his behavior. Often, at meetings about the townspeople's concerns, when there were complaints about the lack of protection of Jewish municipal concerns at the city council, it was Icel Sojka, in a quiet and logical way, who proved that it could not be otherwise – and thus the complaints were closed. In the eyes of all, he was suitable and important as their city council representative.

Icel Sojka shared the fate of all Ostrolenka's Jews, at the time of the extermination of the Jewish population in Slonim.

May his memory be blessed.

Chaim Drezner

Zalman Chanoch Gorzelczany



When we describe Zionist activities in Ostrolenka, and those involved in them, Zalman Chanoch Gorzelczany has a place of honor at the eastern wall. Even if it hurt his livelihood, if a matter concerned the Land of Israel, nothing was dearer to him.

He was principal of the Yavneh School, where children whose parents were anti-Zionist also studied. He was often warned that, as principal, it was best not to emphasize his viewpoint. To this he replied, "I will not object if you limit me in anything else, but for Israel and Zionism, I am ready to lose my livelihood. No one will hinder me from my activities!"

At his public appearances, he fulfilled the phrase "All my bones will praise . . ." He was glad of any good news from Israel and fully believed that the settlement of the Land of Israel was the beginning of the redemption. Although he did not know how and when it would happen, he aspired to realize his life's purpose – to settle in Israel.

Although he was extremely busy as principal of the Yavneh School, which had about one hundred pupils and where he taught many hours a day in different classes, he participated in all Zionist meetings as a Mizrachi representative, together with his good friend, Efraim Chmiel. If he suspected that an injustice was being done to the Mizrachi movement, he immediately made an emotional speech about protecting his movement, using all his rhetorical talent. All the city's Zionist factions, and the left among them, treated him reverently, because they knew that Israel and Zionism were part of his soul, his life. The Yavneh School, which he founded, was one of the most superb educational institutions of its kind.

The Mizrachi center in Warsaw often proposed that he join them and travel all over Poland to propagandize for the party. He refused, because he did not want to leave his city, even for a few days. Ostrolenka, with all its Zionist parties, was dear to his heart.

When the Nazis banished Ostrolenka's Jews, after much hesitation, he went to Slonim, where he had been a Hebrew teacher many years before. I heard that during that stormy period as well, he did not neglect education.

To this day, his later history is not known to me.

C. Drezner

Efraim Chmiel

When we describe the typical "types" of our city, Ostrolenka, such as workers devoted heart and soul to public affairs, we must mention Efraim Chmiel, may God avenge his blood, who held an important place in the gallery of honor of our city's personalities.

An uncommon prayer leader and Torah reader, he demonstrated his beautiful voice. He attended nearly every joyous occasion, and used to sing the well-known song, *The Contrasts*. I thought then that he, himself, was a person of contrasts. On the one hand, he took care of small children, whom he supported and educated, so that they would grow up well. This was the aspiration of his life. He was devoted heart and soul to his children's education. On the other hand, he always answered every call to meetings where matters of the needy Jewish population would be discussed. Meetings of this kind did not occur without Efraim Chmiel's productive presence and wise advice.

He was among the first to help and establish the cooperative bank in the city, which was later known as one of the most splendid Jewish financial institutions in Poland. Over the years, he served as the bank's Chairman. With great enthusiasm, he devoted himself to its development and saw the fruits of his labors. Hundreds of tradesmen and small merchants borrowed money from the bank and thus, survived, despite the difficult conditions prevalent in towns at that time. He had a warm heart, which beat for the good of nationalistic Zionist goals.

Over the years, he represented the Mizrachi in all Zionist organizations, together with Zalman Gorzelczany. He participated in all Keren HaYesod and Keren HaKayemet fundraising campaigns, and for a long time he was the active Chairman of the Yavneh School Board. For all this, he was a humble and modest person. Therefore, at all community meetings, they fought for the election of Efraim Chmiel.

When someone came to him to ask for his help with a matter pending at some ministry, he did not have to stand on the doorstep and wait to be invited in. He was received immediately and made to feel welcome. Efraim heard his request and tried to resolve the matter as well as he could.

He was always happy and cheerful, as if he had no worries. He loved the Land of Israel with all his soul and, at every joyous occasion or social gathering, he sang Zionist and nationalist songs. With great joy, he saw some of his children emigrate to Israel, including Dr. Chaim Chamiel (Camiel). He educated his children in the traditional religious spirit. On Sabbaths and holidays, when he sat with his wife at the head of the table, he beamed with happiness. Around them were all the children, from the biggest to the smallest, and they sang *zmirot* [songs traditionally sung at Sabbath and

Festival meals] and nationalist songs with their father.

He especially loved the Mizrachi environment, and aspired to fulfill the saying "Serve God with joy". No Sabbath or even a vacation day passed without a meeting of Mizrachi members. These were respectable pastimes, with words of Torah and energetic Chassidic dancing until late into the night, mostly at Efraim's house. On Simchat Torah, he invited the entire community to his house for a communal *kiddush* [sanctifying the Sabbath or a holiday by reciting a blessing over wine], like a general leading his army. Later, there were traditional visits to the homes of almost every member, accompanied by Chassidic songs and Jewish folksongs. Everything was done with and energy and enthusiasm that did not show weariness or signs of age. Even when he was a grandfather, he looked like a young man who had just completed the period of living and being supported in his father-in-law's home. Until . . . until World War II broke out in 1939, and Hitler's armies drove the Jews from their homes, like birds from their nests.

I met Efraim Chmiel then in Bialystok. An internal struggle waged inside him. He tried to be happy and full of hope, but he could not succeed when he saw thousands of Jews from Ostrolenka and other cities, with small children and bundles of clothes, wandering around in synagogues and sleeping in the streets, with no way to help them. It hurt him to see that his life's work had gone down the drain. The city of Ostrolenka, where he lived and founded, with others, Jewish institutions for the welfare of his people was suddenly destroyed, and there remained no vestige of a Jew.

His fate was as the fate of all the martyrs of Ostrolenka. With his family, he wandered from Bialystok to Stolin. Some postcards he sent from there reached his children in Israel. In them, he wrote that he was trying to live under the Russian regime and hoped for the opportunity to realize his Zionist dream. The German invasion of Russia put an end to all his hopes, and Efraim Chmiel and his family disappeared without a trace.

Alas for those who are lost and who will not be forgotten.

Chaim Drezner

Mosze Lejb Skrobacz

He was a tall and broad man, in contrast to his small, thin wife, who was always busy in her store. No one was exactly sure what kind of merchandise was primarily sold there: paint, wool, kerosene, cement or whitewash. There was an extinguished lime pit in the yard of his house. Whenever a railway car full of lime arrived, farmers with wagons and horses [gathered] near the railway station outside the city, waiting until his son, Herszel Skrobacz, arrived with money to receive the merchandise. He carried on an extensive business. In the city, it was said "Korach's treasure is necessary to maintain and support a house like Mosze Lejb Skrobacz's."

Mosze Lejb himself looked like someone who had become a storekeeper by chance, and that that trade was not his calling. Prominent under the brim of his Jewish hat were a high, intelligent forehead and quick eyes. He was a Torah scholar, expert in Mishna and verses, as well as ancient Hebrew literature.

Although at his house, he ran a *shtebl* of Amszinow Chassidim, who were at that time far from Zionism and nationalistic aspirations, he did not refuse to help Zionist causes. He always helped with advice and contributions.

Instead of using his knowledge in the rabbinate, and delving into the ocean of Talmud and the Early and Later Sages, he was forced to be in his store during the week and help with the sale of paint, kerosene, wool, etc., to farmers from the area.

On Sabbath and holidays, Skrobacz's house changed its look, as did its owner. In his apartment on the second floor, Mosze Lejb sat at the head of the big table, studying a sharply-debated page of Gemara with his sons, all of whom were Tze'erei Mizrachi members. In the *shtebl* below, the Chassidim waited to pray until Mosze Lejb, in his long silk *kapote* and velvet hat, came down, accompanied by his sons – they, too, in handsome traditional dress, in beautiful shirts with elegant ties.

In any disagreement about the *Even Ezra* or a section of the Midrash, Mosze Lejb was the highest authority. If he decided that the simple explanation was such and such, everyone understood that it could not be otherwise. He did not want to be involved in public affairs. Only during the last period was he persuaded to join the community committee as Chairman.

Mosze Lejb was expert in worldly matters and, in conversations about politics, he often expressed original and logical ideas. Once, in Warsaw, the writer of these lines witnessed an "examination", when Mosze Lejb examined a graduate of the Tachkimoni School – which, in addition to a matriculation certificate, also granted rabbinical ordination – as a candidate to marry his daughter, Zlata, who owned a pharmacy.

In a short time, he covered different Mishna tractates, verses, the history of the Jewish people, ancient and modern Hebrew literature. I sat amazed that a man who spent so many hours a day in his store could have such a wonderful memory and be so expert in all matters of Judaism.

World War II broke out. His house was destroyed, like all the other houses of the Jews. We were expelled from the city. I met him while wandering in Bialystok, where he had opened a restaurant. Later he was in Slonim. It seemed that after all the troubles that came upon the Jews of Ostrolenka, Mosze Lejb was still holding on.

He was killed in the last act of extermination of the Jews of Ostrolenka.

May his soul be bound up in the bond of everlasting life.

C. Drezner

Pesach Hochberg



Who in Ostrolenka did not know Pesach Hochberg? Just as surely as no one in Poland even *somewhat* expert in the history of his country did not study about the famous battle near Ostrolenka, so there was no one in our city, Polish or Jewish, who did not know Pesach Hochberg. The Poles envied us: how was it that, for years, a Jew could be the supplier of the Fifth Regiment of the Polish Cavalry encamped in Wojciechowice, a distance of four kilometers from our city? With "kosher" and "non-kosher" means, they tried to expropriate his supplier's license, but they did not succeed. Every year, when the tender was held for supplying meat and other goods to the army, they informed on the Jews, as if the latter were deceiving them with merchandise unsuitable for consumption and with short weight. But the commander and other high officers protected Hochberg, contending that he was an honest, conscientious merchant.

Nearly every day, Hochberg came to the regiment in his carriage, which was harnessed to a pedigreed race horse, and thus aroused the Gentiles' envy. The audacity of the Jew!, they said. But the Jews enjoyed this and were glad – at least one of us has risen to greatness. In the winter, he wore riding trousers with matching boots; in the summer – light trousers, carefully pressed, in which he looked ten years younger than his age. Pesach Hochberg maintained good relations with the city's administration. He often drank a toast with the police supervisor or with a high government official, and gave them charitable loans – not to be returned, of course – so that he could ask for a favor for a Jew, whenever a problem arose.

On the other hand, there were Jews who did not look favorably on his devotion to anything connected with Zionism, with the Land of Israel. I often accompanied him when he collected money for Keren HaYesod and saw his suffering when a Jew did not wish to contribute, or contributed an amount much less than he could afford.

Over the years, Pesach Hochberg was authorized by HaKeren HaKayemet. At Lag BaOmer celebrations, when, in a unified parade, the youth went out to the forest near the city, he gave them his horse and carriage in order to bring them everything they needed. Toward evening, when the young people returned to the city and passed through the main street, singing Hebrew songs, Pesach Hochberg received them and marched with them, dressed in a HaShomer uniform, his chest adorned with medals that he had received from HaShomer HaTzair's Central Leadership in Warsaw.

All meetings took place in his home. He gave HaKeren HaKayemet a spacious room for activities. A regular *minyan* also prayed in that room. He did not

send invitations to meetings, but stood in the street and called to members of HaKeren HaKayemet's committee. He was not always satisfied with the members' work, contending that with a little effort it would be possible to collect more. Pesach Hochberg had sufficient means to live a comfortable life, but he could not be easy because of his concern that not enough was being done for the Land of Israel. He did not get involved in general matters, but only in Zionist activities. All parties, both left and right, respected and cooperated with him.

Every visit of emissaries from Keren HaYesod and HaKeren HaKayemet in Ostrolenka ended with a reception at the home of Pesach Hochberg.

Who among the surviving remnants of our city, once active on behalf of Zionism and the Land of Israel, does not remember Pesach Hochberg's house? At night, when the entire population was already sunk in deep slumber, in Hochberg's house the light was still lit for a HaKeren HaKayemet meeting.

Before Chanuka or Purim, activity continued until late at night, preparing fetes, the revenues of which were dedicated to Keren HaKayemet. He did not let us leave his house before everything was ready, to the last detail.

When we asked him, "Hochberg, when will you sell your house already and go to Israel?", he replied, "Soon, in a little while, I will liquidate everything and go to Israel to see with my own eyes Jews working their land with plows, and fertilizing it with the sweat of their brows."

September 1939 came and World War II broke out. The Jews ran from the city to wherever they could go. On a certain Friday, notices were hung in the streets, in Polish and German, that all Jews must leave the city.

On one of the roads near the town of Lomzica, I met Pesach Hochberg for the last time. Hundreds of Jews from Ostrolenka and the area were there. He whispered something about the destruction that had visited our townspeople and all of Poland's Jews, but because of the noise all around, I could not understand what he said. Only one of his words is engraved in my memory: Israel.

He survived the cruel war, returned to Ostrolenka together with two other Jews who were townspeople, and was murdered there by Poles.

May his soul be bound up in the bond of everlasting life.

C. Drezner

Mosze Margalit



The son of Aron Jankel Margaliot, of blessed memory. Like his father before him, he was involved in public affairs and, for some time, was the head of the Jewish community in Ostrolenka. He was an active member of the Poalei Zion (Z.S.) party.

During the days of the Zionist crisis – the hard policy of the British Mandate, the events and the limitation of emigration – despair stole into the ranks of the Zionist camp in our city. Active members, whose only dream was the Land of Israel, also left Israel a short time after emigrating there, when they found it hard to hold on in the difficult circumstances. But Mosze Margalit did not despair, and together with other friends, he remained steadfast in his belief. The city found in him a loyal head of the community, who took care of the Jewish public's needs. He was one of those who could communicate with members of the Polish government.

Mosze Margalit emigrated to Israel in 1936. There, he immediately began to do routine work. He opened an upholstery workshop and rebuilt his family nest. Suddenly, an incurable disease struck him, from which he did not recover.

Mosze Margalit left a wife, two daughters and a son, as well as sisters and brothers – one of whom, Meir Margalit, is known as a major actor in the Ohel Theater, and all of whom are in Israel.

We honor his memory.

A. Landsman

"The Father of Ostrolenkan Youth"

(In memory of Pesach Hochberg, of blessed memory)

Pesach Hochberg was a friend to many. A friend to those equal to him in seniority and status, a friend to those younger than him in experience and life, a friend and guide to many of the younger generation which grew up in our city.

Pesach Hochberg was a community worker, a public servant in the finest sense of the term. He administered the activities of HaKeren HaKayemet LeYisrael, filled central roles in HaShomer HaTzair, attended to economic problems and was a sort of *shaliach tzibur* [prayer leader, designated representative] of the youth in the entire city. When matters arose for his attention, his character was always outstanding. He encouraged individuals, the suffering and uncertain friends, as well as the community. Indeed, everyone knew him well and treated him with love and great honor. Even when he was busy and prostrate under the yoke of the tasks loaded on him (because he did not know how to refuse), he always found time to listen, to organize and to guide. He was a father to Ostrolenkan youth, and was greatly interested in its deeds. He did everything with all his heart and soul, completely devoting himself to activities for individuals and the community. As one who gave his heart and soul to others, the figure of Pesach Hochberg will remain as a man who loved life and people, as a symbol of friendship and devotion to individuals and the community.

Rachel Sapir (Romani), Ayelet-HaShachar

Article which appeared in the newspaper *Dos Neier Wort*, No. 197, Warsaw, Tuesday, 25.8.1936

Ostrolenka

Member Margules Emigrates to Israel with His Family

Member Mosze Margules and his family left today, on the Warsaw-Konstanca train, on their way to Israel.

Member Margules is not a veteran member of our party. He is one of its young ones. He came to us when he was already head of the community in Ostrolenka and a member of the city council. There, in the community and in the city council, when he witnessed the sincere and devoted activity of our members on behalf of the poor population of our people, and for building the Land of Israel, he was enthusiastically swept up in their work. He officially joined the party and HaOved, and devoted himself to party and public activity. As head of the community and a city council member, he used his influence and helped the poor population as much as possible.

His Zionist work was prominent not only in the community, but also in the party and in the street. If a certain member needs help, if another member does not have work or a new member arrives in the city – where do they turn? – to Member Margules. The doors of his house are always open, not just for members but also for strangers. Everyone knew how to show their appreciation before his emigration; the many farewell parties held in his honor attest to this. His friends say, "If with his leaving we lose one of our good friends, his aspiration is also our aim, because we all hope to meet there and work for the Working Land of Israel."

Mendel Brin

Reb Mendel Brin was a special "type". We were neighbors. His house stood not far from our house in the beautiful city square, and he was a friend of my father, of blessed memory. Members of the Brin family came to our house every day. We would meet and stroll together in the municipal park. I can still see Reb Mendel, of blessed memory, as if he were still alive and active and full of life . . . Tall and handsome, of majestic appearance, with his fine, well-groomed beard. He was very punctilious about his dress. He was a great Torah scholar, and numbered among those who prayed at the Gur *shtebl*. He dealt in forest commerce. He was an agent for the purchase and sale of forests around our city, because to purchase a forest for himself, in his responsibility, required a great deal of money – which he did not have.

He traveled frequently to Germany for his dealings in forest commerce, and when we saw him travel to the railway station in his carriage, we could not recognize him. An English lord to the last inch. Dressed in a beautiful black frock coat, a top hat on his head, white gloves on his hands, everything majestic. His way of life in our city was out of the ordinary and strange to us, because Reb Mendel Brin, may he forgive me!, was far from rich. Every Thursday, he made the rounds of his neighbors to ask for a charitable loan for the Sabbath.

Of course, he returned the loan immediately after he had some new earnings. In short, he lived from hand to mouth, but had a great deal of confidence, was always cheerful, brimming with humor and jokes about others and also about himself, an optimist in the full sense of the world. We never saw him despondent and sad, and he always lived expansively. He bought himself a magnificent carriage with rubber wheels and a beautiful and noble horse. The coachman was a Russian, who wore special clothes: a uniform with buttons that were always shiny and polished, an extraordinary hat on his head and gloves on his hands. When he brandished his long whip and struck the horse, the bells tied to it rang. When Reb Mendel and his family went out in their carriage for a trip outside the city, the city pranksters stood and looked after them, shaking their heads and calling after them, "Whoever lives recklessly – dies without confession . . .", but he continued to go his own way, as did we.

And whoever has not seen his portable *succa* [temporary dwelling used during the Succot holiday] – has never seen a beautiful *succa*. Not just a *succa*, but a temporary apartment, a real house! Big and wide. A wooden floor beautifully painted, with beautifully painted walls and on them Succot holiday pictures. A large, beautiful rug on the floor, the *succa* was hung with all kinds of fruits. Reb Mendel slept in the *succa* every night of the holiday. In the summer, he moved his *succa* to the grove near our city and set up a summer camp for his entire family there. The carriage came a few times a day and brought food and other requirements to the merry campers. And who could compare to them? We children were a little envious of them. The man lived in a beautiful, spacious apartment. Elegant furniture adorned the house, and everyone had their own room. It was unique in the city. An elegant desk stood in it, proclaiming its quality. Beautiful armchairs in various corners of the apartment tempted one to sit and rest in them. An iron box stood in one corner, as if it wanted to emphasize its owner's importance. And when they asked him, "Reb Mendel, tell us please, why do you have an iron box, since there is no money in it?", he answered with a laugh, "And where will I keep the Sabbath fish – it serves me as an ice-box on the Sabbath." On top of the box were two pictures: one – a rich banker, sitting serenely and comfortably on a beautiful armchair, replete with pleasure, a cigar in his mouth and a gold chain adorning his chest, and at his side an open box, full of sacks of gold. In the second picture was a poor banker who was bankrupt, miserable, full of worry, his clothes patched. The box was open and empty, and mice jumped in and out of it. "This is me myself" – Reb Mendel would announce. So lived the man in happiness, living for the minute, as it is said, Thanks be to God, every day!
May his memory be blessed.

Awiezer Drori-Kupferminc, Kfar Yechezkel

Mendel Gedanken

The son of Pinie Gedanken was born in Ostrolenka. He studied in *heders* and yeshivas. He received a religious-traditional education. He had a fabric store and his own house. In the beginning, he was active in the Mizrachi movement; later he moved to the General Zionists. He worked with Mendel Bialy for the Zionist funds.

In particular, Mendel Gedanken excelled in his work on behalf of the Hebrew University. He was one of the founders of the Culture School in Ostrolenka. For a few years, he served in the city council as a representative of the General Zionists. In the last elections in 1937, he was elected Chairman of the Jewish community in Ostrolenka, a role he filled until the destruction. He was killed, together with his family, in Slonim. May God avenge his blood.

A. L.

Awraham Piaseczny



Born in Ostrolenka in 1885. He was one of the main pillars of the city's middle class. In his actions, his

forbearance and great-heartedness, he was an example for all his acquaintance.

During World War I, the Jews were expelled from the city by the Cossacks, who burned it. To rebuild the city when the Jews returned to it, Reb Awraham Piaseczny, of blessed memory, was one of the few to lend a hand to establish a financial organ, the *Handwerker Bank* [tradesmen's bank], which greatly helped the rehabilitation. For many years, he was a member of the board of the bank and guided it in every phase of its development until it was well-established.

Over the years, he saw that the middle class needed spiritual focus. Together with his friend, Efraim Chmiel, of blessed memory, he established a synagogue for this class, [funded] nearly all from their own money, and also obtained the ritual objects.

From 1932-35, he was elected a member of the community committee and, later, Chairman. During his tenure, he succeeded, after a great struggle, passing an article for financial support of needy pioneers for emigration to Israel. This decision was intended to increase emigration from our city, despite the alienation from it of many in the community committee.

During World War II, when the Jews were expelled from the city by Hitler's soldiers, Awraham Piaseczny and his wife, Fejga, moved with their family and the family of his brother-in-law, Pesach Hochberg, and his wife, Sara Rywka, to live in Lomza (Lomza was then under Russian occupation). After three difficult months in Lomza, they were moved by the Russians to the town of Dereczyn, near Slonim. With the capture of the region by the Nazis when they attacked Russia, the Jews of the town were arrested and shot in the forest. Among them were found the Piaseczny family and Pesach Hochberg and his wife, Sara Rywka. Chaja, a Piaseczny daughter, succeeded in escaping from the valley of murder to the forests, and joined the Partisans; but in the winter of 1942, her strength weakened and she died somewhere in the forest.

The last postcard, sent by the family from Dereczyn on 27.1.41 to their son, Chaim, in Israel, describes the great tragedy of the family's fight to survive in inhuman conditions; it also describes the breaking of their spirit with the arrest of their son, Mosze Hersz, and his being sent to Siberia for five years of hard labor (now in Israel).

Their last hope before the outbreak of the war was to liquidate their property and emigrate with the Hochbergs to Israel, to build their home there, together with the family of their son, Izrael Chaim.

The war and Hitlerism put an end to their dream and their lives.

May their memory be blessed.

C. P.

HOMES AND PEOPLE – MEMORIES

Chaim Chamiel

Our Home

Jewish families in Ostrolenka, as in other Polish towns, excelled in the traditional and special Jewish atmosphere that filled them. Modesty, piety, intimacy. In those homes, the father assumed the chief place. He determined the way of life, the milieu, the education. He was the supporter, honored and revered and, in most families, no one disobeyed him. The mother, the housewife, raised her children, toiled and labored from morning until night, attended to the welfare of her husband and her children. Some women helped their husbands in their businesses and still found a free hour to help others. There were many relatives in every family in the small city: grandfather and grandmother, uncles and aunts. The families grew and branched out, and met on holidays and family celebrations.

I will try to describe life in our home, although it is not an easy thing to erect a gravestone in writing for a father and mother who ascended to heaven in a whirlwind in the prime of their lives. I only saw them briefly in their lives and do not know how they died and where they were buried. I did not weep for them and did not eulogize them. How will I tell my sorrow before all? My parents – who raised and nurtured me, taught and guided me, and gave me their blessing when I emigrated to the Holy Land, when they parted from me with a kiss and burning tears – did not see the comfort toward which their hearts and souls aspired, for which they educated their sons and daughters, and toward which they dedicated the best of their days and years. Woe is me!

From my childhood memories, one evening stands out, when my father carried me in his arms to the large study hall. It may have been the celebration of the opening of the study hall or another festive event. But that act remains etched in my mind and heart as a symbol – my father carrying me in his arms to the synagogue. All the days of my childhood, youth and adolescence, when I deferred to him, I see myself carried in his arms, hearing his lessons and listening to his teachings, ethics and reproofs. His words light my way even today.

My father and teacher, Reb Efraim, of blessed memory

My father, Reb Efraim, the son of Reb Mordechaj Zew, of blessed memory, was born in Ostrolenka and lived and worked there until the expulsion. He was modest, spoke little but did much. He was dynamic, an initiator, active, a Zionist in word and deed. He observed the word of God and was prudent in his ways. He helped to establish the Talmud Torah and later founded the Improved *Heder*, so that his sons would learn Torah willingly. He was among the founders of the Jewish bank, to help the needy with loans. He established the Mizrachi organization because he foresaw the destruction of Polish Jewry and heard the steps of the redemption coming near.



Reb Efraim Chmiel and his wife, Bejla Rywka, of blessed memory

I did not hear a great deal about his childhood and youth. Sometimes he spoke with reverence about his venerable teacher, Reb Nechemia Rozenbojm, of blessed memory, the father of the teacher Gedalja Rozenbojm, who was later my teacher and friend in education at the Yavneh School. My father studied Hebrew and its literature, and the Pentateuch with Reb Nechemia. My father subscribed to Hebrew newspapers: *HaTzfira*, *Baderech*, etc., and from my childhood I remember that he read the Mizrachi newspapers, which were published at the time. My father spoke Hebrew and many of his letters were

written in Hebrew. His correspondence with me was all about the purity of Hebrew and demonstrated his satisfaction with my progress in knowledge of the language and its literature. He did not tend to reveal his feelings, but despite this, he could not hide his joy when he saw my first published work. In our house there was a closet full of books, many of which my father acquired in his youth. Among them were Pentateuchs with commentaries, the *Nevi'im u'Ketuvim* [The Prophets and The Hagiography], the Mishna and the *Poskim* [Jewish legal decisors], Chassidic books and enlightenment books. In the closet were also manuscripts, among them a manuscript of a book by his rabbi, Reb Nechemia.

★

Near our old apartment in my grandfather's house, lived Reb Szlomo the Tarrer. My father's bedroom was divided from Reb Szlomo's only room by a wall made of wooden boards. Every night, Reb Szlomo rose at midnight and prayed and studied the holy books for many hours. His voice, chanting the Gemara melody, penetrated my father's room night and day, especially on Sabbaths and holidays. Reb Szlomo used to study and pray every free hour. His pious and modest figure still stands before me.

★

My father traded in leathers, scrap iron, wool and cotton. From all the villages and towns in the area, they brought "merchandise" to the storehouses in my grandfather's yard and my father would transfer it to Bialystok, Warsaw and even send railway cars of merchandise to other countries. When trade collapsed, and large investments were required, my father, of blessed memory, combined with a few partners and continued to run the business. I remember days of crisis, when prices dropped. Buyers went bankrupt and did not pay. The partners withdrew and competed. New merchants appeared. My father, of blessed memory, did not despair. He brought his competitors closer, returned those who had withdrawn and was again free to work.

A great deal of affection was shown to my father by the small merchants who came from the area and from the edges of the city. My father, of blessed memory, helped them with his money and advice. [I remember] a story of a butcher (today a wealthy man in Tel Aviv), who received money from my father to buy a calf for slaughter and could not pay the debt. Ashamed, he evaded my father. When my father realized this, he went to his house, calmed him, encouraged him and gave him an additional sum of money to buy another calf and try again – and thus it was. The butcher returned to business, got out of his straits and paid his debt.

The merchants and butchers who came to our house "to settle accounts" spoke with satisfaction and respect, and were certain that they would get a just reckoning. I never heard anyone insult my father. On the contrary, while settling accounts, they brought up personal problems and asked for advice and guidance. My father did not take part in the disagreements and divisions prevalent in town. He did not want to be chosen for community work, except for educational matters and social assistance. Finally, he also helped the Zionist Federation at the beginning of its way, and founded Mizrachi, until others came and continued on.

★

When he had money in his pocket, my father did not withhold it and helped others. It once happened that my father's niece, Sara Rywka, reached marriageable age. My grandfather, Reb Mordechaj Zew, of blessed memory, went to the Rabbi of Radzymin to ask for advice. The Rabbi said to him, "Do you have sons?" He answered, "Yes, three – Jehoszua, Efraim and Icchak." He said, "Tell Reb Efraim to give five thousand gold coins, and take the young man from Warsaw." My father gave the money and Sara Rywka, who had lost her mother, married Reb Awraham Rozensztejn – a fine young man, a Chassid and *lamdan* from Warsaw. After many years, my father built his new house at 28 Kilinskiego Street, and needed five thousand gold coins. He met a Gentile from the city and received this sum as a loan from him. After this, the Gentile disappeared and was never seen again in the city. My father tried to find him and could not. My father was sorry, but my grandfather said to him, "You were a *shaliach mitzvah* [a messenger for a good deed], so God repaid you. Great is the credit of one who fulfills the *mitzvah* of helping to provide a wedding for an orphan."

★

My father's hand was open; he shared with others what he had received from God. He gave his money to

his family, supported my grandfather and other relatives in their old age, and acquired many friends. He did much for the public good, being on the Mizrachi committee for tax evaluation in the city. He devoted himself a great deal to educational matters. He was appointed supervisor of the Polish Jewish school on behalf of the government, and tried to help poor children in the school by the distribution of clothes, food and milk. He also evaluated the Yavneh School from time to time, and his evaluation was always a pleasant experience for the students.

★

We were three brothers and six sisters. The sons went to school and to yeshiva, and the girls to school and *Bejt Jakow*. When we grew up, we learned a trade or went to work. People would say, "The daughters of Reb Efraim do not loiter in the streets, and you will not see his sons running around the market." Education at home was religious, but my father, of blessed memory, was not a Chassid, or among those who were strict or sought to impose fear. He himself was enlightened, even though he was very meticulous in his observance. He spoke Hebrew and subscribed to *HaTzfira* and other Hebrew newspapers that appeared in the '20s and '30s. He planted a longing for Zion in our hearts and a love of Zionism, and he motivated us to emigrate and prepare the way for the whole family.

★

We prayed at *Chevrat HaTorah*, first at the added *minyan* in the home of my grandfather, of blessed memory. Reb Mosze Natan Tejtelbojm, of blessed memory, would give a lesson in [the commentaries of the] Alsheich. Later, the congregation collected money and built a beautiful building of its own near the large study hall. From time to time, my father prayed at the large study hall, until Mizrachi was established and, together with the Zionists, they founded their own *minyan* and prayed at the home of the watchmaker, Reb Naftali Blum, of blessed memory, at the Improved *Heder* and at the home of Czapnikiewicz. Still later, they rented an apartment in the home of the teacher, Filar, of blessed memory, and, at the end, Mizrachi left and prayed at the Yavneh School. Praying at *Chevrat HaTorah* was a special experience for me.

My father had a pleasant voice. He was a Torah reader and led the prayers on Sabbaths and High Holy Days, but not for any reward. I stood at his side and helped, singing the tremolo part and whispering the melody to him. He got his style of prayers and melodies from previous prayer leaders in town. He got a great deal from Reb Jakow Byszko, who was a veteran in *Chevrat HaTorah*. My father's melodies and styles were willingly accepted by the congregation; many asked to hear his voice and prayers.

★

On Purim, my father read the *Megillah* at my grandfather's house. When I grew up, I took this role on myself. Once, I even organized an acting company and we presented the contents of the *Megillah* at my grandfather's house. I received a whole gold coin as a prize and the members of the company were also rewarded . . .

My father knew many songs – songs in Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish and in Polish and Russian dialects from around the area. When he came to a religious celebration or a family party, his songs were a marvelous experience for the listeners. They were an outpouring of the soul and longing and yearning, loftiness and joy all in one. He knew many folk songs. The audience's favorite songs, which he often sang were *Dort in Turky*, *In Der Soche*, *Die Kontrasten*, *Lo Amut Ki Echyeh* and other Zionist songs, folksongs and songs of camaraderie. He sang and the audience repeated the chorus or melody after him. When the song was over, he went to the center of the room and stimulated the crowd with solo dances, with all the audience clapping hands to the rhythm of the movement. My father, of blessed memory, knew how to be happy and to make others happy and he was loved in the city for this as well.

★

Everyone knew that World War II was coming. My father, of blessed memory, said to me during one conversation near our parting, "If, God forbid, war breaks out again, who knows if I will have the strength to wander from place to place, as we did during the last war. The war came, shook and uprooted everything; nothing remained but the burning memory in our souls."

★

I will never forget the day of separation from my home and my father in March 1939, when I left the city on my way to Warsaw. The parting was difficult. My mother, of blessed memory, wiped a tear from her eye and whispered, "In whose hands do you leave us?", and

after a moment, "Go, go my son, and save your soul and survive." And my grandfather asserted, "The war is approaching, we hear the shooting on the border. Anyone who can, should flee." With the blessing "Be strong and of good courage", I parted from him. My father brought me to Warsaw, to the Bristol Hotel, and accompanied me to the train that took me to Konstanca. As I stood near the train, he proffered a small prayer book and said, "You can't take a lot of baggage with you (I left on an illegal immigrants boat), but take this as a memento. Great prayer will stand by you at all times. And another thing I would ask – I attended to your education and taught you everything I could. Continue, at least, to read a chapter of the Pentateuch every day."

I exchanged only a few letters with my father, of blessed memory, from the Polish Diaspora and the Russian Diaspora at the time of the escape, until everything sank.

My mother and teacher, Bejla Rywka, of blessed memory

My mother, Bejla Rywka, *nee* Zyman, of blessed memory, was a saintly woman. All her life is a story of sanctification and purification, works of charity and kindness in the name of Heaven. My father, of blessed memory, brought her to Ostrolenka from nearby Myszyniec. From her parents' house, she brought with her religious zeal and a way of strict education; but with this, also she demonstrated a great deal of gentleness, pleasantness and poetry of soul. I remember the hours she sat by the wooden cradle of my little brother and sisters, rocking it and singing. She had a pleasant voice, and it was nice to sit by her side and listen to her songs. I loved to listen to her reading from holy books, books of supplication and requests, the *Tzena U'Rena* and, sometimes, from other books she found suitable.

She educated her children to learn Torah and do *mitzvot*, and read the *Shema* with them morning and evening. She took care that we had the finest teachers. When my father established the Improved *Heder*, she reacted to it with mixed feelings. While she believed in its superiority over the other *heders*, it was hard for her to come to terms with the new education. She reached the height of happiness on the day I went to study at the Lomza Yeshiva. Finally, she would have a "*yeshiva bochur*" of her own. She expressed her happiness with packages of food she sent me every week, and with tears of joy that stood in her eyes when she accompanied me to the bus. She even came to visit me once at the yeshiva, with my sister, Leah. This was a great experience for my mother, when she saw me among hundreds of young men, bent over "my pulpit" and reading the Gemara.

Out of her love for the Torah, she always worked for the yeshiva that was founded in the city. The *Bejt Josef* Yeshiva, a Nowardok yeshiva, was located in the city. Townsmen and others from nearby towns and villages learned there. My mother made the rounds of the houses to get *teig* for the yeshiva boys. The yeshiva students also had *teig* at our house. Even today, I meet former yeshiva students from our city who dined at our table. I met one of them in Mexico, when I visited there in October 1957. Together with a friend among those who worked on behalf of the yeshiva, my mother also collected money for the yeshiva. At Purim plays held at the yeshiva, she sat among the important guests and, thanks to her, I also sat in one of the first rows.

She ran the household with great wisdom. We were nine children in the house, and it was orderly and clean. Once every two weeks, a big wash was done. For two days, the house was full of steam, big pots set on the stove top, and the *kleine weibale* (which is what we called the washerwoman) scrubbed the laundry, while Zelig the Water Carrier brought water from the spring near the electricity station. Mother soaped the laundry and helped rinse it. The washing ended by going to the River Narew, where the wash was scrubbed and rinsed in the clear water of the river. It was brought up to the attic of the house and hung on ropes there. After a few days, we all followed the *kleine weibale* to the "mangle house", where the clothes were pressed and then returned to the closet. In the winter, the washing was done once a month. Zelig became almost a member of the family. He took care of the water. He never used yokes, like his competitors, Zyszte the Mute or Chaim Trajtel and his sons. Zelig was paid for every pair of buckets he brought. He also ate at our house whenever he came. Therefore, he was generally loyal and took care that the water barrel was full.

The Sabbath was a special experience. Even preparations for the Sabbath created a festive atmosphere in the house. Two days a week were market days in the city – Tuesday and Friday. On Tuesday, mother bought the necessities for the Sabbath that were to be found in the market. On Thursday, we brought Sabbath necessities from the grocery: flour for *challot* [Sabbath breads], yeast, sugar, etc. On Friday morning, mother went to get fish. We brought meat on Thursday

or Friday morning. Early Friday morning, mother koshered the meat, prepared the sourdough for the *challot* and the vegetables for the *tzimmes* (compote). On Thursday, the rooms were cleaned and the floors washed. On Friday morning, the smells of the Sabbath food had already spread in and around the house. We loved the Sabbath Eve atmosphere, and the rest and serenity that prevailed in the house after all the many preparations. We went to synagogue with father and, when we returned, the big table was set for the whole family. On it was a pure white tablecloth and lit candles, in silver and copper candlesticks. We sat around the table. Father sat at its head and, opposite him, a Sabbath guest or yeshiva student, or both. Father began singing *Shalom Aleichem* and everyone sang along. Father said the *kiddush* [blessing over the wine], and those sons who were already *bnei mitzvah* [bar mitzvah age or over] repeated the blessing after him. At the Sabbath meal, we sang together a great deal, parents and boys and girls together. Our voices broke through the windows of the house, and often people gathered to hear "Efraim's choir". From time to time, we sang one of the *zmirot* [Sabbath and holiday songs] to a new melody. We also glorified the rest of the Sabbath meals with *zmirot*. Sabbath Day was also examination day. According to the examinations, my father knew how our studies were progressing. He came to school on Sundays and made his comments.

Holidays, too, were rich with experiences. Even during hard times, we did not omit singing in our house. If we sometimes felt hard-pressed during the week, happiness prevailed on Sabbaths and holidays. We wore new clothes and tasty food was served. Guests visited and, sometimes, we visited our relatives and they served refreshments.

Drinking tea on Sabbath was a sort of special ritual in our house. Mother prepared a few kettles and a pail full of boiling water, and placed them on the stove top. Relatives, friends and neighbors came to our house before prayers and in the afternoon to drink a glass of tea.

Mother's grace pervaded the house – on weekdays, Sabbaths and holidays. She ruled the house with iron discipline, and aspired to see her children walk the straight and narrow way – God's way. When the Jews were expelled from Ostrolenka, she left with my father and three children for Stolin. There they tried to rebuild the family nest, but were killed by the enemy, and with them family members who were there.

Episodes of Memories

A.

As if through a fog, I remember my first days at the *heder*. Wrapped in my father's prayer shawl, I was brought to Reb Jakow Byszko's attic and placed near the desk. I stood on a small stool with father and mother near me. Reb Jakow opened the prayer book in front of him and told me to look in the book. I fixed my eyes on the letters and began to read after the teacher, "Alef, bet . . ." A metallic clink stopped my reading. A copper coin rolled on the table.

"This coin fell from Heaven for you!" – "Study Torah and angels will protect you!" – I raised my eyes upward and looked among the rafters and boards for the crack through which the coin fell.

– "There's the crack above . . ." and while I was looking up, another clink was heard and a second coin rolled and fell on the floor.

On that day, I began to study the alphabet.

B.

My teacher came to our house to teach the children how to read and pray. He was an old man and ate at our house. The teacher sat at the head of the table and we climbed on a chair one after another and repeated our lesson. When my turn came, I got up on the chair and read after the teacher while looking out the window at the yard.

C.

It is said that a beautiful synagogue stood in the city before World War I. After the war, nothing remained of it but a brick foundation, walls and pillars. Grass and thorns grew on it. At night, it cast fear on little school children. Strange stories were told about ghosts and spirits of the dead who walked, prayed and went up to make a blessing on the Torah. They called to some passersby to come up and make a blessing on the Torah. This was a bad sign for the passerby – God forbid, he

might not live out the year.

The synagogue foundation enclosed the south side of the courtyard. On the eastern side, a big study hall was built. A large hall for prayer was painted with oil paint; paintings of the tribes of Israel adorned its walls. The walls rose, slanting upward and ending with a painting of the army of heaven. The big hall was surrounded by the women's gallery on west, north and south. Small windows punctured the walls, and the women peeked through them into the hall. In the study hall, on the western side, was the "community house" (the community *shtebl*), a place of prayer and Torah. *Minyan* after *minyan* came and went for morning, afternoon and evening prayers. During prayer hours, the community *shtebl* was completely full, especially in the winter, when it was hard to heat the large hall of the study hall. People sat at the tables and studied Mishna and *Chok Le Yisrael.*

Any magid who happened to be in the city would preach from community *shtebl* pulpit, and place a candle and a bowl near the door. Everyone who went out left a donation there. Whether the magid was a famous one, or one of the emissaries and great rabbis, while he preached from the pulpit of the study hall, notables went out in pairs, and collected funds from the *balabatim* at their homes or businesses.

West of the study hall building was a courtyard surrounded by buildings on three sides, with a gate enclosing it from the north. At a distance of approximately twenty meters from the synagogue, the Talmud Torah, a two-story wooden building, was built. It had eight big rooms and a small one. On the lower floor, the *melamdim* [teachers] taught: Reb Lazer Eli – the beginners' *melamed*; a second *melamed*, nicknamed Japonczyk – the Pentateuch *melamed*; Reb Mendel Lomzer and others, whose names and nicknames I do not remember. I remember that we used to bring Reb Lazer Eli *Rosh Chodesh* [new month] money. At Japonczyk's, I sat with the bigger boys, and we studied prayer and Pentateuch all day. We stopped for breakfast at eleven in the morning, and for lunch at four in the afternoon. During these long breaks, we managed to fight. A lime pit remained in the yard after construction, and once a boy was pushed into it and saved only by a miracle. This picture remains before me to this day.

D.

One Yom Kippur Eve, Mother placed a prayer book before me, opened to *Bnei Adam*, put a rooster in my hand and commanded me to read. I tried to read, but it was as if the words got stuck in my throat. Mother urged me to continue. I stammered and got fragmented and distorted syllables out of my throat. All my efforts to continue reading correctly were in vain. Fog covered my eyes, the letters rose and fell, tears rolled and dropped on the page. Mother railed against the *heder* and against the *melamdim* until she despaired, and then read word after word with me until the end.

Thus ended the episode of the *heder.*

E.

After many years, I discovered that Father, of blessed memory, was one of the builders of the Talmud Torah. His great concern was to improve education in the community. But it did not help; the building was new, but the *melamdim* and the methods of instruction stayed the same. There was no chance to institute innovations and change.

That year – I was six years old then – a guest from Horodenko, Reb Zalman Gorzelczany, happened to come to our city and our house. He was a young man, handsome, in European dress and with a pleasant voice. He came to our city from nearby Wojciechowice, where there were army barracks and a brickworks. Gorzelczany spoke Hebrew with an Ashkenazi accent and sang new and heartwarming Hebrew songs. My father invited the man to be a Hebrew teacher for the younger generation.

After the holiday, the Improved *Heder* was opened.

F.

The opening of the Improved *Heder* was not easy. Its opponents fought, indifferent to general studies. This was opposition to enlightenment, innovation and Hebrew. Sometimes I heard the curse "*apikorsim achbarishim*" [heretic rats] (a hint at *Hebreishim*, that is, Hebrew speakers*) aimed at teacher, parents and students. The first problem was the problem of the apartment. The upper floor of the Talmud Torah building stood empty. The Improved *Heder* board decided to break into one of the rooms facing the study hall courtyard. Most of the community elders, along with the head of the community, Chaim Pinczas

* Stutchkoff, author of *Der Otzar fun der Yiddisher Shprache* (New York 1950) writes that *achbarash* is a nickname for a rude person, and we also heard that Germans used this nickname in other areas. See *HaTzofe*, edition 6716, 4 June 1959, comment of Elkana Bilik.

Gingold, and the Chassidim and *gabbaim* of the Talmud Torah were opposed. They came in droves to expel the teacher and take the room by force. My father, of blessed memory, invested many efforts then to neutralize the opposition. He was also made responsible for the budget of the Improved *Heder*. Finally, the *Heder* opened, and a few students gathered to learn there. From time to time, isolated attacks, insults and injuries took place – windows were broken, the room was befouled. The teacher Gorzelczany demonstrated great patience, attending to repairs, cleaning and orderly studies.

I progressed quickly in reading, writing and studying the Holy Scriptures.

G.

After a few years, the Improved *Heder* changed its name to the Yavneh School. It led to a turning point in Jewish and Hebrew education in the city's spiritual and cultural life. An expert in Hebrew education, Reb Jakow



Jakow Filar

Filar, who until then gave private Hebrew lessons to young and adult students, came to teach at the Improved *Heder*. An additional *Heder* was "captured" on the west side of the Talmud Torah building, where his class studied. Filar the Teacher was one of the most educated in the city. He was considered an excellent teacher, expert in Pentateuch and linguistic grammar, although strict and irritable. His students felt the strength of his arm. Gorzelczany taught reading, Pentateuch, prayer, laws, Hebrew and songs. Filar taught the older-advanced students. At one time, he taught Hebrew literature and Jewish history, but then a beginners' class was also given to him, and he taught Torah with a heavy hand.

Soon, Hebrew song echoed through the Jewish houses and in the streets of the city. On summer days, we went to the grove near Bialy's sawmill or the grove across the river. On Lag BaOmer, we went armed with bows and pistols. On Shavuot Eve, we went to gather reeds. Despite this, we did not enjoy the usual rights of a school. Our studies continued every day during the breaks usual in a *heder*. There was no vacation; even in the summer, we learned without a stop. Jewish studies were dearer to our parents than anything else in the world.

Until the Improved *Heder* opened, and even during the first period of its existence, we had to be at the government school as well. After a short time, however, the government recognized the Improved *Heder* as a school with a general governmental curriculum. The first teachers who came to teach secular studies at the Improved *Heder* were Nadler, the principal of the Jewish government school, a short, chubby man, who won our hearts with his pleasant stories about nations and countries, Kaplan, Abramczyk, Mrs. Holcman, Lejbel Krystal and his wife from Lomza. Krystal later became the city clerk. The district government supervisor visited the school infrequently.

H.

The Improved *Heder* board was active. From time to time, examinations were held, parents were invited to meetings with teachers and to parties held by the students. Sometimes, Rabbi Icchak Bursztejn, of blessed memory, stood at the head of the examiners, or one of the two *morei hora'a* (judges), Reb Jermiah and Reb Jakow Szlomo, of blessed memory. The school gained a good reputation as to the level of studies, achievements, discipline, cleanliness and courtesy. Quickly, we began speaking Hebrew with an Ashkenazi accent and received the first Hebrew study booklets.

Parties and celebrations, student fetes and plays were sometimes held at the school. These celebrations took place on holidays, such as Tu B'Shevat, Chanukah or the intermediary days of a holiday. I remember that on Tu B'Shevat, I was assigned to speak about the holiday. The teacher Filar prepared me for this. In one play, performed in the Jewish government school at about the time I left the school, I performed together with my sister, Rachel, and played one of the main roles. The play was prepared by Bajuk and Wajnkranc and presented successfully twice.

The Yavneh School's development was given great impetus by the opening of the Culture School, which competed with it. The Culture School attracted children of well-to-do and non-ultra-Orthodox circles. New

methods of organizing the school and in its curriculum were used. In addition, Hebrew instruction methods were improved and the students did very well. The Yavneh School also reorganized and added celebrations, plays and even short vacations, trying not to lag behind. In a short time, it recaptured its superiority and the Culture School was forced to close.

I.

As it grew and developed, the Yavneh School added Gemara teachers. First, the teacher Filar taught Mishna and the teacher Gorzelczany, Gemara. Then, Mr. Dawid Sarniewicz (Kaspi) began teaching Gemara. One year, we studied Gemara with Mendel Lomzer (this was in the Talmud Torah class, which was placed at the disposal of the Yavneh School). Reb Mendel Lomzer was the best Gemara *melamed* in the city, and the parents of children in the upper grades wanted them to have a real taste of the study of Gemara – so we were given over to his hands.

Although Reb Mendel Lomzer was strict and very temperamental, the students did not balk from teasing him. I remember a prank we played one night. We poured water into the kerosene lamp and it went out in the middle of the lesson. We also played pranks like these on other teachers, especially Filar, who applied straps and sticks to the backs of his students. Thanks to one of these pranks, we were barred from our studies for an entire evening. At Reb Mendel Lomzer's, we began smoking cigarettes. He, himself, smoked many plain and cheap cigarettes of the Wanda brand; we, too, bought these cigarettes and smoked secretly.

It did not take many days and we were returned to the Yavneh School's regular framework. A teacher named Pietruszka came every afternoon to teach Gemara for two hours. With this teacher, we made great progress in Gemara studies. It was he who prepared me for the Lomza Yeshiva's entrance examination.

J.

The Improved *Heder* or, as it was later called, the Yavneh School, laid an important foundation for the growth and development of the city's nationalistic Hebrew education. The school's students were among the founders of Zionist and pioneer youth movements. The school was especially influential in the development of the Mizrachi movement and its branches – HeChalutz HaMizrachi, Tzerei Mizrachi and HaShomer HaDati. Thanks to the nationalistic education given to the generation that grew up in the city from 1925 and on, the Bund's influence decreased. Hebrew began to take the place of Yiddish in nationalistic youth organization "nests" in the city.

In 1937, approximately 150 students in eight classes studied at the Yavneh School. Those who completed their schooling received certificates of completion, recognized by the government's Ministry of Education. In 1936-7, I worked as a teacher in the school*.

Gedaljahu Rozenbojm also worked in the school at that time. He moved to the Yavneh [School] after the Culture School was forced to close. By adding new instructional staff, the teacher Gorzelczany could devote himself more to general administration and strengthening the school's budget.

K.



Gedaljahu Rozenbojm, of blessed memory

Gedaljahu Rozenbojm was one of the city notables. His noble face radiated magnetism and special charm. He knew Mishna and the [works of] Jewish law adjudicators, and had a broad general education. He did not quarrel with anyone and did not raise his voice. From the first time we met, I always found him reading and studying. He was also a writer, and guided his students-friends with love. He was a teacher gifted with unique, manifest pedagogical qualities and important humane qualities. He was honored by people and beloved by his many students and friends. He had a wonderful Hebrew writing and speaking style. He worked hard at school and at private lessons he gave until midnight in order to support his family. He lived in a small apartment with one room and a kitchen, with little furniture and a bookcase crammed with new and expensive books, which he willingly loaned. Although I studied with Rozenbojm for only a short time, this

* See the picture of the Yavneh School, "Between two wars", C. Chamiel

teacher succeeded in creating a revolution in my life. I opened my eyes and saw what was happening in the world of the spirit. The Hebrew language became dear to me, and the Zionist ideal penetrated deep into my heart and soul. To this day, I have not forgotten his way of teaching. In my own instructional work, I have derived much benefit from it. He opened the gates of Hebrew language and literature to his students. His small library contained a selection of ancient and modern Hebrew literature, and it was placed at the disposal of his students. He introduced modern Hebrew poetry and living Hebrew speech at the school. In the 30s, most of the city's Hebrew speakers were his students. He was humble, modest, fled from all publicity and honor, spoke pleasantly and was a friend to anyone who turned to him. From the day I began studying with him, a real friendship sprang up between us. We went on long walks in the city and out of it, and all our conversations were conducted in Hebrew.

He told me a great deal about his father's house, about the people of that generation and about events in the world of the spirit and culture. He did not talk much about himself, but, from hints, I understood a great deal about the suffering he had seen in his life. Remnants of that suffering were engraved in the wrinkles on his face and in his prematurely whitening hair. After his son went abroad, he remained alone. His wife's illness depressed him and caused him much sorrow and spiritual suffering. But I heard nothing about this from him. I heard him moan only once, during the days of *shiva* [seven days of mourning] after the death of his wife. I stood in his room and looked at the pictures of his wife hanging near his picture over the beds. He came into the room and moaned. When he sensed this, he sat and after a silence of a few minutes, he said, "Yes, she was handsome and sweet and full of charm – "Alas for that beauty that withers in the ground" – and said nothing more.

Usually, he beamed and smiled. He loved to talk about books he had read, about stories worth knowing and about news of the world of politics and science. He told me of language innovations, as well as jokes and riddles. We sat closed up in a room for hours, deep in a game of chess, and he would win, as he was a chess champion in our city and known as a leading player in the entire region. I admired the man and loved his conversation, his warm and fascinating words. I longed to hear what he had to say. There were those who envied me the privilege that befell me, to be close to this modest and solitary man, the pride of Jewish education in the city. There were, however, those who reproved me for my closeness to a man who was not ultra-Orthodox. Indeed, he had his own religious outlook, although we never spoke of it. He came to the Mizrachi synagogue on Sabbaths and holidays, and I always got to sit near him and enjoy his society.

He was circumspect in matters between man and God, as well as those between man and his fellow men. With love and longing, he told me about his daughter, who was in a kibbutz in Israel, and revealed his desire to emigrate to Israel in order to see her and be near her. Before I emigrated, he asked me to give his daughter his regards and tell her of his feelings and longing for her.

I heard of his bitter end from survivors. He left the city with all the exiles and escapees, taking the difficult route between Ostrolenka and Ostrowa-Mazowiecki. Airplanes circled over the escapees and fired on them. Reb Gedaljahu Rozenbojm was among the wounded, and fell dead.

Woe unto us that a righteous person has passed from this world, and woe unto me, that a comrade and teacher, a guide and a friend, has been taken from me.

May his memory be blessed. May his name endure forever among the great teachers and educators, teachers of the Hebrew language, its first disseminators and pioneers. May his name be remembered forever with the first Hebrew authors, who, with their pens, awoke hearts to Zion and paved the way to love of our people, our Torah and our culture.

L.

Zalman Gorzelczany* came to Ostrolenka from Lithuanian Poland by way of Wojciechowice to teach Torah and knowledge. He excelled in organizational and pedagogic abilities, and demonstrated energy and initiative in his actions. He opened the Improved *Heder* and strove for its improvement and development all his days. He knew how to sing and lead prayers in the synagogue, and was the first to teach his students to sing Hebrew songs – religious and secular songs, songs of life and nature. He was vigorous and decisive in his speech and actions. While he did not back down before those who opposed him, he also knew how to make friends. He was among those who visited our home. A genuine friendship existed between him and my father,

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* See his picture: Personalities and Community Workers

of blessed memory, one of his first supporters, who attended to the budget of the school when it first opened. My father was close to him, despite the fact that sometimes there were differences between them.

During the early days, my father advised him about the administration of the school, and protected him from those who ridiculed and sought to hinder him. In a short time, Mr. Gorzelczany became independent, expanded the school, brought in new teachers, rented a big house with six large rooms and put in modern furniture. The Yavneh School achieved a good reputation in the whole region.

Reb Zalman Gorzelczany was among the founders of the city's Mizrachi Federation, and one of the *gabbaim* of the Mizrachi synagogue. He was active in all Zionist Federation enterprises, and was the first of the Zionist fund contributors and fundraisers. An excellent speaker, he appeared at various opportunities at gatherings, parties and circles. He represented Mizrachi at national conferences and was a member of the Mizrachi National Council.

There is no doubt that Reb Zalman Gorzelczany began a revolution in Jewish education in our city. Thanks to his diligence, the Yavneh School was a stronghold of Hebrew education in Ostrolenka for fifteen years, until the bitter end.

Chaim Chamiel, Jerusalem

Awiezer-Drori Kupferminc, Kfar Yechezkel

My Childhood Home

In memory of my father and mother, Jechezkel and Dina Kupferminc

My father, of blessed memory, was a Gur Chassid. I can still remember when he was in the prime of his life. From time to time, he used to travel to the Rebbe in Gur and enjoyed being in his presence. Over the years, an impasse developed in him. He stopped visiting the Rebbe's court. The source of this change was a spiritual revolution taking place in him. At the time, a growing wave of Zionism flooded the street; it was a popular nationalistic movement that changed values. The situation of the Jews in Poland was very bad. Agitation rose in the Polish nation to rid itself of the yoke of the Tsarist government. This awakening encompassed all echelons and classes of the Polish people. At the time, Polish villages suffered from agricultural over-population. Most of the land was occupied by estate owners, and the primitively-based economy could not support a large population. The country needed agrarian reform, a change in economic patterns and development and streamlining in different spheres. Lacking land and status, the excess rural population streamed into cities, looking for places of absorption and livelihood. Some were absorbed and found work in city factories, most of which belonged to Jews. As commerce was primarily conducted by Jews, the Poles turned their powers to a cruel war against them on this front, to disinherit them from their strong positions. Estate owners, in close cooperation with the intelligentsia, proclaimed a general boycott of the Jews. They called upon the Polish people, maintaining that the Jews were to blame for the prevailing rural poverty. The Jews exploited the Polish people and were disinheriting them from their economic status. The Tsarist government warmed its hands at this bonfire and tried to add oil to the fire. The slogan "Divide and conquer" met with great success. The Poles forgot their main enemy and turned their rage against the Jews. They, the Poles, began to organize cooperation in all its forms in the country and the city. They spread slogans: "Don't buy from Jews" and "Don't sell to Jews". They also acted with force and terror against Poles who, for various reasons, did not obey them. They organized surveillance by poisoned youths, who stood by venomous propaganda posters near the Jews' stores, and did not allow farmers to enter. The situation of the Jews was very bad. They felt their entire economic status being swept from under their feet.

My father, of blessed memory, was a community elder for many years. By virtue of his role as the representative of the Jewish community, he was close to

the Russian government and expressed his criticism to government representatives. But he could not find a sympathetic ear there. He was convinced that there was a united front consisting of the Russian government and the Poles. Ammon and Moab had joined forces to shorten the steps of the Jews. From where would rescue come? Who would stand in the breach and avenge the pogroms against our people? The Chassidic movement, in all its manifestations, was indifferent to what was happening in the Jewish street. Opposed to it, they did not delve deeply into what seemed beyond their understanding. More than once, the Chassidim, the assimilated and the Bundists joined in a common front to sabotage the Zionist movement's activities. In our city, as well, Zionism began to spread and put down roots. Many became convinced that there was no hope for the Jews among the wolves lying in wait for their souls. The idea was born in our family to leave Poland and emigrate to Israel. My father, of blessed memory, became a fervent Zionist. His heart's desire was emigration to Israel. The idea and the aspiration were not enough – they had to be realized. After a family consultation, it was unanimously decided to make the necessary preparations for emigration to Israel. "The final outcome was conceived of at the outset." We prepared a plan down to its last detail. The store had to be slowly liquidated; 10,000 rubles, to purchase land (*kolonia* [moshava]), had to be taken out of the business.



Reb Jechezkel Kupferminc and his wife, Dina, of blessed memory

My father had a friend in Warsaw – Lewita, the well-known Zionist activist. His son, an agronomist, had settled in Bat-Shlomo in the Shomron. Through Lewita in Warsaw, my father contacted Lewita's son in Bat-Shlomo. We soon received full information and a detailed, arranged plan from him, as to how to organize a mixed farm in the settlement. The money required for this purpose amounted to 10,000 Israeli pounds. Father did not hesitate, and hurried to Warsaw. He contacted Jehoszua Hesczel Farbsztejn, one of the heads of the Zionist movement in Poland, and completed the purchase of the land by depositing a sum of money on account.

We were joyous when he returned home and told us the details of the purchase arrangement. Preparations began immediately. We inventoried the merchandise in the store and were convinced that we had enough capital to realize the plan. In a family consultation, it was agreed that my brother, Awigdor, of blessed memory (who was killed in the events in Israel in 1936, standing on the scaffolding of an Arab building in Jaffa), and I would emigrate as pioneers before the rest of our family, and lay the foundation for building the farm in Bat-Shlomo. For the present, the rest of the family would stay in the Diaspora. The business would continue to exist on a smaller scale, and they would also send help to us in Israel to expand the farm.

All this developed close to the outbreak of World War I. In July 1914, World War I broke out, and the entire plan we designed was turned upside down. From immigrants who would settle our land in Bat-Shlomo, we became refugees and wanderers in Russia. For four years, we lived in Russia, in the cities of Homel and Kozlow, in the Tambov region. When we left Ostrolenka before the German occupation of the city, we managed to take out a fair amount of merchandise, under a shower of bullets and shells, and move it to Russia, to the city of Homel. With the outbreak of the October Revolution, our property was taken from us. When the family returned to our city in 1921, our material status was very shaky. My father, of blessed memory, opened a small manufacturing store in the houses of Ben-Adam, which were converted from barracks to residences.

In 1922, with my wife, Chasja, I emigrated to Israel. We entered as members of the labor battalion near Ein Harod Spring. During that same year, my father, of blessed memory, passed away. Our plan was that a short time after we moved to the nearby settlement of Kfar Yechezkel, we would bring our parents to Israel. My father did not get to emigrate to Israel and fulfill his heart's desire. In 1923, we brought my mother, of blessed memory, to Israel. She was with us in Kfar Yechezkel for about twelve years, and with my sister, Chana, for five years. My mother helped us build the farm. She especially liked taking care of the chicken

coop. She spoke to the chickens in Polish, because it was not possible that chickens and other animals understood Hebrew . . .

A businessman and commerce entrepreneur my father was not. I remember him as a public worker and community elder. For dozens of years, he served his flock faithfully and with endless devotion. Against his will, from time to time, he was elected community elder (*dozor* in Polish). Most of his time was devoted to arranging the community's matters and caring for its needs. All the embittered and distressed turned to him, and they never went away empty-handed. Integrity – this was the major, outstanding characteristic of his personality. Everyone trusted him. When estate owners in the area, as well as affluent Jews, came to buy in his store, they asked him to sell to them on his word of honor (they said the words in Hebrew, as there was no similar Polish expression). Then they were certain that they would not be deceived. The Zionist youth organization, HaKica, held plays. It needed a license from the local government for this. Who, if not my father, attended to this, and took the required license out on his personal responsibility. How happy he was, when he was advised that the results were satisfactory, and that a nice sum was left over for HaKeren HaKayemet. When we sold shekels, we were often helped by Father. His influence helped increase their distribution in our city.

Our house was an open house for all kinds of people. HaKica meetings were also held at our house. Besides the *heder* we attended, Father wanted to acquire a broad education for his sons and daughters. We studied at the *heder* of Nechemia the *Melamed*. His *heder* was a sort of "improved *heder*"; its students were children of respected *balabatim* of the city, who were intelligent and inclined toward Zionism. They wanted to obtain knowledge of Hebrew and the Pentateuch for their children. Who, if not Nechemia, of blessed memory, was expert in teaching this Torah to his students? Indeed, we studied general studies with him and absorbed a love of our land from him. It must be admitted that Nechemia also instilled in us an attitude of scorn and some hatred for those who "rebelled against the light". He was one of the enlightenment types remaining from the generation of Smolenskin and Lilienblum. It seems that he suffered not a little from his choice at the hands of the Chassidim and the fanatical government. The Chassidim considered him a thoroughgoing heretic, and none of them dared place the education of their sons in his hands. Besides *heder* studies, we studied with different teachers at home, continuing our education in Hebrew and general studies. Hirszkorn and Filar, both of them excellent teachers, will be remembered favorably. All his life, Father loved to read the most serious newspaper of the time, *Der Friend*. In addition to this newspaper, we subscribed to *HaTzfira*, *HaOlam*, *Razviet* and *Niva*. Every morning, our store became a reading room. Different people came and enjoyed reading newspapers. A special type of newspaper enthusiast is particularly engraved in my memory. They called him Japonczyk. Why Japonczyk? Because he "supported" the Japanese without limit at the time of the Russo-Japanese War. This name stuck to him to the end of his days. He was my cousin Cycowicz, a seasoned politician and expert like no other in world events and the ways of politics.

"Everything that the Compassionate One does – is done for the good." How great was the faith of our fathers in God and in the justice of his acts. The justice of the law and faith – with the strength of these two fundamentals, the Jews overcame obstacles in the road of their lives. I remember an event that happened in our home that illustrates this. To this day, whenever I think of it, I am filled with wonder at the strength of the faith and confidence of those Jews. When I was still a youth, one of my sisters married. The wedding was to take place in Lomza. At that time, my brother, Szaul, who was 18 years old, fell ill with a fatal illness. My father traveled with him to Warsaw, where he was admitted to the hospital. From Warsaw, my father telephoned home to say that the wedding should not be postponed, that it should be held on the appointed date, because Szaul's condition had greatly improved. Father returned to Lomza and did not tell anyone of the death of his son. On the contrary, he reported that his condition was much improved and that he was recovering from his illness. Nothing could be seen on his face. He was happy and danced at the wedding, as if no tragedy had befallen us. When we returned home after the wedding, he told us the whole truth and directed us to sit *shiva* [mourn]. This reminds me of Bruria, the wife of Rabbi Meir, who concealed the death of their two sons from her husband, so as not to sadden him and to end his Sabbath joy . . . So Father, of blessed memory, always knew how to sustain his faith and serve as a personal example.

My father served as a personal example in another instance. At one time, fires raged in our city, the acts of

arson of local anti-Semites. As among the firefighters there was not one Jew, they were negligent in saving the property of Jews and in extinguishing fires. About 56 years old then, my father stood up and announced publicly that he was joining the firefighters. His friend, Chanoch Flakser, joined him. This was not easy to do. The Poles would not agree to add Jews to the fire brigade, as the organization also served them as camouflage for a Polish underground. Thanks to diligent lobbying in the district city, the Poles were ordered to allow Jews to join the firefighters. My father and Chanoch Flakser were the first volunteers, the pioneers. After them, many of the city's "common people" and tradesmen joined the firefighters. They proved that by personal example, it was possible to excite many people and rouse them to save Jewish property and Jewish honor.

About a Dear Friend

"Like those who will die in the spring of their days"

We were friends from the time that we were students at the Improved *Heder* of Nechemia the *Melamed*. Nechemia the *Melamed* was not just a *melamed*. He was an extraordinary person, an excellent teacher, and all his students loved and admired him. The Chassidim in the city boycotted him and did not send their children to him, of course. They knew that a new wind of education and progress blew in this *heder*. There, students studied Hebrew as it should be taught, grammar, Pentateuch and, in addition to all this, general studies. This method of study was opposed to their outlook and way of life. The students were of a special kind. All of them were children of progressive parents, who aspired to give their children an education in the spirit of the time and progress.



Berel Rakowski

The Rakowski family was a respected family in our city. They came from Bialystok. The head of the family was a special, prominent figure among the city's Jews. Tall, upright, modernly dressed – everything radiated dignity. He was a learned person, imbued with the spirit of the time, and educated his sons and daughters in that spirit. Because there was still no secondary school in our city, all of them studied at the secondary school in Bialystok. Because the family was extensive, they lived near the Kaczyny railway station at a distance of a few kilometers from the city, in a large, spacious house. A beautiful, well-kept garden surrounded the house, and wide fields spread behind the garden. Few Jews lived near the railway station, and their house was set apart from the rest of the houses. The head of the family had strong connections with the city. He was an agent of a crude oil company and, with the help of carters, supplied kerosene to all the city's stores. Berel, of blessed memory, studied at Nechemia's *heder*. Because the family lived far from town, he ate and slept at Nechemia's house, and returned to his family only on Friday afternoons. He was a gifted youth, with a quick grasp of things. His life in the bosom of nature left its mark on him; he was used to work and his muscles were developed. He demonstrated his strength at every opportunity, especially in various calisthenics with his *heder* friends. On every day off and on vacations, we organized trips out of the city. We were attacked by Polish youths more than once, but we never retreated, because Berel stood at the head of the battle and instilled heroism and courage in us. Although we were few against many, we returned our enemies' blows and drove them away in all directions. Yes, such was Berel, and for this quality we admired him as a hero and as our leader. He was very proud when he came out the victor, decorated with our praise and affection.

When he completed his studies at the *heder*, he went on to the secondary school in Bialystok. From time

to time, especially during summer vacations, we would meet, and the friendship between us did not end. Like the rest of the youth, he, too, dreamed of emigration to Israel. At the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the city was destroyed by the acts of the German enemy. Many inhabitants left and spread in all directions, among them the Rakowski family, which wandered and moved to Russia. The last time I met Berel was in Homel, where our family lived then. He came to Homel suddenly, to visit me. That day is etched in my memory. How happy we were to meet. We decided to mark the day by a long trip outside the city. Homel was the capital of Byelorussia (White Russia). Many Jews lived there, and a cultural life and various political party activities had developed. The Graf Paszkiewicz Park, in the center of the city, is prominent in its beauty, and the palace in it bespeaks splendor and honor. Many artistic sculptures are in the park, as well as a water pool on which float swans as white as snow. How we loved to visit the park and feast our eyes on its beauty. The Suz River flows near the city, spectacular in its banks covered with thick trees and groves. We rented a boat and sailed on the waters of the river all day. We had a picnic on its bank, in the shade of the thick trees. We had enough to talk about, and we wove dreams. Although the war still continued and the entire world was cut off, our longing for Israel knew no bounds. In our imaginations, we saw ourselves absorbed in its land. We wove plans from other plans, in the hope that the end of the war would come and that together, we would reach the homeland, build our lives and settle there. We ended our trip by bathing in the river and swimming in its depths. After we parted, the connection between us ended. I thought about him often, and wanted to know his fate and where he was. My heart wanted to believe that one fine day he would appear here in Israel. The sorrowful news reached me that he was killed in the civil war in Russia. He was drafted into the Russian Red Army and fought in its ranks. At the time, wave of pogroms against the Jews was widespread in Russia. The Counter-Revolution revenged itself on the Jews at every opportunity and spilled their blood like water. He, Berel, in joining the Red Army, saw a means to avenge the wild pogroms' offence to our people. Berel was by nature of a passionate character, ready for self-sacrifice. How the heart aches at his tragic end.

May his memory be blessed and preserved with the memory of the heroes of our country and homeland.

Figures, Memories and Deeds

Ostrolenka lies on the bank of the long, wide River Narew, an arm of the Wisla. Our city is known as an historical place in the history of Poland. In 1914, on the eve of the outbreak of World War I, the city numbered approximately 6,000 Jews. We were close to 45% of the entire population. Most of the Jews engaged in commerce, and a considerable portion of them were tradesmen and workers. The city was surrounded by villages, and the livelihood of most of the city's inhabitants depended on them.

The center of the city was a beautiful square, near pavements planted with tall, beautiful trees. The view and the surroundings drew the eye with their loveliness. A wooden bridge over the river, nearly 500 meters long, was a wonderful place for trips. We loved to stand on the bridge for hours and watch the wooden barges floating toward Germany.

Trade in wood was very common among the Jews in our city, and it was a source of livelihood for many of them. The barges that floated down the river passed under the bridge, and the oarsmen had to take care not to bump into its pillars. The sounds of the orders of the steersman came from the bridge, in a language understood only by him. The work of rowing was difficult and hard on the body. They traveled on the barge for many days until they reached their destination. On the other side of the bridge stood a large monument, as high as a tall tower. This monument was erected to commemorate the victory of the Russians over the Poles in the revolution in 1831. The two camps clashed on the bank of the river: the Russian Army, commanded by Field Marshal Dybicz and the army of the rebels, commanded by General Skarzynski. The Russian camp was vast and the Poles suffered a decisive defeat. How much we loved going to that tower during our childhood! We swung on the thick chains that surrounded the monument and, at dusk, we sat on its wide steps, deep in conversations and dreaming the first dreams of return to the Land of Our Fathers.

In the shade of the high, thick trees, surrounded by channels full of water, the forts (*die farten*) were located. For many, many years, Russian soldiers

guarded these places, so that no stranger could enter them. In the last years, the value of the forts as protective strongholds declined. We loved to walk there from time to time, to hide in the excavations and underground bunkers.

On the road going toward the regional city of Lomza, outside the city, was a place of honor, the famous city park. The park was wonderful, cultivated tastefully, beautiful and clean. We loved to stroll in groups among the straight, handsome avenues of trees, and to sing songs of Zion and Yiddish folksongs in chorus. Young couples met there and dreamed the dream of their love. We, the youth, always met there and discussed our current Zionist activities. We distributed shekels among strollers and sold them HaKeren HaKayemet stamps. The Tze'erei Zion Federation was in our city and we called it HaKica. We held meetings and discussions at the *Zionisten Shtebl* in secret, for fear of the authorities, because Zionism was then forbidden in Poland under the Russian government. We disguised our activities, as if we were praying. Each one held a prayer book on their lectern (*shtender*), in case of trouble. Thus we discussed matters and, under these conditions, we worked. Anszel Lew, the organizer and arouser, will be favorably remembered. For most of his life, he was a Russian language teacher. When the loan fund for tradesmen and small merchants was established, he was among the founders. For many years, until the Holocaust, he worked there as an accountant. His son, Icchak Lew, worked in that institution together with him. The institution was established with the help of the I.K.A. Company, which greatly help to ease the condition of the masses in the city. Another important credit institution established in the city then, a few years before the outbreak of World War I, was the Company for Communal Credit. This bank, which operated primarily in large commerce groups, was founded by Jechezkel Kupferminc and Henach Flakser. They were the primary driving force of the institution.

At that time, in about 1910, when we established the Tze'erei Zion organization in our city, we began to dream the dream of emigration to Israel. Our hearts' desire was agriculture. The founders of the organization were Motel Frumkin, the writer of these lines, Awigdor Kupferminc, Icchak Lew, and the brothers Jehuda and Efraim Cuker. We conducted productive activity in the city and instilled the Zionist ideal in the ranks of the youth. We collected a great deal of money for the benefit of the K.K.L. and the Odessa Committee. We were particularly successful at collecting monies at weddings, banquet evenings and celebrations in two ways. At every wedding or banquet in the city, and also in towns and villages nearby, we paired up a young couple: a young man and a young woman. In the hallway near the dance hall, we arranged a cloakroom. Everyone who came to dance gave us his garment and when we returned it, they contributed for the benefit of K.K.L. We had great success in this activity. In a hall such as this, only girls and women danced, because no one dared yet dance in mixed couples. We solicited donations from men in another way. We placed bowls on tables in the room, as was customary in those days. When the banqueters were in good spirits, donations flowed into the bowls. We were particularly successful at the weddings of tradesmen. The hearts of the masses were warm and open, their souls full of longing for our Land. On the other hand, we had a very hard war at Chassidic weddings. They opposed Zionism and hindered us wherever they could. We overcame them, too, however, and carried out our activities energetically.

I remember an illustrative incident: three community elders (*dozory*) were in the city then, and every three years there were new elections. My father, Jechezkel Kupferminc, of blessed memory, also wore this robe for many years, as well as Margalit (the father of Meir Margalit, the famous Ohel Theater actor). It came to pass that Mendel Nadborny, one of the elders, married off his only daughter. We waited impatiently for the wedding. It was a wedding of the wealthy, and many guests were expected to come from outside [the city]. Then we discovered that the Chassidim and, at their head, Rabbi Bursztejn, of blessed memory, had decided to come out against us in an all-out war. The rabbi of the city decided not to perform the wedding ceremony if we would be at the wedding with our cloakroom. We knew that Mendel Nadborny had sentiments for the Land of Israel. We asked him, "Can it be possible, Reb Mendel, that we will not collect money for HaKeren HaKayemet at your celebration?" "Don't worry," was his answer, "You can depend on me. Come and you will be successful!" So the wedding day came. We arrived and made all the arrangements. When the time for the ceremony drew near, the rabbi did not appear. We were very sorry that we were the cause of this unpleasantness. But everything ended well. Reb Mendel asked the Town Major (Naczalnik) for a police

officer and sent him to bring the rabbi. After a few minutes, the rabbi appeared and performed the ceremony to the joy of all, and the celebration continued. From then on, after our great victory, they did not bother us again.

Theater plays were another source of income. We founded an amateur theater company in our city and began to prepare plays. The first play was *Scattered Far and Wide*, by Shalom Aleichem. We chose this play because it symbolized the abnormal social condition in the Diaspora, the multiplicity of parties and opinions in the Jewish street, and Zionism as the solution to this situation. A serious problem arose here: we must get a license from the authority, but they would certainly not give it to us, the young, because we were suspected of "subversion against the Tsarist government". We were afraid to ask for the license, because we were sure we would fail. What to do? Our home was clearly a Zionist home. My father, of blessed memory, favored Zionism and aspired to emigrate to Israel. As a *dozor*, a community elder, he could obtain the license; on condition, of course, that he would take upon himself responsibility for the play's political legitimacy. We asked him, and he acceded to our request, even though he knew that he would thereby endanger his relationship with the Chassidim. A tumult arose between them and, on the Sabbath, many of them came to the synagogue where father prayed. They made a lot of noise and delayed the Torah reading, but they did not succeed and were expelled by force. The play was performed with great success at the municipal theater and the city was overjoyed. On that night, many young men and women, the sons and daughter of Chassidim, absorbed some sound blows because they dared to go to the theater. It should be noted that we were the first in the city to organize an amateur theater company, and paved the way for the next generation.

At the end, I wish to mention here again Reb Nechemia Rozenblum the *Melamed*, of blessed memory, who was mentioned in my previous article. He accomplished the impossible in the education of the students and the youth who studied under him. The children of parents who wanted, as said, to give their children a better education and have them learn Hebrew, the Pentateuch and general studies, attended Reb Nechemia the *Melamed*'s *heder*. Of course, he was boycotted by the Chassidim and considered a heretic by them. Reb Nechemia was a handsome man, clean, polished and elegant in his dress. His long, white, very beautiful beard (the city's clowns said that he dyed his beard) radiated honor and dignity. We, his students, loved him very much. Those of his students who grew up, matured and married remained loyal to him. They visited his house, consulted with him and received guidance in purchasing Hebrew books from him. There was a special room in Reb Nechemia's apartment for studies. The benches and tables were modern, as in government schools. The room was full of light and clean air. Even in the winter, the teacher opened a window for ventilation. We studied Hebrew, the Pentateuch and grammar with him in a methodical way. He planted in our hearts a great love and longing for the Land of Israel with his stories about the country and what was occurring in our homeland at the time. How he aspired to emigrate to Israel himself! If we, his students, achieved this, it is thanks to the love of Zion that he planted in our hearts. May his memory be preserved in our hearts forever.

The Home of Reb Welwel Ben-Adam (Benedon), of Blessed Memory

Reb Welwel was like a member of our family. From time to time, he came to Father to consult him on family and business matters. The man was very honest, very careful with the money of others and careful not to deprive the workers who worked for him, Jews as well as non-Jews, of their wages. Reb Welwel was very rich. An entire regiment of soldiers was housed in the barracks he built. Work, of course, was plentiful around these buildings. Every time an inspection had to be made, various tradesmen found their livelihood through him.

The family was extensive, because when his first wife died, he married her sister, and he had many children from both wives. He and his family lived near the barracks outside the city, in a spacious courtyard containing the farm's buildings: a stable, barn and

chicken coop and a vegetable garden near the house with all kinds of vegetables for household needs. A garden with fruit trees surrounded the house on all sides. A country atmosphere prevailed in the courtyard and hungry dogs guarded the property of their owner, which was not customary with Jews. Wide fields spread behind the residence and farm buildings. Reb Welwel worked the fields with great diligence and exceptional devotion. He loved nature and animals very much. We, the youth, respected and appreciated him for being a worker of the land, because our aspiration was to do this in Israel. We saw in him the sort of figure we longed to be, the figure of a farmer in the fields of his homeland. We were good friends with his son, Szlomo, and studied together in the *heder* of Reb Nechemia the *Melamed*. We were good friends, devoted to one another. I received my first agricultural training at Reb Welwel's farm. More than once we were absent, Szlomo and I, from the *heder* when we decided to go to the field to help his father with various kinds of work. One fine day, Szlomo whispered a secret to me: "Awiezer, today we are baling hay in the field. Father has hired many workers. There is much work and time is short. There is a chance that it may rain. The hay must not stay spread out in the field, because if it gets wet and the rain is continuous – it will rot. Even if a passing rain befalls us, the value of the hay will decrease and its quality will lessen." There was no end to my happiness and I agreed to his offer with pleasure. At home, of course, I did not tell of my "intrigues". Reb Welwel did not get angry if he found out, because he understood our desires. Early in the morning, I came to Szlomo's house, and together we rode on horseback to the fields. There was no limit to my happiness. Who could compare with me?

When we got to the field, work was already in full swing, because the workers got there before me. I took my first steps in agriculture then, and did physical work with untrained hands. I tried to work with all the workers. My friend, Szlomo, worked easily and did his work like the rest of the workers. All the workers were Christians. What Jew would agree to do agricultural work, which was considered shameful? It seemed to me I was working not in a field, but in a strange land. My imagination carried me to our Land and its fields. Reb Welwel did not keep himself aloof. Mounted on a horse, he passed from worker to worker, expedited, encouraged, promised additional wages if only they would finish baling and complete the work, because he was afraid of the rain. In fact, a heavy cloud came from somewhere on the horizon, boding ill. We began to urge each other on and vigorously continued our work. When we had nearly finished, the rain came, first quietly but then stronger from minute to minute. Szlomo and I ran to our horses and rode quickly to the house, soaked from head to foot, but happy that we had completed our work. I was afraid to return to home, and waited a few hours until my clothes dried. Often in Israel, on my moshav [cooperative settlement] in the Jezreel Valley, when I am busy harvesting the hay and doing work connected to it, pleasant memories of those days, and the experience I had at Reb Welwel Ben-Adam's farm, awake in me. This Ostrolenkan family could have moved to our Land naturally, to become integrated and strike roots in the earth of the homeland without unnecessary adjustment pains. How sad it is, that not one of its members emigrated and continued the traditions of their father.

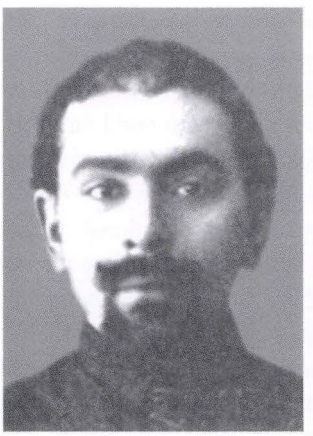
A man close to the earth, who loved the land, was Reb Welwel.

May his memory be blessed.

Motel Cycowicz Despairs of the Revolution and Repents

This Motel was related to me, my cousin. His father, of blessed memory, was an excellent *lamdan* and a learned person, but in reality – not completely successful. He was a great beggar all his life. He took care of many children, two of them mutes. When he did not succeed in business, he turned to work. He did a few kinds of work, and his wife and the many children he had helped him. They smoked herring and made bags for food. They were proof of the saying "In a multiplicity of work, there is very little blessing". They lived in a rickety building at the edge of the city, in one large room. There, they smoked fish in an oven. In the middle of the room stood a large table on which they prepared the bags. When poverty became an honored guest at their home and did not want to leave under any circumstances, my uncle sent his children to tradesmen to learn their trades. Motel was one of them. In his youth, he learned carpentry. He was a good carpenter

and knew his craft well. When he grew up, he left our city and went to Warsaw. There, he advanced in his profession and sent help to his parents when times were hard for them.



Motel Cycowicz

In Warsaw, he utilized his time in the evenings for general studies, and joined the Poalei Zion party. He read a great deal and was especially interested in literature about socialism and the development of the workers' movement in the world. His class consciousness developed over time, thanks to the workers' circles he frequented. His ambition was strong and sincere to emigrate to Israel and fulfill his heart's desire.

Whenever we met, a sharp disagreement would spark about activity in the Diaspora and about building the homeland in the future. Then our ways parted. He had an active class consciousness. The life of poverty in his family's home shaped his opinions, which did not take into account conditions existing then in the Jewish street and made no concessions regarding building the homeland. He was extreme in his opinions and outlook. He always maintained: "This is what Karl Marx said." He did not recognize the Zionist Congress and the Shekel. Of course, the K.K.L. had no integrity in his eyes, because he did not accept the possibility of cooperating with the Jewish bourgeois in all areas of life. In his opinion, we had to move and transfer the doctrine of class struggle to our country without concessions, and build a new society according to it.

At the outbreak of World War I, our city was very near the front. A few days after the start of the war, the Russian Army invaded eastern Germany. Drunk with victory and full of "patriotic" enthusiasm, it sowed destruction and ruination every step of its way. The Jews were the first victims of this war. The Russian government falsely accused them of collaborating and sympathizing with the Germans. The consequences were not late in coming. There were numerous small towns along the German-Russian border. Many of the Jews who lived in them were soon expelled. In panic and bereft of everything, they fled for their lives. Many turned their faces toward the district city of Ostrolenka. I remember how much Jewish devotion and warmth we demonstrated in their reception, absorption and settlement, to ease their suffering.

The Russian Army did indeed advance into Germany and it captured Konigsberg. After a few days, however, the victors fled in panic and disgrace, in a disorganized escape. How miserable they were in their flight. They fled for their lives, half-naked, some of them wearing women's clothes or traditional Jewish garb, which they stole in towns near the border. They left their cannons, of course, at the front. The front came closer and closer to our city. Day and night we heard echoes of cannon fire. In the evenings and at night, wagons with wounded streamed in from the front. The lightly wounded came on foot.

Materially, our city was built then, thanks to the large army encamped near it. Trade flourished and the Jews got richer day by day. Deeply involved in trade and business, they did not perceive the evil drawing closer. And the terrible day came: the strength of the Russian Army was broken and the line of retreat passed through the city. Cannon fire was aimed at the city; German aircraft bombed it from time to time, injuring the population. Jews were recruited for excavation work to protect the city. The Russian Army, seeing that it could not protect the Narew Line, retreated to the other side of the river and blew up the bridge. Soldiers prowled around the city in groups, and looted everything that came to hand. With their weapons on them, who would tell them "Stop!"? A hail of bullets and shells chased the Jews from the city. They managed to take only a tiny part of their property with them. They scattered to nearby cities far from the front.

After managing to save some of the textiles in our store, our family also left the city and moved to Bialystok, with the intention of getting to Homel in White Russia. Why specifically to Homel? Because it was far from the front and famous for its great commerce, and because most of its inhabitants were Jews. Suddenly we were refugees and homeless,

wandering and seeking shelter. We placed everything we saved in a railway car. We put a few belongings, necessary for day-to-day life, in suitcases and left by train.

On Sabbath Eve, when it was almost dark, we reached the railway station in Homel, and traveled to the city by carriage to look for a hotel. The entire city had the look of Sabbath Eve. All the stores were closed and the Jews were rushing to the synagogue. Mother, of blessed memory, burst into tears when she saw that the Sabbath had begun and that we were still knocking on the doors of hotels. No one would agree to let us in, using the same pretext – no room. Immediately, however, we discovered the secret. They were afraid to rent rooms to refugees, "*Biezencom*", in their words. When we got a negative answer at the last hotel, too, Father, of blessed memory, ordered our belongings off the cart and let the carter go, because he was Jewish and wanted to get home and to the synagogue. When the hotel owner continued to refuse, my father took out a wallet full of 500 ruble bills and gave him one bill (in those days this was a respectable sum) as a deposit and security. The hotel owner's mouth dropped open when he saw the wallet stuffed with bills. He apologized with exaggerated courtesy and immediately offered us two rooms and the best service . . . After a short time, we found a good and very comfortable apartment near the hotel. The owner of the house was a wonderful Jew. He was a tailor and a learned man, and kindhearted without limit. He is etched in our memory for the goodness of his heart and his gentle nature. For several years, we lived a life of friendship and amity in his house.

One day, Motel Cycowicz appeared in Homel. Everyone in his family stayed in Occupied Poland. He settled in immediately as a carpenter and worked in a military carpentry factory. This work entitled him to be released from army service. The Germans slowly began to advance eastward toward Homel. The city was besieged and a state of emergency was declared. Everyone to the front!

In February 1917, the first Revolution broke out. The Tsarist regime was destroyed. Freedom and liberty in the land. General happiness enveloped all Russia's populations, including the Jews among them. Freedom and liberty and public expression of opinions and thoughts. No fear! All the workers' parties came out of the Underground. The Jewish street felt the excitement and an awareness of everything that was occurring and being rekindled in Russia. In all things, the Jews were equal to all other citizens, and they stood erect. Zionists of all types organized their ranks and carried on extensive activity in all areas of life. Motel appeared in Homel at the head of Poalei Zion and was their official spokesman. At all gatherings and meetings, he spoke and argued passionately. The workers followed and loved him.

At the front, the situation was bad. The German Army would not agree to make peace. It exaggerated its demands, rebuffed the offer of peace of the Russian proletariat, advanced toward Homel and captured it. The civil war in Russia intensified. The Germans deepened their penetration into the expanses of Russia and captured Kiev. As time passed, the Bolsheviks succeeded in sowing weakness and sympathy for the Revolution's ideals in the ranks of the German Army. The German Army was bitten by the bug of the Revolution and beat a disorderly retreat to Germany through Poland. The Poles exploited the chaos and established Free Poland. The Poalei Zion party recognized the October Revolution and offered active help to the Bolsheviks in their war against all enemies who rose against them. The Soviet government declared them a legal party and a sister [organization], with common interests. In their great happiness, they forgot their mission and were swept away in the waves of the Revolution, in which they saw the solution to the Jewish problem.

Meanwhile, with the help of equipment from France and England, the Polish Army fought bravely against the large Russian Army, which had no weapons and was surrounded by enemies. The Poles approached about fifteen kilometers from Homel. The police were drafted to the front. Fearing pogroms and riots, the Soviet government took measures and recruited the city's workers for self-protection. In workplaces, every workers committee was required to send people for protection. I was also drafted then. Suddenly, a change for the good began. The strength of the Polish Army was broken and it retreated westward in panic, with the Russian Army chasing after it.

On the part of the Poalei Zion party, Motel enlisted in the Red Army, fought in its ranks and advanced with it toward Poland, to Warsaw. When the Red Army entered our city, Motel was appointed by the new authority to head the Workers' and Farmers' Council, and the entire government passed into his hands. The day after the occupation, he called all the townspeople to a big meeting. Before all those who attended, he

wrathfully took down the Polish eagle. He made a revolutionary and enthusiastic speech in favor of the liberating Red Army and promised the glory of a bright era in Poland for all the Jews who lived in it. To the wealthy of the city, Jews and Poles, he said: "From now on, all the property you stole will be taken from you. It will be given to the workers and the poor. What you have amassed from the work and exploitation of others will be returned to the people."

But the glory days of the Red Army government in Poland did not last long. The Red Army was defeated near Warsaw and retreated eastward. Motel felt the earth shifting under his feet, and knew that the days of his government were numbered. He feared greatly lest the Polish authority, returning to the city, would avenge itself on his family. He decided to move them to the regional city of Lomza. He confiscated a wagon, gathered all their personal belongings from the house, loaded it all on the wagon and seated his family on top of everything. Lest any harm befall them, Motel escorted them personally, armed with a rifle, bullets and two hand grenades in his belt. After bringing them to Lomza, he parted from them and joined the retreating Red Army again.

At this time, I still lived in Homel and worked there as an accountant in one of the government institutions. Quite late one winter night, I heard a quiet, hesitant knock on the door. A knock like this did not raise any suspicion in me, even though at that time knocks at the door late at night boded unpleasant things . . . I got up from bed, went to the door and cautiously asked, "Who is that knocking?" "Open, Awiezer, it's me – Motel." When I recovered, I asked him, "Is it really you, Motel, at this hour? And from whence do you come?" "Don't ask. I'm frozen with cold and dying from hunger." I opened the door and lit the lamp and, in its light, I saw him. Motel himself stood before me. He looked terrible. He had grown a beard, he was dirty and shook with cold. After he ate and drank, I prepared warm water for him. He washed and shaved and, without any discussion, I showed him a place to sleep. The next day he told me all his encounters from the time he left Homel and joined the Red Army. He had endured hard spiritual shocks. All his faith in the new regime was shaken. He returned to work as a carpenter for the government, and from time to time worked in the homes of the commissars and chief workers who had a party card. He told me what he had seen while he worked. In the city, there was hunger. Bread was distributed in small portions – but in the homes of the commissars, he saw excess and gluttony. They fried meat and fish and swilled wine in large glasses. "Is this the Revolution", he asked, "that we hoped and waited for, and for which we fought? And where is social equality? The Tsarist regime fell, the strength of capitalism was destroyed and in its place has risen a third, over-privileged class, which exploits the power of its government and enjoys everything and the people – once again, suffering, hunger, groaning and asking: 'Who will save us? And we, the Jews, what do we have to do with all this?'" During stormy battles throughout Russia in those days, especially in the Ukraine, the Counter-Revolution conducted pogroms against the Jews. Entire communities were erased from the face of the earth. The Russo-Soviet government took no heed of the Jewish community's appeals to allow them a self-defense organization to stand up against the White rioters. "Join the ranks of the Red Army, and thus protect yourselves." The fate of the Jews in Russia at that time was bad and bitter. They were between a rock and a hard place. Motel did not return to the Poalei Zion party. Despair beset him. He could not find a solution for the Jewish Question in their program. Its way and direction were not in accord with his viewpoint and bitter experience. "No," he asserted, "we will not be grease for the wheels of the Russian Revolution." In the Jewish street, the Section for Jewish Affairs took control, with the help of the authority. It became an official part of an omnipotent government. The Poalei Zion party was brought down from its greatness, declared illegal and its existence ended. Only the I.K.P. [Jewish Communist Party] communist faction of Poalei Zion was permitted a miserable and limited existence.

Motel saw that everything was over and that he sat on the ruins of all that was dear to him. He was despondent and silent. One evening, he came to visit me at my house and sat opposite me, enfeebled and sunken into himself. I felt that he held something inside him. With much exertion, I succeeded in drawing him out. Before me sat a despairing and bitter-souled man, from whom everything had been stolen. His world was completely destroyed. At the end of the conversation, he turned to me and said, "Awiezer, accept me into the ranks of HeChalutz. I am yours! Send me wherever you command. I am behind you and at your disposal. Only in our land will we find refuge and a solution for all our longings! . . ."

Awiezer Drori (Kupferminc), Kfar Yechezkel

Yosef Finkelsztejn, Holon, Tel Aviv

Upon the Outbreak of World War I

Among the hundreds of cities and towns in the country of Poland, there was something special about Ostrolenka. This city held an honorable place in Polish history because of the famous Rebellion of 1831, and the Poles were proud of it. Besides this, it was known and had great importance for these reasons:

1. Its proximity to the border of Eastern Prussia (only 35 kilometers) had a positive influence on its economy and commerce;
2. The Russian Army barracks in the town were a source of livelihood for many Jewish families, which provided goods for the Russian Army;
3. On the River Narew, which flowed through the center of the city, wooden rafts floated to Danzig, providing a source of regular support for the town's wood merchants;
4. A railway hub connected Ostrolenka to many cities and towns, increasing trade and creating places of livelihood for its inhabitants.

As in the rest of Poland's cities, there were study halls and prayer houses for the Chassidim of Admorim of various courts and dynasties in Ostrolenka, too. There was also a yeshiva for hundreds of the children of the inhabitants of the town and the neighborhood.

Life continued this way until the 1st of August 1914.

On that day, like lightning from the heavens, news of the declaration of World War I struck the heads of the Jews.

Upon receiving the awful news, panic rose in the town, which was all in turmoil. Whoever had a grosz in his pocket began stocking up on various foodstuffs, but the staples merchants were in a difficult position, because, without cash, they could not get anything. People stood in the streets and talked gravely about the calamity which had come upon them so suddenly. The town's "shield bearers" looked for advice as to how to face the evil. The first of the speakers among them was Mojszele the *Melamed*. He suggested that all the Jews should go to the cemetery at the outskirts of the town immediately, and pass their days there in Torah and respectful behavior until the end of the war. Eliezer Eliahu the *Melamed* opposed this suggestion with all his might, asserting that this was not the way. Then, Chaim Mordechaj simply said they should wait and see what the day would bring, and then what would be decided would be decided . . . Thus they argued for hours, and did not agree on any opinion . . .

This was the first day of the war. During the next days, people slowly began to get used to the situation that had come into being and life nearly returned to its routine. There were those who derived material benefit from the war by purchasing surplus goods from the Russian Army, which was transferred to the border (word of mouth said that they became rich and made a fortune). Meanwhile, the war continued and the Jews renewed their affairs and supplied goods to the army. It surged to the border through town, which was the main artery to the front. Suddenly, all this bliss vanished, as if it had never been.

Black Friday

It quickly became clear that the Russian Army's progress in Eastern Prussia was enabled by the enemy's intentional misdirection. After the Russian Corps reached the outskirts of Leipzig and the Allenstein [Olsztyn], a German strike force launched a huge counterattack and struck the Russians, who fled for their lives while they still had the chance.

The first escapees who appeared in town were mostly wounded and crushed. This terrible and sudden sight cast terror on the townspeople, who left their stores open and fled for their lives, leaving the city. It was shocking to see mothers, gripped by fear, searching for their children and not finding them. The same thing happened to the children, who searched for their parents in this chaos. The Lord, who "provides the cure before the disease", made a miracle by sending a Russian-Jewish officer, who perceived the sudden danger and came. On horseback, he hurried to the Jews, who were gripped with fear. He calmed them and counseled them not to abandon their property and their children. Even, he said, if the enemy enters the city, no danger to the citizens was foreseen. His words found an attentive ear and the panicked flight stopped. Messengers were even sent to bring back those who had fled. My late father, Fajwel Finkelsztejn, may he rest in peace, also calmed

agitated spirits. During those frenzied times, he supplied goods to the Russian Army and, until then, had been near the front. He suddenly appeared in town on horseback, after senior officers hinted to him what they hinted. He helped explain that the danger was not so great and that, in any event, there was no need to flee the city. After this incident, life returned to normal, and continued without any discernable change for about a year, until August 1915.

The Destruction of the Town

Livelihood was plentiful. The front was about twenty to twenty-five kilometers from town, and the movement of the Corps through town, to and from the front, was great. Of course, something remained in the inhabitants' pockets. There were, however, problems and other dire straits: 1. aircraft came rapidly and dropped bombs (small ones in today's terms), causing loss of life and property damage; 2. daily kidnappings of men for forced labor, such as fortifications, etc.

On Sabbath, 17 July 1915, the Corps conducted a search for men in the town's streets and in its homes. The latter hid in basements and attics, but did not always succeed. Suddenly, there was a feeling of approaching danger in the air. The fact that the railway was dismantled and that movement took place in one direction only, that is, from the front, only confirmed this feeling.

The next day, an order from the Front Commander appeared in the streets, to the effect that the Jews must leave the city within a few hours. At first, the Jews thought that this was merely a trick to get the men out of hiding, but it was quickly clarified by a delegation received by the Front Commander, headed by my late father, of blessed memory. This absolute command from on high for the expulsion of the Jews could not be changed (expulsions at that time involved a "scorched earth" policy). Only then did people understand the gravity of the situation. Once again, panic to leave the city arose. Now, everyone wanted to salvage whatever they could. Actual rescue, however, was impossible to carry out without the help of wagons, a fact that was well-exploited by the rurals. The next morning, when we left the city in four wagons that we had succeeded in obtaining, the road was full of men, women and children, who left town bereft of everything. This was a terrible sight. At the same time, we heard the sound of an enormous explosion; the bridge over the Narew was blown up by the retreating army. This thunder increased the confusion even more. Harnessed to wagons, the horses were also frightened and ran away with their owners. No one knew how to escape from the chaos and the impending danger. Of all the wagons brought, only one remained. Although its horses were gripped by fear and went wild, for some reason, they did not get away. In the blink of an eye, the wagon was filled with various personal effects. After it disappeared, I lingered in the city for some reason, and saw a city emptied of everything. Only here and there, things were loaded onto handcarts. Only army personnel, who stayed close to the walls of the buildings, could be seen in the empty streets. It was clear that they were far from friendly to us. With a few other youths, I tried to remove signs from stores, to make it more difficult for robbers who would come seeking what they wanted, but our mission was not very successful. On that same day, I left the city. For the next two days, we made efforts to reach the city, but in vain. We tried bribery, we asked for mercy, but all our toil was for naught. The answer was one and the same: there is a war on now, and there is no chance to change the decree. Indeed, the battles were in full force and the firing reached four-five kilometers from the city.

One morning a few days later, I awoke at three o'clock and, together with some other people, tried our luck at getting to town. When we reached the barricade near the train, we encountered the army guard and, without any particular effort, succeeded in bribing them with a five ruble note and continued on our way. Exactly the same thing happened after we had gone another half a kilometer. Thus we continued, until we encountered the main guard two kilometers from the city. Here again, nothing helped. Not the bribe we offered, not our many pleas. At the last minute, the carter suggested that we bypass the guard and reach the city through the fields. Indeed, we had seen wagons that went this way, driven by rurals. We decided to try. In a nearby grove, about a kilometer from the city, we turned off the road and entered a field. Suddenly, a Cossack appeared before us and arrested us. We were four adults and I, a child of thirteen. The Cossack led us to his commander, who, as it turned out, was an honest Cossack. Here we discovered something very interesting: on horseback, with his whip, the commander of the Cossacks struck in all directions at the heads of the rurals, without mercy. What was happening soon became clear to us. The rurals

absorbing the blows were thieves who had come to the city to plunder it; using this route, they were taking their plunder out. The Cossack commander, however, saw what was going on, came toward them with some of his people and punished them. About 40-50 wagons had already been emptied there. On the ground were many piles of all kinds of goods and possessions that the rurals had stolen. The commander questioned them briefly and punished them on the spot. While doing so, he saw us and, turning to the Cossack who brought us, asked, "Who are these people?" The Cossack replied what he replied. Our group pushed me forward as the spokesman; because of my youth, they thought I might awaken his mercy. And indeed, this plan succeeded. I told him that we were residents of the city, and were having problems obtaining a permit to enter town. After we saw people leaving the city on this road with all sorts of items, we decided to try our luck. He asked what we wanted to do in the city which was within range of the front. I explained that none of us had managed to save any household items, and therefore remained bereft of everything.

Apparently, my words made an impression on him, because he immediately pulled a register with seals from his pocket and prepared an entry permit for us. Then he directed us toward the main route running along the road. Once again, we encountered the same guard, which did not even want to hear our pleas earlier. But this time, after they saw our permit, they allowed us to enter the city. We saw a horrible sight: the stores were broken into, merchandise and various goods were scattered in the streets and the rurals went from house to house, stealing whatever they could get their hands on. At the study hall, we found a few poor families with their possessions. The soldier-guards helped the rurals to plunder the Jews' property and, on the other hand, demanded of the Jews entry permits and proofs that they were residents of the town. They left us alone only after we showed them our permit. After a very short time, the enemy began shelling the town again. A short distance from me, a soldier was killed and a young man was wounded. The horses, gripped by fear of the firing, went wild and ran away. The carter took off after them. I remained in the city and, after the shelling stopped and the firing subsided, I wandered here and there to see the destruction.

While I was walking on Ostrowy Street, where Schmidt's medical warehouse was, I noticed soldiers coming out of it, with bags full of merchandise on their shoulders. At that moment, some shells blew up in the area. After a short time, I saw yellow smoke billowing and rising from the store. I turned to some passersby and to some soldiers, and asked them to help me extinguish the fire, but they were all confused and at a loss, and no one paid attention to me. The bullets began whistling around me again, and I could not find any buckets. Besides, I did not know where to get water. So I stood there, bewildered, at a distance of 30 to 50 meters from the place where the calamity began.

Another shocking moment is etched in my memory. After we succeeded in loading the household goods on the wagons, a guard of soldiers suddenly appeared and demanded that we give them the horses harnessed to the wagons. We begged them with tears in our eyes, but they were adamant. They needed the horses. Luckily, an officer appeared and ordered them to leave us alone. We saw the fire spread throughout the entire town. Distancing ourselves from town, it was clear to us that this was our last visit there, where we were born and raised. In great despair, people who had lost their property threw the keys to their homes onto the road. We reached Czerwin, about twenty kilometers from Ostrolenka. For three continuous days and nights, we saw the fire eat our city and our property. This happened exactly one year to the day of the declaration of war.

Meir Margalit

My Memories

I came to the world in the month of May 1906, in my town of Ostrolenka.

In 1914, World War I broke out. One morning in 1915, after the cannons' thunder had continued for an entire year, and after many sleepless nights frightened by cannon thunder, an order was given at sunrise that all Jews, as well as the rest of the inhabitants, must leave town immediately. The cannons roared and the soldiers of the Tsar's defeated army fled from the German front, running wild, dressed in torn clothing. On their way, they plundered and murdered the Jews.

I remember that near our house stood a wagon loaded with pillows and other household items – whatever could be saved of property accumulated by hard work over dozens of years. We harnessed a pair of horses and set off. What a shocking picture! Hundreds of wagons, as well as those on foot, carrying all their possessions on their backs. The despondent faces of the sick, unable to walk. Good Jews had mercy and transported them without payment. Thus the convoy continued on to Ostrowa. A similar fate befell dozens and hundreds of towns and Jewish settlements.

We wandered for a whole year. News reached us that Ostrolenka was completely burned, that only a few houses were left on the edge of the city. Luckily, Benedon's barracks still stood. Most of the Jews who returned, and found their homes destroyed, congregated there.

Ostrolenka! I remember very little of my life in the city before World War I. I was, after all, a child of nine, but I remember how we returned after a stay of a few months in Lomza, harnessing a pair of horses to a wagon and loading bundles on it.

We arrived early in the evening. A light rain fell. I sat on the wagon, together with my brother and my sisters, big and little. When we approached the city from the Lomza Road, we saw the destroyed buildings, the chimneys, burned walls and shaky terraces. We reached the street where our house stood, opposite the great synagogue. Suddenly, the destroyed houses appeared before us, among them our house. The sign on it, with a picture of a horse and saddle, blew in the wind. The head of the horse drawn on it was perforated with bullet holes. We stood silent in front of the house; only the soft weeping of parents and children was heard.

A similar sight repeated itself in front of many Jewish homes whose owners returned from exile to their ruined homes.

I remember that I did not close an eye that first night. The wind whistling among the walls cast fear, especially over the children. The next morning, the sun shone as if nothing had happened. I wandered around the alleyways and met many friends who had returned. Everyone searched among the ruins; perhaps they would find some familiar things. There were those who dug in the ground and took out valuables they had buried before they left, such as silver and copper items, or keepsakes passed on in the family from generation to generation.

And so our city gradually revived and showed signs of life. The relationship between the Jews and the German occupiers was good at that time. The Poles had no contact with them, but for the Jews, the German language was familiar and they felt like fish in water . . .

Again stores opened and tradesmen who had a bit of cash began to build their homes anew. During that period, the construction of an iron bridge over the River Narew began, replacing the old wooden bridge from the time of the tsars, which was blown up during the war by mines. Many workers were employed in the construction of the bridge. Jewish craftsmen and merchants also had a plentiful livelihood from it.

* * *

But it is a mistake to think that the town flourished only economically. At the same time, different [political] parties and cultural groups began to organize. Despite the lack of housing prevalent then, the organizations found places where they could run their activities. I remember well the two rooms at Joska [Joszkieliczy]. In one room there was a library, with some large closets crammed with books. The librarian was Icchak Lew (the oldest son of Anszel Lew). In the evening hours, these two cubicles filled up with youths who exchanged books, held lively debates about literature and books, and recommended that their friends read this novel or another.

A choir and a drama circle were also organized.

Parties arose: the Bund, Tze'erei Zion, Poalei Zion and Mizrachi, as well as Agudat Yisrael (which was then called "Shlomei Emunei Yisrael"). This party tried to fight against us, especially the Zionists, but without success. Many of their followers, especially the youth, joined other political organizations.

Once again, the ruined buildings with the protruding chimneys did not frighten us. After the Tsarist regime, everyone breathed more easily and enjoyed the unlimited freedom. Every evening, after the stores and workshops were locked and the serving-girls finished their ten-hour work day, everyone gathered in recreation and cultural clubs. Discussions were heard and song echoed (every organization had its own songs). Jews also sat in temporary study halls and learned – some *Ein Yakov* and some *Mishnayot*. In time, different lecturers began to visit our city. I remember the visit of the writer Numberg, who lectured about Peretz. The theater hall was full. Sometimes [theater] companies visited us, as well as actors, among them famous ones, such as the troupes of Anna Jakobowicz, Awraham Icchak Kaminski, Julius Adler and others. I still remember winter nights when the theater was completely full, and plays of those times were presented to the audience: *The Family*, by Numberg, *Uriel Acosta* and *The Kishinev Pogrom*. This always interested the townspeople.

By the way, I would like to mention that when Awraham Icchak Kaminski traveled from Ostrolenka with his troupe to perform in Lomza, he caught a heavy cold on the way and was buried in the Lomza cemetery.

Storytellers also came to the study halls. I remember the famous magid, Rapaport from Bialystok. He stood on the stage and preached for four full hours. A religious and secular audience filled the study hall; it devoured all his utterances with admiration. Thus, our city revived.

In addition to party and political activities, voluntary work for the needy was also in operation, for example, a soup kitchen that distributed hundreds of lunches daily. Although there were Jews who supported themselves respectably, poor people were also not lacking from among us and the homeless of the area. I remember that when a typhus plague ran rampant in the city, the *Linat Tzedek* organization arose. Youths and adults were enlisted to work and help the severely ill to the best of their ability. Blocks of ice were smashed and the heads of the sick were bandaged with the fragments. [The volunteers] came in contact with them without fear of contagion. The soup kitchen was not only a place of social assistance. We held literary evenings and theatrical plays in its hall. Shalom Aleichem's famous sketches, *The Doctor*, *The Merchant*, *The Divorce*, *Mazel Tov* and others met with special success. Some tables were pushed together to form an impromptu stage. Sheets became a curtain, *kapotas*, belts and other necessary props were taken from the inhabitants' houses. We pasted on primitive beards and "played" theater. Revenues from these evenings were not always small, according to the standards of those times. The profits were used for charitable purposes or organizational activities.

All sorts of youth groups met in private homes. I wish to mention here groups that I was connected with, for example, the group at Bajuk's in Szrejter's House on Lomza Road. This home was far from rich and luxurious. A comfortable disorder always prevailed, but there was a warm and pleasant atmosphere. I remember the furniture there: two couches, a big table with chairs and a number of other items, the "historic" value of which was doubtful; but the whole house was full of light and happiness, song and merriment. The father, Jakow Bajuk, who had a high forehead, large, warm eyes, a carefully trimmed graying beard and a deep, pleasant voice, always sat in one of the rooms. He never got angry and did not raise his voice. He sat at a table in the corner, with a pen in his hand, before him an inkwell and a white sheet of paper. Near him sat a Jew who murmured unclear words and Jakow turned these inarticulate sentences into a letter in Polish or German. Jakow Bajuk wrote requests. He sometimes also appeared in court as a sort of defender or advocate to protect people and look for points in their favor against their indictments. He belonged to *Chovevei Zion*. He led prayers with his pleasant voice and was liked by all the city's circles. His wife was a model *Yiddishe Momme* [Jewish mother], not only for her sons, but for anyone she encountered. Nearly every day, the happiness brought by their sons (they did not have daughters) prevailed there. The Bajuk family was blessed with handsome, talented sons, who had a gift for the theater arts. They all sang and recited; some of them acted on the stage. One of them, Welwel Bajuk, left his home while he was still a youth, and was thus saved from the Holocaust.

A few words about my friend, Eli Bajuk, who was my age. He was a handsome lad of diverse talents and wrote well. He demonstrated his dramatic abilities when

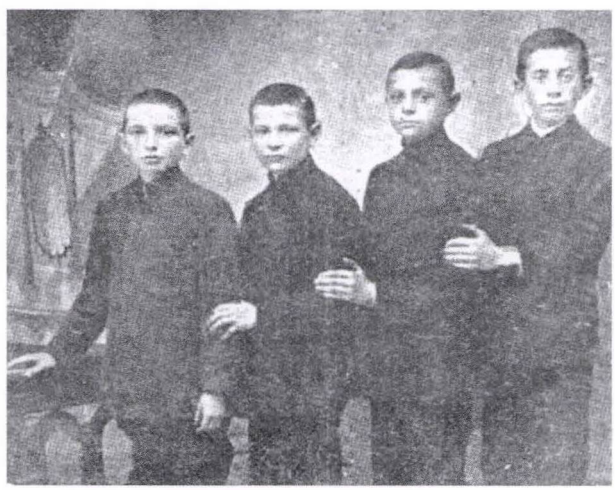
he appeared on the stage. At every social gathering, he created an atmosphere of intelligence and humor around him. This is a brief description of the Bajuk family, which we, the youth, admired, loved and often visited at their home.

In the same hallway, in a nearby apartment, lived Anszel Lew. His name meant a great deal to many of our townspeople. This home was the source of Zionism in Ostrolenka in those times. Anszel Lew, short and broad-shouldered, with graying light-brown hair and beautiful, childlike eyes, was the first teacher of modern Hebrew in the city. He also taught Yiddish and mathematics in various evening courses, and worked with great devotion as secretary of the community chest. He always held a cane in his hand. In the winter, he wore a cloak and hurried from one *heder* to another, from one club to another, to give lessons to groups until late at night. Besides this, individuals studied with him. He imbued in all our hearts the Hebrew language and culture and great love for the Land of Israel.

Anszel Lew was a typical enlightened man of those times. He was replete with old and new Hebrew literature and possessed universal knowledge. His wife, short and thin, was influenced by Chassidic literature. Their house was simply furnished. A large book closet took a place of honor. Their house was also blessed with children, with energy and activity. The oldest son, Icchak Lew, was one of the central figures of the HaTikva Zionist organization, and after him, Jankel and Awraham. The youngest, Dawid Lew, who was my friend, was a member of the Haganah and fell in Jerusalem at a young age, during the events of 1929. He was a metalworker and every day, after working hours, secretly manufactured weapons for the Haganah. The youngest of the Lew family was their only daughter, Golda.

We spent a lot of time at that house. We tried to speak Hebrew among ourselves and listened to Anszel Lew's stories about Israel. He was crammed with knowledge and aspired to emigrate himself. He told us about different Zionist leaders, about books they had written in Yiddish and Hebrew. He especially liked to talk about Hillel Zeitlin. We, the youths, were enraptured by his words and, together with him, traveled in our thoughts to the Galilee, the Jordan Valley and young Tel Aviv. We "met" Jewish workers of the land and guards, who were known to us from various postcards and Keren HaKayemet stamps. We never tired of listening to him and he always influenced us with fatherly love. May his memory be blessed.

We now leave the Szrejter Building, walk the length of Lomza Street, turn left to Ostrowy Street, reach the fire station and turn right again. Here the road was unpaved. On dry days, it was possible to get to the Benedon barracks without sinking into the mud. But on rainy days or periods of melting snows, sinking into the mud was unavoidable. After the first fire in the city, the barracks became the center of Ostrolenka's population. They removed the big windows and used the wood to make doors for stores. At the entrance to the tinsmith's store hung various iron and tin products: baking pans for cookies and *challahs* [Sabbath bread], pails, bowls and housewares. From inside the store came the sounds of tin and soldering tools, attesting to the fact that here lived a tinsmith.



Youngsters in the Ostrolenka drama group
From the right: Awraham Perla, Eli Bajuk, Meir Margalit, Dawid Lew

A sign hung on a nearby store and on it was drawn a boot. A folk melody and cantorial selections burst from the store. A newly-soled pair of shoes, turned upside-down, was put out to dry in the sun. Here, the shoemaker worked. Onward – a store for textile products, the milliner's and, nearby, a store from which the smells of herring and fresh oil spread, mingled with the smell of kerosene and other sharp odors. Further on, cries of the "confession" of a rooster, fluttering in the hand of the slaughterer, merged with the voice of the *melamed* teaching Torah to his students.

Most of the inhabitants here were laborers. The wealthy and the more affluent built themselves new

homes in place of those that had burned, so the Russian barracks of Benedon became a town existing on its own merit.

Welwel Ben-Adam (Benedon), the old man himself, and his respectable family lived in a big apartment with large rooms, and on its front a porch with colorful awnings. I see before me the patriarchal figure of the head of the family, Reb Welwel Ben-Adam, the richest man in Ostrolenka. Despite his wealth, he was a gentle man, with a stirring voice. His hair and sparse beard were white as snow, and his benevolent blue eyes gazed through gold-framed eyeglasses. In the summer, he wore a white jacket; in the winter – a black coat with a fox fur collar and a black fur hat. In his hand, a walking stick with a silver monogram. His wife, short and solidly-built, received the youths who visited their home warmly. Their son, Szlomo Ben-Adam, a Zionist activist, was older than we were. We visited those who were our age, Lazer and Chana. An atmosphere other than those I have described prevailed at this home. Here, discussions were about Polish literature; they sang Polish and German songs and also romances. One of the house's large rooms was used for our drama circle rehearsals. The parents and the older brothers and sisters never disturbed us, even if the rehearsals were loud and caused disorder in the house. We used household articles for props. Eli Bajuk wore the host's frock coat and his high silk cap, and played the role of the rich man in *Doctor-Merchant*; Chana Ben-Adam wore her mother's velvet coat and played the wife of the rich man; Gutman Grosman found the secondary school beret of one of the sons and played the role of the secondary school student son, and Rywka Braun played the female secondary school student. I took Reb Welwel's cane, turned his hat around a bit [to look like a *chevreman* ("cool")], stuck a red kerchief into my pocket and played Reb Shalom the Matchmaker. Rehearsal nights caused us joy and brought cheer to the entire house. Afterward, the play moved to the improvised stage in the soup kitchen hall. Of course, I could only devote myself to acting during summer vacations and on holidays. For us, the [drama] circle was like a club and a place of recreation, in addition to political organizations, where we met for other purposes.

I would like to recall another house in Ostrolenka – the home of Gutman the Medic. They were partly assimilated and spoke only Polish there. Gutman himself was short, with a hint of a small beard in the style of aristocratic Jews. His older children studied medicine outside Ostrolenka, of course. His children, Chajka (in America today), Estusza (or Ester) and Beniek, who were our age, were our friends. Different opinions and viewpoints ruled in their house. Some belonged to the Zionist movement, others to the Bund, and it was said that one of them was even an extreme leftist . . . but this did not interfere with friendship and amity when we all met there.

Thus things went on for a few years, until the Germans left Poland. Poland became independent and was a sovereign state. The situation of the Jews became more difficult. Many of our older friends were drafted into the Polish army. Despite this, life in our city was as effervescent as ever. Disagreements between parties intensified; idealism and the yearning to free humanity from the yoke of the oppressors were prominent. We, the Zionist youth, never negated this yearning, but as to Jewish national freedom – there was only the Land of Israel, or as we called it then, Palestine. Serious arguments took place between members of various organizations, and not necessarily in meeting clubs or halls, but also during walks in the park or on the Sabbath, when we went over the bridge to the forts. During the walk on Ostrowy Road, the songs of members of different parties mingled – mostly Bund songs with Zionist songs.



The drama circle with the actor, Meir Margalit (as a visitor from Israel), in Ostrolenka in 1934 (standing, third from the right, Shalom Margalit)

Lecturers from big cities came to us and spoke in full halls. Stormy debates broke out then, and we also argued within the walls of study halls and prayer houses.

After a short time, another storm occurred in our lives. It was at the time of the Bolshevik invasion of Poland in 1920. As always, in tense situations such as these, the Jews absorbed the "first fire", and did not know how it would all end. In a short time, as is known, the Russian Army was defeated and retreated. The Polish government, especially the anti-Semites (who were never lacking in Poland), began to avenge themselves on the Jews, despite the fact that they had no connection with what had happened. And life went on. Social meetings began again. The organizations were active once more, and the youth tried to create a more or less normal life.

I return to the Gutman family, because their home had a fateful influence on my future life. It happened on a regular evening which we, a group of young people, spent at their home after we had not met for several months. As usual, we had fun, we argued, we burst into song. Suddenly, we heard familiar whistles. The Ostrolenkan police surrounded the Gutman home and arrested all of us. We were brought to the municipality with coarse curses and brutal shoves. Among us were Eli Bajuk, Gutman Grosman, Jechiel Szafran and others. We spent the night at the police station. They accused us of Communism and that we had sung Bolshevik songs – no more and no less! The investigation proved that all this was only libel and we were released. Even so, the evening's events cast fear on all the Jews in the city. We sensed the terrible situation in which we found ourselves, and although I was very young, I began to speak to my parents' hearts about leaving Poland. They understood me, but said that at my age it was still too soon to consider, and that I had to continue to learn and possibly also to acquire a profession. At the time, emigration to Israel was already progressing. After long negotiations between my parents and me, they agreed at the end. I began to learn a profession (metalwork), joined HeChalutz of Lomza, prepared a passport and got ready to emigrate.

* * *

More than 13 years have passed since I left Ostrolenka. Contact with the family was, as usual, through letters and regards sent by townspeople. By the way, the friends who emigrated to Israel over time, and later returned to Ostrolenka because they could not find their place in Israel, shared, of course, the bitter fate of all those who remained there.

One of the friends who emigrated and stayed was Dawid Lew. Our close relationship and the warm connection between us did not stop for even one day. When he lived in Tel Aviv, we met every day and talked about the future of our country. Our conversations did not lack the mention of our city, our circle of friends and its primitive, yet interesting life. Sometimes we humorously referred to specific "types" of our city: community leaders, public activists and party leaders, as well as slogans that the right and the left disseminated. Meanwhile, we matured and with life of the Land of Israel in the background, everything seemed innocent, like a far-off echo.

In the course of time, Jechiel Szafran and Awraham Lew (the brother of Dawid Lew) arrived here. When we speak of Dawid Lew, we must relate how his life developed in Israel. Let it not be forgotten that we were very young. Every meeting with Dawid became a source of great enjoyment for me. It would not be banal to say that he was the most ideal and the best among us. He combined Torah and work: during the day, he worked as a metalworker and in the evenings, he studied. During all his free hours, he was never without a book. Dawid joined the Haganah when I was already there, but each of us did not know about the other until we met at a course. We both burst out laughing, out of real enjoyment that we had succeeded in keeping the secret. Meanwhile, I was accepted by the Ohel Theater drama studio, which was established then. After a time, Dawid Lew moved to work in Jerusalem, but our deep friendship continued as before. When Dawid came to Tel Aviv, or I to Jerusalem with the theater, we always spent time together in the theater hall or backstage. Whenever we met, he was more enthusiastic, interesting and unpredictable. He found great satisfaction in his work in Jerusalem, both in his profession and in the Haganah, where, as a metalworker, he was of great value in the manufacture of weapons (none of the weapons we had were first-rate). He did this, as we all did, not for the sake of reward. And so we met, as natives of Ostrolenka and as good friends, until . . . the events of 1929, when one morning I saw a black frame in the newspaper: Dawid Lew fell while protecting Jerusalem. May his memory be blessed.

After the calamity, letters reached his brother, Awraham Lew, demanding that he return home to Ostrolenka. He went, as he told me, only for a short time. Unfortunately, he stayed there and his fate was the same as the fate of all Ostrolenka's Jews. Others also

returned, among them Berel Bajuk, Jechiel Szafran and Israel Kachan. As the mood in Israel was very bad then, they could not withstand the difficulties and left.

* * *

In the summer of 1934, our Ohel Theater traveled to Europe for guest appearances. After we played the capital cities of Paris, London, Brussels and other cities in Italy and Switzerland, we reached Poland. We reached the border city of Grabie at midnight. I left my friends, who continued on to Warsaw, and the next morning I traveled to Ostrolenka by way of Lomza. At night, I sent a wire that I was coming home. When I reached Lomza, some family members, as well as members of the local drama circle were waiting for me. The streets of the city that in my eyes, as a child-refugee, were once large and important – seemed a backward province now.

It was time to travel to Ostrolenka. All the way, I did not take my eyes off the sights of the villages I passed, especially the Wojciechowice army base. At the outskirts of the city, I immediately recognized the prison which, out of fear, Jewish youths sometimes avoided passing. On the right – the large public park, where we used to stroll. It now seemed more improved than when I left it, after the World War, neglected. The schools which I attended in my childhood – first the Jewish, then the Polish – looked a great deal better.

A large group immediately came to meet me. Friends, comrades, acquaintances and family members received me with warmth and friendliness. Unfortunately, I could stay with them for only three days, because of the debut of a play that was to take place in Warsaw (at the Kaminski Theater). I devoted these few days to my townspeople and family. Although aware of what was happening in the towns of Poland – anti-Semitism, oppression of the Jews, etc. – the entire atmosphere there made a depressing impression on me. While the city had been rebuilt and the roads paved, restlessness and disquiet prevailed among the Jewish youth. From everyone I spoke to, regardless of outlook or party affiliation, I heard only the words: Israel, America, Argentina, Uruguay, etc. The members of HeChalutz and HaShomer HaTzair were more optimistic, because they knew that sooner or later they would leave the place. Whoever had money for travel expenses was happy and everyone envied him. The situation of female members was worse. They were deeply depressed. The daughters of respectable or established *balabatim* were helpless and thought: From where will help come?

Ohel's first plays in Warsaw met with great success. The positive reviews and praise in the Polish and Jewish press reached cities and towns all over Poland. The people of Ostrolenka were especially proud of their townsman, who did not shame them.

The first reception took place at the HaPoel Hall, which was completely full of townspeople. Many others stayed outside for lack of space. For me, this was an unforgettable experience, and I was thrilled to the depths of my heart. Even people I did not know shook my hand and expressed their thanks. The event warmed the difficult atmosphere that prevailed in town a little. I told them about the Hebrew theater in Israel and about Ohel's successes in the capitals of Europe.

Later, we spent time in an intimate circle, with drinks, at the home of Pesach Hochberg. Some townspeople who had seen the play in Warsaw, asked me to appear in a one-man show in Ostrolenka, acting and reading, specifically in Hebrew. They wanted to achieve a double purpose: first, to see me perform, and second, to dedicate the performance's proceeds to pioneers who were planning to emigrate to Israel, but could not afford to buy a travel ticket.

I received the proposal with great joy. Ten days later, I appeared at the CISZO Hall, in an evening of Yiddish and Hebrew readings, with selections from the works of Bialik, Avigdor HaMeiri, Mendele and others. Within two hours, all the tickets were sold. It is interesting that most of the audience were Bundists. The Zionists stayed outside . . . During my performance, there was complete silence in the hall, and I felt that I was merging with everyone, and everyone with me . . . these enchanted moments will never leave my memory.

My last visit to Ostrolenka was on Simchat Torah. It was very joyous at the home of my brother, Mosze Margalit, of blessed memory, and also at other meetings.

Thus my beloved and dear town of Ostrolenka remains in my memory.



Meir Margalit (guest) with other party members
From the right: Chaim Piaseczny, Zyskind Lachowicz, Meir Margalit, Pesach Hochberg, Hanan Eisenstein, Eliezer Lachowicz, Berel Bajuk

Shimshon Dov Yerushalmi (Jeruzalimski)

My Ostrolenka

Is it "mine"? Why, it no longer exists. (I refer to Jewish Ostrolenka.) And even if it existed, would I have the right to call it "mine"? What is my right to hold on to it? Can a man who lived in a city for less than four of his childhood years – and this was about sixty years ago – claim that it was "mine"? And what gives him the right to do so?

All these questions gnawed and continue to gnaw at my brain, as I approach and draw my memories from the depths of forgetfulness, and put them in writing – memories combining recollections of my childhood and the period after it, of Ostrolenka, that was and is no more ...

I must first tell how I came to write of these memories.

This is what happened.

A number of years ago, in 1954 or 1955 I believe, someone whom I had never met before approached me and introduced himself by his Hebrew name, the name of Yitzhak Ivri, one of those who worked at the *Davar*. He presented me with a beautiful brochure about a "memorial book" of the Jews of Ostrolenka due to be published soon, and asked me to help in any way I could.

I promised to do this, but did not see him again.

Then, in November 1956, I read an announcement in *Haaretz*, that the Committee for the Publication of the Memorial Book of the Martyrs of Ostrolenka shares the sorrow of the Finkelsztejn family for their son, Szaczar, of blessed memory, who fell during his service for the sake of the homeland.

I wrote a letter to the committee, offering my promised help for the memorial book.

The above-mentioned Mr. Yitzhak Ivri appeared again. After a few meetings, I understood that here sat a genuine *Ivri* [Hebrew], literally and figuratively, whose heart and time were given to carrying out this important project – publishing the memorial book of the martyrs of Ostrolenka. For various reasons, there had been a pause in its fulfillment, and now they were tackling a quick implementation.

I saw it as a pleasant obligation to myself, to respond to his renewed request to keep my promise and contribute my modest part to the memorial book.

My Entry into Ostrolenka

I must relate how I "wound up" in Ostrolenka. I was about six years old when my respected father, teacher and rabbi, Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski the righteous, of blessed memory, Rabbi of Kaminka (Kiev region), was appointed Rabbi of Ostrolenka. In the *Ktav HaRabbanut* [official appointment as rabbi of the city] which I still have, given to him on July 10, 1898, there is written, among other things:

" . . . The erudite friends and leaders of the city, as well as all the townspeople, from the greatest to the smallest, by the agreement of all and with the greatest pleasure . . . to appoint the Honorable Great Gaon, the Gaon Rabbi, the Glory of Our Generation, Expert and Sharp in Torah, Replete in the Holy Books, etc., the Honor of His Name is His Glory, Our Teacher and Rabbi Mosze Nachum, son of the Rabbi and teacher Beniamin, of blessed memory, Jeruzalimski, as Rabbi, teacher and administrator of our congregation here, the holy community of Ostrolenka", etc. In the same *Ktav Rabbanut*, it is also indicated: " . . . and we have promised to give the above-mentioned Rabbi the sum of twenty silver rubles a week for rent, besides a good apartment that this community has, and besides the income of the Rabbi."

The signatures of the heads of the community appear on the above-mentioned *Ktav HaRabbanut*. Alongside the signatures are imprinted round seals, one of which designates the signatories as "the erudite friends and leaders of the congregation of the People of Israel here, the holy community of Ostrolenka".

These erudite friends of the city were not satisfied with this alone. They also had the heads and *gabbaim* of different societies in the city sign. (To memorialize the names of the societies and those who headed them, this memorial book contains a photograph of the historic *Ktav HaRabbanut*, which has been preserved).

Ostrolenka and its People

I cannot remember the reason we did not live in the community's apartment, as was mentioned in the *Ktav HaRabbanut*, but I do remember that we lived in a beautiful, spacious apartment in the center of the market, on the second floor.

Under us, on the first floor, was the store and apartment of Reb Chaim Pinczas Gingold, of blessed memory.

This Reb Chaim Pinczas was a Chassid and a practical person at one and the same time.

His wide, long beard gave him a special majestic appearance and evoked a relationship of respect from all who saw him.

To the right of his home was the home of Reb Israel Icchak Zalmanowicz, of blessed memory. He was a great Torah scholar and a veteran Gur Chassid. For most of his days, he dwelled in the shadow of the righteous Admor, of blessed memory, author of the *Sfat Emet*, who dealt in holy matters – and not for the sake of reward.

Reb Israel Icchak excelled in the quality of giving. He was first and foremost in all local matters, and all echelons of the community related to him with respect and trust. The Gur Chassidim especially esteemed and respected him. They frequented his home, which was open to all of them, even in the days when he lived in Gur.

The young married yeshiva students who were Gur Chassidim – and their number was not small in Ostrolenka – used to hold their third Sabbath meal at his house every Sabbath.

A great and special quality was evident in the city when these young married yeshiva students prepared to hold a meal celebrating the beginning of a new month, or a *seudat mitzvah* [celebratory meal] on the remembrance day of one of the righteous Admorim, of blessed memory, of the Gur dynasty.

"Our yeshiva students" kept a Chassidic custom – each one brought his share of their common meal. From the balcony of our apartment, I used to see them rushing by in their Sabbath clothing, each one carrying a cooking pot in his hands and Sabbath *challahs* [breads] on their shoulders, and entering through the front gate of

the home of Rabbi Izrael Icchak, of blessed memory. Only a short time later, one could already hear their heartwarming voices singing with awe and reverence, using Chassidic melodies for that day's songs – Sabbath songs and different *zmirot* [Sabbath and holiday songs].

I still remember my impression when that modest woman, Mrs. Frejda, of blessed memory came to us. (She was the wife of Reb Efraim Goldbruch, of blessed memory, who was "a simple man, dwelling in tents" [learning Torah], and solely occupied with heavenly matters. All concerns of livelihood were borne by his above-mentioned wife, a woman of valor and great understanding, who ran a large business on Market Street.) Actually in tears, she asked my righteous father, of blessed memory, to influence her son-in-law, Reb Chanoch Henach Flakser, of blessed memory (who will be told about at length later) to agree that the "portions" designated for his share in the *seudat mitzvah* meals at the home of Reb Izrael Icchak would be sent there by the serving girl. Mrs. Frejda, of blessed memory, described how all the customers who came to her emporium – primarily government clerks and Russian Army officers – mocked her and her above-mentioned son-in-law, when he hastened by the store, cooking pots and Sabbath *challahs* in his hands. Because of his haste, the food spilled and, sometimes, he also splashed the cooked food on the clothes of women who came to the store with their husbands. My father, of blessed memory, promised her to speak to him on the subject. This time, however, Reb Chanoch Henach did not accede to my father's request, saying:

"Rabbi, please do not be angry, but this time I cannot, unfortunately, obey you, because on this subject, our Sages, of blessed memory, ruled that 'it is better to do a *mitzvah* [religious commandment] personally, than through an agent' . . .", and he continued to fulfill this commandment as required . . .

Ostrolenka and its Scholars

In general, Ostrolenka was famous in the entire region as a place of Torah. Many of its *balabatim* – not only the wealthy among them – but even people for whom it was difficult to find sustenance for their families tried, despite this, to acquire bridegrooms for their daughters who were yeshiva students. They supported them for many years, so that they could be solely occupied with Torah study. They maintained them, their wives and the children born to them during that period of time very respectably and enjoyed their brilliance. Many enjoyed the rewards of their labors, when their sons-in-law were ordained to the rabbinate. I will mention the names of a few of them:

The Gaon Rabbi Cwi Hersz Szylewicz, of blessed memory, Rabbi of Szefarow (Piotrkow region).

(It should be noted that the name of the town was actually Peszarow, but the Jews of the town changed its name, saying "Here there is no Peszarow [in Hebrew: great crime], but Szefarow [in Hebrew: great abundance].)

The Gaon Rabbi Dow Berysz Nejfeld, of blessed memory, Rabbi of Racionza (Plock region). He was the brother of the Gaon Rabbi Reuwen Jehuda Nejfeld, of blessed memory, Rabbi of Nowe-Dwor (Warsaw region) and Chairman of the Agudat HaRabanim in Poland.

The Gaon Rabbi Mosze Menachem Mendel Spiwak, of blessed memory, who was *moreh tzedek* in Czyzewa near Ostrolenka, and later Rabbi of Podziemca (Kielc region).

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I also wish to mention the names of a few of the inhabitants of Ostrolenka and its prominent people – to the extent that they are preserved in my memory. The thread of friendship between them and my father's home was unbroken even after we left the city.

Reb Awraham Nachum Lejberman, of Blessed Memory

He was a devout, God-fearing person. He was modest in his conduct. He operated his store (which was also on Market Street, near the home of Efraim and Frejda Goldbruch, of blessed memory) with trust and honesty.

Reb Awraham Nachum, of blessed memory, also tried to marry off his daughters to Torah scholars.

His first son-in-law, Reb Chaim Herszberg, of blessed memory, was from a wealthy family in Lodz which dealt in the textile industry. He devoted most of his time to Torah and Chassidism, and a little to industry. He was always elegant in his dress and manners and greatly excelled in this.

His second daughter, Chaja, of blessed memory, was privileged to be the daughter-in-law of the Admor Rabbi Szmuel Bursztejn, the righteous of blessed

memory, the son and right-hand man of the greatest Gaon in Poland, Rabbi Awrejmele of Soczaczow, the righteous of blessed memory, author of the books *Aglei Tal* and *Avnei Nezer*.

Reb Jechezkel Kupferminc, of Blessed Memory

He, too, was one of the great textile merchants. His business and home were in a house at the corner of Market Street and the street leading to Lomza.

He was one of the city's prominent people and was involved with public needs. He was fortunate enough to see some of his sons emigrate to Israel. They were among those who built the country.

His son, Awiezer, was one of the first founders of Kfar Yechezkel. Awiezer's wife, Chasja Drori, was among those active in the Moetzet HaPoalot [Working Women's Council]. She was a member of the first Knesset.

His son, Awigdor, may God avenge his blood – who was a teacher and cultural activist in the town of Bloina, near Warsaw – emigrated to Israel in 1932 and was enrolled as a member of the Organization for Settlement in Ein Vered. He did not succeed in this and learned the plastering trade. He was murdered in Jaffa during the events of 1936, while working as a plasterer.

His daughter, Chana, also emigrated to Israel as a pioneer and participated in many pioneering projects. Although she was twenty, she adapted to pioneer life and all the suffering and want entailed in that life at the time she emigrated.

In 1935, his son, Jeszajahu, of blessed memory, emigrated to Israel with his family. He also suffered the difficult pains of absorption. In addition, his only son, Jakow, who was the head of Beitar in his native city of Poltusk and one of the commanders of Etzel in Israel, was caught while training with an entire military company, with weapons in their hands. He was sentenced to imprisonment and sat in a jail for political prisoners until the establishment of the State.

Reb Jechezkel Kupferminc, of blessed memory, a Gur Chassid, divided his visits to "the Rebbe" between the Rabbi of Gur and my father, of blessed memory. He used to say "There is a place on the head to lay two phylacteries, and my phylacteries are the Rabbi of Gur and our Rabbi. I cannot reconcile myself to the fact that our Rabbi left us." He came to Kielc to spend time with my father, of blessed memory, and to receive his blessing and advice.

Reb Mosze Rubinsztejn, of Blessed Memory

He was a short man, with a potbelly. A well-kept beard adorned his face, and his entire appearance confirmed that before us was a person always satisfied with himself and happy with his lot.

He spoke Russian well and was a type of "Jewish lobbyist" of the older generation.

One of his sons – Reb Szlomo Rubinsztejn, of blessed memory – lived in Ciechanow and had a big manufacturing shop there. He was also head of the Mizrachi in that city and its representative in the Jewish community and other public institutions in the city.

Another son of Reb Mosze Rubinsztejn (whose name I do not recall), younger than the above-mentioned Reb Szlomo, was caught as a revolutionary and rebel against the government . . .

At that time, some Russian Army regiments were encamped in Ostrolenka. Russian social-revolutionary parties sent propagandists to the city, to stir the army up against the Tsarist regime. One of the most important propagandists, who came especially from Petersburg for this purpose, was caught and put in prison.

After a short time, however, this person was released because of a really ingenious trick. One day, a gendarmerie officer appeared, accompanied by a company of gendarmes. In his hand was an "order" to take the prisoner out of prison and transfer him to Petersburg for investigation. It later became clear that the "order" was forged and that the "officer" and his escorts were wanted revolutionaries. . . Young Rubinsztejn was suspected of planning this operation and he was arrested and exiled . . .

Reb Mendel Brin, of Blessed Memory

A great wood merchant of vision and handsome appearance, a head and shoulders taller than all the townspeople. His external appearance, as well as his behavior toward people made a big impression, although he had a forceful personality.

His son was also tall, really like oak trees; they had a dignified appearance.

Reb Mendel Brin, of blessed memory, was also one of my father's "Chassidim". Even after he moved to

Warsaw, he visited my father's house in Kielc from time to time.

Reb Zew Chacek, of Blessed Memory

The owner of a wine and sweets shop in the market, at the corner of the street leading to the Narew River. He was a pious man, and as careful of *mitzvot* that were easy to perform as those that were more difficult. He was especially careful not to bring in, God forbid, wines and beverages for Jews without first checking the *kashrut* [fitness in accordance with Jewish law] of the wines and whether they could be sold to those who observed the strict letter of the law.

Reb Zew Benedon, of Blessed Memory

A simple Jew, who rose to greatness and became a great army contractor.

It was he who built all the enormous barracks for the army regiments encamped in Ostrolenka.

He was involved with high-ranking officers, who placed their trust in him. His pride in his command of the Russian language was very great. Even when he spoke Yiddish, he used to sprinkle it with Russian words, to demonstrate his expertise in the language.

He always responded willingly to those who requested his assistance in army matters and helped to the best of his ability.

Reb Iser Blumowicz, of Blessed Memory

The son of Reb Judel Blumowicz, of blessed memory, one of the prominent persons of Lomza. He had a printing press in Ostrolenka. Nobility and sensitivity radiated from his face, which was adorned with a small blond beard. He always remembered that "The words of the sages are heard in calmness" and set store by this method in every step of his short life. He moved to live in Lomza, his native city, and passed away there in the prime of life.

His wife, Ester (the daughter of Reb Awraham Mlynarzewicz, of blessed memory, who owned the Kopisk estate near Lomza, and who set aside time for Torah study and was snatched by death early in the morning, with the open Gemara from which he was learning lying on his table), now lives in Tel Aviv.

His daughter, Miriam, is also in Israel (in Kiryat Chaim). She is married to the engineer, Szraga Mizrach (the son of the well-known Zionist activist, Reb Awraham Mizrach, of blessed memory, from Lomza).

Reb Menachem Jehuda Lonanter, of Blessed Memory

Reb Menachem Jehuda, of blessed memory, the son of Rabbi Jonatan Mordechaj of the Lonanter family, was a dear man with superior qualities. He worked and had great success in the city of Ostrolenka in the field of religious education, and fostered many students. He was known in the whole city by the nickname of Reb Mendel Lomzer. He passed away a month before the outbreak of the war on July 31, 1939, and was accorded great honor at his death from the townspeople, the rabbis and his many students.

I was privileged to be numbered among his students until I left Ostrolenka at the end of the summer of 1902. His image remains before me to this day.



(A photograph from 1913)
From the right, standing: Beniamin (may God avenge his blood) and Szimszon Dow, long may he live (the sons of Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski, of blessed memory). Seated: Reb Henach Flakser, may God avenge his blood

How he knew the souls of his students and how great was his ability to explain! When he held the end of

his long, yellow beard – the hair of which was already beginning to go gray – and looked into his students' clever eyes, he awoke in them the desire to listen endlessly and absorb his logical explanations. It was a special pleasure to listen to his stories of Jewish lore, with which he enriched his students' knowledge and inspired their imaginations. I remember that when he parted from me, he said to my father, of blessed memory, "This is my share of all my labors, that I part from my student and in his head are preserved forty pages of Gemara which he learned from me".

And indeed, my studies with him served me as a "prelude" to my future studies. My affection for this Rabbi is always with me.

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Last, but not least, I devote the lion's share of my remembrances to the memory of Rabbi Chanoch Henach Flakser, of blessed memory (who has already been mentioned above, by the way).

The late Henach Flakser was like a brother to me, and not just to me, but to all my family. My father, of blessed memory, regarded him not just as his student, but as one of his sons, and so he was considered by my mother, the Rebbetzin, of blessed memory.

Henach Flakser, of blessed memory, was a scion of a line of famous saints of the generation – the grandson of the Admor Rabbi Chanoch Henach, the righteous of blessed memory, from Alexander, and was named after him. This Admor was one of the heads of the dynasty of the "Court" of Gur.

This Reb Chanoch was born in Malenic and was educated there.

Rabbi Cwi Chanoch Lewine, the righteous of blessed memory, also grew up in the same place. He was the son-in-law of the author of the *Sfat Emet* and was the Rabbi of Bendin and the father of the head of Agudat Yisrael in Poland, Rabbi Icchak Meir Lewine, may he live a good long life. The latter was Welfare Minister of the State of Israel and is presently a Knesset member on behalf of Agudat Yisrael, as well as its distinguished leader.

From the day we arrived in Ostrolenka, Reb Henach, of blessed memory, was an adherent of my righteous father, of blessed memory, and was one of his most outstanding students. The late Reb Henach was gifted with unusual ability; he had a quick grasp and marvelous memory, really like a "lime pit that does not lose a drop". His diligence was indescribable. He did not stir from the tent of Torah and personified the *mitzvah* of "and you shall study it day and night".

From the time we left Ostrolenka in 1902, when my righteous father, teacher and rabbi, of blessed memory, moved to serve as Rabbi and Av Beit Din in Kielc, Reb Henach did not part from us and joined us in our travels. He stayed with us for a few months, and came to visit for a number of weeks every year.

In 1914, when World War I broke out and Ostrolenka was almost completely destroyed and its Jewish inhabitants spread out all over the country, he, too, fled with his family.

When he heard that my father and teacher, of blessed memory, had gone to my brothers, Dawid Jonah and Jehoszua Hesczel, of blessed memory, in Horol (Poltawa region) for a brief rest, and that meanwhile Kielc was occupied by the Germans and he could not return, Reb Henach immediately went to Horol, and with him Reb Szmuelke Frydman and their families. There, they did not leave my father, of blessed memory, until the day of his death, as is also related in the history of my father, published in this memorial book.

But I must return to an earlier period in Reb Henach's life.

Already in his youth, he was certified to teach and was given an ordination certificate from the rabbinate, according to which "His teaching is true teaching and his judgments are true judgments" . . .

When he decided to take upon himself the yoke of the rabbinate, he also needed "ordination by the State" ("akzaman" in Russian) of his knowledge of the Russian language. . . (he did not even know the Russian alphabet then!). He came to us in Kielc and shut himself up in his room from morning until late at night. After only a few weeks, Reb Henach presented himself for the examinations at the Kielc regional office, and left there "crowned" with an official certificate authorizing him to serve as a rabbi on behalf of the Russian regime as well. He was not satisfied with this certificate, however, and continued to read the finest Russian literature with great diligence. He became expert in all its aspects, although his accent in the language was faulty. When this was remarked upon, he replied:

"What do you want from me? I am not a Muscovite from Moscow, but a Jew from Malenic . . ."

Later, the rabbinic chair in the town of Kikol, near Lipne, was offered to him. The rabbi of the town had passed away, and the widowed rebbetzin was ready to

leave Kikol and waive her right of inheritance, if she were paid the sum of one thousand silver rubles as compensation. Reb Henach was ready to pay her this amount and assume the above-mentioned rabbinic chair. He was invited to appear before the congregation, found favor in its eyes and was accepted as rabbi by unanimous agreement.

The negotiations were held during the Days of Awe, between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, and it was agreed that the rabbi would return to his home and, God willing, after the Succot holiday, he would come with his family to settle in the holy community of Kikol.

Since there was no hotel or even any kind of a hostel in this "big city", the "new rabbi" was housed in the home of the head of the community.

When the rabbi was about to return to his home, he was summoned by the head of the community to an unoccupied room. There, he whispered in his ear: "Does the Honorable Rabbi know that his matter will cost him another hundred rubles?" When the rabbi asked him why, he replied "Does the Honorable Rabbi not understand that I, too, must profit from this affair?"

Rabbi Henach kept his thoughts to himself and answered: "Nu, nu, we will see!". . .

When the beadle entered the home of the head of the community, the rabbi asked him to invite all the city's inhabitants to the study hall for a meeting.

The head of the community was surprised by this and asked "Why?" Reb Henach answered him quietly, "It is impolite that I should leave the city without taking leave of my *balabatim* and without wishing them a good new year." This answer calmed the head of the community . . . Because of its suddenness, there were many participants at the meeting. This is the content of the rabbi's speech at that meeting:

"Gentlemen! You all know that it is a Jewish custom to prepare *kapparot* [symbolically transferring one's sins to a fowl, which is slaughtered] for Yom Kippur Eve. The task of preparing the *kapparot* is given, of course, to the housewife and, indeed, the trustworthy Daughters of Israel safeguard the fulfillment of this duty. I am certain that everyone has their *kapparot* ready by now, and that they are waiting for the slaughterer, who will come to slaughter them . . .

"Because my rebbetzin, long may she live!, is not here, *kapparot* has not been prepared for me as required. But as I cannot deviate from a Jewish custom, because "a Jewish custom is Torah", I have therefore prepared *kapparot* myself. While it is not a white rooster, it also has great importance and is – the "Rabbinate of Kikol", as I have decided to renounce it. This will be my expiation. Peace be with you and a good new year to you all!"

The congregation was stunned to hear the words of their "new rabbi", and the head of the community became as white as a sheet . . . and to the question of many people, the rabbi answered: "The head of your community will explain the reason to you." . . . and thus, took his leave of his rabbinic service . . .

From then on, an enormous change took place in Reb Henach's life. He decided to renounce rabbinic service altogether, and went into business – which he inherited after the death of his mother-in-law, may she rest in peace – and also devoted himself with all his great vigor to extensive public work. At his initiative, during the same period, a loan fund for mutual credit opened there. He headed it and dedicated himself to its growth and development.

When the time came for elections to the first national Duma in Petersburg, it became clear that the rights of Poland's Jews had been reduced to the minimum in the elections law. Polish Jewry was prevented from electing their representatives as it wished. The electoral system was such that in electoral regions, the voters were divided into their different classes, with the prior intention of depriving them of their rights. Thus, a small number of estate owners were given the right to vote for "their electoral representatives", as did the inhabitants of cities and towns, where the number of voters reached the thousands, and this – in order to reduce the value and influence of the Jews, nearly all of whom lived in the cities and towns . . .

In addition, elections were not direct. Representatives of all echelons, the number of which was – I believe – sixty in each region, elected two to three delegates to the national Duma. Of course, according to this electoral system, the Jewish representatives could not elect even one delegate of their own.

Reb Henach Flakser, the candidate of the Jews of Ostrolenka and its vicinity, perceived the injustice that was done to the Jews. He took upon himself the effort of organizing the Jewish inhabitants in the entire Lomza region and urged them to broad participation in the elections, in order to comprise a significant force in the final elections. Later, he contacted Dr. Harusewicz, the representative of the progressive forces of the Polish

population. With these combined forces, delegates were elected to the Duma from the Lomza region who promised to protect the rights of the Jews as well.

I believe that this was the first phase of the emergence of Jews for general elections in an organized manner.

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As I have already mentioned, Ostrolenka was completely destroyed during World War I, and its Jewish inhabitants dispersed all over huge Russia.

The first of the "initiators" of the return of Ostrolenka's Jews to Poland was the son of Reb Henach, the journalist Menachem Flakser, who immediately began his journalistic work with the Agudah newspaper, the *Yiddisher Tagblatt*. Later, he moved to *Das Yiddishe Folk*, a Zionist Polish newspaper, which later merged with the *Heint*. Then he was one of the editors of the *Yiddisher Express* until the outbreak of World War II. After much moving about, he reached Shanghai and there edited three newspapers in three languages. With the change of regime in Shanghai, he fled to the United States, and is now among the writers of the *Forward*.

Reb Henach Flakser and his family later returned to Ostrolenka and found their destroyed home there. They could not get along in the destroyed city. They settled in Warsaw, where they were in a very difficult financial condition; there was no place suited to the spirit of this erudite person that could exploit his unique qualities and broad knowledge. He was forced to earn his meager living by supplying cigarettes to kiosks in the city. Tobacco wholesalers set the most minimal salary for him and he ran around from morning until late at night, and this – without a distribution license! This gave rise to not a few insults, as well as great grief for his wife, Rywkele, of blessed memory. This gentle soul lovingly accepted all her pains.

I think it appropriate to mention here an interesting fact that highlights the personality and behavior of the wife of this friend.

When the Flakser family returned from Soviet Russia, they possessed only the jewelry of Mrs. Rywka, of blessed memory, who had succeeded in holding on to them. In exchange for what they received for them, they purchased an apartment in Warsaw at 25 Bonifraterska Street, from the owner of the house, who was emigrating from Poland.

The seller of the apartment asked their consent to stay in it until he received his visa to the United States. Mrs. Rywka, of blessed memory, who always excelled in her innocence and goodness of heart, said to him:

"Not only do we agree to your request, but I also want you to dine with us, not for the sake of reward, of course, but to save you your subsistence expenses until the trip." Because the man was alone, she was concerned that he not spend his money in restaurants. . .

The seller thanked her from the depths of his heart, but "for the sake of order", noted in the apartment's bill of sale that the Flakser family agreed that he continue to reside in the apartment until his departure from Poland, and that board would be given to him by the Flakser family without payment . . .

In the end, the man did not get a visa to the United States, and he continued to be dependent on them until his dying day, even though their financial condition was so bad . . .

I believe that I would not be fulfilling my obligation if I do not also relate the last meeting of Reb Henach with his Rebbe – the Admor Rabbi Awraham Mordechaj Alter the righteous, of blessed memory (who passed away in Jerusalem in 1948, at the time of the War of Independence). This story testifies to Reb Henach's strength of spirit and strong character.

When he returned from Russia, he was dressed in short, simple and coarse clothing, with his refugee's hat on his head.

In these miserable clothes, he traveled to Gur to look on the Rebbe's face. . . Those "holy workers" in the Rebbe's Court, who did not know him, saw before them a person whose beard and clothes were cropped, and prevented his entry into the Rebbe's room. . . When he asked them, however, to tell the Rebbe that "Henach Ostrolenker" wanted to see him, the Rebbe immediately invited him into his reception room and gave him his hand in greeting. These were the words of Reb Henach to the Rebbe:

"When I was in Russia, I was in real mortal danger many times. Once, when I hid with my wife and son in a cellar, from outside there erupted terrible cries of Jews who were killed and slaughtered during those terrible days. I prayed in whispers and made a vow that, if God would help me, and I would remain alive and return safely to Poland, I would immediately make my way to look on the face of the Admor, may he live a good long life, Amen.

"With the help of God, I have done so, and therefore came to fulfill my vow. But I must also reveal

that I have ceased to be a Chassid and will not continue to come to look on the face of the Rebbe. . ."

The Rebbe looked at him with his sharp eyes, and said:

"Go in peace, and may the blessed Lord be with you in everything you do!"

Although it is said that "a righteous man decrees and God fulfills", the saintly man's blessing was not fulfilled in Reb Henach, and his lot, even unto destruction, was full of pain and suffering.

In addition to the pangs of adjusting to a life of grief and distress, disaster struck him and his wife when their only daughter (except for their two sons), Frejda, may God avenge her blood, who excelled in her beauty, talents and broad knowledge, was caught up by Communism, arrested and sentenced to many years of imprisonment.

A tragic fate also pursued her after her release, after she left for France. There, as well, she was a prominent figure in the Communist party and her speeches at meetings always drew a large audience.

At one of the meetings, she was caught by Hitler's troopers, and shot on the spot . . .

Reb Henach and Rywka Flakser, their son Szymon, his wife and their small son were destroyed, together with the Jewry of Warsaw. May God avenge their blood!

I have written a great deal about a friend who was like a brother to me, because our souls were bound together for many years, from my childhood and until I left Poland, and until its Jews were destroyed.

I fully appreciate that the man and his household, who worked and did so much for Ostrolenka in its glory days, are worthy and deserve that some praise for them be recorded in this memorial book. So, too, all of the people of the community in Ostrolenka deserve to be remembered in these our remembrances, with the feelings of appreciation and love which are still preserved in my heart for them.

I pray that the God of Forgiveness will not judge me lacking, if, God forbid, I somehow diminished the character and virtues of anyone among the holy names I have mentioned. I have not done this from wickedness, but because a man is only flesh and blood and may err and forget, as in the words of the author of the Psalms: "Who can discern errors, cleanse me from hidden faults".

Shalom Margalit

Our Home

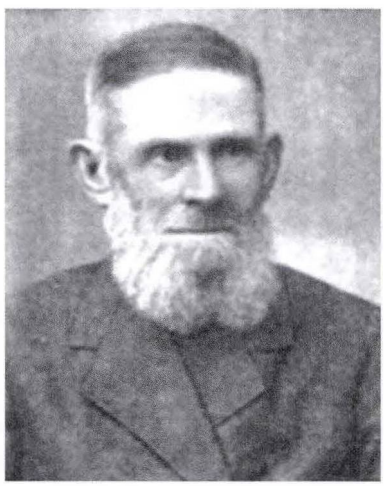
My father, Reb Aron Jakow Margaliot, of blessed memory

My father's entry into life began something like this: the beginning was like every bar-mitzvah boy's. On Sabbath morning, my grandfather, Reb Shalom Margalit, appeared with his son, Aron Jankel the bar-mitzvah boy, at the Ciechanow study hall. They prayed and read from the Torah. When they reached the end of the Torah reading, the beadle announced: "Rise for *maftir* [the final section of the weekly Torah portion read on Sabbath and holiday mornings in synagogue], the young man Aron Jankel, son of Shalom". He ascended the reader's platform and stood next to his father before the open Torah scroll. At the proper moment, his father called out in a solemn voice, "Blessed is He who has absolved me from the punishment of this [boy]", that is, from that moment, he "opens" his son's own account, for good deeds as well as bad ones, Heaven forbid.

After three years, my grandfather brought him to Ostrolenka, to his bride, and ordered him to say the "Behold, you [are consecrated to me]". The *klezmorim* played, it was merry, they danced a *mitzvah tanz* [*mitzvah* dance, dancing before the bride on the wedding night] with the virginal, modest bride. The jester made the crowd merry with his rhymes "for laughter and for tears", and the in-laws congratulated each other – in short, joy and happiness. When the tumult subsided and the guests dispersed, the two, who had just come out from under the canopy – the husband, only recently turned sixteen years of age, and the young

wife – were led to the bedroom in the father-in-law's apartment. They also said that from here, perpetual support began, that is to say, full maintenance of the groom in his father-in-law's home. The father and mother asked the in-laws, while parting, to take care of their son, so that he would sit and learn and be an observant Jew. Good friends praised the groom and recited his good qualities to the father-in-law: handsome, smart, a scholar. The father-in-law added "Indeed, I have got a bargain." Those gathered immediately grasped this characterization, and the nickname "*Metzia*" [bargain] stuck to my father all the days of his life.

My father told me that his father-in-law owned a large workshop for leather goods and upholstery, and employed several workers and a foreman. At the time, my father still sat in the study hall and learned Torah from early in the morning until late at night. He was the leader of the "kept sons-in-law" before they began dealing in "something", that is to say, before they found a source of support for themselves.



Reb Aron Jakow Margaliot, of blessed memory

After a time, my father suddenly began to appear at home in the evening, and also peeked into the workshop when work went on there at full speed. He showed great interest in work procedures, asked questions and made comments which already bordered on expressions of opinion.

The foreman saw him as a kind of competitor, and the father-in-law was angry at his son-in-law, who was neglecting the study of Torah. For it is clearly stated: "And the study of Torah is equal to them [*mitzvot*, religious commandments] all", and the neglect of Torah study is the greatest transgression. They both forbade him to enter the workshop and indicated his proper place: the study hall.

The situation led to disputes and harsh conflict. Since my father could not tolerate this, he left the house and returned to his parents' home in Ciechanow.

Letters and messengers arrived. His wife was suffering, disgraced before others. But he was inflexible in his decision not to return. Grandfather went with my father to the famous Rebbe of Ciechanow, Reb Awrejmele, the very same rabbi that my father went to when he was a youth, he who had approved the match. The rabbi asked him why he had left his wife and returned to his father's house. My father explained to him that, besides learning Torah, he also wanted to learn to work and engage in trade. He did not agree that his father-in-law should work and support him.

When the rabbi turned to my grandfather and asked his opinion, he answered, "Holy Rabbi, my son lacks for nothing. In my opinion, the cessation of learning is a sin on his part" . . .

My father related that silence prevailed in the rabbi's room. The rabbi's face became serious, as if he was planning something. My father was desperate, because he knew that his fate hung on the rabbi's decision and that he could not oppose it.

The rabbi began to mumble something, as if he were consulting himself:

"While neglect of Torah study is indeed a sin, so hard work is a great thing, as is written: 'While you eat of the labor of your hands, happy shall you be and it will be well with you . . .'"

Here the rabbi turned to my father and asked him aloud: "Who is it that interferes with your entering the workshop? If it is the foreman, perhaps he does not know that you are the son-in-law of the owner!" My father explained that this was impossible, since the foreman was at the wedding.

The rabbi signaled to my father to draw near him, and said to him, "Perhaps you should make clear to him that you are the son-in-law of the owner, and he, the foreman, is only a salaried worker." Hearing this, my father was at a loss. The rabbi, as though shrouded in a cloud, suddenly uttered a few words: "Any Torah that is not supplemented with work – its end is idleness. He who formulated the idea of linking Torah with hard work – let him say how to act . . ."

The rabbi took 20 kopeks out of his pocket and offered my father his contribution to the purchase of work tools, wished him success and ordered him to return to his wife.

When he returned home, my father really began to take an interest in the matter of work. Armed with the rabbi's blessing, he began to organize a group of young men from the study hall to support him in case of any trouble. The foreman was still not ready to accept my father's enthusiasm and wanted to dismiss him, but his friends came to his aid and a public scandal developed. Neighbors in the street also intervened. "This is the owner's son-in-law!" Finally, the two – the father-in-law and the foreman – agreed that my father would be recognized as a partner in the business. Gradually, he took upon himself the management of the workshop.

In those years, labor was done mostly by non-professionals. Thanks to his drive, sharp intellect and power of persuasion, my father succeeded in developing the business to the fullest extent in a short time. He began supplying merchandise to the army and formed ties with estate owners, as well as the nobility. His dress became very elegant, in Jewish style, however. To impress his clients, he used to travel in a private carriage, harnessed to his own horses, to get orders and manage accounts. His gaze was deep and wise, his beard short and well-trimmed. My father was not tall, but he walked very erectly, with quick steps. Interwoven in his conversation were wise maxims, verses and sayings of Our Sages. He always had an audience that listened with enjoyment to his stories, which were laced with humor and wit.

In time, his wealth grew, and he began to give interest-free loans to the needy in exchange for collateral. When the collateral was Sabbath or Chanukah candlesticks or another useful item, the debtor received it back for use whenever necessary, and then returned it to my father.

My father's prestige grew yearly, until he became an elder of the city and the Jewish community, and served as the latter's chairman for a time. He administered the city's affairs in his own way, and refused to be "harnessed to any political wagon", especially the religious parties. His uncompromising personality did not permit the exploitation of any decision for the benefit of any group. He remained non-partisan. His eyes and heart were open to everyone, without ascertaining the tendency of their thoughts or party affiliations. Therefore, he won the recognition and appreciation of all classes of the Jewish populace.

A practical person, my father understood how to make his actions suit every government and regime. When the Cossacks murdered the Jews of Miastkowa at the time of the Russian regime, the city's rabbi, Rabbi Icchak Bursztejn, of blessed memory, announced in the middle of prayers (it was on Rosh HaShana), that the congregation should perform the Torah reading quickly, as Reb Aron Jankel, my father, had to go to the gubernator to try to prevent the pogrom that might take place at any minute.



My mother, Fejga, of blessed memory

I remember that when I was already a mature youth, I heard my father's conversations with members of the German regime, and after a time – with the Poles. He behaved toward them as an equal among equals, and got their attention thanks to his power of persuasion and his words, which were always seasoned with piquant humor.

More than once, my father saved Jews from imprisonment and other punishments. Although he was a lobbyist – because other means were not available then to Jews – he acted with pride and not with flattery and obsequiousness. I remember an occasion of a commercial transaction, when a Polish officer (an apostate) from the Fifth Regiment of the Army Cavalry spoke to my father in a tone of disrespect, as if to a "Jew boy". My father did not fail to respond. The officer was insulted and pointed to the signs of his rank, as proof that he was of senior status and privileged. My father immediately pointed to his white beard and said, "I am more senior than you . . ."

After World War I, when my father lived in Lomza with his family, a delegation from Ostrolenka, together

with the mayor, Reb Mosze Aron Kaczor, came to him and asked that he return to them and help build the city. They promised to provide him with a new apartment, in place of his home, which had been burned. Although he was no longer young, he returned and went to work, still full of energy and firsthand experience. He assisted in the construction of the study hall, the ritual bath, the Talmud Torah and the community, and took an active part in the appointments of Jewish law adjudicators, slaughterers, etc. Apartments and work were given to refugees who came to the city, most of them from Pinsk. Out of their own pockets, they also took care of residents of the city who survived and were without employment and a roof over their heads.

I would like to mention here the famous story that has passed by word of mouth among Ostrolenkans to this day, about the way that Rabbi Bursztejn, of blessed memory, was hired to be rabbi of our city. The famous episode also touched directly on my father's communal activities. It is said that after Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski, of blessed memory, left the rabbinical seat, Ostrolenka remained without a rabbi. Two camps formed concerning the appointment of a new rabbi for our city. One side, made up of Gur and Amszinow Chassidim and others, demanded the appointment of a specific rabbi (a rabbi from Seraja, I believe, whose name I never heard). The second side, to which respectable *balabatim*, such as Welwel Benedon, Aron Jankel Margaliot, Mendel Brin, Lejbke Lejzer, Israel Chmiel and others belonged, insisted that only Rabbi Bursztejn from Piontnica (outskirts of Lomza) would get the rabbinate of Ostrolenka. A life or death dispute broke out in the city. The two sides did not balk at any means, even physical force, and also recruited their sons and hirelings in the "war".

My father, as I have mentioned, tended entirely toward the opinion of the *balabatim*.

The decisive day came when Rabbi Bursztejn was to arrive in the city. Everything was ready for his reception. The night before, however, the beadle woke my father and told him about the intrigues of the other side – the Chassidim. The access lane to the study hall was strewn with obstacles and the new rabbi's place at the eastern wall was destroyed and overturned by acts of mischief done when no one saw. The "department" of the *balabatim*'s side labored all night to restore order. The next morning, the new rabbi was received with great honor and glory. My father's side celebrated after the victory.

For many years, Rabbi Bursztejn occupied the rabbinical seat in Ostrolenka. The entire Jewish populace, without exception, honored him greatly.

Arbitrations and compromises of all sorts between Jews and Gentiles, as well as between Gentiles and Gentiles, were a daily phenomenon at our home. My father's public activities cost him a great deal of energy, sleepless nights and sometimes expenditures from his own pocket, as well, because the community fund did not always have the means necessary to cover all expenses.

The way to help Jews in times of trouble was not always easy and simple. Sometimes a Jew built his modest home at great expense, but without the required license, and a demolition order was issued against him by the government; or the son of a poor widow, her sole support, was to be drafted into the army. In another instance, a young man went out one night and the police caught him when a red flag was hung on the telegraph wires. My father could help only before the report reached the Commandant, and he tried not to miss the deadline. This was not easy.

For several decades, my father served the city of Ostrolenka faithfully and devotedly. He helped Jews in times of trouble, great and small. Every groan echoed in his soul.

My father was born in 1885 in Ciechanow and passed away in 1939 in Lomza, which was already under Nazi rule.

Blessed be his memory.

My mother always used to talk about how her parents married. It happened thus: my mother's father leased lands on a large scale. Among others, he leased a plot of land in the village of Brzezany. He generously supported yeshivas and needy Jews. The father of a "grown-up" daughter (barely fifteen years old), he decided to marry her off. He therefore turned to the head of the yeshiva and asked him to find a groom among the "yeshiva's leading minds". And indeed, he gave him one of the sharp minds. This was Rabbi Icchak Mosze, of blessed memory, the son of the great *lamdan*, Rabbi Meir Krulawiecki, author of *Divrei Negidim* and other books.

Of the daughter, the young bride, they did not speak at all, and no one cared how she looked. Terms were agreed upon and a date was set for the wedding.

A short time before the wedding – it was the week of *Shabbat Bereshit* [the Sabbath when the annual cycle of Torah readings recommences with Genesis I –

Bereshit] – the bride's father invited the groom and the head of the yeshiva to [visit] him. The father-in-law's house was built in rustic style: a large square room, in the midst of which stood a wooden tub for waste water. Around it strolled chickens, pecking up food crumbs that were abundantly spread on the floor.

One day, in the afternoon, the sound of an approaching wagon was heard and someone called out "The groom is coming!" The young bride was panic-stricken and, while running, slipped and fell into the waste water tub. . . She stood there, wet, and burst into tears when the groom entered and caught the first glimpse of his bride. He merely said "Rustic", but this did not interfere with the match . . .

After the wedding, he devotedly continued his studies, wrote and published treatises about Torah matters, and was revealed to be extremely talented. His brilliant mind was an inexhaustible source of Torah, and his books won recognition from Torah and religious greats.

In time, three daughters were born to him, but he himself passed away in his prime, at the age of thirty-six. His unfinished treatises were completed by his father, Reb Dawid Meir, of blessed memory. One of the three orphans, named Fejga, a beautiful young girl, was "handed over" to the home of her father's sister, Sara Basia, and her husband, Eliezer Dimensztejn, in Lomza, where Torah and wisdom were respected. She was educated there.

My father, then a widower with three children, sought a mother for them and a wife for himself. He was among the city's community leaders and a very well-to-do man. He was presented to Fejga Krulawiecki, an eighteen year old beauty of very distinguished lineage. Although he was a widower and older than she, his captivating personality and the fact that she was an orphan were persuasive and she agreed to the match.

My father brought her to Ostrolenka, to his big, beautiful home. She demonstrated maternal devotion to her husband's three children, opened her good heart and gentle soul to them, and was like a real, not step-, mother to them. The fact that she herself had been orphaned from her mother helped. We, her five children, who were born to the family (who survived out of seven), did not feel the difference at all. It was as if we were the children of one mother. She also demonstrated a good and kind attitude to those around her.

I remember my mother always diligently and devotedly busy, occupied with housework. Even when my father's three sons from his first wife – Josef, Icze and Mosze – were already married, the house was still full of noise and hustle and bustle. The hardships of parenthood began when my brother, Meir, went to Israel. My mother worried without end and used to say sadly, "Does my son eat enough there? Who prepares a clean shirt for him? Is there someone who takes care of him when he is sick?" Her worry and disquiet caused her many sleepless nights and tears, which she wept in secret.

She led only one of her children to the wedding canopy – her eldest daughter, Chaja. She escorted all the others to the railway station in Kaczyny, on their way to Israel. Instead of singing *Mazel Tov to the Bride and Groom*, the song *A Jew Goes to Israel with Tears in His Eyes* echoed in the air.

My dear, beloved mother! You stood there broken-hearted, for instead of standing under your children's wedding canopies, you accompanied us on our way, while loud *hora* [Israeli folk dance] and stirring pioneer dance tunes played, which were not to your taste then. You stood there dumbfounded. You were silent and did not say anything. Only at the moment of departure did your eyes speak, expressing grief and deep pain. One tear trickled after another, out of love for your children who were going far away. . .

The train's whistle split the air and took us from her. Your heart was weakened, cut off, severed piece by piece. . . After the departure of each one of us, you returned home and counted how many were still left to you – and thus five times! The most painful of all is that we did not get the chance to repay you for your kindness, for your good-heartedness and devotion, for raising and educating us. We cannot be blamed for this. The hand of fate was involved, the loss of the six million by the demonical and evil hand, meticulously and thoroughly planned on that somber Friday which foreshadowed destruction. You, too, my dear mother, shared that cruel fate.

May your memory be blessed and may God avenge your blood!

Chasia Drori

In 1937

In 1937, I was sent from Israel to the United States for public relations and fundraising on behalf of the Histadrut and the Moetzet HaPoalot [Working Women's Council]. On my way from the Zionist Congress in Lucerne, I was asked to stay at *hachshara* kibbutzim in Poland for two months.

I was glad to have this opportunity to visit my relatives in Ostrolenka and Zambrow – sisters of my husband, Awiezer (his sister, Leja, and a married daughter with children lived in Ostrolenka).

When I arrived from Warsaw at Ostrolenka's railway station, which was far from the city, a middle-aged man suggested that we hire a carriage together. I agreed immediately. When we passed through an avenue of beautiful, tall birch trees, I remarked that, in Israel, the eucalyptus trees grow better and taller. My traveling companion demanded immediately that the coachman stop the horse, jumped as if bitten by a snake and, with his suitcase, ran away terrified, vehemently cursing the damned Jews all the while. The embarrassed Gentile coachman hurriedly brought me to my sister-in-law in the city center, hinting that the man had supposed that I was a Christian tourist. He was a government clerk and, in light of the anti-Semitic state of affairs that was growing daily, it was impossible for a Polish government clerk to travel in public with a Jewish woman.

After the first joy of meeting passed, I felt the family's anxiety, an anxiety that returned every day at one o'clock in the afternoon, when their six year old grandson was due to return home from school, insulted, beaten, and sometimes scratched and injured by inflamed Polish children. Indeed, the grandson returned home a whole hour late, because he had searched for a new route to avoid the wrath of the Gentile children and their abuse.

Because of the growing anti-Semitism, the general boycott spread to the city's entire commercial life, attended by murderous terror. Every day, I went to the Square to observe the lives of the Jews and their suffering. Most of the Jews' shops were in the city's center, and above them – apartments. On the paved road, elderly people did business over small handcarts. At nine o'clock in the morning, young Poles appeared, dressed in the uniforms of the quasi-Fascist movement, and armed with special sticks. Within a few minutes, five carts and their contents were overturned and boxes strewn in every direction. With threats and murderous roars, they forced elderly Jewesses to leave the place. A Jew, dressed in long, somewhat shabby clothes, with a leather satchel under his arm, cautiously drew near to help gather up the merchandise. When he bent down under an overturned handcart, the impure hand of a young Gentile caught him up and dragged him the length of the street. He handed him over to his friend for additional blows from a stick intended for this purpose. The doors of the Jewish shops were closed against the "evil eye" of the Polish bullies. Heavy curtains covered the windows, so that Gentile customers who came in to make a purchase would not be seen. There was widespread spying by the youth gangs, and a Christian who bought from a Jewish store did not escape them. Heartbroken, I went out again the next day to see the hurt of my people with my own eyes. Standing on a corner on the side, I suddenly heard a prolonged whistling. This was a signal announcing that a Christian woman had violated the boycott and was in a Jewish store. In a minute, a group of six young bullies encircled a manufacturing shop, from which an elderly peasant woman burst, hiding some fabric under her clothing. She ran with all her might to evade her pursuers. Breathing heavily, she stood for a brief moment before the wild youths and shouted at them: "Savages! Scum! God does not dwell in your hearts! Are not the Jews human beings?" Their reply was an evil laugh, vehement curses and raised sticks. Alongside her stood a sturdy peasant, her husband, however, and she was rescued.

Indeed, there apparently were some people among the Poles who were disgusted by the manifestations of hatred against the Jews – but how few they were! I stayed in Ostrolenka for five days, because I had to visit Zambrow before going on to Vilna, Lodz, Brisk and Warsaw. That week, in very large letters, the newspaper announced a national Andaks convention. Deathly fear seized nearby towns, in the expectation that a pogrom would follow the Andaks convention. It was Yom Kippur Eve. The synagogues were full to the

bursting. A heart-rending cry rose from the women's section. I myself had grown up in Homel, a city in White Russia, formerly a large Jewish center. During my childhood, I had not attended a synagogue except for on Simchat Torah for *Hakafot* [seven dancing circuits made with Torah scrolls on the holiday]. Here in Ostrolenka, however, in the women's section of the synagogue, I wept bitterly for our bitter fate, together with the multitude of Israel.

The rumor of my arrival from Israel by way of the Zionist Congress and my mission to the Jews of America reached many who dreamed of emigration and certificates – especially the youth groups. On Sabbath afternoon, my sister-in-law's house was full to the bursting: men, women, young couples and youths. I told them about my village, Kfar Yechezkel, which was being built, about the accomplishments of the settlement movement and the Histadrut, about our war against decrees to strangle emigration, about bloody events that still continued, about the first of the "stockade and tower" settlements that year, about the hope of meeting soon in the fields of Israel. Ah, they were not fulfilled – these, my hopes, their hopes – all our hopes.

Who could have imagined that the lives of the Jews in Ostrolenka during that black year were idyllic, compared to the Holocaust and the loss which overtook them after only two years? Solitary, broken survivors came from there. From the extensive, established Kupferminc family, not a single soul arrived. I was the last to see them.

May we be worthy of the holy ones of Ostrolenka in our renewed lives in the sovereign State of Israel.

Kfar Yechezkel

Memories of the Townspeople

Like other cities in Poland, our city of Ostrolenka also excelled in interesting "types", whose names are worthy of preservation. I will describe here one of the interesting and important couples – perhaps the most important in our city – Chaim Elkes and his wife, Pina, of blessed memory (his nickname was Chaim Skornik).

Although everyone in Ostrolenka knew them well, no one was as attached and close to them as my parents, may they rest in peace, and we children, since our early childhood. Therefore, I feel obliged to describe these two rare people.

Chaim Elkes was of medium height and a bit plump. When he walked in the street, his body always leaned forward, in the direction of his steps. He had a beautiful yellow beard (which, at the end, was already graying). By nature, he was very meticulous. In his dress, on Sabbaths and on weekdays, his cleanliness and preciseness were obvious. His boots shone in the winter, as did his shoes in the summer. He was a keen Gur Chassid, but without political involvement. He never got involved in the political strife of the *shtebl* of the Gur Chassidim. He walked the path of a Torah Jew. He studied a Gemara lesson every morning, and among those who studied with him was Icze Szperling (the son of Herszel Szperling). His life went on this way daily.

Chaim Elkes and his wife, Pina, were cousins of my parents, may they rest in peace, and lived in our apartments. Chaim had a store of hard and soft leathers, which he sold to tailors and shoemakers, Jews and Christians alike. Farmers who came to the city on market days bought his merchandise, too. We, the children, [visited] them, ran about and got into mischief every day after we returned from *heder*. Chaim and Pina loved us very much (they were childless). On Purim, I came to them in costume, sang a few Purim songs and received three kopeks and, in exchange for the *mishloach manot* [Purim gift basket] I brought them, three kopeks more. By the start of World War I, I already received 10 kopeks for *mishloach manot*, and thus ended my Purim profits . .

A fireproof safe stood in Chaim's house. He used to give charitable loans in exchange for collateral, which he kept in the safe until the debtors came to redeem them. It would happen that on a Sunday, a woman brought her silver candlesticks, her only possessions, as collateral, in order to get a charitable loan so that she could earn her bread during the week. Of course, Chaim gave it to her. If on Friday, however, she did not repay her debt, he understood that she had not earned anything. In such an instance, he gave her the candlesticks on Friday, so that she could light candles and so that, God forbid!, her Sabbath would not be disturbed. In addition, he left her a bit of money for

Sabbath expenses. He sometimes returned collateral without getting a loan back, especially when respectable *balabatim* were concerned. He understood their condition well, and instances like these were not rare. I remember that, once, he was robbed and a great deal of merchandise was taken from his store, which was not insured. The lost was very great, but he did not talk about it a great deal. In general, every loss was lovingly accepted.

Thus he conducted his affairs until he left the city, a year after World War I broke out.

The war broke out on *Tisha B'Av* [the ninth day of the month of Av, a major annual Jewish fast day] in 1914. After exactly one year, a decree was published, according to which all the city's inhabitants had to evacuate the area of the front. Chaim and his wife went to Ostrowa and we met them there. We were together for three weeks and then we separated. Both families moved to Russia, but in different directions. After a few weeks, my parents received news that Chaim and his wife were in Homel. We were in central Russia. Chaim, a devoted and faithful Chassid, was unable to sit in peace, and wished to be united with the holiness of Chassidism.

One day, my parents received a letter from him, informing them that he intended to go to Rostov, where the Lubavitcher Rebbe resided. He went there, absorbed the Chassidic atmosphere for a few days and visited us on his way back. We were all glad to meet after a separation of several years. After a few days, he returned to Homel. After that, we did not see Chaim in Russia. They returned to Ostrolenka a long time before we did. As soon as they arrived in the city, they went to their apartment (on our lot) to find articles they had hidden in the cellar, as well as collateral that the Jews had not managed to redeem before the evacuation. Chaim and Pina were stunned to discover that nothing remained; everything had been burned, and even the foundation stones were uprooted.

Having no alternative, they began a new life. They settled in Pesach Hochberg's house, where they received an apartment and an empty store nearby. Chaim returned to his business, trading in hard and soft leathers, and his business flourished. Meanwhile, we, too, returned from Russia. Our first stop was Chaim's house, because nothing remained of ours. In a few days, my mother and two of her sisters, may they rest in peace, fell ill with typhus. This was a result of traveling for weeks in Russian freight trains in shameful sanitary conditions (various plagues ran rampant in Russia then).

Chaim and Pina were not frightened, despite the fact that the disease was contagious. When neighbors suggested moving the sick to a hospital, they did not consent, and preferred tending them by themselves and helping as much as they could. To this day, I remember their warmth and devotion toward my mother and her sisters, may they rest in peace, until they had completely recovered.

Chaim was a man of integrity. He gave his merchandise on credit to Jewish tailors and shoemakers, and patiently waited until they were able to pay him. He never tried to collect notes from Jews. He was also very charitable – openly and, even more, in secret. I often met him on Thursdays in some side alley, on his way back from a home where he had left an anonymous donation for Sabbath expenses. The main thing was that Jews should not go hungry. And there were more than a few homes like these. He also brought charitable loans to the lender's home. Now, he did not ask for collateral. After he returned from Russia, he gave loans and did not take any collateral. And so his life went on until World War II broke out.

Pina also followed in her husband's footsteps. I often met her carrying a hot stew pot under a shawl, so that it would not get cold. She took it to a poor, sick woman, in whose home, Heaven forbid!, there was nothing with which to keep body and soul together. She also brought food daily to women in confinement and prepared it for the Sabbath, too. Yeshiva students ate regularly at their house and left there satisfied.

How did Chaim spend the Purim holiday? I remember, when I entered the house I always found people sitting around the table, a mixture of Chassidim and Misnagdim, drinking a toast and happy. And then Chaim stood up on a chair and sang *Dudele*. . . and also *Duchovnemu Naszemu Rabinu Sznejorosona – Ah Pintele* (*To the Holy Rabbi Schneerson – a Point*), and many other songs. Only late at night did the company disperse. This is what Chaim did every year. On Simchat Torah, it was even merrier at his house . . .

Chaim never spoke ill of anyone. As long as I knew him, I never heard him speak a word of slander. He spoke respectfully about the Chafetz Chaim, the righteous, of blessed memory. Although he was an extreme Gur Chassid, he often sat and studied the books of the Chafetz Chaim which were arranged in his book closet, including *Shmirat HaLashon*.

The most beautiful qualities of faith, morals and

ethics were hidden in Chaim Elkes. He was one of those Jews about whom King Solomon wrote in Proverbs: "That you may walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous." Thus he behaved during the last years, before he was killed, although he had large financial losses.

It should be mentioned that a short time before I went to Australia, a Polish shoemaker (named Niewiarowski) owed him 18,000 złotys, which was then a huge sum. Smaller sums were also owed him, but despite all this, he did not alter his usual way of life and never complained. Only Pina, his wife, would come to us on Sabbath Eve, and sigh and tell us about his losses. Chaim had great confidence; he believed that God Almighty derived more satisfaction from a Jew who never stopped hoping and was always grateful for everything he received. He always referred to the verse in Psalms: "But as for me, I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more." If someone asked him "What is the extent of your wealth?", he would surely answer as the great Rothschild of Frankfurt answered – that the Torah tells us: "And every man's hallowed things shall be his" – everything that a man gives for holiness, for charity, for anonymous donations, this is his wealth. Anything else does not belong to him . . .

A few years before World War II broke out, Chaim and Pina adopted an orphaned girl. Her name was Brajna and she was a member of the family in the full sense of the word. They educated her in the same spirit as they themselves behaved. A short time before the war, they married her off to a yeshiva student and gave her a nice dowry. This was the last wish of Chaim and Pina.

Chaim and Pina were killed in Slonim, together with many of our townspeople. May God avenge their blood.

May their souls be bound up in the bond of life, with the rest of the holy and pure souls of our townspeople!

Aryeh Liubka Levi, Australia

Menachem Flakser, Brooklyn

A Home in Ostrolenka

With the passage of years, you look at the nest where you grew and from which you went out into the great world. How much sorrow and pain you endured during those years! Two World Wars took place, your home was burned. Everyone close to you was destroyed and you do not know where their graves are.

But that warm and pure nest still stands before your eyes, and why is it to blame? You left it, believing that you were going to a new life, to dreams wrapped in soft silk. How rosy, enticing and beautiful the world looked to me during my childhood years in Ostrolenka. It was as if something pushed me toward it when I crossed the bridge over the River Narew. There, near the "monument", I hid my hot head in the damp grass of the field. The walk was like going out into endless blue distances, enfolded in youthful expectations.

Sometimes, we gathered in the municipal park toward evening, lads and lasses, and sang songs of longing and yearning, such as *The Sun Sets in Flames* (by Yitzhak Katzenelson).

This was a difficult period for youths in all the Jewish towns. The Revolution of 1905 lingered in the ruins. I remember our revolutionaries of those years: Mendel the Blind, Fenster and Herszel Rozenblum, who often sat in the giant prison in our city, opposite the park. For the brief periods of time when they were released from prison, they still tried secretly to continue their activities to overthrow the Tsar, but the youth was already disappointed. More and more, they began to look inward, into our nation, into our origins, and were drawn to Zion.

I remember what happened in our city when one fellow went to Israel to study in a high school in Jaffa.

My dear teacher, Anszel Lew, was the one who prepared him for the journey and the studies. The Chassidim, on the other hand, congregated around their rabbis. During the week, they made do with a poor existence, but on Sabbaths, they gave expression to their

faith and gushing joy. Be there a Tsar or not, it did not affect their inner world one bit.

I would like to tell of such an ardent Jew. He shines from my childhood years, and not just because he was my grandfather. His name was Efraim Goldbruch. He owned a stone house in the old market, as well as a large store where Russian army officers and the Polish authorities in the area shopped.

In fact, it was my grandmother, Frejdele, who was the great merchant. It was she who traveled to Warsaw in a wagon with a canopy to purchase wares for the store. It was she who went to the barracks on the 20th of every month to collect the officers' debts before they became hopelessly drunk. It was she who traveled distances in search of grooms for her daughters.

Theirs was a home of Torah and greatness, of Chassidism and wealth. Into this home, my father came as a groom with "perpetual board". The store prospered and it seemed as though homes like these were created to stand forever. As a young lad, however, I already sensed the storm taking place in the atmosphere of the house. Frejdele, a "woman of valor", ran the house and her daughters helped her. Efraim, the husband, however, always walked around as if immersed in other worlds. It seemed as if all the abundance of the house did not interest him. He did not interfere at all in the store and would disappear from the house for days on end.

Perhaps it is not completely true that Efraim Goldbruch was driven away from the rich house, as our dear townsman, the poet Yisroel Shtern, described in his poem *Ostrolenka*. But there was friction between my grandfather and grandmother, which was with me all my childhood years, because of deeds that I will describe below.

Grandfather and Grandmother did not talk to each other. If here and there a word was spoken, it was with bitterness and anger. Thunder echoed in my young ears and I could not understand why domestic peace did not prevail, why they quarreled all the time, when the Almighty blessed them with plenty, with the respect of their fellow men and with a beautiful and spacious home. In time, I learned that in his youth, Efraim lived in Kotzk, and the rebellious spirit of Reb Mendele Kotzker stuck to him all his life. He did not acknowledge the importance of daily functioning and of responsibility for the family. He rebelled against everything – and also against his wife and children.

When Frejdele passed away at an advanced age, Efraim still remained as though standing aloof. He did not care who inherited the property and who ran the house and the store. After matters of the inheritance were settled, he lived with my parents, who paid the other children their share and received possession of the house and the store. He was supposed to be boarded at our home.

How strange it seemed to my young eyes, however, when, at a moment when my father turned his head, I once saw Grandfather snatch *challah* [Sabbath bread] from the Sabbath table, hide it under his coat and run quickly from the house. I could not believe that he did this to satiate his hunger far from us. I did not know my grandfather to be such a glutton.

Later on, Grandfather began taking not only Sabbath *challot* from the house, but anything that could satisfy a hungry man or make a wretched man happy. The entire city quickly came to know Efraim Goldbruch. They saw him every Friday, loitering around houses where Sabbath dishes were being prepared. He asked for a bit of chicken soup, a chicken wing or gizzard, a little wine for *kiddush* or two candles – all this to bring the Sabbath atmosphere to the homes of Jews who could not buy these things themselves.

They saw this old man, with a white beard and shaking hands, holding a basket and running in the direction of Send, the city's poor neighborhood. There, like Elijah the Prophet, he brought the light of the Sabbath, thus wiping away tears from the eyes of an unfortunate widow and her children.

And then came the worst of all: Efraim Goldbruch, the wealthiest man in the city, the owner of a big store and a stone house in the market square, standing near the door of the study house every morning and extending his hand for a donation. He does not omit any Jew who comes to pray, and gets a cent from him. And so he stands on his feet from early in the morning until the afternoon. The Jews are astonished, but no one refuses to give him a penny. They know that something is hidden behind this.

And what did Efraim Goldbruch do with the pennies he gathered? He set up a residence for the elderly, for those who were homeless. He rented an apartment in a narrow lane between our house and the study hall, and put iron beds with mattresses, a book case and everything necessary for a home in it. He began to walk among the houses not just on Friday, but every day; to keep the old Jews alive in "his" residence for the elderly, he got all the food the generous housewives had saved.

In the cold and the snow, Efraim Goldbruch walked through Send, searching for dejected widows or merely poor people to cheer with the goodness of his heart. The rebellious spark of the Kotzk days created a purified humaneness in him; however, this was not obvious to those around him. To his closest family, it was not clear exactly what Grandfather was doing and why. They supposed that he was ashamed of it. They accepted his deeds as a punishment from God; there was no need to become too excited about them.

But Efraim Goldbruch could not eat his bread to satiety while so many were hungry around him. He rebelled and wanted to destroy his home. He fled to a place where he could do only good for others.

Efraim Goldbruch was one of the beautiful and noble personalities in our city. He was aware of the solitude of man on earth, of his ignorance of how and why things happen, of his going the way of "Against your will you were created and against your will you will die." On *Motzei Shabbat* (Saturday night), he appeared in poor homes, like Elijah the Prophet, bringing a message of justice and equality and the smile of the Omnipotent to the despondent and forgotten.

Once, I remember, he took me, his small grandson, to show me the "splendor of his creation" – the primitive residence for the elderly that he founded with his own hands. I saw old, weak Jews lying in beds, in the hands of each a book. A spark lit up in their extinguished eyes when Efraim appeared and began to distribute food to them.

This is the last picture I remember of my grandfather: it was in 1915, at the height of World War I. The Germans approached our city, which had already been bombed by a zeppelin. We were ordered to flee and abandon everything. There was only one way to Ostrowa, and we had go on foot. Crowds walked in that direction, most of them families carrying little children and bundles of food and clothing in their arms.

Efraim Goldbruch walked on this road of pain, in his arms a Torah scroll from a synagogue that he had managed to save. The fate of his children and grandchildren did not interest him. He took the Torah scroll to his heart, the dearest thing worth saving.

We, the exiled, walked on the stony road, stricken with worry for the future. We did not know where we would sleep, on what we would rest our weary heads. But the head of Efraim Goldbruch was in the heavens.

His eyes shone, he went toward a never-changing eternity. The Torah scroll he embraced was his warm nest; no storm could get the better of it.

Thus is the Efraim Goldbruch engraved in my memory: his white beard fluttering in the wind, his head held high, holding the holy Torah scroll and walking toward a clear, pure future, more exalted than a simple person of flesh and blood could comprehend.

Yitzhak Kachan, Melbourne

Our Old Home

A. Visiting the Graves of Our Fathers

Today, in thought and feeling, I was at my old home, visiting the graves of our fathers. I tried to open a door to the yesterday that was annihilated. I peeked into the houses in the narrow lanes, into the small and large stores in the Small Market. I reached the Old Market. Silhouettes appeared before me and I was reminded of names that began to echo in my ears, quietly at first, and then gradually growing and sounding like the ringing of bells. Forgotten figures stealthily appeared from doors and gates, those near and far united in one circle – a circle of the city of my birth, of my childhood years and the dreams of my youth.

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Yesterday's doors open without creaking. How much time has passed? Twenty years – it seems like an eternity!

Our fathers lived their lives until they ended in the same city, on the same street and in the same house. They grew old peacefully (sometimes in sorrow, each according to his own fate. . .). Years came and went, hair whitened, those who were close came and went, voices were silenced. One generation interwoven with the second, like links in a chain. One generation passes away and another generation comes. . .

I look at the city in which I was born, now destroyed, where every stone was familiar to me. There was Cyganska Street, jammed with small houses, in each a minute workshop. And there, at Small Market

number 3, lived the shoemaker from Goworowo. While sewing boots, his three sons sang *Ve'al Kulam* from the Yom Kippur [prayers], which they had learned from the High Holy Days cantor.

And near them, the facades of small and large stores. I see Alter Szlomo the Baker standing on the corner in front of his door, tired and pale after baking during the suffocating summer night. And above, on the second floor, was the Alexander *shtebl*. With their prayer shawls and phylacteries, Jewish tradesmen hurry to be on time for the first *minyan*. The merchants pray later. Why not? The customers will wait for them. And here, with measured steps, walks Reb Herszel Szperling, his hands clasped behind his back, a wide smile spread over his broad face. He seems to be pondering some question. Coming toward him, with rapid steps, is Reb Menachem Frydman. The two of them walk back and forth near the study hall, deep in conversation about Chassidism and business.

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I dip into the morning dew of the lively town which has already become romanticized. Memory sharpens recollections, experiences and pictures combine, images and visions of the past rise anew before my eyes. Here are Chassidic Jews, here the faces of youths who wove a dream of redemption, of a land of our own. Here a picture arises and is reborn: Sabbath morning on Lomza Street. On the corner, near Szapira's house, a group of Poalei Zion members encircle Herszel Rozenblum, the old Bundist, and argue about Yiddish and Hebrew. Like a game ball, verses fly from Borochow and from Medem (Medema). The boisterous laugh of Berel Zabludowicz is heard, he must have scored a goal. . . but Herszel Rozenblum does not give in, he strikes back. He is short and, when he speaks, he stands on tiptoe and looks with satisfaction at the opposite side. He reciprocates with an opposing goal. . . the circle expands. Aaron Zusman and Bomsztejn arrive. The partisan argument ended a while ago, but for another two hours they stand there, until the street empties and everyone hurries to the Sabbath meal. After eating, they go out again. Couples stroll arm in arm and walk toward the park near the Lomza Road.

It is dusk. The park fills with youths strolling in groups. Suddenly a solo song is heard. A girl's voice sings Peretz's song, *Zei ah Beiter fahr deiner Chassidim, Bim-Bum, Bim-Bum, Bum. . .*" (Please, ask for the sake of your Chassidim). Those gathered draw near the source of the song, the bench by the wide-branched pine tree. Now we see the singer – it is Chajale Gingold. Her clear voice echoes afar. After she finishes the song, everyone applauds and asks her to continue. She begins a new song, quite well-known. From a far corner, basses and tenors join her, and the whole park gives voice to wonderful song, *Az die peiklach hoben gepeikelt . . .* (When the drums did beat). A pale, full moon appears in the sky. Light and shadow combine on a *Motzei Shabbat* summer night in 1928.

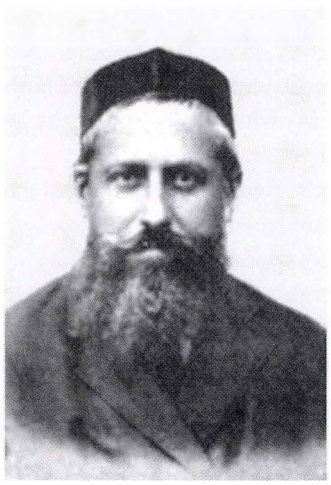
B. My father, as I knew him

(Lines of an intimate picture)

It is not easy to write about my own father.

The intimate, delicate feelings we feel for someone who is closest to us also influence memories. Therefore, when I write about my father, I try to refrain from superlatives and concealment. Simultaneously, I feel that the unique picture I draw reflects the typical type of Polish Jew of dozens of generations and what characterizes him: faith and confidence, Chassidic fervor and Misnagdic coolness, acuity and innocence, earnestness and lightheartedness, outer creases and inner perfection.

When he shook off the dust of weekdays, in the depth of his dealings with life, this type did not only think, but also pondered and delved into matters of life, and lived the burning questions of existence as well as distant problems of eternity.



Reb Chaim Dow Hakoen
the Ritual Slaughterer

These Jews, who had drive, thought and feeling, who in their way of life personified this unique nation, they who Y.Y. Trunk defined so felicitously as "the full and wonderful Jews of Poland", who were sentenced by cruel decree of history, to them is dedicated this description of an individual – my father, may he rest in peace – who was one of that community.

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In every person's life, there are moments engraved deep in one's memory. At the time, although they may not have seemed so significant, something in them, fundamental and lingering, entered the soul forever. While writing these lines, memories arise that I see now in a stronger light than in the past. I remember how my father once explained the meaning of "the People of the Book" to a Polish doctor. The doctor came to our house to examine my father, who was ill and whose temperature had gone up. When he came in, my father was learning aloud from a book. "Until what age do Jews learn?", he asked in wonderment. "We learn our whole lives, we learn during the day and also at night", my father replied with a smile. "Yes", said the doctor, "I have heard that the Jews are called 'the People of the Book'. Does this mean that you are so enamored of books and learn for the sake of learning? What does it give you?" "Oh, very much", answered Father, "The book is our flag." And then he pointed at me and added, "Here sits my son, who reads books other than the ones I do, books of our contemporaries, modern ones. But he, too, is not cut off from books. He is a son of the People of the Book."

When we examine the creation of our spiritual roots, we should look first for the family's roots, the environment in which we spent the years of our childhood and youth.

My father's figure stands before me: taller than average, his movements direct, as was his behavior. He had a dignified appearance and smiling eyes, radiating joy and warmth. His black beard, always tidy and combed, emphasized the lines of his face – a combination of gentleness and decisiveness.

He spent every free minute with the Gemara or a Chassidic book. But he was not a dry scholar, who dealt only with *halacha*. He had a sense of the beauty of the *Midrash* [commentaries on the Jewish Bible] and the *Aggadah*. *Halacha* and *Aggadah* shaped his spiritual nature. He was affable and people were therefore drawn to him. He loved Chassidism, which symbolizes the joy of life.

Pictures from my childhood years in the Alexander *shtebl* arise in my memory. Young and old Chassidim crowded around Father, avidly absorbing his Chassidic folktales. My father was a walking encyclopedia of Chassidic folklore, a wonderful storyteller with a phenomenal memory. He always found an apt proverb, a saying of a saintly person (I have not forgotten what he related from *Yismach Moshe*: "There is nothing more whole than a broken Jewish heart" . . .). People were ready to listen to Father's stories all night long. But, while telling them, he looked at the clock and finished quickly. The Chassidim begged: Chaim Berel, sing us the Rebbe's old melody, and Father acceded. He loved musical renditions very much. Not only as a prayer leader on the pulpit on the High Holy Days and holidays, but on festive occasions, as well, he loved to sing warmhearted Modzitz melodies.

I remember Sabbath nights in the summertime in our house. *Zmirot* went on and on into the night. Father sang new tunes, mostly from Modzitz, which he learned from chance guests (they sat at our table on Sabbaths, as well as weekdays). Father sang a melody of atmosphere and mood and we, the children, accompanied him. Our singing got stronger and, beyond the open windows, the melody carried outside the house and spread into nearby courtyards. Neighbors finished their meals, went out to their porches and listened to the singing which echoed in the silence of the night.

Sabbath night singing was very characteristic of the feeling of the *neshama yetera* [additional Sabbath soul] in Poland's Jewish towns. Now, I live in far-off Australia. When I feel a strong longing for the past, there appears before me the picture of the Jewish home in Ostrolenka on Sabbath Eve, the sweet smells of cooking and fresh baking. Twilight comes, the joyous melody of *Lecha Dodi Likrat Kallah* [*Come My Beloved to Greet the Sabbath Bride*] heralds the coming of the angels of peace and the ministering angels . . . and the Sabbath Queen, described so beautifully by Heinrich Heine, escorted on *Motzei Shabbat* by the sad melody of *seudah shlishit* [third Sabbath meal]. Between these two eves – Sabbath Eve and *Motzei Shabbat* – the coming and going of the Sabbath drama took place in the Jewish home. The pictures come, bringing the atmosphere of those days.

Father came from the *shtebl* after the afternoon prayer. Mother prepared two small *challahs*, a knife, a

salt shaker and leftovers of Sabbath foods or cold sour milk (in the summer). The shadows become more pronounced and actually oppress the heart. Father sits at *seudah shlishit* in the company of some Chassidim and sings *Bnei Heychala* in the Lubavitcher Rebbe's melancholy tune, so suited to the Sabbath Day twilight. The melody's sad sounds spread all over the street and cast awe on us, the young children, sitting near the house and telling each other stories. Later, we listened to Mother's *Elohei Avraham* prayer, and with our youthful gaze, accompanied Father and his Chassidim on their way to the *shtebl*, with their slow and sedate steps.

On his return from the *shtebl*, Father made *Havdala* [the prayer separating the holy Sabbath and the secular week] and assembled the tables for the *Melave Malka* repast [Saturday evening meal attending the Sabbath Queen's departure] which would be held in our home (every *Motzei Shabbat* at the home of another Chassid). Our large house filled with Chassidim of all ages, from young to old. In the kitchen there was a great bustle: groats cooked on the stove and Mother prepared the herring. Slices of meat, fish, lungs and the cheek meat that the Chassidim brought with them for King David's feast [the *Melave Malka*] were arranged on plates.

The crowd warms up with a little of the 96 proof liquor that Josel Dawid brought. Father begins to tell someone something from *Yismach Moshe*. Mendel Mashgiach adds something about the nephew of Rabbi Fajwele, who passed away at an early age. Pinczas Hakoen quotes a verse from *Proverbs*. Fajwisz the Melamed takes a pinch of snuff and interrupts Pinczas' words: "You have a verse from *Proverbs* for everything"...

Menachem Frydman mixes in: "What do you care about the verse?", and begins to talk politics. A discussion begins about hard times, about "Grabski's wagon" [Grabski was Prime Minister and Treasury Minister; his "wagon" was the Tax Ministry wagon, in which possessions of Jews who could not pay taxes were confiscated] and that the young men were being drawn to the big world. . . To dispel the bad mood, Mendel Liberc pounds on the table with his fist: "Chaim Ber, start singing *Eliahu*!". Father begins to sing and the whole house is filled with the sounds of sorrow and longing for Eliahu HaTishbi and supplications that he should come speedily. Quietly at first, but then the song gets stronger and more powerful. All those gathered join in and ask him to come already and bring good news of consolation and the coming of the Messiah. . . And then more liquor is served and again they tell of the words of the Saints. The elderly Chassidim mention "The Bialer" [Rebbe] and thus the *Melave Malka* continues until morning. In vain, Mother asks us, the children, to go to bed. We would not hear of it! Our tender souls absorbed the joy of the *Melave Malka*, the atmosphere of the good days. These were hours of happy exaltation of the soul of our childhood in Ostrolenka. As I describe these dear pictures from my father's house, I see in them all our homes, homes that gave us joy and sorrow, light and shadow – the unique life of a throbbing Jewish community, until the murderer's ax descended upon us . . .

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A few biographical details about my father, of blessed memory.

He was born in Ostrolenka in 1881. My grandfather, Reb Szmuelke, hung great hopes on him and, indeed, in time, he became my grandfather's deputy. The elders surely remember that unique personage, descended from a great Chassidic lineage. I can barely remember him, because he departed from us when I was still very young, but I heard a great deal from many people about his character and personality. Although my father inherited many characteristics from him, two World Wars did not affect him, he was not forced to take the wanderer's stick in hand. He lived his life until a good old age in Ostrolenka. During World War I, my father fled to Russia with his family and experienced the tragic events of the civil war there, the pogroms, plagues and famine. He lived in different Russian cities (Levadjan, Lipetsk and Vitebsk), and in each of them worked as a ritual slaughterer, a cantor and a *mohel* [Jewish ritual circumciser]. Until the Revolution, he was the representative of the refugees (in the city of Levadjan). During the conventions in Moscow, he became well-acquainted with Rabbi Mazeh, of blessed memory, who greatly valued Father's spiritual qualities. Father was then revealed to be a great speaker. Many years later, I read his accounts of these conventions and was impressed by their unique style.

At the end of 1921, Father returned to Poland, to Ostrolenka, which he missed during all the years he spent in Russia. Between the two World Wars, he dealt with religious matters. His skill as a *mohel* and a ritual slaughterer of great repute made him well-known far

beyond Ostrolenka's borders (he was often invited to serve as a *mohel* in Lomza). He was a devoted husband and father. Although modern concepts of "isms" were foreign to him, he related to the aspirations of the young generation with great tolerance because of his Orthodox-traditional world outlook.

I saw my father for the last time before I left for Australia in December 1937. On a snowy winter morning, we waited at the Kaczyny station for the train, which arrived late. Father wandered around, sad and silent, sorrow in his eyes, as before a storm. "You should be happy, Reb Chaim Ber, that your son is going to a great country", said an acquaintance to him. "Yes, everyone tells me that, but I feel. . .". Father did not finish the sentence, as if afraid to give his thought utterance. I felt that the words burned his throat. Later, to improve the atmosphere, he quoted an adage of the Sages, which symbolized a baby's birth. "Why, asks the Gemara, does a baby go out into the world from his mother's womb with clenched fists? Because the baby has come to conquer the world. And at the time of his death, a man's palms are open, as if to say: 'See, I am not taking anything with me.' The last part symbolizes the absolute truth. But in the matter of birth", Father continued, "I prefer another interpretation. The baby's clenched fists say that he does not arrive like a torn-off leaf, but that he brings a long history with him." And then my father said to me: "You are going to a foreign land, but don't think that you will be like a torn-off leaf there. You take with you pictures, memories and experiences – a piece of history and a cultural treasure with which you must identify and know your roots . . ."

The train arrived and we parted emotionally. Forever!. .

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In September 1939, my father, my mother and two sisters, walked the road of the torment of the slaughtered Jewish nation. The path of the seven levels of Hell extended though Lomza and continued until Molczat (near Baranowicz). During the first months of the Nazi invasion of Russia (1941), they were murdered, together with the entire community of Ostrolenka's Jews.

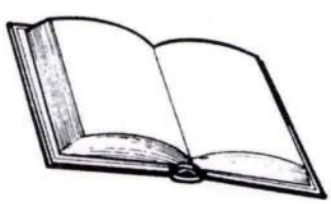
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Near Molczat, there is a large common grave in the shape of the letter *dalet* [the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet]. Our holy martyrs are buried there. While writing these last lines, I cannot sever my gaze from my father's picture. Memories of my childhood arise in me. I see him walking about the house on *Motzei Shabbat* and saying *Veyiten Lecha* . . . "May God give you of the dew of heaven and the riches of the land . . . Nations will serve you and be your slaves . . . God chose you, do not fear, Jacob".

★

After great and cruel torment, my dear, unforgettable ones, my father, Chaim Dow, my mother, Chaja Bejla, and my sisters, Fejga and Rejzel, were buried in the ground of Molczat.

May these lines serve as a gravestone in their memory.



Rabbi Jakow Hirsz Zimmerman*, London

Ostrolenka of Long Ago

Whoever remembers Ostrolenka, with its *balabatim*, scholars, Chassidim, rich men and common folk; with its institutions, schools, study halls, Chassidic *shteblich*, Talmud Torahs, yeshivas, its shelter for the poor, sick and needy, and so on – can understand the meaning of Ostrolenka's destruction.

Ostrolenka was among those Polish cities known for their people – *balabatim*, Torah scholars, community workers, the intelligentsia and the God-fearing. Several thousand Jewish families (approximately half the general population) resided in it, and all of them were like one big family. Even the disputes among them (about a rabbi, adjudicator, ritual slaughterer, community elections, Sejm (Parliament) elections, or even about an attendant at the ritual bath and the modern bath house, or the position of beadle at the synagogue) – these were disputes confined within the walls of the house, as within the family. After the disagreement was settled, peace and serenity prevailed once more. The reason for this was quite simple: serious divisions between one group and another did not exist. The sole division between the Jews was primarily religion. But in Ostrolenka, this did not exist either. Only infrequently did someone dare to defile the Sabbath publicly. There was a Sabbath Observance Society, which dealt primarily with two matters: supervising the *eruv* [a fence enabling carrying within its boundaries on the Sabbath], as well as the bakers – that they should not put pots of *cholent* (a meat stew traditionally eaten on the Sabbath) into the oven after the Sabbath had begun. As to *kashrut* [fitness in accordance with Jewish law] – there was almost no Jewish home that aroused a doubt as to whether one could eat there. Even in the homes of the most "free", they were punctilious as to family purity. And who then was considered "free"? – those who wore stiff collars and pressed pants. I remember only three agnostics: actually, two "whole ones" and the third – only "half a one". The two were beardless, and the third had a short beard. Each of the three wore a short jacket. They were the doctor, the druggist and the attorney.

Ostrolenka was a center of Torah and Chassidism. They prayed in the large synagogue only on Sabbaths and holidays. In the very same courtyard stood a large study hall, where they prayed every day and all through the day; that is, they began prayers at daybreak until one o'clock in the afternoon. After one – the afternoon prayer. Later, the evening prayer and, thus, without a break until night. Near the study hall was the place of prayer called the community *shtebl*, where they learned with study partners. Early in the morning and between afternoon and evening prayers: *Mishnayot*, *Ein Yakov*, Gemara and *Chayei Adam*.

The uneducated, the illiterate, almost did not exist in Ostrolenka. This was the concern of certain Jews, among those prominent in the city, who knew Torah. One of them was Reb Mordechaj Farber, of blessed memory – a scholar who did not want to turn the Torah into a tool for financial gain. He owned a dye-works, but his wife ran the business, and he helped her in the factory for only about two hours a day. Reb Mordechaj gave classes for the young men among the tradesmen and the merchants†, as well as for those who were older. Three generations studied under him at the same time. Later, some of them served as teachers themselves. There was not even one tradesman who did not go to at least one of his three daily lessons: in the morning, between the afternoon and evening prayers, and at eight o'clock in the evening.

In my time, there were about one hundred sons-in-law who were supported by their in-laws. Even the simplest people tried to acquire bridegrooms who were learned for their daughters. These young men studied mostly in the Chassidic *shteblich*, and learned with great diligence, day and night. There were about 300 worshippers in the *shtebl* of the Gur Chassidim, all of whom studied and were learned. In time, most of them became respected rabbis, such as Reb Hirsz-Lejb, the son-in-law of Efraim Goldbruch, who was the Rabbi of

* Rabbi Zimmerman was a rabbi in London for 32 years. At first, he was an Agudat Yisrael Rabbi; currently he is Chairman of the Rabbinate at the Union of Synagogues.

† Half the townspeople were his students. He did not do this as a livelihood. On the contrary, it cost him a great deal of money. He could have found a very honorable rabbinical position, but preferred not to do so.

Szefarow; Reb Berysz, the son-in-law of Frumkis – a rabbi in Racionza; Reb Efraim Perlmutter (known as Szmuel Icchak's Efraim) – a Jewish law adjudicator in Ciechanow.

Among the Chassidic scholars, [these] are worthy of special mention: Welwel Noskes, Ben Zion Cukrowicz, Lazer Mintz, Awraham Mlynarzewicz (known as Dawid's Awraham), Mendel Cuker, who ran the yeshiva, Szlomo Sapir, Szmuel Baruch Landau and others.

Each and every one of the *balabatim* in Ostrolenka wanted to have a guest for the Sabbath or a holiday. (In Poland, there were many itinerant beggars, as well as Jewish soldiers from other places who "served" in Ostrolenka.)

Even the poorest *balabatim* invited yeshiva students to eat at their homes one or two days a week. Even in small, uncomfortable apartments, yeshiva students were given places to sleep – free of charge, of course. (It should be noted that Avraham Brum, an old Jewish man who is a native of Ostrolenka, lives in Jerusalem. In Ostrolenka, he was known as Awrejmel Ben Israel-Icchak. He was a teacher and a Torah scholar. He was a Gur Chassid, and the Rabbi of Gur, who lives in Jerusalem, visits him frequently.)

We feel the destruction more intensely when we remember that all this is gone, and that not a trace remains of our Ostrolenka. The will burns in our bones to perpetuate a monument memorializing the holy lives of our townspeople who are no longer, to remember them always and not forget for even one second, to fulfill what is written: "Remember what Amalek did to you!"

May God avenge their blood!

Chanoch Gingold, Sydney, Australia

The Ostrolenka That Is No More

When we come to write about "a city and mother in Israel" that is no more, where we were born and raised – a strong will strikes us to raise things from the depths of our memory, in order to perpetuate them in eternal memory. "Types", streets, pictures, people who lived and created, organizations which were active, etc, etc. All this is so dear to our heart and our desire to perpetuate it for the next generations – everything that the evil hand of the Nazis destroyed and uprooted.

I wish to mention here some types and episodes that are engraved in my memory of Ostrolenka.

Our city Ostrolenka was blessed with important and significant personalities, who did much for the city. There were also, however, idlers, who contributed to the unique lifestyle of the society. Who among us does not remember the two clowns of the city, Pinie Gedanken and Dan Kachan, who in the last years did almost nothing, except to serve here and there as witnesses in court as to a person's age, to carry out some chance brokerage deal, or to say *kaddish* for someone who had passed away. Their main profession was to cheer the townspeople . . . Pinie and Dan, the two friends, always strolled the streets together and sought opportunities to surprise people with their pranks.

In Ostrolenka there were also Jews who were expert at construction work. There was Reb Awraham Aron the Plasterer, who went to Israel with his sons as early as 1924-1925. Here is Lejbel Korman, nicknamed Lejbel Trotsky (I don't know why). The popular opinion was that it was impossible to build a house without him. He was tall, and I remember him always looking at building plans. I was particularly impressed when they built Mosze Szafran's house, but the height of his work came when they built the new ritual bath. It was impossible to speak to him then. It was a unique project. He attended to matters of water tanks, pumps, steam, special bathtubs and other complex devices. My father, of blessed memory, Reb Pinczas Gingold, soon came to his aid and supervised all the work. It was impossible to fool him, as he was expert in these matters (I will tell about my father below).

Ostrolenka also had its "town wise man". This was "Mosze Sechtoni". From where he got that name, I don't know. Probably it was connected somehow to ritual slaughtering.

"Mosze Sechtoni" was the son of Reb Fajwel Lejb

Hersz, who played the role of doctor in Ostrolenka. He was expert at cupping treatments and enemas, and was also said to have an understanding of heart diseases and "heard" the patient's heartbeats in a primitive way. His healing methods were not especially medically "kosher". For example, if someone complained of a sore throat, Fajwel Lejb Hersz always had cotton wool ready, not because he had a first-aid kit with him, but very simply because he wore a winter coat padded with cotton wool. Whenever necessary, he pulled a piece of cotton wool out from under the lining. And from where did he take a stick to wrap with cotton wool? In every home there was a twig broom. He took a small twig from the broom, wrapped it with cotton wool, dipped it in iodine and swabbed the throat of the patient, who became better immediately. He also determined if the patient needed cupping or whether it was enough to spread a salve on his back. When the matter was serious, he also advised as to whether or not to consult a doctor. From whence came his skill in medical matters? It was said that he served in the Russian Army in his youth, and was sent to work in a military hospital. There he learned [medical] theory. Reb Fajwel was a pleasant man, a *lamedvavnik* type [one of 36 hidden saints, for whose sake God preserves the world, even if humanity has degenerated to total barbarism]. He always made do with what he was paid. In poor homes, he did not ask anything, and even left an abundance of blessings and wishes for a speedy recovery there. In exchange for that "payment", he would visit the patient another time.

The son, "Mosze Sechtoni", was the complete opposite of his modest father. He earned the nickname "The Courier" in the city, because he spread all the gossip. He was the first to know about everything that happened, and never kept a secret.

Ostrolenka was known for the original family names of its inhabitants, such as Ma Towu, Adon Olam, Thylim, Malach, Misznayot, Ismach and others.

I wish to mention one of the members of the Ismach family, Szmuel Lejbel, who was my good friend. He was a watchmaker (a profession passed down in his family from generation to generation) and a skilled professional, but he belonged body and soul to the party (Rightist Poalei Zion) and politics. He had a heart of gold, a good soul and always sought honesty and justice. Szmuel Lejbel contributed a great deal to the life of Ostrolenka's community, and always supported the needy with great devotion and good will. His brothers: Chaim (now in America), Anszel (he was a hatter), one more brother and two sisters whose names I do not remember. All belonged to the Poalei Zion party.

I would like to mention another water drawer in Ostrolenka, Beniamin – a tall, broad man with a black beard. He looked like a *lamedvavnik* (a type like Bontshe Schweig – Bontshe the Silent). He never insulted anyone. After he brought water, he went straight to the study hall to say the afternoon-evening prayers, and heard a bit of the *Mishnayot* that Mordechaj Iglewicz taught. In the morning, he got up for the first *minyan*. On the holy Sabbath, after resting from the exhausting work he did all week, he went to the study hall to hear *Ethics of the Fathers* from Mordechaj. Beniamin's life was honest and pure. What its end was – I don't know.

Here I am reminded of another honest Jew, that is, Chaim Welwel Malach, who had a big family and small means. In Mir, they called him "Der Fleter". His trade was mending books and all sorts of things. The worshippers at the *shtebl* took care to provide him with his weekly sustenance. He was learned, somewhat cut off from reality and believed that evil did not even exist in the world. He never complained and always prayed for the Jewish people.

Among the teachers in our city only two are etched in my memory – those I studied under. I remember them with honor and respect: Dawid Lichtensztejn and Meir Jankel Bloumenkranz. Dawid Lichtensztejn was still a young man. His great talent was that he knew how to influence his students and awaken the will to learn in them. It was really a pleasure to study at his *heder*. Later, he became a merchant and did not do badly in his business. Meir Jankel Bloumenkranz was my last teacher. I say "last" because at that time, although I already worked at my profession, for a long time I still came to him for a "lesson" every morning before work. He was a person, as is said, without an evil bone in his body, and had a special relationship with children. He never struck us, as was customary among other teachers. If it happened that on a certain day we did not feel like learning, he did not get angry, but delved into the Gemara and studied by himself with great diligence. We became sick of sitting idly by very quickly. He used to say, "If you don't want to learn – alright, but don't disturb me in my studies." Of course, his words influenced us and, as one, we immediately sat down before the Gemara. In the summer, on especially hot days, he released us for an hour, so that we could take a

dip in the river. His house was near Sojka's flour mill, very close to the river. After we took a dip in the cool water, we came back to learn refreshed, with desire and diligence. Meir Jankel was a mature man, but he had great patience with his students.

Many Jews took part in public life in Ostrolenka, but I would like to mention only a few of them. One, who was closest to me, and he whose ways I knew, of course, was my father, Chaim Pinczas Gingold, of blessed memory. He guided Ostrolenka's Jews from birth to death, because he was the *mohel* [Jewish ritual circumciser] and a member of the burial society at one and the same time. He was always at the service of the community. If there was a Jew who came from the country whose son had to be circumcised on the Sabbath, he [my father] did not care whether it was stingingly cold or pouring rain. Chaim Pinczas got into his wagon on Friday afternoon and traveled to the country. He was a member of the city council, representing the Agudah.

After World War I, when the Joint established in Ostrolenka a public soup kitchen, where free meals were distributed to the poor, he was immediately recruited to this job, and made sure that everything ran properly and that no one was deprived. In his eyes, the first thing was honesty, and then mercy. Perhaps because of this, his opinion – that all the needy were entitled to equal assistance, and not a great deal to one and little or nothing to another – was not always properly appreciated. No one could change his ways and his principles, not even his wife. He became a *dozor* [an elder] in the community. He was active in all areas, and was especially prominent in his involvement in the construction of the large study hall, the Talmud Torah and the ritual bath. He demonstrated familiarity with and great knowledge of matters of construction. Experienced craftsmen respected him and his opinions. Later, he was elected Chairman of the community and, in fact, administered the lives of the Jews in the city. In addition, in various disputes that were usual in towns, he steered matters fearlessly. Who among us does not remember the famous dispute concerning the ritual slaughterers? In the *shtebl* of the Gur Chassidim, he set the tone and took care that no one would be deprived. If guests came to prayers on the Sabbath, he took care that each one was invited for a meal, and would not go home until everything had been arranged.

In time, a committee was established, consisting of people from the *shtebl.* (I remember two of them, because they were good friends of my father: Chaim Elkes and Welwel Chacek.) Together, they founded an interest-free charitable fund especially for Jews of the *shtebl* who had met with financial difficulties. Each person was required to pay one zloty a week (everyone was required to pay, without exception; the poor paid 20 grosz per week). Jews received loans of hundreds of zlotys, to be returned in small installments. This fund was active for a long time, for as long as I can remember. Later, the city's youths became its administrators. One of them was Lejbel Barszcz. It should be mentioned that my father, Chaim Pinczas, himself went to collect the fund's weekly contributions. Many brought the money by themselves. Thus he worked for the lives of the Jews in Ostrolenka for many years. May his memory be blessed.

Because I have told about my father here, I also wish to mention my mother, Judyt Gingold, of blessed memory, who was, in my opinion, the complete opposite of my father. For her, mercy was in the first place, and then honesty. I saw in her the picture of "Sara Bat Tovim"; she gave a great deal of charity and supported the needy by giving charity in secret. As the youngest son, the task was often assigned to me of fulfilling her charitable missions, especially on Fridays, Sabbath Eve. On market days in town, Mother was most busy, and I would help her. In addition to waiting on customers in the store, we packed up bundles of food for distribution to the needy, according to a prepared list. On holidays, especially before Passover or Rosh HaShana, the commotion was at its height. This was a critical charity season, and so special lists were prepared of families that must be provided with matzos, wine, bundles of food, as well as sums of money. Here, too, I was the *mitzvah* [religious commandment] messenger. I sometimes added money from my own pocket, for which Mother later reimbursed me. Thus she dedicated a great deal of her life to charity and good works. May her memory be honored.

I wish to relate the interesting incident of "Yom Kippur on a weekday", which happened at the home of Mendel and Josef Cuker, with the participation of the tenants of the house. It happened at the time of the war between Poland and the Bolsheviks (1920). When the Bolsheviks pursued the Poles, the old market in our city filled with the Polish Army. I remember that on that day, a heavy rain fell and because of the wetness, one of the bricks fell off the building, landed on the Polish soldiers and injured one of them. Inside the house, we

did not know what had happened. Suddenly, a great many soldiers broke in and accused the Jews of throwing stones at the Polish soldiers. They also added that apparently someone from this house had flown a red flag – the symbol of the Bolsheviks. Before the Jews had a chance to say anything, they took two people out of the house as guilty of throwing stones and giving secret passwords to the enemy. (Witnesses to this were not lacking then. At the time, Poland was "blessed" with witnesses of all kinds . . .). The two hostages were, if I am not mistaken, Mendel Cuker and Aszer Motel Cuker (the sons of Josef Cuker). In our house, a Yom Kippur atmosphere prevailed. A short time after the two were arrested, two gendarmes – the fate of Ostrolenka in their hands – came and took us for questioning. In the main, they asked where we had hidden the red flag and the bricks we had thrown at the soldiers. Many lost control and burst into tears. Only my sister, Tanja Cuker, took courage and with decisiveness, invited the gendarmes to search the entire house. Of course, they found neither bricks nor a red flag. What they did find were various wares in our store. When we began to prepare packages of delicacies – for them, their wives and children – the "red" became "white", and immediately after the gifts passed into their hands, the two "guilty ones" returned home. The happiness that took over the entire city was unimaginable.

But the matter did not end there. Unexpectedly, after a few days, an order was issued by the City Commander concerning the evacuation of Ostrolenka's populace in the shortest time possible. The news fell on us like thunder on a clear day. Had we not suffered enough during the war? But quick as a flash, the order was cancelled and the situation returned to what had been. Again, a committee was organized with Tanja Cuker at its head, and a delegation, laden with the best of everything, saved us from the new decree.

I have mentioned Chaim Elkes, and I wish to add a few more words about him. This man was always ready to do a favor for any Jew. He was the first to contribute money for the *shtebl* charitable fund, in order to distribute loans even before the weekly contributions had been collected. Lejbel Barszcz was also beloved by the city's Jews. He was a *dozor* [elder] of the community. After I left Ostrolenka, he was elected Chairman of the community.

Another interesting incident should be mentioned, about an American Jew, of those who came from Wojciechowice, who left a respectable sum of money to establish a municipal charitable fund. I do not remember the exact name (I think it was Blum or Ajblum, a relative of the family of the teacher, Gorzelczany). This man came to visit his family in Wojciechowice (a brick factory) and, as a guest, was invited to pray at the [synagogue's] eastern wall. But he waived this honor. He asked that on *Motzei Shabbat* (Saturday night), the honorable *balabatim* would gather at the home of the Rabbi. He informed them that he intended to leave a large sum of money for the community. When it became clear that this was indeed so, there was a great deal of surprise in the city; people did not stop talking about it. With the money he left, a charitable fund was established and all the Jews of Ostrolenka were eligible to receive an interest-free loan. He left five thousand dollars, another thousand dollars to erect a fence around the cemetery were his parents were buried, and another thousand dollars to complete the construction of the large study hall. In addition, he promised to send more money every year to the charitable fund. Unfortunately, however, he went bankrupt and was unable to keep his promise anymore.

All the parties and organizations that existed in those days in the Jewish street also existed in Ostrolenka, for example, the Zionists, the Bund, Poalei Zion, Mizrachi, Agudah, as well as youth movements: HaShomer HaTzair, HaShomer HaDati, *Freiheit* and Beitar.

When HaShomer HaTzair was still a young movement in the world in general, and in Ostrolenka in particular, it was considered a scouting movement that needed an older leader. Pesach Hochberg was elected to this position. He was devoted heart and soul to the organization and to the Zionist movement in general. Who among us does not remember the Keren HaKayemet meetings he ran? Generally, all activities for Israel were held in his house and under his leadership.

Finally, I wish to mention another two Ostrolenkans who, like Dan and Pinie, also loved to cheer the townspeople. These were two young men, Hercke Sojka and Eli Bajuk, who used to react to every event in the city with acting and jests, with criticism and moral lessons. Who among us does not remember their appearances in merry current affairs sketches and songs describing community meetings, Chassidic scandals and more.

There arise in my memory many figures from my life in Ostrolenka who were, and are no longer: familiar

people, relatives and friends. It is as if they plead: memorialize us! Revenge our spilled blood, our destruction!

May these lines serve as a monument to their memory!

May God avenge their blood!

I Remember . . .

Y. I.

A. Our Courtyard

In the courtyard in Ostrolenka that had two exits – one to Synagogue Street, now Kilinskiego, which led to places of prayer, *minyanim*, study halls and Chassidic *shteblich*, and the second to Cyganska (today Berek Joselewicz), which led to Torah, *heders* and yeshivas, stood the cradle of my childhood, my father, of blessed memory, a *lamdan* and great Chassid, brought from Poltusk to marry the youngest daughter of Reb Josel Mejrann. The two of them suited each other – he, in his erudition and gentle Chassidism and she, in her great modesty and devotion to her Torah scholar husband. Reb Josel Mejrann owned the courtyard, where the voice of my father echoed day and night and penetrated the neighbors' homes. The neighbors were of all sorts, Chassidic Jews, simple types, merchants and "common people". For many years, they lived in our courtyard. First, I will mention the two who lived near our apartment. They were Chanoch the Fat and his wife, Fejga the Fat. This is what all of us in the street called them, because of the unusual proportions of their bodies. In addition, they had a store of sausages and all kinds of smoked meats, which contributed not a little to their obese bodies, which swelled from day to day. This tendency toward obesity was passed down to their descendents.

Reb Chanoch was a well-known meat merchant, and also traded in poultry for export. Therefore, our courtyard often became a poultry market. The noise was unbearable. The calls of the roosters and turkeys deafened the entire courtyard, which sometimes became a battle field. The hot-tempered turkeys fell upon and bit each other, penetrating each other's flesh with their beaks until blood flowed, without the possibility of separating them. I liked to observe these battles. If someone passed through the courtyard dressed in red – he was not to be envied. The turkeys immediately beset him with their cackles. Therefore, for many years I wore white clothing as a remedy. When the birds were sent for export, quiet prevailed once again in our courtyard.

When World War I broke out, I left the city, together with thousands of its inhabitants. Since then, I do not know what happened to that family.

The second neighbor lived opposite us, next to Grandfather's apartment, which faced the street and was opposite the study hall. This was Szymon Landau the Scribe. He was known for writing Torah scrolls, Biblical scrolls, *mezuzot* [parchments inscribed with verses, affixed to doorposts in Jewish homes] and parchments for phylacteries. He was an Otwock Chassid, a very quiet man. Absolute silence always prevailed in his home and, except for the scratching of the goose quill on the parchment, nothing could be heard. But on holidays, when he drank liberally, he changed completely. He spoke, was joyous and repeated the refrain "Yadi yadida, yadi yadida" when he joined the circle of dancers. He and all his family (except for one daughter who lives in Canada) were murdered by the Nazis, may their names be obliterated! May God avenge their blood.

Beyond his [apartment] was the apartment of the Lachowicz family. My Uncle Nyske and my Aunt Neszke and their family lived in a two-room apartment. My uncle was a calm person. He worked as the foreman at Mendel Bialy's sawmill. My aunt was his complete opposite: a fiery woman, involved in everything that took place in the city, full of energy, always ready to do good for others, to help in time of trouble. A real woman of valor, who also helped support the family. They succeeded in emigrating to Israel with their children, and passed away there. May their memories be blessed.

After their [apartment] was the apartment of the shoemaker (I have forgotten his name). He was

stubborn and silent, as though for spite. A type of the common people, he never specified the price of his work. "First order, then we'll see" was his usual refrain. Sometimes he said "I rely on your honesty" – and indeed, he took what was given to him. Despite this, he cast a black gloom on the entire courtyard.

Another tenant: Reb Icchak Ajzyk, who made and sold cigarettes and was called "Papierosnik", and his wife, Rejzel, who was always ailing and sad. He was also an Otwock Chassid. They were childless, but they brought up the wife's nephew, whom they treated as if he was their son. Since the income from the cigarettes was not enough to live on, during the second half of the day, Reb Icchak Ajzyk worked at another profession – he was a tinsmith. They lived next door to us; we had a common wall. As I was like one of their family, I learned the lore of smoking very early . . . Although Reb Icchak Ajzyk was feeble and suffered from a strong cough, he was always happy with his lot. He passed away during World War I, and his wife – even before him. May their memories be blessed.

Opposite him lived Awrejmele Szlafmic, the wine maker, also an Otwock Chassid. His profession did not provide him with adequate support, as he was burdened with many children. He died of cancer even before World War I. I have forgotten the names and occupations of the other neighbors, who changed over frequently. The only one who is etched in my memory in great detail is Reb Mosze Hersz the Baker.

He lived near the exit to Cyganska Street, nearly at the edge of the courtyard. He was a sort of secret *lamdan*, in the style of the *lamidvavniks*. Thin, short, with bright and honest eyes. He prayed in the *shtebl* of the Gur Chassidim, was a zealous observer of *mitzvot*, and was as precise about those that were easy to perform as those that were more difficult. He always smoked a long pipe. They called him Mosze Hersz the Baker only because he stood on the street and sold baked goods. His wife passed away in her youth, and he raised a young orphan in his home, a distant relative. The relationship between them was not of the best, because the latter did not follow the ways of Torah, as Mosze Hersz wished. After working hours – selling bread – he was always bent over heavy tomes and studied them day and night. He studied more than he learned aloud, an unmistakable sign of certain Jews. His house was always full of smoke from his pipe, mingled with the fragrance of fresh baked goods. When one entered his house, there was the feeling that here lived a great and illustrious Jew, whom no one recognized. The only one who understood him was my father, may he rest in peace, who treated him with great respect and befriended him. Together they spoke about Torah and Chassidism. He visited him at his home from time to time. When he came to visit us, their conversations often lasted into the late hours of the night. Sometimes, I would enter his home. Although I was still a child, I still felt something special within the four walls of this unusual man.

During World War I, when the Russians ordered the population of Ostrolenka to leave the city – already in flames – Mosze Hersz was ill and did not want to leave his home. He always refused to be examined by a doctor and would not agree to take any kind of medicine. This time, too, he insisted on staying and did not agree to accompany the neighbors, who proposed taking him with them. "God will be with me everywhere, even in the greatest danger", he said. He meant "Until the wrath will pass". But the great believer paid for this with his life . . . We left the city and reached Czerwin, which was not too far from Ostrolenka and from immediate danger. The next day, to our surprise, we saw Mosze Hersz approaching us, limping and tottering with his last strength, and with death reflected in his eyes. He smiled at my father (this was his last smile), because he was unable to utter a word, and lay down on a bundle of bedding that had been packed for travel. My father put some medication in his mouth to strengthen and calm him . . .

The next day, Reb Mosze Hersz was no long among the living. May the memory of this saint be a blessing.

B. One Hundred Explosions in One Day

Passover Eve 1915, eighteen months after the outbreak of World War I. Ostrolenka was still far from the front. Cannon fire was heard day and night, like distant thunder. Sometimes, a German plane or zeppelin would appear, and the Russians tried to "intercept" them with fire from a regular cannon. But it affected them "like last year's snow" did. All in all, a cloud of thick smoke arose and quickly dispersed in the air. When the "guest" dropped an incendiary bomb on the city, there was real damage, but not in modern day proportions. Now and then someone was killed, and a few fires broke out.

I remember that after such operations, we would go

out to look for unexploded bombs on the ground. Usually, we did not find anything, a sign that most of the planes had been sent for reconnaissance only.

We, the children, loved to follow these "air fights" between the planes and the cannons – which did not damage the planes at all. We also followed with pleasure the army camps, marching with powerful Russian singing in the streets of Ostrolenka, toward the front. It continued thus for a time, and we were sure that with this – "our" war had ended. On Passover Eve, while the city prepared to welcome the holiday of the two Seders [Jewish ritual feasts], Four Questions and Four Cups, I went out just then on some household errand. Suddenly, I heard such a mighty explosion that the ground trembled under me. I ran to the nearest house to take cover. The first bomb fell with great impact, apparently not far from the house where I was, because all the windows shattered and fell – and immediately again the same noise and explosion, this time right near me. And so it continued without a stop, and I thought that there would be no end to this hell. The planes attacked at short intervals. This time, many "guests" visited our city all at once. It was clear that the enemy had decided to raze the city to its foundations.

From the beginning of the war, Ostrolenka became known in the strategic world. The newspapers wrote about the large army units camped near the city, on their way to the front. The River Narew was also continually mentioned because of its strategic importance for the entire front, which stretched to the border of Eastern Prussia. Decisive battles were expected near the city, and it was therefore clear that the purpose of the bombings was to disrupt the supply route and destroy the barracks. They did not strike the populace itself, as this was not yet in style . . . Because of the aerial attacks, panic awoke in the inhabitants. On that day, there were many killed and wounded. Fires broke out in all parts of the city and the idea of the evacuation arose. The joy of the holiday was spoiled. To the usual Four Questions, a fifth, and most serious, question was added: What do we do and to where should we turn? The newspapers immediately published menacing headlines: "One Hundred Bombs on Ostrolenka! German Planes Destroyed Many Parts of the City!"

And thus it was, as we had originally expected. That Passover Eve was the beginning of the end . . .

For about two months, the front came closer to us, and shells even fell in the streets of Ostrolenka. This was around *Tisha B'Av* [the date of the destruction of both Holy Temples] and for us, it was a real *Tisha B'Av*. In a short time, an order was issued by the Russian Army regime, that all inhabitants must leave the city for "strategic reasons". With a heavy heart and a sensation of death, we left Ostrolenka, together with all the inhabitants. The Russians followed us and set fire to every house that was abandoned. Given no choice, we left the city of our birth, which was in flames.

C. My Grandfather

I remember my grandfather, Reb Josel Mejrann, as a tall, strict man with a beard, an intense face and flashing eyes – a man who would not tolerate injustice, even if it was inflicted on someone else. But for all this, he was good-hearted, ready and willing to forgive and to do good deeds without end – on the condition that you knew the right way to approach him . . . From family conversations, I came to know facts about his good deeds: he would, if necessary, interrupt a meal and try to exert himself on someone's behalf – and run to the municipality, to the head of the district or to the prison commander. I remember this clearly. Besides being the owner of the entire courtyard where many neighbors lived, my grandfather was a hatter by profession, and ran a workshop with workers and apprentices. He provided merchandise for Russian Army regiments camped near our city.

My father, may he rest in peace, a scholar and fervent Otwock Chassid, was supported by my grandfather for many years after he married my mother. He received one of the apartments in the house and, later on, began to engage in business – despite the fact that he held a license to teach – with the consent of his rabbi, of course. He ran a large-scale business, but also did not neglect Chassidism, devotion, the Zohar [considered the most important work of Kabala, Jewish mysticism] and the Kabala. As a child, I used to ask my grandfather for a few cents to buy sweets. Of course, he gave [them] to me willingly, and sometimes also looked for me. He loved me very much, and usually called me "the grandson of Josel Mejrann". My grandfather had five sons and four daughters. My mother, of blessed memory, a modest, good-natured woman (murdered by the Germans, my God avenge her blood), was most tolerant of her husband, the scholar. She always went along him and understood how to value his ways, which were not always simple and straightforward. She, herself, absorbed the Chassidic spirit of her father, Reb

Josel, who had the refined desire and will to receive into his home a son-in-law who was a Torah scholar . . .

As has been mentioned, my grandfather was the owner of the courtyard in which stood a large wooden house, with exits to two streets. The apartment we got from my grandfather was included in my mother's dowry. We lived there until the outbreak of World War I. I was proud of my grandfather, with his lofty mien and majesty of face. In my childhood, I spent many hours in his house. I was always drawn there; his home was an inseparable part of my home. My grandfather was one of the prominent worshippers in the beautiful synagogue that stood opposite our courtyard. At night, unlike other children, I was not afraid to pass near the synagogue, which imposed dread on all passersby. There were widespread stories of the deeds of the dead, who prayed there in the late evening hours and called the names of those who passed by, inviting them to be called up to read the Torah. This was a sign that that person would not live out the year, God forbid. First of all, I felt a certain closeness to the synagogue and secondly, perhaps it was thanks to my grandfather's steadfast stance, so full of self-confidence. All this fortified me against certain fears, although I was quite a coward in my childhood.

A few years before the outbreak of World War I, my grandfather passed away from an illness from which he had suffered for a long time. I remember that it happened during the night. At that time, I was sleeping at my grandfather's (my parents had gone to Warsaw, with a sick child). Suddenly, a sustained cry woke me. By the time I opened my eyes, my grandfather had already breathed his last.

The strength left that house.

May his memory be blessed.

D. Pania, Kawale, Nawiwaj . . .!

Like a divine voice, this deafening call split the skies of Ostrolenka. It even penetrated the house in the old market near the bridge, where the people known as "Orylas" rowed their rafts on the river, far, far out of the city. From their places of Torah near the river, the *heder* children and the Gemara youths, who learned independently, left their studies and ran to the river to see the great "wonder" and hear the wild voices of the Orylas. Our attention was especially drawn by the huts of straw, like birds' nests, that they built on the rafts for rest, and to sleep in at night. Where do they come from and where will they go?!, we asked. And how do these people live on the water? Sometimes, we mimicked their cries and threw stones at them, just as a lark, a way of sharing the joy of the water people. "Pania Kawa-a-le-e-e!!! Nawiwaj-aj-aj!!!" Sometimes this rang out like the regular call of the Oryla gang, and sometimes, like a shout to endless distances: Pania Kawale! (Perhaps it was Kawalski, but to us it sounded exactly like Kawale.) Sometimes, bent over the railings of the bridge, our eyes glued to the rafts, we felt like we were sailing on the bridge and as if they, the wooden platforms, were standing in one place – – – "Nawiwa! Nawiwaj!" and other words and cries we did not understand. When they stopped or got stuck, their shouts especially reached the heavens. Sometimes, hours and even days passed until they were extricated from their plight. In these instances, we often came there after school hours, to see how the matter had ended.

E. How I "Discovered" the Promenade Park

In my childhood, I received a strict Jewish Chassidic education. I was the only child (unfortunately) of an Orthodox father, an outstanding scholar, a Torah great, strongly Chassidic, meticulous about the smallest detail and a zealous fighter for anything pertaining to Judaism. Therefore, expectations of me were very great. Even as a small boy, I was dressed in a long silk *kapote*, and my long earlocks reached my shoulders. The main thing: it seemed that I was supposed to fill the place left by my brothers and sisters who had passed away, without apparent reason, as early as their first year of life . . .

Perhaps because of this, I was confined to the four walls of our house, to my very pious father, who forbade me to take even one step anywhere without his permission, Heaven forbid. But the Evil Inclination sometimes loves to break into precisely such strict homes . . . Thus, my devoutness was not so genuine as was proper for the son of such a father. Actually, I felt like going out somewhere and taking a "prohibited" look at certain things. My father, sensing this, took a hard line and was doubly forbidding.

The struggle this childhood imposed on me was difficult. This is not the place to describe life in homes like these. I would like only to relate an unbelievable event from those years, which, later on, greatly amazed

me. As I said, I grew up in the shadow of my father, the great Chassid. We prayed together, we learned together. He did not leave me even for a minute. This was probably his exaggerated fatherly love for the only son remaining to him.

The only thing I liked then (and this was my reward for my repressed childhood years) – were the Chassidic stories he told during our walks on Sabbath afternoons, when my father went to the fields outside the city with some of those from the *shtebl*. I will always remember the sandy path leading there. On Sabbaths, after the afternoon rest, a long time after we ate, when the Sabbath's rest radiated from everyone, the Jews of the different *shteblich* strolled there, row upon row, talking among themselves about Torah and Chassidism and telling miracle tales of the saints and the courts of the Rebbes. For a child like me, these were unforgettable moments of freedom and release, after a whole week during which I absorbed the dust and mustiness of a room for about 12 hours a day. During those moments, on the Sabbath walk, I knew that I was a child. Walking on that very narrow path, my glance wandered over broad fields, sheaves of wheat and the marvelous expanse, which literally made me lose my balance . . . Flocks of chirping birds flew all about. The chirps of the birds in the courtyard of our house were completely different. Gentile children ran the length of the fields and their happy, free laughter rolled out over boundless distances . . .

We had just reached our destination, that is, the usual spot where we rested – when I heard some sort of noise from somewhere very close by, as well as the sounds of free laughter that grew without end. In the distance, I discerned a grove of tall trees standing in rows. I did not understand this and asked my father: "What's going on there?" His face became grave, as though covered by a cloud, and he spat out angrily: "Sit!" The Chassidim exchanged significant glances between themselves and ended with a deep sigh . . .

Since then, I did not ask any questions and even forgot about the existence of the place.

From August 1915, when we were ordered to leave the city because of the battles that were drawing nearer, we lived in Lomza. From time to time during the German occupation, I would visit Ostrolenka, which I missed greatly.

Once, innocently strolling along the Lomza Road, I suddenly came upon a place that seemed strange to me. I saw a grove with rows of trees and benches before me, and in it were young couples who strolled along embraced, laughing and carrying on.
For me, this was an amazing discovery!

Now I received an answer to my innocent question "What's going on there?", which I had asked my father then.

– Are you a native of Ostrolenka, or not?! . . .

Now my memories of Sabbath afternoon walks with Father in my childhood years arose and floated to the surface . . .

With dread, I grasped it all . . .

They intended to hide from us, the Chassidic children, this "sinful" place, which they themselves tried to avoid out of disgust.

Thus, I "discovered" the promenade park of Ostrolenka.

F. The Ritual Slaughterers Family

Reb Szmuelke the Ritual Slaughterer, in his time one of the heads of the ritual slaughterers in Ostrolenka (two others were Reb Gerszon and Reb Chaim Ber), was also the head of an extensive family of ritual slaughterers. He was known in the city as an expert in his profession and trained many students. He was a Torah scholar, of the Alexander Chassidim. He had six sons. They were all ritual slaughterers and *mohels* [Jewish ritual circumcisers], as well as superb public prayer leaders, known in the entire area.

The closest of the *shtebl*'s members to my father, Reb Mosze Aron, the eldest of Reb Szmuelke's sons, visited us often. He served as a well-known ritual slaughterer around Ostrolenka, in the towns of Czarny, Kadzidla and other nearby places. He stood for "Torah study and work" and, like his father, Reb Szmuelke, he was a fervent Chassid. He traveled to the Rebbe of Worka in Otwock. At the same time, he was a very honest man, who made do with little, and in his free time dedicated himself completely to the study of Torah. Day and night, Reb Mosze Aron Kachan (from a family of *Cohanim*) sat bent over holy books with love and devotion. It is true, God must dwell in the heart of a Jew so that he will observe the *mitzvot*, pray with fear and love, make the blessing aloud before every meal – the Otwock-Worka Chassidim were very strict about this. But the study of Torah is above all.

Once, on a fast day, he saw Hersz Icchak, one of his sons and a close friend of mine (today a well-known ritual slaughterer-cantor in America and head of one of

the communities there), wandering around and wasting time that should have been spent studying Torah. When he asked him for an explanation, his son answered that it was a fast day and that, therefore, he had no strength to learn. To this his father answered: "Ah, you are looking for an excuse. It is better that you should eat something and start studying immediately . . . "

It happened that Reb Mosze Aron suddenly cast doubt on his ability to be a ritual slaughterer, although he was still strong. It is said that when news arrived of the sudden passing of Mosze Aron (he passed away in Lomza, where he lived with his family after World War I, on Sabbath Eve, while he was immersing himself in the ritual bath), Rabbi Jehuda Lejb Gordin, the Chairman of the Board of Rabbis of Chicago, tore his clothing and said "The Last of the Mohicans has gone! . . ."

Because of the war years and the development of the immigration movement in Poland then, Reb Mosze Aron's family dispersed all over the world: two sons (both of them ritual slaughterers and cantors) and four daughters in America, two daughters in Brazil and two daughters in Soviet Russia. Reb Mosze Aron's wife passed away after a time in Lomza. Another son and daughter were murdered in Poland by the Nazis, may their names be erased.

The other sons of Reb Szmuelke the Ritual Slaughterer were also, as was said, famous ritual slaughterers, *mohels* and public prayer leaders, among them: Josef Welwel (a ritual slaughterer in Chorzel), Jehoszua Baruch (a ritual slaughterer in Rutek and in Blendowia, in the Warsaw region), Chaim Berel (a ritual slaughterer in Ostrolenka, about whom there will be a separate chapter) and Mordechaj Mendel (a ritual slaughterer in Zaromb).

It should be mentioned that Reb Szmuelke also chose a ritual slaughterer for a son-in-law. This was Reb Naftali Frydman, a ritual slaughterer in Ostrolenka for so many years. Many of them were killed by the German murderers. May their memories be blessed and preserved in our hearts and may God avenge their blood.

G. Note the Quiet

As a child, this was what I called him "deep down". And no one knew about it.

He was an Otwock Chassid, prayed in the *shtebl* of my father, of blessed memory, and was one of his faithful friends. I always liked being in his quiet presence, which warmed my heart.

He was never a "sharp" Chassid and did not display wonders of erudition. He was an honest man, in the fullest sense of the word, and conducted himself modestly. At prayers in the *shtebl*, he sat on the side, far from any prominent place, simply, like someone who knew his own worth and place. He sometimes traveled to his Rebbe.

Note was proficient in the Bible, stood for honesty and was always on the side of justice. But even when he objected to an injustice that was caused someone – even then he remained Note the Quiet. He did it privately, gently, speaking from the heart, in a distant corner, not in public, Heaven forbid. He shied away from any Chassidic dispute that broke out, or from *shtebl* gossip. "Jews, why is this necessary?", he used to ask. Sometimes an argument erupted about some public or private matter, with shouts and invective, and often this led to blows and real slaps "flew", Chassidic-style slaps . . . Note succeeded in imposing peace in those instances. His gentle presence was a good influence. As soon as he appeared, with his captivating smile, amidst the noise and confusion, the excited crowd calmed down and, inadvertently, the disputants stopped quarreling and did not insist on carrying on the dispute.

Note was fair, blond, with blue eyes and heavy eyebrows. His appearance expressed energy, tenacity and the iron will of a religious Jew who was not a fanatic. He spoke quietly, with a slightly husky, but still fine and gentle voice, and it was as if the words came from the depth of his heart. He always parted his golden beard in two, and combed each part so that its end turned up. Apparently, he wanted to minimize the value of his beard when he went out among people.

In my childhood, I knew very little about his private life. It was probably not very tempestuous. I remember only that he was married and owned a small grocery store near the big wooden bridge. On regular days (except for market or fair days), customers appeared infrequently, but I visited him often. First, as I said, I loved Note's presence very much; second – his store was near the wooden bridge (later built of iron), which tempted me in my childhood with a flood of green and flowers on its opposite side, and with the cries of those who rowed the rafts, the Oryla, which reached the heart of the heavens.

In my childish eyes, the bridge was like a giant floor of wood resting on the river, leading those who

trod on it to cities and towns, to enchanting landscapes, to ancient fortresses and monuments that could tell of wars that raged there, and of magnificent victories: beginning with the days of Napoleon, through the Polish Revolution, the battles between Russia and France, the Swedish invasion, etc. And all these took place on that wooden bridge.

This was completely contrary to the quiet nature of Note, the bridge's next-door neighbor. Only once, I remember, in 1914, when World War I broke out, Ostrolenka became an important geographic center, well-known in military strategy. It was mentioned by statesmen, generals and important commanders. Russia flooded our city then with an army which marched to the front to stop the German invasion. The Russian strategists could not understand why, at the beginning of the war, the Germans did not [try to] prevent the Russians from advancing with even a single shot. The Russians did not perceive the trap that the Germans prepared for their army under the command of General Samsonov; too late, everyone awoke. Our city became one big barracks. Day and night, rows of foot soldiers, artillery and cavalry passed through it. Their only goal was: To the front – *via* the bridge! At the head of their armies were Russian generals, with beards like a Ruski Kacap, and in their hands open maps, which they looked at "like a chicken at people", for they did not know how to read them correctly. They asked the citizens: Which way to the bridge? – while the bridge was under their noses . . .

The passing soldiers also brought a great deal of noise and tumult to Note's store. They entered with rude shouts, with careless looks, grabbing anything that came to hand – bread, rolls, fresh or dry – taking them without paying most of the time, and immediately running out and getting back into the ranks. Their look said: "What does it matter, tomorrow we will probably not be among the living" . . . One step separated Note's store and a bloody war for life or death! . . .

As the battles came closer to us, the cannon fire did not echo like distant thunder, but deafened our ears and spit real fire in our eyes. Note lost his serenity and retreated into himself. Everyone talked about leaving the city and taking only what was most essential.
And Note became even more quiet . . .

*

Even before the end of World War I, after long wanderings, Reb Note Cukierkorn returned to Ostrolenka with his family, like many others. Under the German occupation, the city gradually rose from its ruins and was rebuilt. Life flourished again.

In September 1939, when the Nazis attacked Poland and declared a war of destruction against the entire world and especially against the Jewish People, Note was expelled, together with all the Jews of Ostrolenka. They wandered around various ghettos and reached the concentration camps.

It is known that Note and his family were murdered in the Slonim Ghetto, together with other Jews from Ostrolenka. (Of his family, two daughters survived. One of them, Nechama Zygelman, lives with her family in Israel, in Pardes Chana.)

May these lines be an eternal remembrance of Note and his family who were destroyed! May their memory be eternally blessed!



The Story of the Lewin-Levy Family
Their Contribution to *Aliyah* to the Land of Israel, to the Fight Against the Nazis and to the New State of Israel

Israel-Mojzesz Lewin (1873-1938) was known in Ostrolenka as an enthusiastic Zionist activist. A man with a sharp mind, he had great technical know-how, and worked as a building contractor for the Polish Army, the electric company, sawmills and flour mills.

With the support of his wife, **Leja Lewin** (1884-1943), the daughter of Ze'ew and Dina Hajblum, the Lewin house was a warm Zionist house. They were very active in the professional preparation of youths and adults before their *aliyah* – their emigration to Israel – as well as in collecting contributions for Zionist funds.

In 1914, when World War I broke out, Israel-Mojzesz, Leja, and their children fled from Ostrolenka to Riazan, near Moscow, where his brother, Zvi, lived. They lived with him until the end of the war, and in 1919, they returned to Ostrolenka.

Since 1926, the name of **Israel-Mojzesz** was a byword in the city. At the request of the Zionist movement, he volunteered to take upon himself an important Zionist mission: training many pioneers in various construction-related professions before they emigrated to Israel. It became routine for Zionist youths and activists from the general Zionist movement, as well as Bundists, to gather at the Lewin home and passionately debate their different opinions – as to whether or not it was necessary to make *aliyah* to Israel.

Leja assisted her husband a great deal in his public activities, as well as in collecting contributions for Zionist funds, including on "Flower Day". To those debating in her home the necessity of emigrating to Israel, she said, "Whatever happens, everyone will have to go to the Land of Israel."

Israel-Mojzesz Lewin (1873-1938) passed away in Warsaw in March 1938.

Leja (Hajblum) Lewin (1884-1943), stayed in Warsaw during the war with her two married sisters, and was murdered by the Nazis in the Warsaw Ghetto in March 1943.

Leja's mother, **Dina Hajblum** (1850?- 1940), died in late 1939 or early 1940, after the German Nazis invaded Poland in World War II.

Five of the children of Israel-Mojzesz and Leja fulfilled their parents' vision and made ***aliyah* to Israe**l:

Batya (Lewin) and Hercke Sojka, in 1933.

Malka Lewin, in 1935.

Arie and Chanka (Lewin) Levy, together with their son Avraham, in 1948.

Reuven and Czarna (Lewin) Levy, together with their son Moshe, on February 18, 1949.

and **Frida** (Lewin) and Fabian Jagoda, together with their son Alexander, in May 1949.

These were the 12 children, and their descendants, of Mojzesz and Leja:

Isidore Lewin (1900-1926), worked as an engineer in Germany and then moved to Russia. He was killed by Stalin in 1926, during the political purges. His wife was jailed. His daughter, Fania Lewin, lived in Moscow.

Zwi Levin and another **three children** (males) lived in Russia, were murdered there.

Frida (Lewin) Jagoda (1904-1979) made *aliyah* to Israel in May 1949 with her husband, **Fabian** (1905-1987). Both of them passed away in Tel Aviv. Their daughter, **Fania** Sadovnik, had four children, Rachel (in Barbados) and Paulina, Edie and Debi (in the United

States), and grandchildren: their son, **Alexander** (1933-2009) and his wife, Judith, had three children, a son, **Steven**, and two daughters, **Ami** and **Heidi**. Steven and his wife, Sussane, had three children, Lee Michael, Aaron Hunter and Molly Roze. Ami and her husband, Marc Shefter, have one child, Barri Leigh. Heidi and her husband, Robert Samson, have one child, Elijah. Ami and Heidi and their families live in the United States.

Batya "Bashka" (Lewin) Sojka (1907-1978) made *aliyah* to Israel in 1933, with her husband, Hercke (1902-1959), who passed away in Tel Aviv. Batya passed away in Caracas, Venezuela. Their son, Mark (Mojzesz-Moshe) Soyka, who was born in Tel Aviv in 1943, was named after his grandfather. He lives in Miami Beach, Florida, with his wife, Gabi, and their four children, Paluma, Gabriel, Sasha and Daniel.

Hersz-Jakob Lewin (1910-1944) fought as a partisan against the Nazis. He was murdered by them together with his wife, **Ruth** (*née* Rosenthal). Their daughter, **Bianka "Biele"** (1939-1943) was murdered by the Nazis when she was four years old.

Malka Lewin (1910-1986) made *aliyah* to Israel in 1935. She passed away in Haifa.

Peszka (Lewin) Frydman disappeared in the forests when she fled to the partisans, after her husband, **Abraham**, was shot and killed by the Nazis at the door of their home, in front of his mother.

Arie (Lewin) Levy (1911-1992) made *aliyah* to Israel in 1948 and passed away in Tel Aviv. His wife, Chana "Chanka" (*née* Boden), may she live many long years, is a survivor of Auschwitz. She was born in 1924 in Hrubieshouw, and lives in Tel Aviv. Arie met Chanka during one of his missions: **in 1946-1948, Arie helped in the illegal transfer of Jewish Holocaust survivors from Austria to Italy, through the Alps, on their way to illegal immigration to Israel.**

Their son, **Avraham** (born in a British detention camp in Cyprus after Arie and Chakna were captured while attempting to immigrate to Israel illegally), and his wife, Bella, have two children, Keren and Shahar, and six grandchildren. Their daughter, **Lea** (named after her grandmother Leja), has two children, Sharon and Tomer, and three grandchildren.

Reuven "Ruwek" (Lewin) Levy (1921-1995) was "the son of Mojzesz and Leja's old age". There is evidence that he was born in 1919. He passed away in Ra'anana, Israel, on September 21, 1995. His wife, **Czarna** (*née* Zielinski), was born in Poltusk on October 30, 1919 and passed away in Tel Aviv on February 5, 1994.

In September 1939, with the German invasion of Poland, their children, Frida (Lewin) Jagoda, her husband Fabian, their children Fania and Alexander, and her youngest brothers, Arie and Reuven, fled from Ostrolenka to Bialystok. In 1940, they were expelled from Bialystok, and endured great hardship and suffering during their journey in Russia, through Bukhara, to the Ural Mountains

On December 30, 1940, Reuven married Czarna in Russia, near Wolgada. In 1943, he was drafted into the Polish Brigade in Russia, which fought against the German Nazis. He served in the Brigade as a logistics officer until 1946. He fought the Nazis and received the **Conqueror of Berlin** medal.

On July 6, 1944, their son, Moshe, was born in the Ural Mountains. After the war ended they returned to Poznan, in Poland, and then, in 1948, to Lodz.

After the continued pogroms against the Jews in Poland, in 1948, Reuven, Czarna and their son, Moshe, left Poland by train to Paris, France. On February 18, 1949, they embarked on the S.S. Transylvania at Marseille, France, and sailed to the port of Haifa, Israel.

Reuven and Czarna had three children:

Moshe Levy was born in 1944 in a forest in the U.S.S.R., while his parents were escaping from the Nazis. He was named after his grandfather, Mojzesz-Moshe. He lives in Tel Aviv.

Eitan (Levy) Levin was born in Tel Aviv on March 12, 1949, a month after his parents made *aliyah* to Israel. He lives in Ra'anana with his wife, Liora. They have three children: Sharon and Nati Eder (who have two children, Shahar and Aviv), Boaz and Hagit Levy (who have two children, Ziv and Adi), and Nimrod Levin.

Avraham Levy was born in Tel Aviv on March 10, 1958. He lives in Ra'anana with his wife, Ester, and their two children, Eran and Idan.

Since making *aliyah* to Israel in 1948-9, the **Levy brothers**, Reuven and Arie, continued in the footsteps of their father, **Mojzesz**. For approximately 45 years, they worked as industrialists in an iron cutting and bending factory.

Mojzesz and Leja's children who made *aliyah* to Israel, and their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, both male and female, served and now (in 2009) serve in the **Israel Defense Forces** as officers and soldiers. Eitan as a fighter pilot, Avraham and Eran as tankists, Boaz and Nimrod in intelligence, Idan in infantry, and more.

In 2001, during a visit to find his roots in Poland, Eitan Levin and his wife, Liora, found **the Lewin house** in Ostrolenka, where his grandparents, Israel-Mojzesz and Leja, had lived together with two of their children: Reuven and Arie. It was located in the back yard of a new private house, at Berek Joselewicz Street 16. The 70 square meters, one-story, four room house (in a railroad-style layout), and the garage and chicken coop next to it were absolutely identified by Yehuda Chamiel and Shlomo Margalit, who were neighbors and friends of Reuven and Arie. The house heater, the kitchen oven, the linoleum floor, the wooden cupboards and the lamps looked as they had then - as if frozen in time!

Eitan (Levy) Levin

Secretary and Member of the Book Publishing Committee

Son of Reuven and Czarna (Lewin) Levy

Grandson of Israel-Mojzesz and Leja Lewin

Scholarly and Chassidic Personalities

Mordechaj Iglewicz



Reb Mordechaj Iglewicz was born in 1865 in Nowogrod (near Lomza), but he was known in Ostrolenka as Mordechaj Farber (the Dyer). The name was given to him because he operated a dye-works. Who did not know him in our city? He settled in Ostrolenka after he left the Yeshiva of Wolozin. All his life, he aspired to Torah and work. He always mentioned the saying of our Sages, that "Torah without work – its end is idleness". Therefore, he gathered all Ostrolenka's workmen and taught them Torah. He adapted himself to them. For whoever was available only early in the morning – he held a lesson early in the morning. Whoever finished his work in the evening, studied with him in the evening, as well as before evening, etc. The most important thing – study and work, combined with each other, and equally important.

Thanks to his initiative, Torah scholars grew in Ostrolenka. Reb Mordechaj Iglewicz did not only study with his students. He also cared about them and was always ready to help in anything they asked. If he was unable to help, he encouraged others to help, and no one dared refuse him. Although Reb Mordechaj worked hard until his last day, he did not spend a minute without the study of Torah. Even when he sat in his workshop next to a vat of boiling dye, he stirred the vat with one hand, and held a Gemara and learned with the other. To us, too, his grandsons, he always explained everything with love and simplicity.

I remember an incident when I was at my grandfather's, and no one else was home except us two. Grandfather, as usual, worked and learned at the same time.

Then a beggar entered and asked for a donation. I was very small and replied that no one was home, because I did not want to disturb Grandfather at his work and his studies. But my grandfather had good hearing and heard my answer. He immediately entered the room and ordered me to run after the beggar and give him a donation. Later, he began to lecture me, in these words: "My child, when a poor person asks for a donation, it is forbidden to refuse him. This is a sign that he is needy and apparently hungry for bread. How could you say that no one was home, when I was in the workshop next door?" I tried to justify myself, maintaining that I did not have the courage to disturb him, and he answered: "You should have given the man a piece of bread or a little sugar or something else yourself – you should help people!"

Grandfather protected Judaism. I remember that once missionaries came to Ostrolenka. He stopped his work and went outside immediately. What he did there, I don't know. I only saw how he gathered all the papers that they strewed in the street, and also grabbed sheets from people's hands – so that the children would not read and be influenced, Heaven forbid, by what was written there. On that day, he was really broken. "They have the insolence to come here and to desire to influence our children", he complained.

*

I have only these few memories of my grandfather, because I was very young then and did not understand many things. But especially etched in my memory are Grandfather's last days. When he sensed his departure from the world drawing near, he called me to him, because we lived next door and I was the only one at home then. (My sister, Chawa, was at work, and my brother, Ben Cyjon, was studying at the *heder*.) He sent me to buy strong drink and cakes, and then asked me to call Reb Josef Nasielski. When the latter stood by his bed, he said to him: "You see that I am about to die. I will not find rest if my students are without a teacher. I

ask that you continue to learn with them, that you will be their teacher." Just then, he did not have another candidate to replace him. He drank a toast with him and wished him success. They parted, and after two days, Grandfather passed away (it was on Chanukah 1927). The study group did not last long, and, at any event, the lessons with the students stopped, and they were left like "sheep without a shepherd". Josef Nasielski, of blessed memory was a weak man, unable to devote himself to them. The students used to gather on my grandfather's *yahrzeit*. Some of them are in Israel today, and there, too, they observed his *yahrzeit* for a long time.

May the memory of the righteous be a blessing.

Brajna Iglewicz-Majrowicz

Naftali-Cwi Iwri



There are in the world modest people who run from honor and do not want to bend their will to anyone. They are "shorter than grass and stiller than water", and this is precisely what draws the attention of others. They arouse respect for their rich inner feelings and their lofty attributes. Such a one was Reb Naftali-Cwi Iwri, of blessed memory.

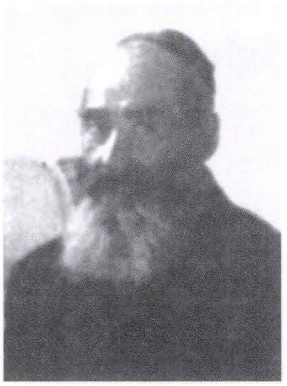
When I first saw him, with my childish instincts, I sensed that he was different from others. And I was not disappointed. Learned, his face expressed the fear of Heaven and respect for others. His eyes were always lowered with sincere modesty; when he raised his brows, I saw eyes that expressed good-heartedness and love for mankind.

On a certain morning, I saw him sitting in the *shtebl*, wrapped in a prayer shawl and phylacteries, learning with devotion. His appearance was not that of a man from the world of law. In this Jew – I thought – was stamped the spark of Reb Zysza Anipoler, the righteous of blessed memory.

Respect to his memory.

M. Kamin

Szmuel Baruch Landau



He was a Torah scholar, with a deep feeling for the Land of Israel. He had seven children and lived in great penury, despite the fact that he had several sources of livelihood: a bakery and a small delicatessen; he worked at the municipal bath house and was also a "part-time" carter, in partnership with the horse and wagon of Lejbel the Engraver. It was said that Reb Szmuel Baruch sometimes stumbled when he traveled with his wagon in the streets of the city, because he was a God-fearing Jew, occupied with the practice of his religion. It also happened that once he drove his wagon straight . . . into the house of Lejbel the Engraver.

Reb Szmuel Baruch had a warm heart and soul. Despite his poverty, he was ready to give others whatever he had, and all his deeds were for the sake of Heaven. If he heard that there was a Jew somewhere who was hungry for bread, he immediately came to his aid and organized a collection among good Jews to help the needy. He also succeeded in obtaining a respectable sum as charity from a rich Jew, without an exact date for the return of the loan . . . He also collected money in the city to pay the tuition of poor students who learned in a *heder*. He was prominently involved in every charitable deed in the city.

He was the type of Chassidic Jew in whom Torah and good deeds were combined; nevertheless, he was strict about religion. When his son, Lejbel Landau, a member of the Rightist Poalei Zion began to study carpentry – this was a sin in his father's eyes, a desecration of the Jewish way of life. He sat *shiva* in

the *shtebl* of the Gur Chassidim, and cried for his bitter fate . . . But after his son learned baking, his attitude changed. Reb Szmuel Baruch already consented to this, because during work, while the dough was rising, it was possible to learn a page of Gemara . . .

Indeed, Lejbel Landau was chosen later as the representative of the bakers in the professional union of Ostrolenka, which did not exist much longer because of provocation.

When World War II broke out, Reb Szmuel Baruch wandered deep into Russia and passed away there. His wife, Leja, emigrated to Israel after the war, to her sons and daughters, who came there years before, and there she passed away.

May their memories be blessed.

A. L.

Moshe Kamin, Netanya

Awraham Mlynarzewicz

He was called Awraham Giszes (Gisze's) – after his wife. He was a Jew with a sensitive heart, a Gur Chassid and a respectable merchant (the owner of a food store). He was hardly involved in business matters; most of the time his wife, Gisze, was in the store. He learned day and night and distributed donations generously.

I remember that on one Passover Eve, a meeting of public figures and regular *balabatim* was held, concerning the urgent need to help the poor. The most pressing question was: from whom to ask, to whom to turn? Quietly, from the side, Awraham Giszes declared: "We will divide the public into two parts: he who is not included among those who receive – he will be among those who give . . ."

These words, which were not said by a professional community worker, but by a modest, simple man, made a great impression on all those present and influenced them. As stated, he was ready to help any Jew in time of trouble.

In 1939, exactly at the outbreak of World War II, Awraham passed away in Shiadowa, a town "on the Russian side". His wife and the rest of the family members were murdered by the Nazis, may their names be erased. There remains only one daughter in Israel (Golda, the wife of Josef Wonszak).

Honor to his memory.

Ben Cyjon Cukrowicz

One of the most fanatic Chassidim in the *shtebl* of the Gur Chassidim. His wife was the breadwinner. He was very angry at her, when, on a market day, her labor pains suddenly began, and he himself had to stand in the store and sell merchandise. "Look," he said, "she couldn't wait until evening, an act of the devil. Because of her, I can't go to the *shtebl* today . . ."

When his son, Szymon, went to America, he rent his clothes [a sign of mourning] for him and refused to write him letters. One evening, after some years, the door of Reb Ben Cyjon's home opened. On the threshold stood a man in "German" dress, clean-shaven, a derby on his head. This was his son, the young American "trinket" . . . At first, a smile appeared on the father's face. One would have thought that his paternal feelings would overcome his religious fanaticism – but as he spoke, his countenance became grave. He turned his back on his son, and did not want to see him . . .

But the dramatic moment had a comic ending. When his son fell asleep, the father went over to his bed, waved his *tzitzit* [fringes on the corners of a ritual garment] over his head and muttered: "Evil Inclination, Evil Inclination, leave my son!" The son awoke and when he saw this performance, grabbed the *tzitzit* from his father's hand and responded in kind: "Stubborn One! Obstinate One! Leave my father!"

Awraham Lazer Skrobacz

In his poem, *My Father*, Bialik describes a father who is happy and contented when he is in the study hall. On the other hand, the hours he has to spend in the pub with his unpleasant customers are a heavy burden for him. But, even then, he has some consolation: from time to time he glances at a holy book . . .

Reb Awraham Lazer Skrobacz was a type like this, a holy and pure Jew. He had a housewares store and, in one of its corners, he sold Polish textbooks. It is said that Jews are sometimes permitted, between day and night, to peer into these books . . . Usually, however, an

open Gemara rested on his table. It apparently interested him more than the customers . . . Nevertheless, [his] Polish customers never paid more for the same product than the Jews did – everyone had complete confidence in him. Such was the character of Reb Awraham Lazer, a small merchant, a gentle man.

Chaim Welwel-Malach

In the city, they called him "The Lottery Conductor". He held private lotteries at home for prayer books, Gemaras or any other item of value. He was a Gur Chassid and barely made a living. Once, on Yom Kippur Eve, I met him on the street and, uncharacteristically, he was very sad. "What has happened to you, Reb Welwel? Indeed, today it is a *mitzvah* to eat and drink!" I asked him. Instead of replying, his eyes filled with tears and he told me that the doctor had forbidden him to fast. "It is a mortal danger for me," he said. He had therefore decided to ask a rabbi's opinion. To his disappointment, the rabbi also ruled: "Eat!" "A catastrophe such as this has never occurred since the creation of the world!" he said in a voice filled with pain. He did not take his serious illness into consideration even for a moment, for he was already used to it. But, Lord of the Universe, how can one eat on Yom Kippur? It was hard for him to reconcile himself to this.

At times like these, I thought of Reb Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, who sought to defend the Jewish people. He would surely intercede for the defense of the Jews at a Torah law litigation with the Lord of the Universe. For example, Chaim Welwel Malach from Ostrolenka, ready to sacrifice his physical existence for a *mitzvah*, who suffered because he could not observe it, although the holy Torah released him from this duty . . .

Folk Types

Zawel the Tailor

I became acquainted with him when I was still a small child. A folk type, with a long, flowing beard, he sat near his tailor's workshop with a large velvet skullcap on his head. While working, he sang to himself cantorial selections that he had heard in the study hall on Sabbaths or High Holy Days. Like everyone in those days, he worked from morning until the late hours of the night. The only respite was for afternoon-evening prayers. Then, he joined the company at the long table and heard words of Torah from Mordechaj Farber (the painter), who served as their rabbi. He did not get involved in public matters. "Community leaders, public representatives," he said, "must be rich and respectable merchants, not workmen."

He always made the garments he sewed wider than necessary. First, he explained, something wide can always be made smaller. Second, clothes are used for many years and, with time, a person gets fatter . . . He lived in one room, which served him simultaneously as a workshop, a guest room and a bedroom . . .

The Fruit Seller

I never knew and never heard his name. It may be that, in time, he forgot his own name. The city invented a nickname for him, suiting his work as a fruit seller in the market. One day, a competitor opened a stand near his own and stole all his customers. Despondent, he went to the study hall and took comfort in reading the Psalms, skipping not only individual words, but whole verses . . .

"What do you wish for your competitor in your heart?" I asked him. "It is forbidden to curse a Jew. Apparently, he deserves it," was his answer.

"If an angel came from heaven now, ready to fulfill all your wishes, what would you request?" I persisted. "Bread to repletion and clothes for my body," he answered briefly.

Thus was the Bontshe the Silent of Ostrolenka – although he had a broken heart, he did not harbor hatred.

The "Dead" Shoemaker

Why they called him this, I don't know. It may be because he was overly industriousness at work. I always wondered why the hammer did not fall from his hand. In the street, it was hard to tell if he was walking or standing. One evening, to my great amazement, I saw him running quickly. "What has happened?" I asked. "I am afraid of being late for afternoon prayers," he said and immediately disappeared.

Then I understood the words of Our Sages: "Be strong as the leopard . . ."

Moshe Kamin, Netanya

Ostrolenka's Neighborhoods

(Types and Vignettes of Our City)

The Way to Mendel Bialy's Sawmill

As in every city, Ostrolenka, too, was divided into neighborhoods. Each had its own unique appearance; its residents had their own singularity.

I will begin with a description of the road leading to Bialy's sawmill. On one side were fields that were plowed, sown and turning green, belonging to Christian owners – Pozniewski, Wojciechowski, Olszewski and others, whose relations with the Jewish population of Ostrolenka were good. On the other side was the Narew River, which, according to the seasons of the year, sometimes flowed quietly, sometimes was stormy and wild, and sometimes overflowed its banks and flooded the road. In certain places, Christian workers pulled from the river rafts that had arrived on it.

The sawmill stood on a giant plot on a hill far from the river. Sawn boards of different sizes were always piled it. Its customers were city dwellers and rurals alike. At one end of the plot stood a beautiful wooden house and, around it, a cultivated flower garden. The owner of the sawmill, Reb Mendel Bialy, and the accountant, Reb Szmuelke Frydman, lived there.

Mendel Bialy was a friend of my father, of blessed memory. I often visited his house because of my work for Keren HaYesod. He was the Chairman of this Zionist institution. Mendel Bialy remains in my memory as one of the most respected personages of our city: a very elegant man, known for his good relations with young and old alike. He was therefore accepted by all strata of the population, Jewish and Christian. Beyond the sawmill sprawled the new market, but there was a big difference between its right and left sides. On the left side lived merchants and shopkeepers: the family of Mosze Aron Edel, who owned storehouses for wood, Grandmother Gita, who owned a textile products store, and others.

Grandmother Gitel was blessed with many children and grandchildren, who were among the notables of the city, both economically and socially. She was a proud, wise and vigorous woman, conscious of her important contribution to the city. In short, "a woman with a headdress", that is, "a woman of iron". Her grandson, Hercke Sojka, of blessed memory, said that stuck into the headdress on her head was a pin with a big "head". When a customer would bargain and ask, "Gita, can I get the material cheaper?" (and here came the proposed price) – she grasped the "head" of the pin and swore on it: "May my "head" live like this, I paid this price in Warsaw!"

The New Market – the Right Side

Butchers and horse traders lived on the right side of the market. One horse trader, called Fajczarz (someone with a pipe), had giant pipe that held a whole package of tobacco and had a metal cover. From after *Havdala* on *Motzei Shabbat* until candle lighting on Friday, he did not take it out of his mouth.

Near him lived Icze Meir, who owned a carriage in which he transported passengers to the Kaczyny railway station. He wore a wide belt, a cloth waistcoat and, around his neck, a chain of white metal, to which were attached miniature items: a few horseshoes, a horse's head, a rifle, a compass and some other tiny things which he wore with pride. When he was asked, "Icze Meir, what is that?" (and there were many who asked), he would take the chain out slowly and importantly, until a round silver box with a "head" popped out of his waistcoat pocket. This was a watch with two covers. On them were engraved the heads of kings and Russian dignitaries and the inscription "A gift to a sharpshooter". He used to read the few words very slowly and then translate them from Russian to Yiddish.

He sat on his seat facing the passengers instead of the horse, thereby observing the impression his stories made on them. The passengers, seeing the train suddenly approaching, cried "Icze Meir, faster, we will miss the train!" Only then did he take the "famous instrument" out of his waistcoat pocket and announce like a proclamation: "The train may be early, but my watch is accurate!" On this watch's conscience weighed more than one passenger who missed a train he meant to take . . .

And here is Reb Jehuda Nadborny, a broad man, with his even broader wife (I have forgotten her name).

A man rich in money and children. He had his own home and a large butcher shop with a number of barns. I remember this family, and I want to relate something about them, about one of the daughters. As I said, this family was known for its many offspring. And thus, in the chain of births, triplets were born – one son and two daughters. A daughter of the triplets appeared one fine day, stepping along the bridge and leading a large ox, a rope tied to its horns. The ox followed her without any resistance. In the face of this spectacle, the Christians crossed themselves and the Jews expressed their wishes that she reach home safely. Passersby looked on in wonder at this strange parade.

Near all these lived the carter, Czaplipaj, who caught on to the idea of going to Israel. Since he did not have the means to do so, he contrived a plan: he would leave in a carriage hitched to his horse and, in every city on the way, he would stay for a few days, work there and earn enough to continue on his way. He did not have children and his wife agreed to his plan.

One day he approached me, very indignant, and told me that he had just spoken to Szafran's son, who had just returned from Israel (he referred to Jechiel, of blessed memory), and it turned out that his plan was not viable for a number of reasons. First of all, Israel was very far; second, one must cross an ocean. In general, he was ashamed to talk about it with his comrades, who held that the idea of traveling to Israel was meant only for well-to-do youths. He wondered why those with the blue ties (that is, HaShomer HaTzair) and the others with the blue and white flag (the Zionists) – who were able to go, why were they still living here among the Gentiles? He opened his deepest thoughts to me and spoke with love and yearning of something far and unattainable, using expressions which were simple, but sincere and true. Tears glittered in his eyes. I felt guilty before him. No Zionist leader, with a passionate speech replete with slogans, could influence more than this carter, a simple, honest man, with his sincere words.

When, after a time, I saw the play *The Travels of Benjamin III* staged in Israel (the role of Benjamin was played by my brother, the famous Israeli actor, Meir Margalit), and heard Benjamin's plan – how he, and with him Senderl, "The Woman", wanted to get to Israel – "the Benjamin" of our Ostrolenka immediately sprang to my memory.

As I said, all these lived on the right side of the new market. Behind their houses was an empty space, where their animals and wagons were kept. Here, too, dovecotes were built. Youths attended to them, bringing them both pleasure and income.

Raising doves was a profitable business, and Jews and Christians alike engaged in it. Many of the well-to-do were carried away by this occupation. They came here and brought a pair of purebred doves or carrier pigeons. Since there was no suitable place to keep them at their homes, they left them with the seller and paid for the cost of their food. In exchange, they were allowed to come before evening, to release the doves and make sure that they returned to the dovecote, and did not fall into the hands of strangers. It happened, too, that the doves did not return and new ones had to be purchased.

Near the dovecotes and the barns lived a family called "Krejer". I cannot remember their other name. He owned an inactive tin smithy. There were a few sons and even more daughters. I am not sure if all the boys were theirs. One of the family members was an amateur fiddler. For years, he ran with the fiddle under his arm to Christian teachers and, later on, to Lejbel Frydman, for music lessons. Afterwards, he already played at weddings and celebrations.

In another corner of this neighborhood, in a small shack, lived a former carter, called Kacze Berel. He was thin and shriveled up beyond his years. No one knew how many wives he had had (divorced and dead), and he himself did not remember . . . Once the old man passed the market square and saw a crowd of people. To his question, "What is happening here? Where is everyone running?" someone yelled in his ear: "Grandfather, a young couple is being wed." In reply, he groaned and said "*Oy vey*, they still want to marry!"

In Benedon's "Kingdom"

At the continuation of Goworowo Street sprawled "Benedon's region". The place was so-called because Reb Welwel Benedon built barracks for the Russian army there. After World War I, when the city of Ostrolenka was almost completely burned, only Benedon's barracks and a few other structures remained. The city's inhabitants who returned and could not find a roof over their heads, settled in these barracks, which were renovated and turned into private apartments. The large halls were turned into rooms and kitchens were added to them. Bathrooms were not yet in style. The municipal ritual bath and the bath house served this need of the population.

Most of the Jewish population was concentrated in these buildings, and its composition was quite varied. Merchants, among them the most well-to-do, took the front, facing the pig market. Stores were built there, adjacent to the apartments. In the inner courtyard, similar to a closed crate, workshops were built. There was no occupation that was not represented, from Josel the Carpenter (who would begin to make a clothes closet and it came out a noodle board . . .) to a coppersmith, who made unbelievably beautiful items.

Besides the merchants and workmen, religious workers also lived there, such as Naftali the Ritual Slaughterer, Mendel Lomzer the *Melamed*, Mendel Richter the *Gabbai*, and even the bath attendant and the [ritual bath] "immerser" for women's purity. In short: an autonomous city in and of itself.

When Reb Welwel Benedon passed away at a ripe old age, management of his business passed to his wife and his children who had not yet married: Szlomo, Eliezer (Lolek), Chana and Chaim, who were my friends. The industrious one among them was Eliezer, a good and gentle fellow, who loved to use high-flown and pathetic expressions. For example, when he was looking for keys, he would say, "God of the Keys, tell me, where are my keys?" In similar circumstances, he scattered words of beauty, which had nothing to do with anything. The janitor of the courtyard assisted him in cultivating his greatness. The sewage there accumulated in pits which were emptied of their contents using a barrel harnessed to a horse. When Jozef the Janitor filled the barrel and began to drive, Eliezer's voice was suddenly heard: "Jozef, stop!" He went over the barrel, peeked into it and cried in a dramatic voice: "Jozef, you are making me miserable! The barrel is not full!" People used to make jokes about him, especially his younger brother, Chaim, but this did not prevent him from continuing in his characteristic behavior.

One of Benedon's tenants was Reb Symcha Szlomkes, a righteous Chassidic Jew of average height, with a thick beard and earlocks. He always wore a heavy, shiny, musty *kapote* and leather boots which he rubbed with fish oil, in honor of the Sabbath. Reb Symcha ran food, grain, paint, oil and kerosene businesses, and samples of all these products were reflected on his clothes and his beard. Sometimes, when a customer forgot what he wanted to buy, it was enough for him to look at Symcha or smell his clothes, and he immediately remembered what he wanted. He himself was the best display window for his wares.

Reb Symcha was also the owner of a three-story building on Ostrowa Street, but the house was too large for him to live in. He felt better in Benedon's housing than in his own apartment, which was adjacent to his business.

Miracles and wonders were told of his bed, which he brought from an estate owner's manor. His sheets and pillows were always packed in a bundle. "Reb Symcha, what is the bundle for?" people asked him. "What do you think? I'll wait for a fire to break out to begin packing?" was his short, sweet answer.

Speaking of Benedon's "kingdom", I cannot omit the spectacles that took place there before Passover. Anyone who has not seen them does not know what preparations for Passover mean. Immediately after Purim, when the snow was melting and the streets were full of mud up to our necks, Mojszele the Whitewasher appeared. A short man, hunch-backed, with a beard that apparently once grew, but regretted it and stopped growing . . . His voice was high, like a woman's. A sport-joker once asked him in fun: "Reb Mosze, can't you speak more deeply (*grub* in Yiddish, also crude)?" "Yes", he replied, "Why not? Kiss my rear end . . . If you wish, I can be even cruder!"

In one hand, he carried a bucket of paint and, in the second, a brush affixed to a long stick. Mojszele's appearance in "Benedon's Kingdom" on the days before Passover was like a rallying call to the battle field . . . Women thronged to him from everywhere, like – *lehavdil!* [but different!] – a Rebbe's Chassidim. Each one began to beg him coquettishly and wanted to be his first customer. Mojszele, on his part, full of self-confidence and aware of his own value, surrounded by so many women, answered: First, already last year, he had promised one of them that this year, she would be the first. And second, there is a new and uniform kind of paint this year, which covers old paint well. When he saw that the women "bought" this, he immediately pulled out a new card: "Know that I do not intend to paint the finishing trim. I don't have time for such nonsense . . ." In response to their dissatisfaction, he declared, "Whoever agrees – good, and whoever doesn't want – doesn't have to!" With no other alternative, they accepted his offer.

The minute Mojszele began his work, furniture of all kinds and styles was piled in all the courtyards. Everyone began to wash, to polish, to rub and pour water . . . Papers, feathers and straw flew in the air – it was merry! The main thing was the women's wardrobes.

Each wanted to compete with her neighbor's clothes and shoes. If one wore her husband's shoes, then the other wore her husband's boots. Their heads were bound with all sorts of strange, colorful kerchiefs. There was really a competition of wide, long, colorful dresses. Each wanted to beat the other, as if to prove importance or strength.

The "final battle" took place when implements were made kosher [for Passover]. At every corner of the city, bonfires burned, and on them giant pots of boiling water and white-hot stones for koshering implements [that had been used for] leavened food. Although there was an accepted price for koshering every implement, they could not help but bargain: "What's so terrible? I paid for four pots, so I can kosher a few more spoons and small utensils without paying more", they said. Because of the rush, the "kosherers" accepted every offer.

Seder nights were celebrated with joy, spotlessness and *kashrut* [fitness according to Jewish dietary laws]. From bitter herbs and *charoset* (a mixture eaten on Passover) to matzo balls and the Four Cups, everything was on the tables at the homes of the rich and poor alike. The community took care that no Jewish home lacked for anything.

When the "kings" sat at the table and conducted a proper Seder, their "queens" beamed with joy. They had, as our grandmothers used to say, "The grace of Leah and the beauty of Rachel". Their festive garb emphasized all the more the contrast between a holiday and a weekday.

Kilinski Street

Behind "Benedon's region" began Kilinskiego Street (called Synagogue Street by the Jews), at the end of which lived Judel the Baker. After World War I, the street was widened and new two- or three-story buildings added, with porches and big, beautiful stores. The deserted, burned municipal synagogue remained as a "remembrance of the destruction". Only its walls of bricks and mortar remained, and the low pillars with chains, which served as a fence for the synagogue. All the wooden parts were completely burned. The arched opening of the burned doors cast dread and fear on all passersby, old and young alike, especially at night. Everyone felt that an injustice was done to the synagogue by leaving it in its wretchedness. Our house stood opposite, so that more than the others, I felt the insult and the shame. When the community elders began to build the new study hall, I asked my father, who was one of them, "Why are you building a new study hall and not renovating the ruined synagogue?" He explained that an extensive population prayed in the study hall, while in the synagogue – only those of higher status.

The builders of the study hall were Aron Takson, the tailor, and his sons, who later built homes in Israel. Many Ostrolenkans were among those who built the Land of Israel. Some of its students were building contractors in Israel.

The construction of the study hall roof was complicated. It was installed by Reb Tuwja the Builder (Wylozny), with the help of his sons, Mosze and Izrael. They were superb professionals. With wonder, we watched them "stride around" on the high roof, quickly and with self-confidence. Reb Tuwja and his sons emigrated to Israel, but did not continue working in their profession there. Some worked in the wood industry, others in metal. Reb Tuwja and his son, Izrael, as well as Reb Awraham Takson and his son, Mosze (Pesia Lachowicz's husband), passed away in Israel.

In the street, you always met almost the same faces. In the winter, Neszke Mejrann (Lachowicz) always wore a masculine short sheepskin fur, and was always rushing, busy with business. Sometimes, she took a rest from her business and began collecting donations for charity – for a respectable person who had met with distress. No one dared refuse her and, thus, she saved someone from an embarrassing situation.

Reb Fajwel-Lejb Herc, a tall man who wore a long *kapote*, worked in medicine, something between a doctor and a medic. He treated only men. When he was called to a patient, he entered the house like a tempest and asked: "Where is he?" His patients did not have time to lie in bed. They suffered mostly from severe colds, prickling in the back or constipation. He would place his ear on his patients' bodies, over their clothes, order them to breathe, to cough, and immediately determined the treatment: to do cupping, to smear on French turpentine – and that was that. He asked patients suffering from constipation to stick out their tongues. If the tongue was as white as milk, he would wipe it quickly with his hand and cry with satisfaction: "That's that!" – that is, he had removed the disease with his own hands. In addition, he ordered the patient to have an enema, to swallow caster oil and to drink sour milk.

At burial society dinners, I saw my neighbors, Noske Tejtelbojm, Szlomo Jabek, Herszel Szperling and

Chackel Zylbersztejn. I was then still of an age where Father would take me with him. Besides them, dozens came to the dinners, headed by Chaim Berel the Slaughterer, a well-built man with a dark face and lively eyes, who led the additional Sabbath morning prayer in the large study hall. At the dinner, he set the tone. He sang and amused those gathered with words of Torah and wise Chassidic sayings. The crowd was tipsy. The more bottles emptied and the more portions eaten – the louder the singing became. Diets were not in style then. This occasion served them as a theater, a concert – *lehavdil!* – as a substitute for the other amusements of the "free" youths. Therefore, joy was great and expressed immense enthusiasm.

The Old Market (3rd May Square)

The closer you came to the old market, the bigger and nicer the stores were. We did not have independent female shopkeepers, except for the few women whose devout husbands sat day and night and learned Torah, or widows. For the most part, women worked in business together with their husbands. I mostly remember the women from the iron stores: the wife of Chaim Szymon, Sara Dwora Zylbersztejn, Etka Thylim – cold, serious women, with a severe expression and a penetrating look. They never smiled. Although there were porches at their homes, on summer evenings, they liked to sit near their stores and follow the youths who went out to stroll in the direction of the bridge or the municipal park with a critical look. The clever mother of my friend, Awrejmel Frydman, used to "toss" an old Yiddish saying their way: "*Vehr es hut kinder in de vegen – zul lazen leiten tzufreiden!*" (He who has children in cradles – should let people be!)

Our city was blessed with straight, beautiful streets and well-trimmed trees on both sides of the pavement. The old market made a special impression, not to mention the bridge over the River Narew, which led to the "forts". An abundance of greenery covered the mountain and the valley, and a large statue of General Bem, erected there, added importance.

In the afternoon hours, the strolls began. Every hour had its strollers. Among the first – the city's Rabbi, Rabbi Icchak Bursztejn, a Jew of dignified aspect, dressed in black rabbinic garb, clean and well-groomed. The handle of his walking stick was made of ivory, his appearance aroused respect among all the passersby. The Gentiles, as well, greeted him and made way for him. He used to stroll accompanied by the city's *Dayan*, Rabbi Jermiah, Chaim Berel the Ritual Slaughterer and the *gabbai*, Mendel Richter. During those hours, Reb Izrael Chmiel, my father, Aron Jakow Margaliot and Mosze Aron Kaczor also strolled. Mendel Gedanken, Efraim Chmiel, Zyskind Zusman and Szymon Czapnikiewicz walked in a separate group. When they all returned for afternoon-evening prayers, the youths began to gather at the corner of Ostrowa and Lomza Streets. Only the young men met at this corner. In the late evening hours, they looked for someone about who to joke and amuse themselves.

The people of our city had a healthy, natural, special and independent sense of humor. Sometimes, it was intentional and, sometimes, in all innocence. Near the municipality, at the home of Reb Mosze Szafran, his son, Jankel, opened a coffee house. At one o'clock in the morning, Reb Mosze would get up early to go to the ritual bath. When he saw through the shutter the group that sat there, playing cards, he said, "They feel like getting up so early to play cards! . . ."

Another story: two friends, in Chassidic dress, Reb Pinie Gedanken and Dan Kachan, strolled the streets of Ostrolenka every day. They had deserted their business long ago. Their entire "business" was mischief, spreading fine words and proverbs, and sitting in the municipal court to follow the proceedings. Often, a dispute broke out between them as to the justice of the verdict . . . When these two jesters appeared in Ostrolenka's neighborhoods – it was merry.

Pinie Gedanken was one of the subjects of juicy, unique humor and jests in our city. It is said that once, when Pinie went to Warsaw and arrived at the Kaczyny railway station early in the morning, he met a couple strolling. He went over to them, apologized politely and asked: "Would you be kind enough to tell me – are you still strolling here from yesterday – or from today?"

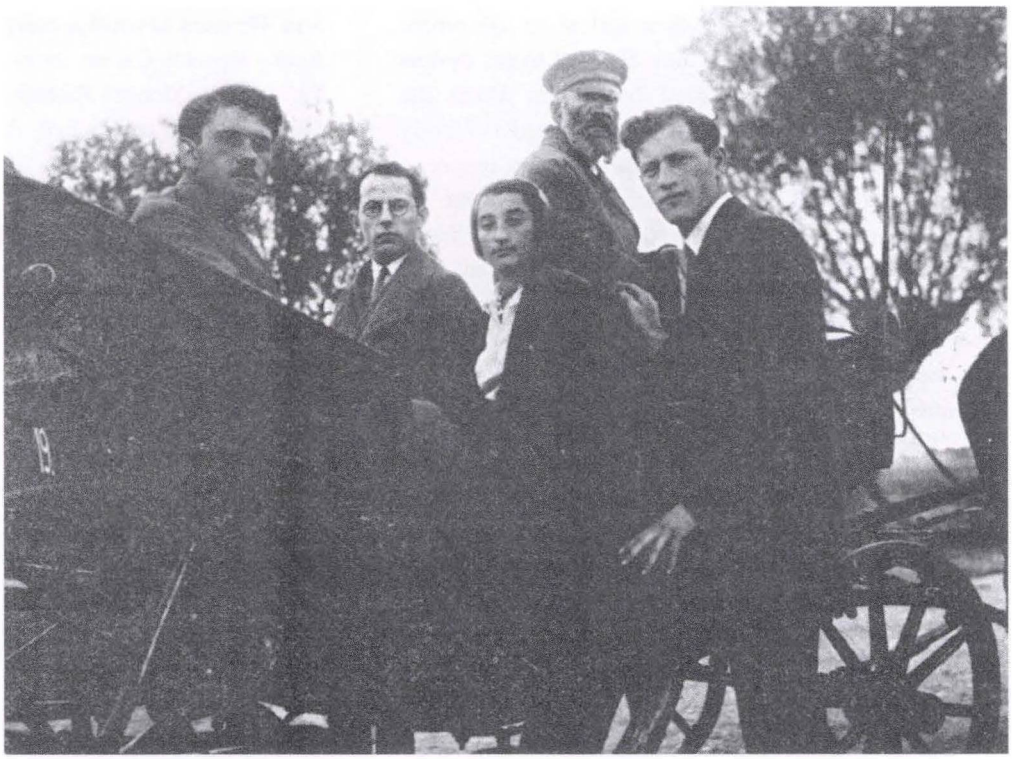
And so on and so forth . . .

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For generations, Ostrolenka's neighborhoods absorbed vibrant Jewish lives and deep-rooted *Yiddishkeit* [Jewishness]. Today, the entire area has become Christian. The Jewish tragedy, however, stands out at every corner there . . .

Jewish life in Ostrolenka is no more.

Shalom Margalit, Tel Aviv



A ride with the carriage owner, Mosze "Naczalnik"



A group of young people

Episodes from Town Life

Frumke Segal-Bogdanowicz, Montevideo

An Event that Occurred – A Story with a Moral

One summer day, before evening, when the sun began to set, Jehuda the Butcher left the butcher shop of his brother, Szaje, on Noworowa Street. He saw Judel ("Lokshe" [Noodle]) the Baker sitting at ease and looking about him. Jehuda decided to disturb his rest and addressed him in his usual style: "Listen, why are you sitting here at ease in the fresh air? Have you forgotten that the burial society needs to erect a new fence at the cemetery? Why are you idling and not joining the dead and buried?!"

Judel the Baker was stunned by this unexpected meeting and Jehuda's "suggestion". At first, he was speechless, but he tried not to lose his composure. He got up from his seat and answered Jehuda in the same "polite" style.

Jehuda the Butcher was a plain, simple man, one of those for whom "the heart and the mouth" are equal. In comparison to Judel, he had a warm Jewish heart and a hand open to [give] charity. No beggar ever left his house hungry. In addition to food and drink, he would also receive a nice donation. His wife, Miriam, already knew from whom among the homeless not to collect payment. On the contrary, in addition to a portion of meat, she also added a nice coin.

After Judel the Baker hears the "refrain" from Jehuda the Butcher's mouth, he returns home with disquiet in his heart. He has lost his peace of mind and begins to search his memories. The first thing he remembers is a tragic event that happened to his son, something that shook the whole city at the time. Did it happen because of his miserliness? He regrets that precisely then, when it occurred, he was not at home. But Judel does not linger over this dark page of his memories. He continues on. He does not remember that he ever gave a generous donation. In general, for him, poor people do not exist. It seems to him that they are a group of racketeers who do not want to work, but to extract money from others by trickery. Judel turns a page in his memories, and here his sister appears, a poor widow with small children. The neighbors say that there are days when a slice of bread is not to be found in their home. And he, Judel, the brother, the well-to-do baker – is he not too indifferent to her situation?!

After leafing through his memories, Judel remembers that it is time to go to the bakery and begin preparing for the work of the night shift.

Hard times have come to the Jews of Poland. Anti-Semitism is rampant and decrees come down on the heads of the Jews daily. In accordance with Mrs. Prystor's proposal, the Polish Sejm is passing a law restricting kosher ritual slaughter. Butchers are in danger of losing the source of their support and existence. There is nothing to sell and there is nothing in exchange for which to buy. Sometimes the butcher slaughtered an animal secretly.

One autumn day, on a Friday afternoon, Jehuda the Butcher asked Reb Meirel the Slaughterer to slaughter a calf at his house (Reb Meirel used to slaughter in secret, without the community's agreement). He placed his daughter, Fejga, who was nicknamed by the butchers "Fejga the Thorn", on guard. Fejga was a short, stocky girl who used to blink her eyes, but her mouth was always ready to chase any intruder away. And so Meirel the Ritual Slaughterer finished his work, and Jehuda the Butcher began to skin the calf and cover up the traces of the "crime".

Fejga was still standing guard. Suddenly, she saw Mjeczek the Policeman approaching and was sure that he was coming to their house. Without delay, she ran to her father's stable and began screaming: "Father, they have informed on us!" Jehuda the Butcher was frightened and did not know where to hide the meat just then. Greatly excited, he fell on the floor – and never

stood up . . . It seems that Judel the Baker was the only one who saw revenge in his death. But even he feels a twinge in his heart when he sees the burial society people come to attend to the deceased without contention and without haggling. The cemetery fence will already not be built from Jehuda's money . . . Thoughts arise in his mind, and he comes to the conclusion that Jehuda's prophesy has apparently come to pass, and only he, Judel himself, will have to bear the expenses of putting up the new fence . . .

Judel is perplexed and does not see a way out of the situation. The only thing that can save him is not to die. But, you see, it was inevitable. The thought that his money will fall into strange hands at the end disturbs him constantly. The magic word "money" takes over everything.

But, Judel's turn came, too. One winter day, he became seriously ill with pneumonia. His wife kept his illness a deep secret, and also ordered her children not to reveal it to the neighbors. She wanted to prevent the premature joy of those who hoped for his death. But Judel's day came, and he had no choice but to give up his soul to his Creator. He left a difficult task to his heirs. When his son went to the burial society, they listened to him calmly and replied: "Tomorrow, if God wills it, we will see. There is still time." When another day passed and the matter remained stuck at the same point, Judel's family lost its equanimity. So the burial society specified a certain amount, and arguing and haggling began. Finally, they reached a compromise and the burial society came to fulfill its duty. When they took Judel out of the house, his wife cried and wailed for two things as one: for the death of her husband and for the many thousands of his accumulated wealth she had lost. Compared to the double mourning prevailing in her house, at the burial society, things were completely different. They drank *L'Chaim* ["To life", a toast] and once more repeated the ancient saying: "Whoever refuses to give during his life, will finally give after his death".

At the time, this was the only subject of discussion in every Jewish house in Ostrolenka.

Shalom Margalit, Tel Aviv

From the Party's Doings

A. A speech for a speech

In 1928-1929, the Bund was very popular in Ostrolenka. Besides youths from the proletarian strata, those from the well-to-do civil sector, and even Chassidim, joined its ranks as well. Later, some became heads of the Bund party, such as Meir Krymkiewicz, Aron Zusman, Icchak Kachan (the son of Chaim Berel the Ritual Slaughterer, he is in Australia today, a well-known writer and lecturer) and others.

On the other hand, the Zionist movement, with its parties and youth movements (such as Poalei Zion, HaShomer HaTzair, HeChalutz, etc.), whose ideology opposed Bundist anti-Israel thinking like fire and water, did not sit idly by. They did everything to be saved from the Bundist danger, and tried to strengthen their ranks with youthful forces that stood for Zionism. Each side made an effort to be on top in this rivalry. A tried and true resource was increasing the treasury of books in the libraries, in order to draw as wide a circle of readers as possible. They also brought brilliant, persuasive speakers and well-known party leaders from big cities, to provide spiritual sustenance for the errant youth which was seeking its way in Poland's small cities.

I would like to mention an episode here that is etched in my memory to this day. It was on a Sabbath night in Ostrolenka (a good time for guest lecturers . . .). As a "bombshell", the Bund brought the famous speaker and poet, Peretz Markisz. I remember that the hall was packed; room for even "the head of a pin" could not have been found. When the speaker touched upon the Land of Israel problem, among other things, he declared with great pathos: "We do not need national cows and national milk! When a pioneer reaches Israel, they dress him in a 'white shroud' (meaning white work clothes, as was customary in the first pioneering years) and [place] clay shards on his eyes (that is to say, dark sunglasses). They give him a few meters of land and tell him: 'Here you are buried!'"

Of course, we Zionists were insulted by his words. When we left the hall, we decided to fulfill the *mitzvah* of "an eye for an eye" immediately, and invite a speaker no less famous than Peretz Markisz. We brought the well-known poet, Z. Segalowicz, to lecture. Our lecture also took place on Sabbath night, in the Zionist movement's hall, which was full. His lecture was not political. It was advertised that he would speak on the subject "Free Love". Segalowicz knew that Peretz Markisz, with whom he apparently had an old score to settle, had appeared before him. He said, among other things, "Distinguished audience! There are lecturers and poets of different kinds. There are those who talk and write according to a predetermined order, like a record placed on a phonograph." He also related, "Once a poet, with a great forelock of hair falling over his forehead, sat in the company of seven young women. They asked him to write a love poem to each of them. The poet rolled up his sleeves, tossed back his forelock, went into a nearby room and wrote . . . Later, he returned with seven poems and gave one to each young woman. And do you know what? There are some poets who write when the muse is upon them, and there are those who write according to the will of young girls . . ." Here, he found an opportunity to settle his old score, and to soften the bad impression left in our city by Markisz's speech.

B. The "bare heads" parable

As in other places at the time of elections for the Sejm (the Polish parliament), famous speakers and party leaders such as Icchak Greenbojm, Rabbi Rubinsztejn of Vilna (Senator), Rabbi Hager and others visited Ostrolenka. I am reminded of something that took place at the time:

The study hall was full of people from all strata of the population who came to hear the address of Rabbi Hager (Mizrachi), which was greeted with great enthusiasm. When he spoke in favor of Zionism and the Land of Israel, and stressed that our young men went there and sometimes sacrificed their lives, Reb Lazer Mintz (Agudat Yisrael) called out, "Yes, yes, those without hats, with bare heads!" Rabbi Hager responded: "As to that, I will tell you a parable. It once happened that the mother of a large family, which included officials, Torah scholars, as well as students in a modern school, passed away. After a time, a miracle occurred, and the mother returned to life. When her son who was an official was told, he answered, 'I will come to see her at one o'clock, after I close the office.' The Torah scholar responded, 'I will run to her after I finish this page of Gemara.' But the students in the modern school, when they heard the news, left everything, forgetting to put on their hats, and ran bareheaded, to see the great miracle that had happened to their dead mother!"

This wise and abrupt answer won extended applause from all those present.

Our Townsman, Cwi Hersz Kachan of Florida, Revives Memories of Ostrolenka

A. Aging overnight

(During World War I)

When Jews were caught in the streets for work in defense excavations, each one tried to escape from the "trouble". Therefore, the government issued an order, placing the matter in the hands of the rabbi and the beadle. So the two of them, the rabbi and the beadle, went out into the city's streets. Before them walked a drummer. They called on all the Jews, young and old, to

appear at the police station. I think this happened on the Sabbath. My father, of blessed memory, and I went to the police station. On the way, I tried to persuade my father not to go there. But, if the rabbi himself had so ordered, it was forbidden to refuse. We got to the courtyard of the police station, which was already full of Jews wearing Sabbath *kapotas*. They kept us there all night. When the police went to sleep and no one was guarding us, all the young people jumped over the fence and escaped. Only the old remained. In the morning, the commander appeared, saw who was there and yelled out: "Where have the young kikes disappeared to?" To this, one of the jokers replied: "We were all young yesterday, but overnight, we got old" . . .

In the end, everyone was released.

B. Because of the arrest

On the eve of *Tisha B'Av* [the date of the destruction of both Holy Temples] 1915, the Jews of Ostrolenka were about to be evacuated. A panic broke out and everyone looked for a way to escape as quickly as possible. My family, too, prepared to leave. My father was placed on a wagon full of bundles and he was tied down with a rope, so as not to fall. My mother, brother and sister left on other wagons. I jumped on a wagon loaded with all kinds of copper vessels, without the knowledge of the owner of the wagon, who had refused to take anyone at any price. (I don't remember his name; I only know that he was a coppersmith.) I hid in a large copper vat. To this day, I cannot understand how the bones of my skinny body survived all the jolts of the road. Along the way, we experienced massive bombardment and shells actually flew before my eyes, while I heard hell's music. Hunger also left its mark. It was the Eve of *Tisha B'Av*, when it was a *mitzvah* to fast, but my empty stomach refused to accept this excuse. I was hungry and despondent.

Suddenly, my hand crept into a pot, and touched a thick liquid. I pulled my hand out and licked my fingers. It was a delicious jam! I licked it all night. I had to hide, so that "my coachman" would not discover me, Heaven forbid. I wondered that at a time like this, he cared more about his pots than about people. We arrived in Lomza, where I met a few youngsters – hungry as I was. It was six in the morning and a curfew was in force, when it was forbidden to wander around the streets. But we decided to go and look for our families. A patrol saw us, and immediately arrested us for breaking the law. Merciful Jews, who saw them leading us in the street, threw bread and rolls at us. Thus, we quieted our hunger pangs – all because of our arrest . . . Later on, we were released.

Arcie Nowinski, Argentina

From the City

A Merit for the World to Come

Late one night, when the yeshiva boys sat over a page of Gemara, trying to crack a difficult issue, they suddenly saw the shadow of a woman creep slowly into the yeshiva. At first, they were very scared, but when the figure came closer, they saw that it was Cyrl, the beadle's wife. She was pale and frightened. To their question as to what brought her there at such a late hour (incidentally, the beadle lived next door to the yeshiva), she replied that she had dreamed that she was needed in the World to Come, and that she should prepare herself. Therefore, she had come to ask the yeshiva students to take pity on her and sell her all the World to Come they had earned in their studies that night, so that she would have something to present to the Heavenly Court. She explained, "My life with the beadle is not the best. He is a bad, irritable man. For every little thing, he swears at me with death curses and sometimes, when he feels like it, he throws a plate at my head. So, with a little of the World to Come, when I get there, I will be at rest. I will sit on a stool at the feet of the righteous in the Garden of Eden and listen to them learning Torah." We could not refuse her. We saw that she would brook no opposition, so we dedicated about twenty pages of Gemara to her.

Out of great joy, she began to kiss our hands and left beaming with happiness, with "the document" in her hand as a talisman and merit for the World to Come.

The Gang of the "Insolents" of Ostrolenka

This was our nickname. We were called thus in the city, and we were proud of the name. This is an episode that demonstrates our insolence. In Poland, after Passover, there was a period of recruitment for the army and we, a group of about twenty fellows, received our call-up orders. Of course, none of us was interested in serving. We decided to lose weight so that we would not be drafted. But how do we do this? We found a way – not to sleep at night and to wander around the streets. To this end, we established an "administration". Its task was to organize the "night's agenda".

One night, we were ordered to switch all the signs in the city. We switched the shoemaker's sign, for example, with the doctor's sign; we hung the community's sign in the bathhouse, etc. Unfortunately, we were caught "at work" by one of the city's eminent Jews, who immediately notified the police. We decided to punish him for this. The next night, our lads placed a coffin near his home, putting the "bed" on his doorstep. In the morning, a rumor spread in the city that this eminent Jew had passed away.

How a Policeman Supervised Kosher Ritual Slaughter

As is known, conflicts and disputes always prevailed among the religious workers in our city. This reminds me of an incident that took place in 1934. The licenses of all the Jews to sell tobacco were revoked by the Polish government, which claimed that this was the right of handicapped Poles. This law especially harmed one Jew, a *lamdan*, who supported eight children. Since he was a Gur Chassid, the Gur Chassidic congregation turned to the community, requesting that he be given a ritual slaughter's license. (Ritual slaughter was in the hands of the community.) Now, a tumult arose between the other religious workers: "This cannot be! The rabbi, the ritual slaughterers, etc., will be deprived of income." Of course, the license was not given and the man began to slaughter on his own. The Rabbi decreed a ban on [the meat] he slaughtered, and ruled that all his tools should be destroyed, as they were not kosher. Many Jews in the synagogue did not accept the ban, because they pitied his eight children. In response, the police were called. They confiscated his knife and posted a police guard near his house for an extended period of time – so that the city should not blunder, Heaven forbid, by eating non-kosher food. As we have related, the conflict continued for a long time, until finally the man was recognized as an official ritual slaughterer of the community.

How Rabbi Jakow Meir Rakowski Turned Kaczyny into an Official Town

(A character description)

Kaczyny, a railway station about five kilometers from Ostrolenka, was always dependent on Ostrolenka in every respect. The Jewish settlement there was very small, only a few houses among the houses of the Christians, and was considered part of Ostrolenka.

Kaczyny's Torah law litigations were, of course, brought before the Rabbi of Ostrolenka. The Jews of Kaczyny ate meat from the ritual slaughter of Ostrolenka. All administrative matters were attended to only in Ostrolenka. Kaczyny's matters of trade were run in Ostrolenka. Merchandise deliveries to Ostrolenka were sent via the Kaczyny railway station, and Kaczyny's carters and porters supported themselves from the transport of shipments to Ostrolenka.

One day, Reb Jakow Meir Rakowski, an inhabitant of Kaczyny (the father of the well-known writer and translator, Mark Rakowski), decided to turn Kaczyny into an independent "kingdom", that is, an official town. First of all, he decided to build a study hall there, and to stop holding the *minyan*'s prayers in private homes. A

decision of Rabbi Jakow Meir was not subject to change. He was a Jew of great energy and an iron will. In addition, he was knowledgeable in many areas, in the field of trade, as well as social subjects. He was even expert in drawing up building plans. All this aroused admiration and respect, even in the eyes of the train's conductor, who would stop the train while it was running when he saw that Reb Jakow Meir had arrived at the station and wanted to get on . . .

He always found a mutual language with Kaczyny's "common" people, tailors, carters and craftsmen, and captured their hearts. It is said that before settling in Kaczyny, when he was still in Malkin, he used to pair off couples during *Hakafot* [seven dancing circuits made with Torah scrolls] on Simchat Torah. To show that his heart was inclined to the simple folk, he would call to the same *Hakafa* someone of great *yichus* [distinguished lineage], together with a common shoemaker, so that they would be joyous together. The *gabbaim* did not approve. They would not forgive him for this.

When the building of the synagogue began in Kaczyny, the Rabbi of Ostrolenka, Rabbi Icchak Bursztejn, the righteous of blessed memory, strongly opposed this "independence" of Rabbi Jakow Meir. In addition, the latter brought a young man from Jadova and appointed him to be ritual slaughterer in Kaczyny. (As a result of this, the Jews of Troszyn, Rzekun and other small towns in the area also ate Kaczyny's ritually slaughtered meat.) In addition, he brought a young yeshiva student, a *lamdan* from one of the yeshivas, and "crowned" him Rabbi of Kaczyny . . . Now all hope was lost – Ostrolenka could not be silent about this!

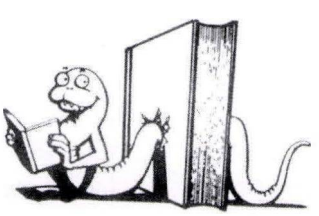
Reb Jakow Meir himself began to have doubts. Was he allowed to act on his own authority? Was this not overstepping the boundaries? He went to consult about the matter with his uncle, Reb Awraham Abba Rakowski, known as a great *lamdan* and Hebrew writer, who had encyclopedic knowledge. (He was a member of the yeshiva of Nachum Sokolow and on the editorial staff of *HaTzfira*!) Although Reb Jakow Meir was convinced that he was right and did not shrink from obstacles in his way, nevertheless . . . On the spot, Reb Awraham Abba gave Reb Jakow Meir the desired permission. And why not? According to all the laws of the Torah, the matter was kosher. When a specific settlement, small though it may be, was interested in becoming independent – it was permissible for it to establish its own study hall, to hire a ritual slaughterer of its own, and also a rabbi of its own . . . Why not? On the contrary, the more the merrier.

Thus strengthened by his famous uncle, and his determined will and dynamic personality – Reb Jakow Meir took a large wagon, sat all the important *balabatim* of Kaczyny in it, together with the simple "common" people (among them Hone, Awraham Mordechaj, Awraham Mosze, Meir Josel, Lejbel the Shoemaker and others), and he himself at their head – and went to the rabbi of Ostrolenka. Teach us, our rabbi, where is it written in the Torah that is it forbidden for Kaczyny to have a study hall of its own, a ritual slaughterer of its own and a rabbi of its own? On the contrary, we are ready to see this! The porters and carters thundered: Of course, of course, the rabbi will show us where it is written!!

The rabbi became confused and lost his senses. When he recovered, he became enraged and angry at Reb Jakow Meir, "He who sins and causes others to sin . . ."

Thus the matter ended. From then on, Kaczyny became an independent town, and this was due to Reb Jakow Meir, of blessed memory.

Recorded from the words of **Tzila Rakowski-Carmel**, Tel Aviv



Ostrolenka Style

How the Jews of Ostrolenka conducted their way of life at home and on the street; in the study hall and in the workshop; in the life of the individual and in public life; in private and in public; in joy and in sorrow. How the people of Ostrolenka spoke and explained; celebrated and mourned. How they acted on the Sabbath and on weekdays. How they sang, talked and jested, worried and regretted, etc., etc.

Collected, adapted and written by Y.I.

A. "I'll show them!" . . .

Jozef, an Ostrolenkan Gentile, very tall (over two meters), who lived on Goworowo Street (in the cellar at Josel Wonszak's), stood up during the last World War with a long rifle from Napoleon's time in his hand, and fired at the German planes. "I'll show them!" he shouted. This was one of the Polish defense's strategic resources against the German air force.

B. He explains . . .

When Pepka the Shoemaker (Kaplan) sewed shoes, he also used material like carton. When they asked him why they tore so quickly, he answered, "Because they don't polish them enough." But after a vigorous polishing – they tore even more. Then he explained that they polished them too much . . .

C. An investment permit is something else. .

The teacher Masza used to say, "Lending money for interest – never! For an investment permit – it is possible."

D. "The shoemakers of Goworowo"

The shoemakers of Goworowo Street were well-known, because they supplied shoes and boots for the entire area. They used to display their wares at all the fairs and market days in the region. The best known was the annual market called Janer, which took place in Ostrolenka for three whole days: Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

E. The face of a Jew

The only son of a learned Jew and fervent Chassid from Ostrolenka left the *shtebl*, cut off his long earlocks, stopped learning and praying, shaved off his beard, and began to wear "short" [coats], German-style.

His father said to him, "All right then, you've stopped being a Jew, but at least keep up your Jewish appearance . . ."

F. The words of a "bought" groom . . .

A learned Jew from Ostrolenka (who had rabbinical ordination) and who was a keen Chassid and a "bought" groom (for a dowry of two thousand rubles, a gold watch and a military band that escorted him to the wedding canopy – thanks to his father-in-law's good connections in "high" military circles . . .) in a simple but accepted family, as was customary in those days, once complained, "Here, I am comparable to a lump of fat tossed into a big pot with water and potatoes. Certainly, the dish has an excellent taste, but the fat itself gets lost in the big pot of potatoes and dissolves."

G. But they are talking in the city

It happened that an Ostrolenkan strayed from the right path, stopped learning Torah and praying, etc. So as not to cause his devout parents too much grief, he decided to pray every day at home in the presence of his parents . . . Thus things continued for some time. And then, one morning, the devout father returned from the study hall to eat his breakfast, and fell upon his son: "Sinner, enemy of Israel, you have become a complete Gentile! The entire city is saying that you have stopped praying!"

"Father! What are you talking about?" – his son did not spare him. "You yourself know this is not true. I pray at home every day. You and mother see this with your own eyes . . . and know this."

"We know," the father justified himself, "but the whole city is talking" . . .

H. How does an Ostrolenkan woman test her husband's piety?

He used to leave early for prayers, taking his prayer shawl and phylacteries and leaving the house quietly – and returning after he finished praying. Once, on Sabbath morning, the wife decided to test her husband's piety, after a suspicion awoke in her that he did not pray at all. And this is what she did: before her husband went to the synagogue, she took his prayer shawl out of its pouch and put two towels in its place. When the husband returned with a great "Good Sabbath!" greeting, and asked to partake of the Sabbath dishes – the wife did not take her eyes off him, and asked where he prayed. At the same time, she pulled the two towels out of the pouch . . .

I. The Jew who "went crazy"

In 1934, an idea suddenly came to the mind of Reb Szmuel Byszko: he wanted to go to Israel. The people of Ostrolenka could not understand him. "What does this mean, Reb Szmuel? You are so successful. Why should you ruin such a prosperous business?" In the city, they began to whisper that the man had gone crazy.

But Reb Szmuel, who was a fervent Zionist and whose heart was full of love for the Land of Israel, said, "I have nothing more to do in Poland. I must go to Israel to build a flour mill there." He gathered all his money and went to Israel as a capitalist. To this day, he lives there in a shack. As a Jew, however, he is contented with his lot. No one is more contented than he. In Israel, he has 26 treasures – sons, daughters, daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, may they be well! In addition, three of his flour mills operate here – one in Kfar Chassidim, one in Haifa and one in Tel Aviv.

It is too bad that other Jews in Ostrolenka and other cities in Poland did not catch Reb Szmuel Byszko's "madness"! Then we would have had much less loss of life and property.

J. A victim of the scene

Once, an amateur actor from a small town in the area came to Ostrolenka to find a play to present. When he was asked, "What kind of play are you looking for – drama or comedy?" he replied that since he was a serious person, he required a "heavy drama". "Look!" he showed us that his thumb was bent into his right hand and that he could not move it, and told us how it had happened. "In our town, we once presented *The Wild Man* by Gordon, and dedicated the proceeds to a charitable cause. I played the wild man and took the role seriously. This was my first appearance on the stage. In a certain scene, I was supposed to 'wound' myself with a knife. The knife was later shown to be rusty. With great strength, I stuck it into my thumb, as was written in the play (as I said, I am a serious actor). But I accepted my wound with understanding, because I was a 'victim of the scene' . . ."

K. How "bloodshed" was prevented during the Ne'ila prayers on Yom Kippur at Ostrolenka's synagogue

A "terrible event" happened to Reb Aron Jankel Margalit on Yom Kippur during the opening of the Holy Ark before the *Ne'ila* prayers. For many years, the "right of possession" of opening the ark before *Ne'ila* on Yom Kippur belonged to Reb Aron Jankel, a representative of the Community Committee. This time, "bloodshed" was prevented, thanks to Icchak Zylbersztejn, as if "it fell on him from Heaven" at the very last minute. It was time for *Ne'ila*. The beadle of the synagogue began to call out prices for opening the ark. Suddenly, wild bidding began. The prices rose without a stop. Each wanted to defeat the other at any price – without a bit of pity. This took place before the new Community Committee elections. Each of the eminent Jews wanted to strip Reb Aron Jankel of his "right of possession". But Reb Aron Jankel did not give in easily; he would not allow them to humiliate him. With his last strength, he shouted over all the [other] shouters and announced an even greater amount. But the bidding went on and on and reached a fantastic sum, beyond Reb Aron Jankel's ability. With fear in his heart, he waited for a miracle to occur. His hands and his voice trembled, his prestige collapsed, the "right of possession" slipped from his fingers . . . He was overcome with shame.

Suddenly, the beadle called out in a loud, strange voice, unlike his natural voice, as if he had gotten hold of a valuable stone at the last minute, and stated a fantastic amount, several times higher than the sums announced so far, an amount that passed all reckoning. A deathly silence prevailed in the synagogue. A trembling passed through all the worshippers. The beadle gave a signal to end the bidding, because no one dared compete with the fabulous amount announced.

"Reb Jankel, open the ark, please!" – a sharp order was heard. This was the voice of Reb Icchak Zylbersztejn, who had looked with sorrow on the

struggle that bordered on shedding the blood of the old man who had the "right of possession" to open the ark for *Ne'ila*, and who saved him from disgrace by setting an amount great than was possible . . .

It was whispered in the city that Reb Icchak Zylbersztejn used the opportunity to repay an old debt to Reb Aron Jankel – as one good turn deserves another . . .

And so Reb Aron Jankel was spared great humiliation.

L. Two smokers

Pinie and Dan were both heavy smokers. Usually they liked the Darmo (in Polish, "for free") cigarette brand. When they met in the street, one would ask the other, "Do you have a cigarette?" "No", came the answer, "from where should I get one?" "Is that so?" "Just as you hear." "Well, if that's the way things are, I'll have to smoke one of my own," the first said unwillingly." "Then so will I", answered the other.

According to another version – as above, the two meet in the street and walk on together . . . One asks the other for a cigarette, and both answer at the same time, "I haven't got one." Then the two turn their backs on each other, stealthily light up cigarettes, take a puff and place them in their sleeves. When they turn back to face each other, smoke begins to come out of their sleeves . . . "What's that?" The one looks at the other in surprise. "Nothing. Yes – I sponged one from somewhere . . ."

M. "Then at least give me a cigarette . . ."

A small shopkeeper in Ostrolenka ran around the city looking for a charitable loan to pay off a note "tomorrow" . . .

He met an acquaintance.

"Could you give me a small loan of 100 zlotys?"

The acquaintance refused.

"So give me at least 50, or 25. Even 10 would be good."

When he did not get this either, he said, "Then at least give me a cigarette."

In the meanwhile

Kaufman, who sold shoes, went into Szafran, who sewed shoes. "Mr. Szafran, I want to order one hundred pairs of shoes from you – fifty pairs – but in the meanwhile, make me one pair!"

Either . . . or . . .

They asked the son of Chaim Szrejter, who was a water drawer, "How much do you earn a day from carrying water?" He answered, "Either I take about a hundred zlotys a day, or not!"

A wise answer

Menachem Frydman, the food merchant, once passed the old market and became angry at the fish sellers for making so much noise and tumult in the street. One of the wise fish sellers replied, "If the food merchants would become fish sellers, they would make even more noise" . . .

"Straight to Szlomo"

Jankele "Koza" (The Goat) the Hatter, buying a ticket to Warsaw at the Kaczyny train station, requested at the ticket window: "Straight to Szlomo" . . . This was because in Warsaw lived a Jew named Szlomo, who owned a hostel, where he put up many of Ostrolenka's Jews . . .

Without fathers and without grandfathers

In Ostrolenka, there was a popular joke that was used to "sting" someone: that he came from a city "without fathers and without grandfathers". How could this be? When they asked someone, "Where are you from?" he simply answered from this city or another. "Who was your father, your grandfather?" Then he answered: So and so, and so and so. The other answers, "Oh, so and so was an honorable Jew! I knew him." But when you ask an Ostrolenkan, "Who was your father or grandfather?", he immediately answers you: Oh, you probably didn't know him! . . .

The Magid [Storyteller] who cursed

The Magid from Bialystok, the well-known Reb Eliakim Getzl, often visited Ostrolenka. He inserted into his sermons a great deal about punishments and threats. This was aimed at the youth of the city, who, apparently, had begun to stray from the straight and narrow, and were exposed to evil influences . . . The youths, in turn, got angry at him and to repay him, they would disrupt his sermons. He used to speak in the large synagogue. (As opposed to the famous, expert preacher, Rapaport, who used to speak in the large synagogue and was careful not to anger anyone). He, Reb Eliakim, felt strongly that he wanted to pay back the youths in his sermon, measure for measure. As this happened exactly on *Shabbat Rosh Chodesh* [a Sabbath when a new month began], he took a verse from the additional

Sabbath-New Month prayer service, and spoke thus: "New months [also 'new heads'] – heads with modern haircuts, to your nation you have given – not like the Nation of Israel, which does not have such haircuts. This is a time of atonement, for all their consequences – for all of Jewish children and their children's children" . . . Besides this, he cursed the city with frequent fires.

The same thing, they say, also happened in the city Zambrow, a city where fires always broke out. This may have happened because of his curses, May the All-Merciful protect us!

"A dear pair of ears!"

Our townsman, Yitzhak Kachan from Australia, tells:

"Reb Chaim Alter Kamin visited us frequently. We subscribed together to *Moment* and *Heint*. On Sabbath and holiday mornings, he came to drink tea and talk about the affairs of the city. He was up-to-date about everything that was happening in the city. Perhaps that was because every morning, he would run to receive a charitable loan, a note to pay . . . and, meanwhile, he would learn the news of the city. After he finished running around, he would burst into our house. Even when he didn't have any special news, I would listen to his stories, which he heard on his way to receive a charitable loan.

He stands before me now, in his Sabbath-holiday *kapote*. Having shaken off the weekday grayness, he listens, in suspense, to Chassidic stories.

He was a special listener, with a dear pair of ears!..."

Heir or seceder?

Yitzhak Kachan continues to relate:

"After I left Ostrolenka, I asked my father to go to the Rabbi of the city, who was a friend of the family. When I parted from him, the Rabbi said, 'I knew Reb Szmuel, your grandfather. Your father, indeed, is like a member of my family. But what is the situation concerning your Jewishness? Are you an heir or a seceder?'

'I am not a seceder, Rabbi.'

'Once I heard a great magid, who asked this question: Why is it written 'The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob'? Why does it repeat 'God of' with each name? Because each of them had to come to know Him by himself, not by inheritance. You are going to Australia. Do many people live there?' asked the Rabbi.

'Seven or eight million', I answered.

'That is, Gentiles. And how many Jews are there?'

'Thirty-forty thousand.'

'So few Jews with so many Gentiles', said the Rabbi. 'Promise me one thing. See to it, when you reach Australia, that you do not add another Gentile to the seven million Gentiles already there . . .'

The Rabbi's words were engraved in my memory. When my son celebrated his bar-mitzvah, which a few hundred Jews attended, I passed the Rabbi's testament on to my son, so that it would be engraved in his memory . . ."

Times in Ostrolenka

As in other cities and towns in Poland in the past, Ostrolenka also had different periods. There were times of happiness, enthusiasm and the revival of social and cultural life, which included different strata of youths and adults as one, and planted the hope for a better Jewish future in their hearts. There were also times of sadness and sorrow, fear and panic, wars, fires, family misfortunes, etc. At difficult and critical moments like these, the special character of the city came to the fore. In Ostrolenka, a notably Jewish-Chassidic city, there was a great deal of "love of Israel and love of mankind". This was one of the main characteristics of our city – not to let a person fall, to help him in times of trouble and to defend his Judaism. As it was an important strategic location during World War I, Ostrolenka was a most wretched place during the War. The Jews of Ostrolenka showed bravery, perseverance and tolerance in their relationships with each other. At the time of the fires, the inhabitants' mutual assistance was prominent in all areas: housing, moving belongings they had succeeded in saving, food, etc. If a misfortune occurred in a family, such as illness or impoverishment, there were immediately Jews who "overturned worlds" and provided as much support as possible. If, Heaven forbid,

a case occurred in Ostrolenka of conversion by force, the youths – healthy and strong young men – were not complacent, and did not rest until they had rescued the convert from the hands of the Gentiles or, at least, had saved his wife and Jewish children. A life and death struggle was waged against the Christian population, which was also notable for its anti-Semitism.

Especially etched in my memory is the incident of the Jewish woman, Cytrynowicz, in 1930. Her husband, who became a Christian (for the love of a Christian woman, not an inhabitant of Ostrolenka) fought hard against the young men Icchak Bocian, Szmuel Lachowicz, Awraham Kowal, the Zyskind brothers, Lazer Lachowicz, Szymon Chmiel, Berel Krymkiewicz, Mosze Kazacki and others, who tried bravely to save the family's children from their convert father. Some of them were sentenced to imprisonment by the court. (You can read about the trial in the newspaper, *Der Moment*, no. 182-3, Warsaw, 22-23 August 1930, and in other daily newspapers of those dates.) While there are other instances of devotion and readiness to fight on the part of Ostrolenka's Jews, as was said, they also knew how to rejoice, to jest and to celebrate. Like any small city, everything happened in a narrow and intimate milieu. Every trouble and every joy, even the smallest, penetrated everyone's heart with lightening speed. Anyone with a joy or a sorrow felt that the entire city was joyous or sorrowful together with him.

Ostrolenka's Dialects

Geographically, Ostrolenka is situated between big cities having completely different characters and ways of life, such as Lomza, Bialystok and Warsaw. A different Yiddish dialect was spoken in each of them. Ostrolenka did not have a uniform dialect of its own. It was influenced by the cities around it and "caught" their idioms.

It once happened that, in the same household, the various family members used different dialects, depending on the strength of outside influences. There were also local and independent idioms, however, which did not exist in other cities and towns.

"Cultural Points"

After World War I, Ostrolenka revived, both economically and spiritually. New houses were erected on the ruins of the destroyed city. For the most part, the inhabitants had already returned from places of exile. Trade began to flourish anew and the youth turned toward the future with new ideals and faith. The winds of spring, which blew in all Poland's cities after the war, also reached Ostrolenka. In the parties, debates were held. As a result, lecturers were brought from the big cities, to draw the youth's attention. Theatrical plays were presented in packed halls, public institutions renewed their activities, all kinds of community workers rolled up their sleeves and placed themselves at the disposal of the inhabitants with new initiatives, etc., etc.

All this penetrated the private sector as well. Gatherings began again in private homes: celebrations and parties were frequently held, especially by those who had excelled at this in the past – and everything was on a high cultural level.

One of these "cultural points" was, without doubt, the home of Rejzka Mazur (then Margalit, now Wissotzky, living in Israel), on Kilinski Street. It was a sort of cultural hostel, which served as a meeting place for the youth labeled "beautiful", "sophisticated" and "sparkling". Every artist and person of culture who arrived from a big city, bringing "spiritual food" for the youth – a speaker, a writer, a cantor, a dancer, an actor, a singer – was received here with respect and enthusiasm. The owner of the hostel herself participated in plays of amateur acting groups and especially astonished [the audience] with her singing, with her metallic mezzo soprano voice . . .

Well-known speakers and writers, such as Rajs, Aiserowicz and Segalowicz, and artists such as Samberg, Morawski and Kusewicki knew this house in Ostrolenka well. Rejzka's brother, Icchak Mazur, who lived in Lomza and was himself a superb amateur actor, brought well-known artists and people of culture to

Ostrolenka from the big cities.

Anyone who had a direct connection to the subjects of art and culture always found a place of refuge in her home – including food, drink, board and anything his heart desired. (The writer of these lines, too, often enjoyed her hospitality when he frequented Ostrolenka from Lomza, where he lived.) The artists used to say, "Her house is full and crammed with art; even the walls recite poetry."

This is a typical incident: in those days, the well-known conductor Sznyor (an irritable and pampered person) came from Warsaw, together with a certain singer, for a concert appearance. As usual, they were brought to Rejzka's house. The conductor, certain that he had to pay for staying there, demanded the best place. He went into one of the elegant bedrooms and did not want to leave it. Arguments did not help; he refused to compromise. "With my money, I can choose anything I want." When it was explained that he was not in a hotel, but in a private home, where guest-artists were hosted without payment, he calmed down, apologized and assented . . .

It is worth noting that the fondness and sympathy Rejzka had from the cradle for art and artists survives to this day. Her famous hospitality continues here, as in those good days.

Nicknames and Derogatory Names

In Ostrolenka, as in any other city, there was an abundance of nicknames and additional names for specific people, attached to their own first or family names. It was enough to just mention the nickname, and everyone knew who was being referred to immediately. Usually, people were given nicknames if they were more prominent than others in regard to a certain character trait, vocation, relationship with others, social standing, etc. Only those who deserved it were mercilessly "crowned" with these names. There were no differences between big and small – from a famous and "loud" personality to a quiet, modest folk type. Sometimes a person was "honored" with a nickname that related only to his outer appearance, not to mention those who let slip a strange word or responded oddly to a social incident, or neighbors, or relatives or friends. A name like this stuck for generations . . . And who could control his tongue? The slip-of-the-tongue Evil Inclination took control, and it was hard to overcome it.

Some of the additional names were moderate and very refined, and did not disturb those who bore them. On the contrary, they lent a feeling of hominess, of family and even affection. It is worth citing some examples of names of this kind, which were abundant in Ostrolenka and pleasant to the ear, as they exuded juicy humor and folksy warmth, such as: Big Icchak – because of his excessive height; The Cold Baker – because his bread was never baked enough; The Doll Shoemaker – who was handsome; Czaj-Maj – because he was acted like a wise guy toward Gentiles in the markets; Jaloszke-Melamed – because his father-in-law promised him a "jaloszke" (a cow which had had its first calf) as a dowry; Dust and Ashes – a man unsuccessful in his business, everything he touched turned to nothing; Japonczyk (Japanese) Melamed – because he sided with the Japanese in the war between Russia and Japan; Mendel Gryczak – he loved to eat dishes made with grits; Motel Dziedzic (*Poretz*) – he loved to dress up like wealthy *poretz*; the Szczot (in Russian: bill) Klezmer Brothers – because they always asked for a bill; Lejbel Trotsky – because of his name "Lew", which was Trotsky's real name; Motel Jakres – a carter who asked high prices for a ride; and also The Cold Blacksmith, The Skinny Melamed, White Head, Jankele the Goat, The Dead Shoemaker, Yellow Mendel, Bolshevik, Little Daddy, The Little Ritual Slaughterer, etc.

There were, of course, much more scathing, discordant nicknames. There were also Ostrolenkan names and nicknames that could suit anyone in any city, such as Ganamnik – a person with dishonest intentions; Gardzielnik (from the Polish) – a glutton and a drunkard, addicted his whole life to eating; Landzibiluz – a beggar who plays the role of a rich man and does not ascribe any importance to money; Hulko-Pulko Jutro Bezkoszula (from the Polish: Rowdy today and without a nightshirt tomorrow), that is to say, a man who does not worry about tomorrow or, in English, "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die"; Nie Dolenga – in Polish, a nobody, an unsuccessful person, etc., etc.

The nicknames suited the person's actions and characteristics, but the "monopoly" on them was the property of the whole city.

The Mentally Retarded

Peszka

She talked a lot, but irrelevantly. A torrent of words came out of her mouth, in addition to sharp curses. Sometimes she used her hands – she struck people and also threw rocks. She always attacked people and was not afraid of even the strongest person. When Peszka passed by in the street, she caused scandals, stopping at each house, yelling and shaking her fists. Therefore, people tried to avoid meeting her. Children, especially, were afraid of her, and ran home or hid whenever they saw her coming.

Peszka was frightened only once. It was on Yom Kippur Eve, at the time of the *Kol Nidrei* prayer, when only children remained at home. Peszka knocked on the door of a house. The children opened the door, saw her and burst into tears and terrible screams. This was the first time that Peszka herself was frightened, and ran for her life . . .

Berele

"Dai-dai-dai-dai-dai" . . . this was his daily refrain. At the same time, he would hop and dance and contort his face with silly facial expressions. People heard him talk infrequently; most of the time, he was silent. He always went barefoot and dressed in rags. He was unkempt, confused and agitated. Most of the time, his mother led him by the hand and watched over him. After each dance and his "dai-dai-dai" song, he got a few grosz or a slice of bread. His mother always chased away anyone who annoyed him like flies, those who crowded around him on the street. Berele himself was quiet and did not attack people. On the contrary, he aroused pity and was grateful to anyone who gave him something. In exchange for every slice of bread, he danced and sang for a long time. Although he was mentally disturbed, a warm heart beat inside him. He liked children very much and enjoyed "performing" for them. It was said that if Berele had been a normal person, he would have been a community worker in our city . . .

Szmuelke

In the past, he was a great *lamdan*, but he became deranged and left the "straight" path. He lived on the roof of the *shtebl* of the Gur Chassidim, at Little Icchakel's, and always spoke words of Torah, even in the street.

This, for example, is one of his disturbed sayings: "From where is it derived that a women is exempt from a strange death? And the answer is: If a person dies of an illness, he is brought to burial. The question is asked: Why is he brought? Is he sick and cannot walk by himself? And the answer is: He is actually sick, and therefore cannot walk. But if he died a strange death, then he is not sick. Thus, there is another question: So why does he not walk himself? And the answer is: A dead man is exempt from *tzitzit* [fringes on the corners of a ritual garment], and is therefore afraid to walk and must be brought. But a woman is exempt from *tzitzit*, so she can walk by herself. So why must she be brought? From this it is clear that a woman is exempt from a strange death."

Zeligel "Bracie" (My brother)

He was called "Bracie" because he used to tap everyone's shoulder and say "Bracie" (My brother). His usual refrain was, "Oy, my sweet God, te-lee-te-lee, shlai-dai dai!" Or, "Where is my luck, I am looking for it everywhere and I can't find it". Thus he would sing and clap his hands rhythmically. He did not like new houses. At the beginning of the war in 1939, when people were expelled from their homes, he said, "I don't understand why we have to leave our homes and find new ones. Aren't the old houses good anymore? . . ." When he met a woman, he would sing to her, "I have a lass. She is pretty, and if she has dollar, ta da risa bim bam bom . . ."

Zyszte

He was a quiet man, partly blind, and did not bother anyone. He only begged for donations and ate what was given to him. In the city, there was a rumor that he loaned money for interest . . . He never agreed to take a small coin. When he was given a donation, he rubbed it well until he decided whether he would take it or not. At night, he slept in the community *shtebl*. He fixed and patched his ragged clothes by himself. His speech was confused and it was hard to understand him. He always wore a black garment, shiny from all the grease that stuck to it; his pockets were full of bread, and in his inner pockets – neat and sorted packets of money . . .

Koppel "Nierozgavarivaj" (Russian for: Don't talk)

He was not born in Ostrolenka, but came from the area. He sold *Havdala* candles, and also had a "cinema" box that he got from America. He wandered around with it at fairs and, for five grosz, sold a peek into it; there, you saw pictures from the country of Columbus. He had a yellow beard and thick earlocks. He was meticulous with all his customers and spoke with a "resh" [stressed his "r's"]. He held a telescope in his hand and was always surrounded by children. But Koppel maintained his dignity and did not want to become a target of ridicule. He took his "business" seriously – he only approached adults with *Havdala* candles, and only children with the "cinema". He could not tolerate crowds around him, and reacted severely to any noise, with only one word "Nierozgavarivaj". That is, Quiet, don't talk! This was his main refrain, and therefore, it also became his nickname.

"The Verses of Ostrolenka"

All sorts of songs, refrains and skits relating to current events were written in our city. The lines that were written always had a personal, political or social interpretation.

Here are parts of songs and skits written by Herzl Sojka and Eli Bajuk. They brought a great deal of joy and hilarity to the Ostrolenkan audience, which avidly "swallowed" these satirical compositions. Every passing episode immediately found expression in their creations, and was often accompanied by sharp criticism. The "bits" were presented on amateur stages, at fetes and any social gathering. (Freely translated from the Yiddish):



H. Sojka

Give back the box of
chocolates,
You are not one of us at all,
I was greatly mistaken,
and I'm not giving even
A penny
or . . .



E. Bajuk

Chawke already went to the field with the Gentile . . .
or:
The black-haired Rywkele
Works in the factory
She winds threads
And a long rope comes out . . .

It is superfluous to note the intent of these few verses here. There was not one among the effervescent youth of our city who did not understand the real meaning of the words, and at whom the "shots" were aimed . . .

Here is a complete "creation", cited because of its special importance as an example.

Verses from Everyday Events

(Written upon the establishment of the Women's Organization of Ostrolenka.
The authors: one of the two mentioned above, or both together. Apparently, Hercke Sojka.)

We are celebrating today – let us say, great joy that my belly is big,
Goods that are in demand have come to town:
A progressive organization of married women –
Who arrange a tea party for us,
Or, as my grandmother calls them, the women's gallery,
That will care for the ladies after nine months . . .
My Uncle Beniamin calls it by another name:
Women in a cooperative,
When one begins to speak –
It immediately becomes a collective.
How do you say it, a Kingdom of Women?
Yes, I agree! If this is good for you, then so be it . . .
I don't care – it won't influence Hitler
Nor will it harm him . . .
What does my brother's brother say:
When women become a study group
Tumult will not be lacking there . . .

*

Dear ladies and gentlemen!
What is there to think?
There is great joy in our hearts –
When women have the floor!

What was it Reb Szaje said:
This is not proof at all
That this ringing can hold out,
And, Heaven forbid, will not slip –
If the honorable Chairwoman
Will speak and mention in her words,
That membership dues must be paid monthly,
Then surely everything will crumble.
And of all the women who have gathered
Maybe only two will remain:
The Treasurer and the Comptroller – that's all!
How does the hackneyed saying go:
We would not even give a grosz!

*

Listen, listen, children,
I will calculate for you here
The entire capacity of the organization –
Because the organization deserves appreciation,
The President, Mrs. Anna Bracha,
Enters successfully here –
Let this now be a secret
An extraordinary enema – of the best rubber
It is said that it is expensive – only one franc,
If a member becomes ill, Heaven forbid,
It helps . . .
She only gets a trickle
Already the fever goes down.
The matron, Tova Genandel
Contributes a meat pot,
She permits cooking in it for Sabbath and for weekdays,
And the matter is not yet closed.
She also gives a milk pot
For she is the Chief Secretary –
To cook gruel for the patients.
Besides this, she has a new medicine for the new mothers:
You take garlic and a lemon peel,
Place it on the woman's abdomen,
And the pain vanishes like smoke . . .
Who needs midwives
With all these aids?
And a minute after the smart trick
Up jumps a male child – a lad of twenty,
Two meters high, until smoke comes out . . .

The Deputy President is also most active
She gave some sort of thermometer
Which lowers the fever
And increases the cold,
In the meanwhile, it's the only one in the world
And the patient, whose temperature rises to forty-one degrees
The miracle-thermometer lowers it to thirty-six . . .

My neighbor would say
It is surely broken . . .
And the Member Chaja
Brings thirteen cupping glasses,
Cotton with ethyl alcohol,
Which will surely help the ladies;
And the Member Fanja Brajna,
So vigorous and good,
And you can't come to her with complaints –
She is the Treasurer with the hundred,
And of course also has the knowledge . . .
Why, it is obvious
That the knowledge is in the hands of she who has the money,
She gave a gift to a married woman –
An elegant bathtub, in which to take a dip and enjoy,
It certainly couldn't hurt
To include the girls of the administration, too.
And from whence to take water?
There will be water, enough for all,
It will flow, it will endlessly flow . . .

Fillings in the teeth for children
Free for the asking,
Promise the modest ladies,
And for anyone whose tooth hurts –
The pliers are ready, the doctor is energetic,
One, two – and the tooth is already out,
May the poor also enjoy themselves.

As you see,
We will be satisfied with the ladies.
We will fill the box for them,
And they for us – the stomach.
By the way, I already feel growing hunger,
And run to the buffet to satisfy what is lacking . . .
But I found there an unpleasant shortcoming –
They don't give credit – the years have passed,
Since you sat calmly at the table
And ate roast goose, fried fish, sipped a drink
And said at the buffet: Write it down in the books . . .

*

I imagine to myself and understand,
How does it look -
A meeting of the ladies? And its proceedings.
One asks for the floor,
And all the others begin to cackle . . .
The Chairwoman wishes to protest,
But they are insulted and burst into tears,
The firemen must be called
To extinguish the fire of the terrible arguments.
No meeting can take place
And when it comes time to vote,
Then the women will forgive me,
The sound of the screaming reaches outer space.
And what would Jankele Dawid the Secretary say?
You are dealing with the nation of women here,
A difficult and strange tribe,
With which it is hard to reach an arrangement.

*

Today we celebrate Women's Day
A good and productive movement,
Without which we would be meager and insipid,
And we are not talking about Zionism and philanthropy,
The Member Nadel from the Bund would say: "This is not utopia . . ."
So, Members, begin to work,
And may it be with luck and success!
Succeed in the length and in the width
Don't be satisfied with only nine measures of speech,
And not with talking about new dresses,
We want to see productive work,
So may you want to dedicate strength, time and energy,
Because
At the end, one of two things will come out:
Either you will work and survive . . .
Or you will disband . . .

*

Long live the Women's Organization
Which promises us culture as well as . . . canalization,
A toast to tea parties, of the day
That approaches, men and women;
A toast to a rich and tasty buffet.
A toast to the guard at the door
Who let me in for free!

These were Ostrolenka's entertainments, with its songs, verses and humor. Its Jews knew how to rise above suffering and poverty, and looked forward to a good and promising future. . . The audience was entertained by the warm, jolly verses of the talented pair of writers, Hercke Sojka, of blessed memory, and Eli Bajuk, may God avenge his blood.



The first Masquerade Evening in Ostrolenka, 1924
In the center: Hercke Sojka dressed as an upper school student

Ostrolenka in the Diaspora

Writers, Artists and Cultural Activists

Menachem Flakser



Menachem Flakser was the son of the well-known public figure, Reb Chanoch Flakser and his wife, Rachel, the daughter of Reb Efraim Goldbruch, of blessed memory. He was born on 11 April 1898 in Ostrolenka. He studied in a *heder* and in yeshivas. From 1918, he lived in Warsaw and was on the staffs of the daily Yiddish newspapers, *Das Yiddishe Folk* (The Jewish People) and *Heint* (Today). In 1924-1925, he studied at the Sorbonne University in Paris and was one of the founders of the weekly, *Pariser Bletter* (Paris Pages). In 1926, he was one of the founders of the daily newspaper, *Unser Express* (Our Express) in Warsaw.

After World War II broke out, fate brought him to China, to the city of Shanghai. There, he established the weekly, *Unser Leben* (Our Life), in three languages: Yiddish, Russian and English. Since 1947, he has lived in America and worked at YIVO (the [YIVO] Institute for Jewish Research). He published the work, *The Bibliography of Yiddish Literature in the U.S.S.R. from 1918-1948*, and collected testimonies of Holocaust survivors. Since 1950, he has worked on a regular basis at *The Forward* newspaper.

Since 1920, he has published poems, stories and critiques in periodicals, such as *Ringen*, *Chaliastre*, *Warszawski Almanach*, *Warszawer Szriften*, *Biecher Welt*, *Literarischer Bletter* and others. He translated into Yiddish Kellerman's *Ingeborg*, *The Extraordinary Adventures of Julia Jurenito and his Disciples*, *The Stormy Life of Lazar Roitschwantz* and *The Thirteen Pipes* by Ilya Ehrenberg, a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, children's stories by Anatole France and more.

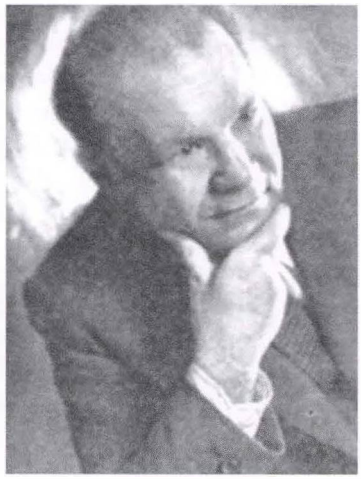
Yitzhak Kachan



Yitzhak Kachan, is the son of Reb Chaim Dow, the Ritual Slaughter and Examiner, and Chaja Bejla Kachan. He is a writer and lecturer. He was born in Ostrolenka and went to Australia at the beginning of 1938. Since then, he has been active in Jewish public life in Australia. Yitzhak Kachan lectures on literature and appears at assemblies commemorating the Holocaust. He writes literary essays and critiques published in periodicals in Australia and abroad. He is one of the editors of the literary periodical, *Die Melburne Bletter*, and edited a book in honor of Ber Rozen, adding his own comprehensive introduction to it. He has written theatrical and cinematic critiques for many years. He is a member of the Yiddish Committee of the Writers Association in Melbourne. At the Peretz Upper School in Melbourne, he taught the subjects of the history of the Jewish people and literature to senior

grades. He also taught at the popular university in Melbourne. He was invited to Argentina to serve as principal of an upper school in Buenos Aires, but did not accept the invitation for personal reasons. Over the years, he was one of the editors of a periodical of cultural and social matters, *Unser Gedank*, in Melbourne.

Meir Margalit



Meir Margalit was born in Ostrolenka, the son of the community worker, Reb Aron Jakow Margaliot, of blessed memory, and his wife, Fejga, may God avenge her blood.

He was a theatrical actor at the Ohel Theater in Israel, primarily playing leading roles. After World War I, when Ostrolenka was rebuilt from its ruins, and life, including the city's cultural life, began returning to its usual routine, the Zionist organization established a drama circle and Meir Margalit became its main star. He demonstrated amazing dramatic talents and abundant humor, played different types, and brought every gathering to life with his jokes and the way he spoke. Even when he was only 13-14 years old, he participated in skits and comedies. Watching the Vilner Troupe when it came to Ostrolenka, finally convinced him that this was his destiny.

In 1922, when he was 17 years old, Meir Margalit emigrated to Israel through HeChalutz. Here, he looked for construction and agricultural work, and later joined the Labor Legion in Jerusalem. In 1923, he joined the dramatic studio of Manya Arnon and, in 1924, was invited to act in Moshe Halevy's Ohel group.

When Ohel became an established theater, Meir Margalit became one of its mainstays. He played leading roles in more than one hundred plays, such as Harpagon, Jourdain, Arnolfe and Argan in Molière's comedies. He played the role of Hašek's *Good Soldier Svejk* more than 800 times, reaching unrivaled international theatrical heights. He played the role of Vasil Antonicz in *Kolkhoz of Women*, Falstaff in Shakespeare's *Merry Wives*, Jeeter Lester in *Tobacco Road*, Benyamin in *The Travels of Benjamin III*, Menachem Mendel the Dreamer, *Shraga Feivish Goes to the Negev* and many others. Finally, he has appeared in Ephraim Kishon's *HaKetubbah* 300 times, and still appears on Ohel's stage.

Margalit is known as a dramatic reading artist, primarily monologues and humorous selections. He produces hearty laughter from his listeners.

In 1956, he received the Ramhal Prize (after the Gordon Prize) for Theater Arts from the Tel Aviv Municipality. He was recently awarded the Aronowicz Prize, as well as the Professor Dr. Yosef Kloyzner Prize from the Kloyzner Club. In 1964, he received the Israel Prize for Theater.

Dr. Chaim Chamiel (Camiel)



He was born in Ostrolenka in 1917, the son of the well-known Mizrachi activist, Reb Efraim Chmiel, and his wife, Bejla Rywka, of blessed memory. He studied in *heders* and yeshivas. In the Lomza Yeshiva, he was among the most excellent students. He began to write at the age of 12. In time, he became a teacher at the Yavneh School in Ostrolenka. He founded HaShomer HaDati and was chosen as a member of the organization's national committee in Poland.

In 1938, on the eve of World War II, before he left the city, he was a teacher at the Yavneh Hebrew School in the town of Motela (near Pinsk).

In 1939, after difficult wanderings, Chaim Chamiel reached Israel on the illegal immigration ship, Asimi. Members of HeChalutz HaMizrachi and Akiva (a general Zionist organization) were also aboard. Immediately upon arrival, he was hired as a teacher and educator in the Religious Youth Village (near Haifa).

Later, he settled in Jerusalem and studied at the Hebrew University. In 1945, he began to work in the Youth and Pioneering Department of the Jewish Agency. From 1950, he headed the Department of Jewish Religious Education in the Diaspora. Later, when the Department of Torah Education and Culture in the Diaspora was established, he became its head.

Chaim Chamiel studied Hebrew literature, and Bible and Psychology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He wrote a research work on the literature of the Enlightenment, for which he was awarded the Kloyzner Prize from the Tel Aviv Municipality and his M.A. degree. Later, he wrote a research work, *Poetry of the Middle Ages* (which appeared in literary publications), and received his Ph.D. in Hebrew Literature of the Middle Ages.

For some years, Dr. Chaim Chamiel was a lecturer in modern Hebrew literature and the poetry of the Middle Ages at Bar Ilan University. To date, he has published four books of poetry: *MeOfek LeOfek* [From Horizon to Horizon] (published by Moreshet), children's poems (published by Tzioni), *Nof Adam* (published by Emunim) and *Moked Ve'Niyar* (published by Rubin Mass, Jerusalem). In addition, he edited various collections on subjects of religious education and instruction, including the *Ma'ayanot* collections (eight volumes) and *Questions in Education and Teaching Judaic Subjects*. At the same time, he was a member of the administration of the World Hebrew Union and the ACUM organization of writers and artists.

Since the publication of the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka*, he has published more books of poetry and research.

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Chaim Drezner



Chaim Drezner, the son of Jakow and Dwora Drezner, was born in Malowany. He studied Torah in *heders* and yeshivas. He was among the founders of Tzerei Mizrachi in Malowany.

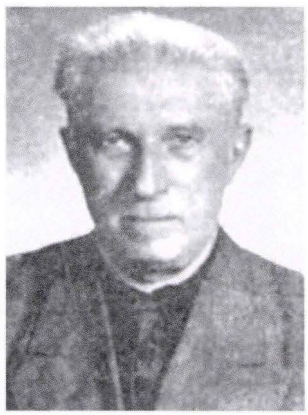
In 1924, he came to Ostrolenka as the son-in-law of Srolke Szron, and lived there until the outbreak of World War II, in 1939. He was among the city's good inhabitants and was active in all public institutions. A religious man and a Torah scholar blessed with the ability to convey information, he disseminated religious Zionist thought (Mizrachi) among the city's residents, and also visited towns and Jewish settlements all across Poland for that purpose.

Besides his rhetorical ability and expertise in public affairs, Chaim Drezner wrote articles and skits in the *Heintike Neies* (Daily News) newspaper, published in Warsaw. During the war (after all the Jews were commanded to leave the city by order of the Nazis), he went to Russia with his family, to a hard life as refugees. Only thanks to his ability to adjust to circumstances did he succeed in keeping his bearings during that stormy period.

With his return to Poland after the war, he continued his cultural-Zionist activities. Later, he went to Austria and met with Holocaust survivors in Displaced Persons camps. He encouraged them and tried to convince [them] that the only real way was to aspire to Zion. He also continued these activities when he reached Germany, where he was elected as a member of the HaPoel HaMizrachi executive committee, and published articles in the HaPoel HaMizrachi journal, *Die Yiddishe Schtimmer*, published in Munich.

At the end of 1949, he reached Israel and worked permanently at the *Kupat Cholim* [Health Fund) center.

Mark Rakowski



Mark Rakowski was born in Malkin. In 1899, he moved to Ostrolenka with his family. They lived at the Kaczyny railway station until the outbreak of World War I.

In the '20s, he lived in Białystok, supporting himself as a writer and translator. Later, he was also a publisher, publishing both original works and those he had translated.

His father, Reb Jakow Meir, of blessed memory, who was also known outside of Ostrolenka, was a learned man, with general knowledge. Among the "common" people, he felt like one of them. His father was the grandson of the famous Gaon, Rabbi Lejbele Plocker, and the nephew of the scholar and Hebrew writer, Awraham Abba Rakowski, who was a *heder* classmate of Nachum Sokolow and on the editorial staff of *HaTzfira*. (Among other things, Awraham Abba Rakowski wrote *Masechet Shtarot*, a sort of humoresque in the Talmudic manner and style, which made a great impression at the time.) His aunt, the well-known writer, Pua Rakowski, who passed away years ago in Israel, was the sister of Reb Jakow Meir.

At the end of 1956, Mark Rakowski returned from the U.S.S.R. and settled in Poland. He was a respected member of the Polish Writers Association and received a salary from the Polish government. As he was fluent in many languages, he continued his work as a writer and translator with great success.

Mark Rakowski expressed his desire to visit Israel, where his two sisters lived. They were born in Ostrolenka and had lived in Israel for many years.

Recently, his seventieth birthday was celebrated in Warsaw, with the participation of his friends, admirers and guests from all over the world.

Helen Kajman



Helen Kajman was born in Szczuczyna, Poland on 7 November 1915, into a traditional home. She studied at the Goldstadt Gymnasium in Lomza and then at the Polish Teachers Seminary. She worked at the bank of the Joint in Szczuczyna.

In 1933, she married Mosze Aron Sojka and, until 1939, she lived with her husband and their two children in Ostrolenka. From 1939 to 1941, she was a teacher in a Polish government school.

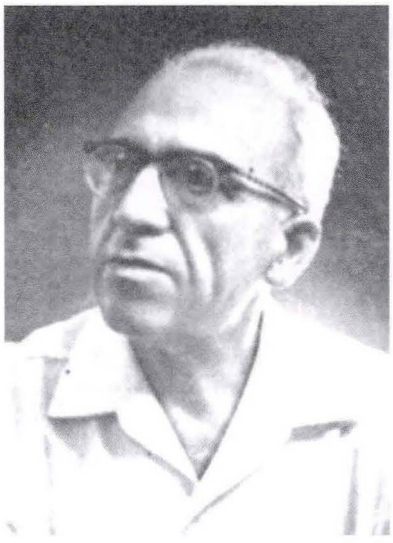
During the war, Helen was in the Szczuczyna and Bialystok Ghettos. She was held in the Bialystok prison and in the Stutthoff, Ravensbrück, Auschwitz and Neustadt concentration camps. All of her family was murdered in the Holocaust. Since 1946, she has lived in America, married – for the second time – to Szymon Kajman, a native of Szczuczyna.

For eight years, she worked in the offices of the Poalei Zion party in America. Now, she serves as secretary of the Histadrut fundraising campaign in America, and is active in the social and cultural life of New York Jewry. Helen Kajman visited Israel and, as an enthusiastic Zionist, expressed her desire to emigrate to the Jewish state. She is endowed with literary talent, as was demonstrated in her story, *The Last Smile of the Children of Ostrolenka*, printed in this book. The outstanding writer, Yakov Fichman, often expressed his favorable opinion of her literary abilities.

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Yitzhak Ivri



Yitzhak Ivri was born in Ostrolenka. He was the son of a well-known Chassid, a God-fearing man, Reb Naftali Cwi Iwri, and his wife, Rachel Lea, may God avenge their blood. He studied in *heders* and yeshivas with famous great Torah scholars, and was on his way to scholarship and the rabbinate. He acquired broad schooling through external education, and found his place in the world of general culture. In particular, he felt an affinity to poetry and theater.

Yitzhak Ivri wrote poems and plays and founded dramatic circles. He himself appeared on the stage in leading and character roles. He published books of poetry. In 1932, he emigrated to Israel from Lomza (the city he lived in since World War I). Here, his book of war poems, *Between Blood and Blood*, translated from Yiddish, was published by the Yavneh Press. Other poems he wrote were published in newspapers and periodicals in Israel and abroad – *Davar*, *Omer*, *Divrei HaShavuah*, *Letzter Nies*, *Moment*, *Heimish*, *HaPoel HaTzair* and others. Since his emigration to Israel, he worked at the daily newspaper, *Davar*, the Histadrut journal. His poems were also set to music, and were often broadcast on *Kol Yisrael* and sung on overseas television programs by popular singers.

His well-known poem, *Song of Resistance*, was set to music and included among the songs in the Passover Haggadahs [the book containing the order of the Seder] of many kibbutzim, and sung there on Seder nights. The music for his poems was written by the composers Chaim Fershko (for solo songs), Yoachim Stutchevsky (for choirs) and others. Yitzhak Ivri is a member of the ACUM and Milo artists' organizations.



Ostrolenkans in Israel

The First Pioneers

Before I mention the names of the first pioneers in Israel who came from Ostrolenka, those who overcame all obstacles and difficulties, helped build new Jewish lives and contributed their share to the establishment of the Jewish state – I would like to briefly mention the first "nest" that produced young Zionism in Ostrolenka. These Zionists paved the way for the emigration of our townspeople and waved the young flag of the Zionist-pioneer ideal with boundless pride.

In 1913, a sort of Zionist society, called HaKica, was established in Ostrolenka. In it were ten to fifteen young men, possessed of a strong love for Zionism and a yearning for the Land of Israel. Among the members were Awiezer Kupferminc (in Israel today, in Kfar Yechezkel, called Drori), his brother, Awigdor Kupferminc (who fell in Israel in the War of Independence), Motel Segal and others. Our task was to go to weddings in the city and collect money for Keren HaKayemet, to disseminate the Zionist shekel, as well as the pamphlets of the Groshen-Bibliotek [the "Penny Library"] (pamphlets containing short articles and stories by Zionist writers, which served as propaganda material for the Zionist idea).

Of course, most of the respectable Jewish *balabatim* in the city were against us, especially because, in those years, Zionism was considered flawed in its essence. Therefore, they often interfered with our activities. It should be mentioned that Mendel Brin, a well-known inhabitant, respected in Ostrolenka, prevented us from collecting money at his daughter's wedding. These phenomena occurred often, when we came to collect money for Zionist causes.

In 1914, I left Ostrolenka and arrived in America. For the first four years, I worked there in a department store and served in the Jewish Legion. In 1919, I emigrated to Israel and participated in the defense of Tel Hai. Then, I lived in Kibbutz Machanayim for half a year, and for eight years in Kibbutz Merchavia.

Now, for over thirty years, I have lived in Be'er Tuvia, always engaged in agriculture.

Among the pioneers who came to Israel were the Kupferminc brothers, mentioned above, Motel Cuker, David Lew, Meir Margalit, the plasterer Awraham Aron Takson and his son, and others.

Among the first pioneers were other young men, among them dedicated Zionist activists, who returned to Ostrolenka because they were unable to endure the difficult conditions prevailing in Israel in those days.

Motel Tzuker, Be'er Tuvia



Awraham Aron Takson (builder) with a group of workers near a building in Israel in the days of the pioneers (standing in the bottom row, fourth from the right, dressed in an apron)

About a Pioneer Family from Czerwin

In the town of Czerwin, Ostrolenka district, the Berel Frydman family was well-known and famous as expert tailors. The head of the family, Berel Frydman, earned a reputation as a superb tailor thanks to the uniforms he sewed for firefighters, uniforms that they wore with pride. Therefore, it is not surprising that his name was commended by the priesthood, the *pritzim* and members of the government, who all inundated him with work. Thanks to his connections with the *pritzim*, Berel the Tailor succeeded in establishing a nucleus of forty pioneers, who received agricultural training from Polish estate owners, in preparation for their emigration to Israel. Among the pioneers who prepared themselves for emigration were Berel's sons, Menachem Mendel, Awraham Zelig and Michael. After a period of training at the agricultural farm, Menachem Mendel emigrated to Israel in 1921 and became a member of the Tel Yosef farm. Of course, the lines between Israel and those remaining in Czerwin were not severed. Immediately after Menachem Mendel's emigration, his brothers, Awraham Zelig and Michael, and his sister, Chana, emigrated. All of them came to the Tel Yosef farm. Next, they began to plan the emigration of the rest of the family members, with the parents. This happened in the beginning of the '30s. The Mandatory government began to reduce the certificate quota, especially for large families. The brothers, members of the Tel Yosef farm, submitted countless requests to the High Commissioner for permission for emigration of the entire family, but he rejected all their requests, claiming that the family was too big, and that he feared it would be a "burden on the public". After the intervention of Chaim Arlozorov with the High Commissioner (mentioned in Arlozorov's writings – Jerusalem Diary, page 228) and the commitment of the Tel Yosef farm to give them places there, the longed-for permit was given for the family: the father, mother and five children. In 1932, the family packed its belongings and emigrated to Israel, to the Tel Yosef farm. The town's Jews could not understand what was happening: an entire family "suddenly" got up and emigrated to the Land of Israel!... (In those times, it was customary to go to America, Canada or Uruguay.) Many among them mocked and laughed at this act, because they knew very little about Israel. They had only heard that the land was desolate and that life there was very hard. In their hearts, they believed that the family would return to Czerwin . . .

When Berel Frydman's decision to leave Czerwin became known to the *pritzim* and the priests, they all came and tried to convince and dissuade him from his desire to emigrate to Israel. They promised him the earth, if only he would not leave Czerwin. But they did not succeed in moving Berel from his strong will to go to Israel, to his children. The *pritzim* drew lots among themselves as to who would have the honor of transporting the family, with its possessions, to the railway station. And on Chanukah 1932, when the whole country was covered with snow, the magnificent sleighs of the *pritzim* appeared, harnessed to noble steeds, and brought the family to the station, many kilometers distant from Czerwin. After traveling fourth-class in an Italian ship *via* Trieste, the family arrived at the Tel Yosef farm. When the family came to Israel, it began to work on the government regarding the emigration of the eldest daughter, Fejga, with her family. Numerous obstacles, however, were placed in their way, such as the reduction of emigration, the limitation of certificates to certain ages, etc., so that the sister, Fejga, and her family did not succeed in coming to Israel.

In 1939, on the eve of the outbreak of World War II, Kalman, one of the brothers, traveled from Israel to Czerwin and met with the Jews there. He told them about the lives of the Jews in Israel, about kibbutz life, and tried to persuade them to emigrate to Israel and follow the footsteps of his family, the first and only family to take this step. But to his sorrow, it was already too late; the war broke out – and after it, the great Holocaust. His sister, Fejga, and her family sank in the depths of the Holocaust, together with the millions who were exterminated during those terrible days.

Today, the extensive Frydman family numbers nine brothers and sisters, children and grandchildren – all working and involved in Israeli life.

The mother, Rachel Leah, passed away a few years ago. While she was still alive, she received a prize from Prime Minister D. Ben Gurion – the Big Family Prize.

Yitzhak Gilboa (Frydman)*

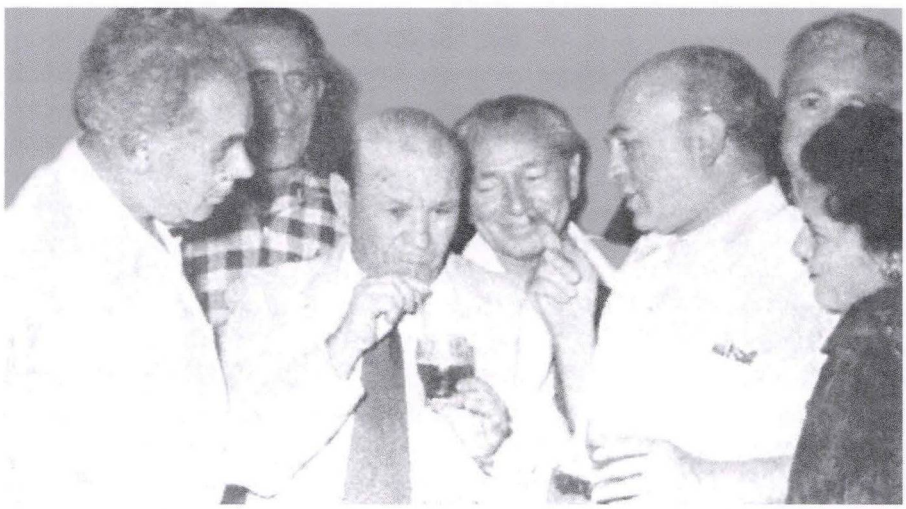
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* Yitzhak Gilboa (Frydman) is a member of the above-mentioned Frydman family. He was, as noted, a member of the Tel Yosef farm, joined the Palmach, was wounded in battle and lost an eye. Today, he lives in Tel Aviv and works in the Ministry of Defense.

Meir Margalit – An Actor in Israel



In his brilliant roles in the Ohel Theater



At a party in Jerusalem after the performance of *The Good Soldier Svejk*. From the right: Gershon Agron, of blessed memory (former Mayor of Jerusalem). In the center: Meir Margalit. Behind him: M. Ish Shalom (currently Mayor of Jerusalem).



Ceremony conferring the Ramhal Prize for his theatrical acting on Meir Margalit, by Tel Aviv Deputy Mayor, Mr. Shoshani. From the right: Mr. Shoshani, Meir Margalit (seated, the actors Moshe HaLevi, David Vardi)

With the President of the State of Israel



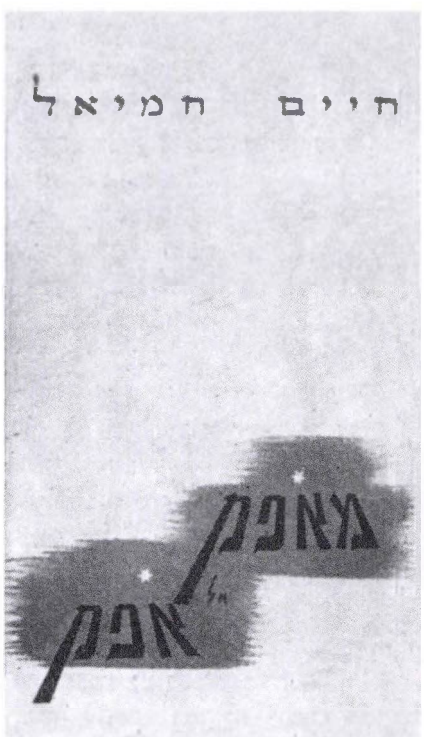
Meir Margalit meets the President's wife



Dr. Chaim Chamiel (far right) – in the President's home



Dr. Chaim Chamiel, poet, religious teacher and educator, speaking at the commencement party of a summer seminar for rabbis and teachers (to his right: Israel's Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Herzog, of blessed memory)



MeOfek LeOfek **(From Horizon to Horizon): one of Chaim Chamiel's books of poetry that was published – *Eins fun Chaim Chamiels Dershinene Lieder-beicher***

The Organization

The activity of the Organization of the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel began when Israel was under the rule of the British Mandatory government, and emigration was still restricted.

The situation of the Yeshuv [the Zionist community in Palestine] was bad then, because of the prevailing lack of work. Despite this, those from Ostrolenka tried to meet. A committee was established to arrange "official" gatherings from time to time. Later, they even set up a charitable fund for the needy, with the help of the Society of Ostrolenkans in the United States. Loans in small and larger amounts were given to those who were already in Israel for quite a while, and still had not made out well enough. In addition, support was extended to immigrants who had recently arrived. Of course, it was difficult to provide for everyone's needs from the money in the small fund, which had come, as said, from members of the Society, from overseas support organizations and from modest contributions of Ostrolenkans in Israel. Despite this, many were assisted with diverse needs, such purchasing an apartment, marrying off a son or daughter, setting up a small business, helping the seriously ill, etc.

After the establishment of the State, the situation changed completely. The new immigrants were already more or less taken care of, and the organization's activity decreased, until it stopped completely. Gatherings were held infrequently, except for annual commemorations and, sometimes, parties in honor of a guest from abroad.

Assistance from the United States and other organizations abroad also stopped completely, although giving loans to our townspeople did not stop. *Keren Moshe* [the Moshe Fund] was established, named after Mosze Margalit, formerly head of the Ostrolenkan community, who had passed away. The sources of the fund's monies were donations from Ostrolenkans overseas and in Israel, as well as sums donated by family members of the deceased.

The loan fund operates to this day, although not to the extent necessary. This is primarily because of the weakening of the warm and friendly connection with our townspeople abroad.

The Memorial Book

Since the publication of the memorial book ceased to be a dream and entered the phase of realization, the situation has changed drastically. Ostrolenkans, both in Israel and abroad, awoke and joined the mission of establishing an eternal monument, in the form of a book, to our city and its martyrs. Hearts drew nearer. All suddenly felt like an orphaned and united family that had decided that the time had come to erect a monument to its dear ones, slaughtered by Hitler's minions. Our townspeople across the sea were in America, Australia, Argentina, Uruguay and other places. In the main, our people in Australia joined the mission. They set up a fundraising drive for the book, with our dedicated townsman, Yitzhak Kachan, as Chairman, Lubka Lewy as Secretary, the brothers Chanoch, Hershel and Lazer Gold (Gingold), Leah Sojka as Treasurer and many others. Our townspeople from Argentina, Uruguay and other places responded with enthusiasm. To our regret, most of our townspeople were passive. In any event, the connection between us and our townspeople has become stronger since then.

With the decision to publish the book, an extremely small implementation committee was established for that purpose. First, an appeal was published and widely disseminated. Material was collected for the book everywhere. Contributions from abroad were received from book committees established for that purpose, as well as from private individuals, in addition to contributors from Israel. But all this was still not enough to cover the expenses of publishing the book in the planned format. The collection of material over the years worldwide, from the most remote places, as well as documents, pictures, etc., in addition to printing expenditures – reached a cost higher than expected.

Therefore, it was decided to look for additional sources of income. For this purpose, evenings and parties were arranged for local guests and those from abroad. At every opportunity, we explained the gravity of the situation to everyone. In the final years, we held Purim fetes, which brought in a certain amount of income. At the last fete, the Megilla [scroll] of Ostrolenka was read, describing the life and tragic end of our community: "Now it came to pass in the days of that Ostrolenka . . ."

We believe that the book will draw near even more of the hearts of our townspeople scattered all over the world, and bring a small measure of comfort for the terrible suffering caused by the Jewish destruction in our time.

A. Landsman



Members of the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel Committee in 1949



Seated, from the right: Josef Wonszak, Awraham Finkelsztejn, Meir Margalit, Yitzhak Ivri, Dr. Chaim Chamiel (Camiel), Shalom Margalit, Zyskind Lachowicz, Yehuda Chamiel (Camiel). Standing, from the right: Reuven Levy (Lewin), Hone Eisenstein, Eliezer Ma Tovu, Chaim Drezner, Tzvi Rezyka, Shoshana Perelman-Blachowicz, Shlomo Kaczor, Rachel Weis-Chamiel (Camiel), Yehuda Yitzhaki (Chomont), Yafa Brojtman-Calka, Aron Szperling, Shaina Lachowicz, Aronowicz, Shlomo Zusman

The Elder of the Ostrolenkans in Jerusalem, Rabbi Awraham Szlomo Brum, May He Live Many Long Good Days

He was born in Ostrolenka in 1880, the son of Reb Israel Icchak Brum (the blacksmith), of blessed memory. He was a Gur Chassid, vigorous, saintly and very learned. In Ostrolenka, he always engaged in scholarship. (Awrejmel the Melamed lived near the river, opposite the *shtebl* of the Gur Chassidim.) In addition, he had a grocery store near the bridge, looked after by his wife, may she rest in peace. Later, he lived for thirty years with his brother in America. His son, Rabbi Jakow Mosze Brum, was a ritual slaughterer in Brooklyn. His son-in-law, Rabbi Israel Sapir (the husband of his daughter, Fejga), was also a ritual slaughterer in the same city.

Rabbi Awraham Szlomo Brum wrote many essays on religious subjects, the six sections of the Mishna, the Zohar and books of the saints, as well as on his Chassidic origins, which are still awaiting publication.

His essay, *Happy is He Who Waits*, a small book, full of Torah, Chassidism and allusions, devoted to the Land of Israel, was published in New York in 1952. Because of his modesty and humility, the author's name is not mentioned outright very much, but is only hinted at. Two letters of *ashrei* [happy] – *a* and *s* – hint at the name Awraham Szlomo.

In 1953, he came to Israel and settled in the holy city of Jerusalem, on Yosef Ben-Matityahu Street, near the Yeshiva of the Gur Chassidim. The head of the Yeshiva, the Saintly Rabbi Aron Israel – may he live many good, long days – visited Rabbi Awraham Brum frequently.

Rabbi Awraham Brum was blessed with a love of the Jewish people, as well as a love of the Land of Israel, which came from the depths of his Chassidic soul. In his book, *Happy is He Who Waits*, he describes extensively the attitude required of every observant Jew toward the Land of Israel as a Jewish kingdom. In the introduction to his book, he says:

> As to the matter of opposition to the subject of the Land of Israel because of the liberality of the kingdom's people – we will not take it upon ourselves to speak, Heaven forbid, about God-fearing people, saintly and of good repute, may there be more like them in Israel. Surely these people in the Land of Israel are obliged to protest – whoever has the opportunity to protest. Thus, we note that at the start of the construction of the Second Temple in *Nechemia Ben Hacaliah*, he protests to the best of his ability about the extent of the desecration of the Sabbath prevalent then in Jerusalem, and also cursed them with curses and beatings, as we find at the end of *Nechemia*. But Heaven forbid preventing any Jew from coming to the Land of Israel (the spacing is that of the writer of these columns). For they, Ezra and Nechemia, wrote letters and asked all those in the Diaspora to come and help build the city and the Temple.

And further on,

> Who can deny that there must be an early ingathering of the exiles? Because of the liberality of most of the people in the kingdom, Heaven forbid that there will not be an ingathering of the exiles at the beginning. The great Last Saints, each as one, replied and said that even if, Heaven forbid, they will not repent, the redemption will surely come.

He wrote about the Hebrew language,

> Now let us see about the Hebrew language. In the Gemara Tractate Shekalim, there is a sage by the name of Rabbi Meir: Everyone who lives in the Land of Israel and speaks the Holy Tongue and eats its pure fruits and prays *Hear, O Israel* morning and night, will be told that he will be in the World to Come. And they explained there, that speaking the Holy Tongue leads to purification of the soul, for this Tongue has an inner holiness, "inner", that is, unfelt, but it is holy". (page 21)

And as to the conquest of the land,

> And you must understand what is before you

today – that the entire young generation there, young men, as well as young women, having no connection to those who have ancestral merits, sacrifice their lives willingly for the conquest of the land. For so it is. And it is the spirit of Heaven that gives them the strength and courage to fight this war of the start of the redemption. (page 9)

He believes with complete faith that the bloody period of Hitler, of suffering and torture, are the Days of the Messiah, and the destruction of millions of Jews [must be understood] in terms of "and it will be at the End of Days".

And if, Heaven forbid!, this was for naught – the killings and the slaughters in all kinds of strange deaths, they and their wives, their sons and daughters and infants and all that they have – the like of which has never been since the creation of the world – how awful would that be! – surely it is the footsteps of the Messiah. (page 5)

He ends with the bloody wars with our enemies who surround us, and brings quotations from Gur and Alexander explanations.

The kingdom of our holy land began in the hand of Israel. If only it will be His will that we merit again that He return with mercy, without killings and wars, Heaven forbid, to Jerusalem, our ancient city, the place of the Temple, and then "speedily renew the Kingdom of David, Your servant", and may Blessed God bring the horn of salvation. And it seems that for this sake, all of Israel living in our holy land, old and young, young men and young women, actually went to war with devotion – they will merit all good.

The Alexander Rebbe said: It is written, "When you go out to war". And why is it not written "When you go to war", but "go out"? Because in order to win a war, you must actually go out of the world, from all the world, and as is written in *Chanoch*, the commandment is not to fear enemies at the time of war. But it is our duty to defeat them, and stand up to them, as it is written "Do not fear and do not be pressed". The basis of the commandment is that every Jew must place his trust in Blessed God and not fear for his body when he can give honor to Blessed God and His nation. This commandment indicates that, at a time of war, a man should not think of his wife, nor his children, nor his money, but free his heart of everything for war, and think that all Israel's existence is dependent on him, and it is as if he spills the blood of all if he fears, and this will turn back our days. Lest his brethren's heart melt as his heart, and so said our Sages: Cursed be he who keepeth back the sword from blood of he who fights with all his heart. And their intention is that he who sanctifies God is promised that he will not be found lacking and will merit life in the World to Come – from all this we understand the words of the Alexander Rebbe, of blessed memory, that one must leave the whole world for war in order to merit sanctifying God.

And in the merit of fulfilling this commandment of conquering the land in completeness, with actual self-sacrifice, we will merit the coming of the redeemer speedily, without any exceptions. God will help and fulfill even more, "for He doth avenge the blood of His servants, and doth render vengeance on His adversaries, and doth make expiation for the land of His people". (End: pages 34-40)

*

In Ostrolenka, he was my last Rebbe at the *heder*, and prepared me for higher studies in the yeshiva established by Lazer Minc and Eli Keller in the east of the city, in the courtyard of Tuwja Wylozny. His memory is still lucid and clear, although he has reached a distinguished old age, may he live for many more days and years. He can relate details of matters of Chassidic life in the community, in particular, and of municipal events, in general. When he begins talking, he becomes an inexhaustible spring. He tells in complete detail about the dispute that broke out in the *shtebl* of the Gur Chassidim because of the new ritual slaughterer, whom the community refused to accept; about the division in the *shtebl* and the insistence of the Rabbi of the city himself, Rabbi Bursztejn, of blessed memory, who refused to accept the opinion of the Rebbe of Gur, himself, in favor of the new ritual slaughterer. He himself carried the letter of the Rebbe of Gur to the Rabbi of Ostrolenka, in which he asks him to yield. The Rabbi refused to accept the letter and was very angry, but immediately thereafter, the Rabbi called him and asked forgiveness for his behavior.

The matter was brought to a rabbinical court of three rabbis: Rabbi Szackes from Lomza, Rabbi Mojsoki and the Rabbi of Zambrow, as head of the

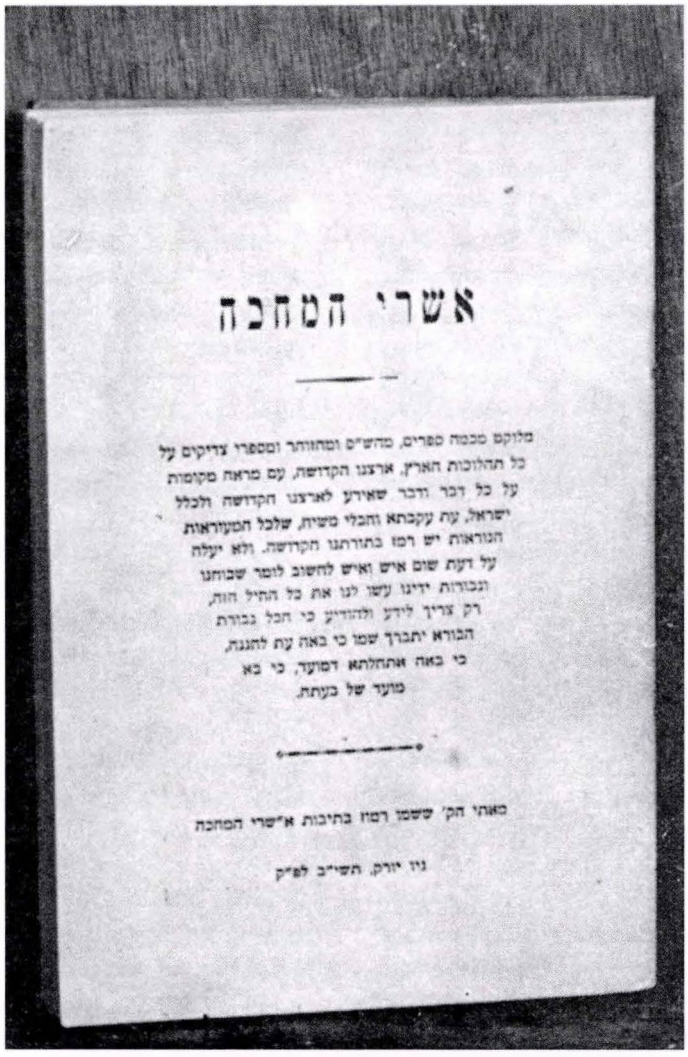
court. The advocates were Chaim Pinczas Gingold and Israel Chmiel. Here, too, there was a judgment in favor of the new ritual slaughterer (Mosze Chaim Cywiak).

He also told of many other incidents – a living spring of memories opened in him, from which much could have been drawn, if not for constraints of time and place.

Reb Awraham, now 83 – may he live to 120 – still demonstrates a large measure of vitality and curiosity.

We, his townspeople here in Israel and his students, bear his name with pride and honor. He awakens in us memories of our childhood years and of the *heder* in Ostrolenka. We wish him health, fruitful creation and long life.

A. Yitzhak, Tel Aviv



אשרי המחכה

מלוקט מכמה ספרים, מהש"ס ומחוותר ומספרי צדיקים על
כל תהלוכות הארץ, ארצנו הקדושה, עם מראה מקומות
על כל דבר ודבר שאירע לארצנו הקדושה ולכלל
ישראל, עת עקבתא ומבלי משיות, שלכל המעוראות
הנוראות יש רמז בתורתנו הקדושה, ולא יעלה
על דעת שום איש ואיש לחשוב לומר שבזמנו
הנכבדות ידינו עשו לנו את כל החיל הזה,
רק צריך לידע ולהזדיק כי הכל בגבורת
הבורא יתברך שמו כי באה עת לחננה,
כי באה אתחלתא דפורקן, כי בא
מועד של בעתה.

מאתי חק' ששמו רמז בתיבות א"שרי המחכה

ניו יורק, תשי"ב לפ"ק

Happy is He Who Waits

Zalman Drezner, Kfar Saba
Shalom Chamiel, Kibbutz HaMaapil

Ostrolenkans in the U.S.S.R. at the Time of World War II

This chapter was not included in the original publication of the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* in 1963. All our townspeople, after their expulsion from Ostrolenka in 1939, lived in Soviet territories and, therefore, all the Holocaust survivors came from those same places. Thus, we found it important to include a chapter about their lives in the F.S.U. in this edition of the book.

The Organization of the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel

Until September 1939, approximately 5,000 Jews lived in our city Ostrolenka, comprising about a third of the entire population. As is known, World War II broke out with the aggressive invasion of the German Nazi army into Poland's territory on 1 September 1939. After sixteen days, on the 17th of September, the army of the U.S.S.R. also invaded Poland and occupied its entire eastern portion, up to the River Bug, in accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Our city, Ostrolenka, remained in the occupied German area, as the border with the Soviets was established just four kilometers east of it, near Wojciechowice. When a German expulsion order was issued for the Jewish population from Ostrolenka, on 4 October 1939, the great majority turned east to Lomza, Bialystok and other small settlements in the area which were under Soviet occupation. Only a few families stayed on the German side, in Warsaw and other cities.

Right at the outset, it should be noted the behavior of the Soviet government toward the Jewish refugees from the occupied German area, several hundred thousand souls who fled of their own free will, was positive. The very fact that the U.S.S.R. agreed, on the one hand, to absorb the Jews and, on the other hand, the latter's negative and shocking experiences with the Germans, influenced the refugees' positive attitude toward the Soviets. Therefore, at the end of 1939, there was a positive response of the refugees to the government's request of professionals to volunteer to work in the U.S.S.R. On the one hand, it is estimated that a few dozen Ostrolenkans were sent east in this framework. On the other hand, a few dozen Ostrolenkans, mostly Zionist activists and others, crossed the border into Lithuania, Vilna and Romania. To the best of our knowledge, no Ostrolenkan tried to return to the German side, and also none enlisted in the campaign of fraud and deception that the Soviets carried on for the return of the refugees to the German side. Later on, it was discovered that all those who signed up were exiled by the N.K.B.D. to Siberia. Meanwhile, thousands of Ostrolenkans who stayed in place, tried to become acclimatized and adjust themselves to the new Soviet reality.

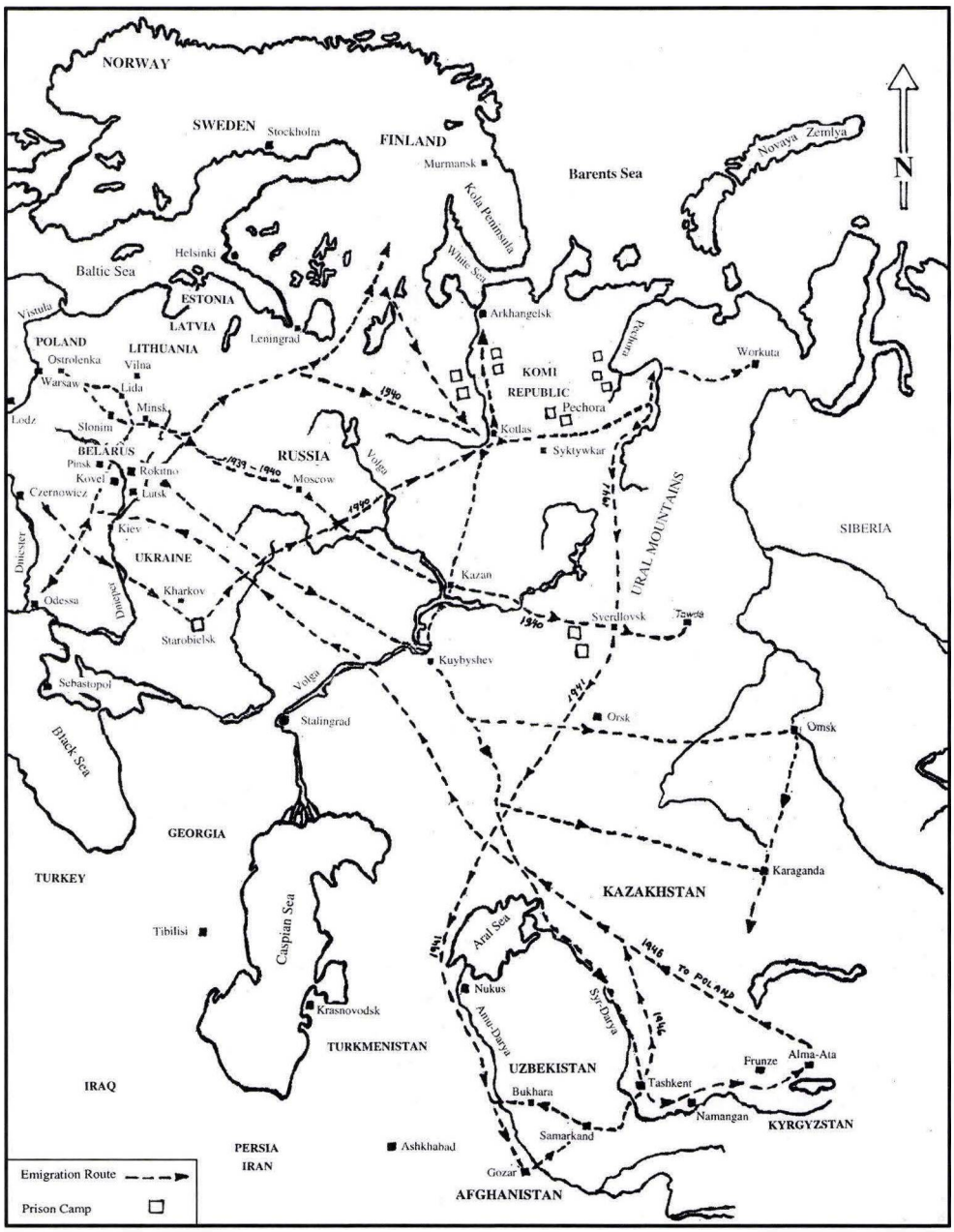
In April 1940, a sudden, marked change began in the situation of the Jewish and Christian refugees, as the Soviet regime presented them with the alternative of accepting Soviet citizenship or – ?! . . . The great majority of Ostrolenkans registered and received a Soviet passport, but they were required to move and live at a distance of at least 100 kilometers from the new German border. Thus it happened that the city of Slonim became a new settlement center for our townspeople, as it absorbed about 70% of them. Others settled in different cities and towns in Belarus, as follows: Lomza, Bialystok, Wolkowysk, Brisk on the Bug, Zelva, Dereczyn, Molczat, Stolin and others. A few dozen were in the city of Vilna.

All those who did not register to receive Soviet citizenship were arrested by the N.K.B.D. and exiled to Siberia or remote northern areas of Russia in freight trains. A similar fate was also shared by all our townspeople caught crossing the border illegally,

or engaging in trade and smuggling. Zionist activists, Bundists and the owners of a great deal of property were also considered enemies of the regime, and were in continual danger. It should be understood and emphasized that the Soviet regime was of a totalitarian and ideological nature, and stood unequivocally for its principles: any one who is not with me – is against me and is my enemy, and must be expelled in any way possible . . . It is also important to add that the attitude toward different nationalities was the same.

According to estimates, some dozens of Ostrolenkans, families or individuals, were arrested and exiled for the above reasons.

We will present some descriptions and personal experiences below.



Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union

Emigration Routes 1939-1946
Of Ostrolenka's Jews

A map of the U.S.S.R. showing work camps and routes of wandering

A Personal Story

My parents, Chaim and Sara (*née* Szron), Zalman, my younger sister, Fejgale, and I were exiled on 4 October 1939 from Ostrolenka. After short stays in Lomza and Bialystok, we settled in the city of Lida, south of Vilna. As said above, in the spring of 1940, we were given the alternative, as refugees, of receiving Soviet citizenship – or not! After delays and repeated hesitations, we realized that the offer of citizenship had lapsed and we were "stuck in the air", as former Polish citizens. It should be mentioned that the determining factor was the fact that our father, Chaim, served as a Polish soldier in the Polish-Bolshevik War in 1919, and was captured by the Soviets. His memories of his experiences there, in the very difficult post-Revolutionary reality, were of hunger, poverty, disorder and contempt for human life. These imbued him with disgust and fear, from which he could not free himself even after twenty years. All the other members of the (Szron) family received Soviet citizenship, left Lomza and settled in the city of Slonim, together with many other Ostrolenkans.

In May 1940, we were terrified by the sudden nighttime visit of an N.K.B.D. gang, the purpose of which was to exile us to a distant and remote Soviet area. It is interesting to note that among the security people was a Jewish officer, who, when he saw that we were frightened, tried to calm us in Yiddish. He claimed that we were to be moved to another place where we could work and support ourselves honorably. Moszke (Moniak) Szron, my mother's brother, who was visiting us as a guest from Slonim, slept at our home that night. Because he had a Soviet passport, he expressed his desire to join us, but the security people did not agree. We were taken to the railway station in Lida, where we were crammed into freight cars, together with Jews and Christian Poles, and traveled a long way, in a direction and to a place unknown.

Escorted by security people, we traveled for weeks, stopping and passing endless stations and villages. The soldiers treated us reasonably well, but conditions in the cars were difficult. We received a little food and boiled warm water (*kipjatok*) at the stations. Thus we arrived at the city of Kotlas, where we were transferred to small ships. We sailed along the northern River Dvina, in the direction of the northern port city, Arkhangelsk. We disembarked midway and were transferred to a work village (*poslok*), Gladzilo, where there were a number of two-story wooden houses. The family settled in a large hall, intended for eight families. Each family was assigned to bunk beds, 2 x 2 meters, which served it as an apartment and its private corner. In our hall, there was only one Polish Christian family (the Raclawski family from Suwalk). The rest were Jews. There was a small administration, headed by an N.K.B.D. officer. No one guarded us, but permission was required to leave the place. Where could one escape to already? In the endless virgin forests surrounding us, were animals (wolves and bears) and a very sparse population of Soviet exiles.

In Gladzilo, we were a few hundred former Polish citizens, all with families; the majority was Jewish. In a short time, our true situation became clear to us. Usually, we were treated reasonably well, and the village commander, the N.K.B.D. officer, was revealed to be relatively humane. All the men engaged in the only work available in the area. It was, primarily, chopping down the trees of the forest. It need not be said that the people were either not used to or completely unsuited to this work, especially during the long and freezing winter months, when the cold reached 50 degrees below zero. In addition, food was very sparse. No wonder people endured crises and no small suffering, although there was no pressure whatsoever to increase work productivity. The amount of payment in rubles had no great value; it was possible to purchase only very little food or other items of very poor quality. After a few months, we displayed many symptoms of exhaustion and disorders resulting from the lack of basic nutritional elements, such as night blindness due to lack of vitamin A. Our family was in relatively better condition, because we received bundles of food from two of my mother's cousins, from the Farber family in the Russian city of Tambov. (They were from Goworowo and, since the World War, they had remained in Russia. It is piquant to note that one of the family's granddaughters is married to the nephew of the wife of Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov; the couple now lives in Israel.) Of course, we also had in our possession a quantity of shoes, fabrics and haberdashery (my mother engaged in trade) that we managed, albeit with great difficulty, to exchange with the rurals in the area for potatoes or other food. Although, generally,

there was no agriculture in the area, most of the exiles had small auxiliary farms. I would like to add that there were no schools for our children. The women, especially mothers of small children, did not have to go to work. Together with other youths, as a youth of sixteen, I volunteered to work in disassembling unprocessed wooden rifle stocks.

To our great fortune – and paradoxically – the Nazi German aggression against the U.S.S.R. in 1941 saved us. As is known, the U.S.S.R. made an agreement with the West, with the exiled Polish government in London. At the end of the year, we were freed as Polish citizens, and received "*Azyl*" rights – to live and work in Russia without citizenship. After a short stay in the area of Moscow – battles with the Germans were already taking place near it – our family continued south, to Uzbekistan in Central Asia, where we settled in the town of Drzuma, near Samarkand.

It is difficult to describe the situation prevailing then in that region, in Uzbekistan and in the Asian south of the U.S.S.R. in general. To this undeveloped and primarily agricultural region came hundreds of thousands or millions of refugees, who fled from the western regions of the U.S.S.R. because of the war and, among them, many Jews. Tens of thousands of refugees, Jews and others released from labor camps or prisons, came as well. The situation was extremely difficult. There was disorder, disease, hunger and lack of housing. Every morning, homeless people could be seen lying dead along the streets, due to exhaustion or infectious diseases such as dysentery and typhus. Despite this difficult situation, life somehow continued. My mother (Sara, of blessed memory) was the family's main provider. Together with my younger sister, Fejgale, she traded in the market in special clothing (brought from afar by Soviet war invalids), selling them to Uzbek rural women. We made quite a bit of money, for which it was possible to buy abundant food and other products in the free market for high prices. My father, Chaim, a religious and conscientious man, volunteered for work, digging the plumbing and sewage system (he maintained that during the war against the Nazi enemy, everyone had to contribute to the war effort) in various public institutions. I began to study in the Russian upper school. I completed the first year at the medical faculty in the city of Samarkand.

In 1946, as Polish citizens, we were returned to Poland. We did not dare visit Ostrolenka then, because rumors reached us of the murders of two of our townspeople who had returned – Pesach Hochberg and Berel Zabludowicz. In 1949, my parents and sister went to Israel. In 1952, I joined them, after completing my medical studies in Frankfurt, Germany. I am married, the father of three children and the grandfather of three granddaughters.

*

I would like to add that at the time of our (the Drezner family's) stay in Uzbekistan, we met some Ostrolenkans. My parents visited the Kalina family, Josef and Rachel, which lived in Samarkand (see the description by their daughter, Chana, below). My mother, Sara, located Eli Bajuk, a well-known and major figure in Ostrolenka, in Samarkand. At the railway station there, he ran a big public restaurant, which provided meals for large numbers of refugees of all kinds. (According to one source, he attended to matters of sanitation there.) The meeting was very emotional, because the Bajuk family lived in the house of our grandfather, Srolke Szron, in Ostrolenka, on 11th November Street, number 4, and in addition, they were almost the same age. All the Bajuk family, after the expulsion from Ostrolenka, lived in the city of Brest-Litovsk; the father of the family, Jakow, came from there. It appears that Eli, at the outbreak of the war, was at an advanced study course in Minsk or some other city. As is known, Brest-Litovsk is on the River Bug, right on the border with Germany. Therefore, none of the Bajuks succeeded in escaping. They were all murdered in the Holocaust. Of the family, only one, Welwel, survived. Before the war, he immigrated to New Zealand with his family.

May their memory be eternally blessed, and may God avenge their blood!

When we were in Drzuma, we received the sad news-rumors that a townsman, Jakow Sztejnberg (head of the "nest" of HaShomer HaTzair in Ostrolenka) had fallen ill with dysentery or typhus and had died in the street, or on a train, in our area. Shalom Chamiel also writes about him below.

May his memory be eternally blessed!

I would like to relate more about our townsman, Jechiel (Chilke) Szafran. As is known, he was one of the important Zionist activists in Ostrolenka. He belonged to Poalei Zion and even emigrated to Israel, from where he was forced to return to Poland. We met him, too, in Samarkand and brought him to our home in Drzuma.

We all lived in one room in a house made of clay. Chilke, when he was still in Lomza, together with the Ostrolenkans Mosze Sarniewicz, Alter Cuker and others, engaged in illegal trade. They were sent to prison and transferred east. There were rumors that they had all passed away there.

In Drzuma, as a former prisoner, Chilke began to rehabilitate. He sold potable water in the local market and supported himself honorably. In 1943, he volunteered for the National Polish Army, Kościuszki, established under the sponsorship of the U.S.S.R. (the previous Polish Anders Army left U.S.S.R. territory). He participated in battles for Berlin and died a hero there in April 1945, near the German city of Ludnel. He was 42 when he died. May his memory be eternally blessed! (Recently, efforts have been made to commemorate his memory and establish a memorial plaque in Ostrolenka, where his family lived, opposite the Municipality, on Gomolicka Street. The Ostrolenkan authorities have promised to implement this soon.)

*

During the first years of the war, 1941-1945, no news about the Holocaust that was taking place in the German-occupied territories reached us in Uzbekistan. The first vague news about it began to reach us at the end of 1944. Only in 1946, when we returned to Poland, did the extent of the great tragedy become clear to us. We did not dare to think of visiting Ostrolenka then. Rumors reached us of the murders of Jews who returned to various places in Poland, and of the murders of two of our townspeople, Pesach Hochberg and Berel Zabludowicz, when they returned to Ostrolenka at the beginning of 1945. (For years after, we tried to inquire into this. We believe that it is possible to state almost positively that they were not murdered in the city of Ostrolenka, but, if at all, in one of the villages in the area.)

When discussing the lives of the Jews and Ostrolenkans in Uzbekistan (part of the U.S.S.R.), for the sake of history, I want to note that a pogrom took place in Drzuma against the Polish Jews in 1942. One day, the young conscripts to the Soviet army from among the Tatars and the local Russians, began to run wild in the streets and to strike any Jew they happened upon. It is interesting that they were brought up before a local court, which found them guilty, but did not decree any punishment for them, because they were about to be sent to the front. The background of these outbursts was the fact that the Jews, as Polish citizens, were not drafted into the Soviet army at the time, but could only volunteer for the Polish army; sometimes, some of them were conscripted to work in distant places.

Zalman Drezner, Kfar Saba, Israel



Zalman Drezner (standing, first on the right) in a commencement picture of the first year of medical studies at the Uzbek University. Samarkand, 1945.

A Personal Story

October 1939 – Occupied Poland. The HaShomer HaTzair movement deliberates how, under conditions of occupation, to advance in the direction of the Land of Israel. In the current situation of a Germany possessed by hatred for the Jews (we had not yet conceived of the danger of the Holocaust), and the U.S.S.R., which ruled Poland, possessed by hatred of the Zionist enterprise, we knew that the chances of emigration were very small. Therefore, many members decided to escape to Romania and get to Israel through it. I was the second member of HaShomer HaTzair who went that way.

It was known that if this route was successful, life and the possibility of emigration were in your hands, and that, if you were caught, the guardians of the Garden of Eden or Hell would spread a carpet at the entrance and await you . . .

I was caught lying on the wet ground, with my face pressed to the earth. A Soviet soldier had a loaded rifle in his hand, and a bayonet aimed at my head. At that moment, thoughts of the end of life come to mind and, then, feelings of parting from all those who care for your well-being. To my good fortune, this did not occur. At an order which I did not understand, I was stood up and led to the headquarters of the border guard and, from there, to a cell in a dark house of detention, crammed with frightened people, expecting to be executed the next day. Among them were Polish officers, disguised as civilians, caught during their flight to Romania, like me. There is no execution the next day, but endless interrogations. Everyone is accused of spying. Denials do not help. Cursing, shouting, screaming, threats to our families, spitting left and right – the charges and interrogation methods of the interrogator or interrogators keep changing, but, to their credit, let it be said that they do not subject us to physical pressure or torture. We are transferred to different detention houses, such as Kuti, Kołomyja and Stanislawow. The interrogations continue. The interrogators promise to free us when they end. Should we believe them or not? My own personal naiveté, and that of the [Zionist] movement, disposed me nevertheless to believe. But, instead of release, disappointment comes. We are transferred and loaded onto freight trains, and travel to an unfamiliar and unknown destination. Thoughts of escape begin to take over. But how and to where?



Shalom Chmiel at a work camp in Kazakhstan, 1942

Very slowly, the horizon comes closer and becomes clearer. We reach the point of the old border between Poland and the U.S.S.R. – Wlocziska and Podwoloczyska. The hope of release vanishes and I am in U.S.S.R. territory. At night, surrounded by Polish officers, I get up from the bunk bed, stand in the middle of the car and from my mouth bursts: "Our hope is not yet lost, the hope of two thousand years . . ." All those around me are stunned. "He has gone crazy," they think. Clearly, they do not understand or know the meaning or contents of the words . . . In my despair, this gave me hope and strength of soul.

At first light, local civilians gather around the cars and ask the guards, "Who are you transporting?" and the answer is "Counter-revolutionaries". The response is, "Why transport them? Why not shoot and kill them?" This is our warm reception. At the entrance to the U.S.S.R., as a warm addition to the daily menu doled out to us to keep us alive, is a box of sugar (in a matchbox) and hot soup.

The monotonous clatter of the train's wheels blur your sanity and your rest. After a few days, you find yourself at the "hidden destination" – prison in Odessa. With another thirteen prisoners, you are sent to a cell of 3 x 4 meters. Wooden shutters nearly cover the light that "penetrates" from the gloomy courtyard. You leave

the cell once a day, to the toilet. There is no yard duty, as is customary in prisons. The interrogations continue.

After nine months (birth . . .), an elegant senior officer appears in the cell, with news of "the redemption" – verdicts have somehow been handed down by the "the triplets" [three judges]. There is no trial, no defense, and it is doubtful whether the judge even heard the prosecutor. I am "acquitted" – to five years in a forced labor camp for character reform. The education process begins anew, although I am already 23 years old and do not know its reason or nature.

Again freight cars, and this time to the area of the northern sea, near the Soviet-Japanese border. The former group of prisoners is dismantled. It should be mentioned that, all this time, we were individual prisoners, without families. This fact had the most negative impact. I find myself among Russian and Polish prisoners also designated for "re-education". They are my partners in carpentry work and in housing in miserable wooden shacks, under cruel, freezing winter conditions. As is my habit, I treat the others with respect and see myself as an equal among equals in every situation. Maybe this is the reason that those who share my fate, the Poles and the Russians, give me dubious compliments, such as "You are not a Jew", despite the fact that in these conditions it was impossible to hide the "covenant" [circumcision] between me and Our Father Abraham . . .

Out of "great friendship", Nazi Germany opened an air attack on the U.S.S.R.'s Japanese border as well. Our camp was bombed and there were casualties. We were transferred to another camp near the North Pole, to a bloc of camps spread along the River Petchora. In the first camp, we had worked on constructing an aluminum factory. Here, the "educational pursuit" was expressed by digging the infrastructure for railroad tracks to the city of Varkuta; coal mines had been discovered nearby. Climactic conditions in the two camps were the same: freezing cold and total darkness on winter days, and the opposite during the short summer months. At both of them, conditions were hard – freezing cold, bad housing conditions, physical work, sparse food and diseases that took a toll of many victims among the prisoners. All this, however, did not particularly disturb those in charge. A wagon driver took care of taking the bodies out, and no one was interested in their place of "burial".

Because of Nazi Germany's aggression, in the summer of 1941, an agreement was signed between the U.S.S.R. and the Polish government exiled in London, including a pardon for imprisoned Polish citizens and the establishment of a Polish army ("Anders") in its territory. Three alternatives were given to the prisoners: to stay in place as citizens, to move to another place without the rights of citizens or to be drafted into Anders Army. Like many others, I chose to be drafted into the army. Our treatment changed beyond recognition. For two weeks, we were given meals in a convalescent home. We received clothes and new underwear, a grant of two hundred rubles and even the return of possessions, or a replacement for those taken away at the time of arrest. (I did not enjoy this privilege, because my receipt was used by my cellmates in Odessa for rolling cigarettes . . .)

The establishment of Polish army regiments began. Those of high rank and priests reported from all corners of the region. Their presence had not been felt during the stay in the camps. All the recruits were sworn in and led in the direction of the Chief Army Headquarters in Bozolok. Rumors flew. Some said that the army staff had temporarily stopped drafting Jews, and that we Jews were being taken again to dig a canal. Another movement member and I decided to get away from the train (from the *aszlon* [the transport of people in many railway cars]) and we did so, without knowing where we were. In the dark of night, we went in the direction of the lights shining in the distance. This was the city of Buchara, in Uzbekistan.

In Uzbekistan, we very quickly discovered friends who, sponsored by HaShomer HaTzair in Vilna, had succeeded in getting there when the war broke out. The joy and interest in us, and the assistance given us, were great. Nearby, in the town of Karshi, we discovered a commune of members.

The excitement was great, especially when I met a dear friend from school and from the same age level in Ostrolenka's HaShomer HaTzair movement there – Jakow Sztejnberg. We cooperated closely in the administration and work of the "nest" in our city. The two of us bore the yoke of educational work and the burden of maintaining the "nest", after the graduate level went to *hachshara* [a training program for settlement in Israel]. Jakow was a gifted fellow of great ability. Primarily, he related with great responsibility and dedication to any task he took upon himself, or that was imposed on him. Jakow was orphaned when he was young. He shared with his mother the burden of supporting the family and running their haberdashery store. Their home was always open to all members for

meetings, conversation or a game of chess. His mother was proud of him and expected great things of him. As will be recalled, the Sztejnberg family lived at the beginning of Lomza Street (now Kościuszki), near the municipality. There were also two daughters in the family.

After a time, Jakow went to Samarkand in Uzbekistan, to look for a possible way back to Poland, as a stage on the way to emigration to Israel. During this long trip, he fell ill (some say with typhus) and died on the train. All my efforts to find his place of burial then failed, and it remains unknown even now.

I regret his absence and, even though his life was focused on emigration and fulfillment on a kibbutz, his failure to reach Israel.

May his memory be blessed!

For an eternal memorial of the rest of his family, murdered in the Holocaust, in a town near Slonim!

*

My wanderings did not end. This time, I was conscripted into a labor camp in the framework of contributing to the war effort. In 1942, I was sent to the city of Omsk, in Siberia, to work on building a tank factory which was moved from Kharkov, in the Ukraine. In the same framework, I was transferred to North Kazakhstan, to a settlement called Kazakhstanian Samarkand, where an extensive steel factory was built. Here I met my beloved future wife, Chawa. Like me, she had been conscripted as a refugee from Lithuania, and worked as a builder, while I worked as an electrician. At the end of the war, we married and have been together for 57 years.

There, in Kazakhstan, conditions of life improved. Worries of obtaining a slice of bread ended, housing conditions were better, we began to enjoy the local cultural life and our social-public status even improved. The movement "discovered" us and sent us material assistance and encouragement for the future. Despite this, a new danger began to loom over our heads: the refusal to allow Polish citizens to return to Poland. Again, the fear of repeated imprisonment grew; the threat arose anew that the dream of my youth – to reach Israel – would not be fulfilled. Despite everything, I believed that the day would come when I could leave the U.S.S.R. and be welcomed in Israel – and it came to pass.

Thanks to the intervention of certain agents, especially the Polish Embassy in Moscow, my right to return to Poland was recognized. In April 1947, together with my wife, Chawa, I opened the door of my parents' house in Lodz. The meeting was very warm and emotional and accompanied by endless tears. The family welcomed its lost son, and the addition of a wife. From here, the way to Israel was paved without any problems. But this way took about nine years. What happened is not to be forgotten. One should not live feeling like a "victim". I take great pride in the fact that, despite everything, I succeeded in surviving and fulfilling the dream of my youth: the return to Zion and life in our homeland. As if the circle of my life had closed, and I have achieved my real identity!

*

After the expulsion from Ostrolenka, my parents, Pesach and Ester, my younger brother, Mosze, and my older brother, Israel Symcha, with his wife, Gitel (née Zysman), all lived in Bialystok, near my sister, Sara, her husband Icchak Kozlowicz and their two children, who were permanent residents there. When, in the summer of 1940, refugees from German-occupied areas of Poland were given the alternative of receiving Soviet citizenship – Yes or No – for some reason, the entire family mentioned above (except for the Kozlowicz family), were not registered to receive it. Therefore, as Polish citizens, they were imprisoned one night by the N.K.B.D and transferred to the railway station. From there, they were taken as exiles to northern, remote areas of Russia in freight cars.

My parents and my brother, Mosze, were exiled to the Komi S.S.R. Republic, the capital of which was Syktyvkar. Unlike them, my brother, Symcha, and his wife, Gitel, were sent to the Arkhangelsk region, west of the Republic. As stated, I was first in a work camp northwest of them in the Murmansk region and, later, in a work camp northeast of there, part of a bloc of camps along the River Petchora. I must mention that, because of his professional status as a carpenter, Symcha succeeded in bringing my parents and Mosze to him. They did not know anything of my fate. All the areas of northern Russia mentioned above belong partly to the Arctic Zone, and are characterized by virgin pine forests and rivers, and border on the White Sea and the Barents Sea. Climactic conditions there are hard, especially in the long winter months, with cold reaching more than 50 degrees below zero. The summer is short and there

are polar nights. Hard physical work and inadequate, sparse food made things even more difficult for us and, in the long run, endangered our lives.

Despite all these difficult experiences during the period of the war in the U.S.S.R., my entire family succeeded in returning to Poland from 1946-1947, and in emigrating to Israel. Now, we are the parents of two children and the grandparents of five grandchildren. All of them live on the kibbutz.

My sister, Sara Kozlowicz, and her family, and the greater part of her extended family remained in German-occupied territory – and they were all murdered in the Holocaust.
May their memory be blessed!

Shalom Chamiel, Kibbutz HaMaapil

A Personal Story

There were the four of us: our parents, Josef and Rachel, me – Chana – and another sister, Syma. My father was from Czerwin. We had a textiles store on 11th November Street (now Glowackiego), near the police station in Ostrolenka. Our family was exiled from Ostrolenka in October 1939, and we managed to transfer a quantity of fabric to the Soviet side. After a short stay, we continued on to Bialystok, and tried to remain there. But in Bialystok, something unpleasant and even dangerous happened to us. Someone informed on us – that we had in our possession a large quantity of textiles. The police visited our apartment and confiscated the cloth. They also intended to arrest my father, who, luckily, was not at home. My mother was not injured, nor were we, the little children. Because of this incident, the family moved to live in the town of Molczat, near Baranowicz, where our relatives resided.

This incident also influenced our decision not to register to receive Soviet citizenship. Therefore, after a short time, we were "loaded up" by the N.K.B.D. onto a freight train and taken east, together with other Jews and Poles, to the area of Sverdlovsk in Orel. There, we were taken to the Lyushinka work village as political prisoners.

Difficult conditions prevailed in the work village: a hard, long winter and meager food. My father did physical work, digging a route for railway tracks. Despite this, our family somehow managed to survive and hold on, until we were released at the end of 1941, because of new German aggression against the U.S.S.R. and the signing of an agreement between the latter and the exiled Polish government in London.

In light of the fact that the German army already stood at the gates of Moscow, we continued on the train south to Uzbekistan, where we settled in the city of Samarkand. It was "bursting" with an endless stream of Jewish and Christian refugees coming from the western part of the U.S.S.R. Diseases broke out in the region – dysentery and typhus. My younger sister, Syma, also became ill on the road and passed away near the city of Buchara.

In Samarkand, we met some Ostrolenkans, such as the Drezner family, which we knew, Eli Bajuk and others.

In 1946, the family returned to Poland. After two and a half years in Austria, my family reached Israel in 1949.

Chana Friedman (née Kalina), Tel Aviv

A Summary and a Conclusion

In fact, it can be established that almost all Ostrolenka's Jews, nearly 5,000 souls, were murdered in the Holocaust in U.S.S.R. territory or, more precisely, in western Belarus, most of them in the city of Slonim. By the same token, a large number of our townspeople survived in the U.S.S.R., although to our great regret, it was only a small minority of about 100 souls. Most of those who were saved were either imprisoned in work camps as Polish citizens in the U.S.S.R.'s sub-artic northern region – and a few in its eastern part – or they voluntarily enlisted to work in the U.S.S.R. in 1939. Very few, about twenty people, survived the Holocaust

in former Polish territories, including the eastern ones occupied by the U.S.S.R. in 1939. Only a few succeeded in evading the Germans in Slonim, Vilna and other places in 1941. Most Ostrolenkan survivors live in Israel, Argentina, Uruguay and North American countries.

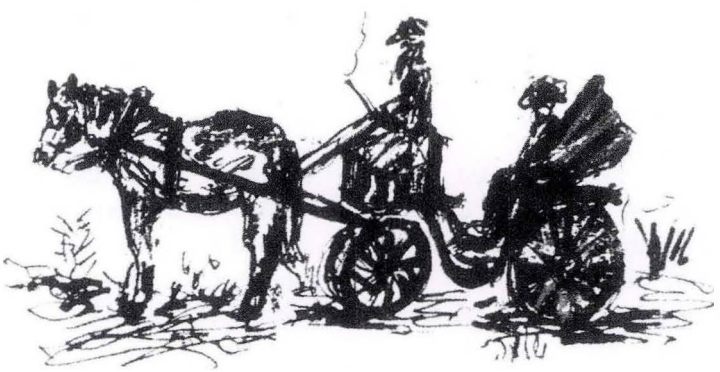
In general, it may be said that the Soviet government's treatment of Jewish refugees from German-occupied Polish territory was not bad – on the condition that they did not clash with their ideological and dictatorial principles. All those who engaged in illegal trade were imprisoned, did not receive Soviet citizenship, were incarcerated and transferred to work camps. As stated above, those who had great wealth, Zionist activists and non-Zionist Socialists, such as Bundists, were in constant danger. (Thus, in 1942, after their release from prison, two prominent leaders of the Bund in Poland were murdered by the N.K.B.D.: Victor Alter, from Mlawa, and Henryk Erlich.)

At the same time, this is the proper place to point out and emphasize three obvious key facts in favor of the U.S.S.R.:

1. Despite the harsh conduct of the Soviet regime against its political enemies, it did not discriminate between nationalities; its treatment of women, the elderly and children, in particular, was relatively humane.

2. The role of the U.S.S.R. in the defeat of Nazi Germany was decisive. It paid a very high price for this: tens of millions of victims, both army personnel and civilians.

3. Despite all our hardship and suffering as refugees and prisoners of the Soviet regime, at the same time, we, as Jews and survivors, owe the U.S.S.R. our deep thanks for our survival of the Holocaust on European soil and our success in reaching Israel.



In Germany



A group of Ostrolenkans in Germany before their emigration to Israel in 1947. (A Memorial Evening in memory of Ostrolenka's martyrs)

Poland

An Award to a Jewish Writer in Poland

The Polish Council of State awarded Mark Rakowski the Knight's Cross of the Polonia Restituta Order for his socialist and literary work. The award was conferred upon him on his 70th birthday.

The ceremony conferring the award was conducted by the Deputy Minister of Culture and the Arts, Kazimierz Rusinek, on the 10th of August.

Mark Rakowski, translator, critic and journalist, began his work more than 40 years ago, with his translation of the novel, *Heart*, by Edmondo De Amicis, into Yiddish. Over the years, he has translated more than 50 works from Polish, English, French, Spanish, German, Italian and Russian. Rakowski has always combined his literary work with socialist activity. In the period between the two World Wars, he was an active member of the Jewish Writers Association, and participated in the first congress of Soviet writers.

Because of his revolutionary activity and the fact that he translated the works of leftist writers, Rakowski was imprisoned by the Polish government in the Kartuz-Bereza concentration camp during the period between the two wars.

Davar, 23.8.60

Rakowski – Always Young

(On his seventieth birthday)

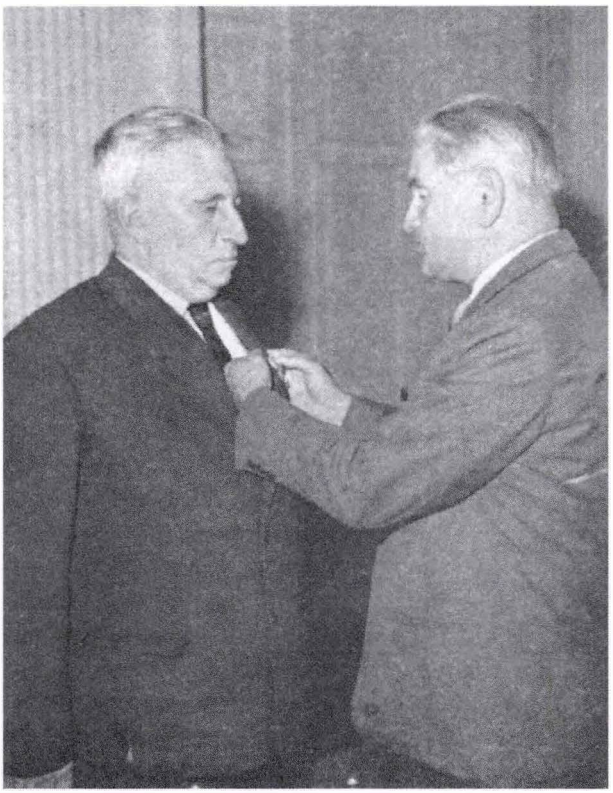
Mark Rakowski, who looks temperamental and angry, but is actually good-hearted and has a sense of humor, has reached the age of seventy. This seems like one of his jokes. Who would believe that this man, solid, vigorous and emanating liveliness, has already passed his seventh decade? But when one remembers what he has done in his life, what he has endured and what he has achieved – one understands that it is true.

The name of Mark Rakowski is closely tied to Yiddish literature in Poland between the two World Wars. To call him a writer and translator – is not an accurate definition; a publisher – not enough; a public activist and political prisoner – this is not yet all. Mark Rakowski is an institution in and of himself. As an expert in different languages, he brought works of different nations to Yiddish literature. He translated from the French, Italian, English, German, Spanish and Portuguese, not to mention Russian. Who knows, perhaps I have omitted a language!



Mr. Rakowski's 70th birthday celebration

Rakowski took upon himself no easy mission – translating world literature's superb creations. For example, *Madame Bovary*, *Salammbô* and *Three Tales* – by Flaubert; *Les Bourreaux* [The Hangmen], *White Terror*, *Jésus* – by Henri Barbusse, *The Merchant of Venice* – by William Shakespeare (together with the poet, Israel Shtern), *El paraiso de las mujeres* [The Paradise of Women] – by Blasco Ibáñez; stories by Edgar Allan Poe, children's stories by Edmondo De Amicis, and other translations of Paniat Istrati, Mikhail Zoschenko, Pierre Loti, Jack London, Japanese writers and others.



Polish Deputy Minister of Literature and Arts, Mr. Kazi Rusinek, confers the award of the Knights Cross medal of the Polonia Restituta Order on Mark Rakowski, for his contribution to socialism and literature. From the right: Kazimierz Rusinek, Mark Rakowski

He began his literary work in 1918. In the beginning, he used his real name, as well as a pen name, Merman. He published his writings himself, but also worked with other publishers, such as Gitlin, Szymon Zaczkowski and Mozaik. We can properly appreciate his literary activity if we take into account that the Jewish reader during that period did not frequent

secondary schools and universities, did not know foreign languages, and was introduced to European literature through translations alone. Among his loyal readers are also "common" people and laborers: seamstresses, shoemakers, clerks and workmen – thus they tasted the excellence of European classics.

Translation, however, is only one facet of his works. He also published periodicals such as *Iberblik* (Overview), *Iberboy* (Renewed Construction) and publications connected with the Polish Communist party (today it is permissible to talk about this). He also published the writings of a group of leftist writers, such as Kalman Lis and others.

Mark Rakowski was not a party member, but he was bound heart and soul to the Communist movement. He did not hide this and, therefore, was persecuted by the Polish government, and even sent to the Kartuz-Bereza concentration camp in 1937. Nevertheless, he stood proudly, as befits the Yiddish translator of Henri Barbusse.

He spent the war years in the U.S.S.R. At the end of the war, he went back to Poland, to Warsaw, and harnessed his great energy to literary activity again. From the German, he translated *The Jewess of Toledo*, by Leon Feuchtwanger. The People's Republic of Poland recognized him as a man who was useful to the regime, and promised him that he would be able to support himself respectably, as was proper for a person with rights. Despite this, he did not rest on his laurels, but always looked for innovations. His head was full of new ideas and projects, which, in my opinion, have not been utilized properly.

And again, we meet Mark Rakowski, as he was thirty years ago. He seems full of anger, but, in a moment, it becomes a smile, hilarity and firm friendship. We embrace him and express a wish that he remain thus until 120. His jubilee is also the jubilee of Yiddish literature in Poland today. Its roots are drawn from Poland before the war, where Rakowski sowed his fertile seeds.

Michael Mirski

Folks Schtimmer, Warsaw, 5 July 1960

In Australia

Celebration in Honor of Yitzhak Kachan's 50th Birthday

It became known to the friends of Yitzhak Kachan, the talented writer and excellent speaker, that he was fifty years old. In his honor, they organized a party to mark this birthday. The celebration took place in the home of the man himself.

Y. Vajslic opened the gathering. He emphasized Kachan's role in the spiritual life of the Jewish community in Australia, and the great impression that his public appearances make on the Jewish public. He came from our area and, thanks to his talents, emerged as a speaker and writer in our community. In detail, B. Ezrowicz told of his first meeting with Member Kachan.

S. Bursztejn spoke in the name of the family, and told of the spiritual road that Y. Kachan had walked, from the town in Poland to his public activities in our community. He wished him many more years of productive work for the benefit of society here.

H. Bachrach discussed the ideological education that Y. Kachan had received at the Bund, his longing for studies and knowledge, and his conceptual and public backbone. To our regret, in our community, the situation does not fully exploit his literary talents. In a larger Jewish community, he would become a rare intellectual force, for the good of Yiddish culture in general.

Y. Gilicz stressed Y. Kachan's contribution to Jewish education as a good school teacher, where his language of instruction was Yiddish. The echoes of his speeches and classes, which were well prepared, still resound.

Finally, P. Albert presented the guest-of-honor with a beautiful gift on behalf of all those gathered – *The History of Jewish Literature*, in ten volumes, written by Y. Cinberg.

Very touched by the warm reception, Y. Kachan replied to the well-wishers with a spontaneous speech, full of inspiration. He pointed out the way he had gone, from the house of his father, the ritual slaughterer and

Torah scholar, through Jewish socialism and Yiddish secular culture, to the present – where he was seeking to integrate the old way of life, which was disappearing, with modern life. When he stands before a community of Jews, he feels the same responsibility that our parents felt toward their nation and their faith.

The sum of 80,000 liras was collected at this impressive evening for the Peretz and Shalom Aleichem Schools.

Yitzhak Kachan – The "Self Made Man"

Yitzhak Kachan came from Ostrolenka in Poland, one of the hundreds of cities and towns where there lived – and for the most part withered away – many Jewish creative powers. Poor conditions and an old-fashioned way of life caused a great number of intelligent young men to be deprived of the chance to develop their abilities; they were swallowed up by a life of poverty and the struggle for existence.

Yitzhak Kachan was the exception to the rule. Despite the difficult conditions of life in the small town, he acquired a great deal of knowledge and education through self-education, drawing from the rich sources of Jewish culture. The Bund served as a good school for people who wanted to acquire knowledge. In its ranks, they had the opportunity to learn about the social factors motivating our lives, about the distorted world order and ways to correct it.

Still a youth, Member Kachan went to Warsaw to participate in the young Bundists' cultural conference – *Zukunft*. There, he already expressed his talents as a speaker and writer. The height of their flowering, however, was reached in Melbourne, Australia.

As soon as he arrived, he began to publish articles in local Yiddish newspapers, and won the recognition and esteem of his readers in the city. Shy in nature, he signed his articles using a pen name and "masqueraded", so that, for a long time, even his close friends did not know who was hiding behind the blessed pen.

Later, as a member of the editorial staff of the *Unser Gedank* newspaper, Member Kachan had a full, open chance to prove that his talents were not limited to the realm of literature alone. He also touched on political subjects – and with great success.

Yitzhak Kachan, the speaker, is a separate chapter. Not only friends and acquaintances, but political rivals do not hide their wonder at his appearances at assemblies marking Holocaust Remembrance Day, and at literary evenings. His deep knowledge of Judaic subjects, inherited from his father, the ritual slaughterer from Ostrolenka, added special Jewish charm to his lectures. He relates seriously to every speech he is invited to make and plans it like sacred work.

We are proud of our friend, Yitzhak Kachan, who grew up in our midst. Here he designed his spiritual world, which he can now pass on to others. For all this, we must state that, to a certain extent, the spiritual poverty of our community narrowed his opportunities. In a larger Jewish community, he would be able to completely utilize his deep knowledge in the field of Judaism – a most rare thing in our times. For that reason, his articles in *Unser Gedank* awoke a wide echo in the Jewish world outside Australia, and they often asked us: "Who is this Kachan?" . . .

H.B.
(From the Yiddish press in Australia)

In Argentina

Ostrolenkans in Argentina

The immigration of Ostrolenkans to Argentina began in the twentieth century, in the '20s. Jews left their homes, mainly out of fear of a new world war. Some wanted to encounter new continents with a new way of life, to escape the difficult, monotonous daily life of a small town and seek their fortune in the wide

world. Ostrolenkans also arrived here with the same intentions. The dream was very beautiful, until their eyes were opened to gray reality and the fact that here, too, they must roll up their sleeves and seek a livelihood.

In the early years, it was hard to find even a day's work. When an advertisement appeared in the newspaper for a worker, one had to get up at five in the morning and stand on a long life at the advertiser's office. Things went on this way for years. Very few were among the fortunate ones who found permanent work. Many workmen were forced to retrain professionally to survive. They became peddlers, selling door to door, carrying a bundle of merchandise on their backs, knocking on doors, hawking their wares in a loud voice. Only some could do this; most gave up. Both the physical and spiritual crisis deepened more and more.

Under these difficult conditions, there was almost no contact between Ostrolenkans. Each was occupied with matters of everyday livelihood. Only in 1945, when the Allies landed a death blow to Hitler's forces and the tragic picture of the destruction of six million Jews was fully revealed, news reached us from Ostrolenkan survivors, with desperate requests for urgent assistance. Only then did our townspeople in Argentina begin to unite, so that, with unified strength, they could ease the survivors' suffering to a small extent. We held a general assembly of Ostrolenkans in Buenos Aires and the area. For all intents and purposes, this was the first contact of our townspeople in Argentina. Everyone was ready to help. We established a committee to contact the survivors in Europe; we sent bundles of food and clothing to Poland. Professionals – tailors and shoemakers – voluntarily sewed clothing and shoes for the survivors, instead of buying ready-made articles at exorbitant prices. Full crates were sent to Europe. Our committee also participated in the life of Argentinean Jewry, and supported various organizations. We were a link in the long chain of our public and social life in Argentina.

Later, the first survivors from Ostrolenka began to arrive, coming to their families in Argentina: the three Holcman sisters came to their brothers, two of them with their husbands and the third unmarried; the son of Chackel the Melamed, Szaje Lazer, with his wife; the granddaughter of Awremcze the Shoemaker with her husband; Sara Grynszpan from Kaczyny with her husband; and Perkal. In their honor, we organized a party in the big hall of the Organization of the Jewish Community of Lomza. We heard shocking testimonies; however, the very fact of their arrival was a holiday and a joy for us. We held often gatherings like these, reminiscing about our past lives in Ostrolenka. With trembling hearts, we mentioned our dear ones and family members who had been murdered, and wished for prosperity and growth for the young State of Israel, established as a comfort for our great loss.

In the last years, for various social reasons, our organization was not so active. This led to loneliness and estrangement among the families of our townspeople. But the wonderful charisma of the effort of the Organization of the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel to publish a "*Yizkor*" book, memorializing our community which was destroyed in the Holocaust, completely changed our organization's situation. It aroused all of us to new activity, spurred us to gather material for the book and to contact Ostrolenkans in Israel and other countries. We will remember and never forget the holy victims and the great destruction of our community in Ostrolenka.

Arcie Nowinski, Buenos Aires



The Committee of the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Argentina
From the right, seated: Awraham Ekelczyk, Herszel Bocian, Hone Holcman
From the right, standing: Awraham Icchak Nowinski, Josef Dojf, Chackel Blumenfeld, Chaim Szana, Icchak Finkelsztejn



Fete for the survivors of Ostrolenka when they came to their relatives in Argentina

In Uruguay

Ostrolenkans in Uruguay

At the end of 1923, the first immigrants arrived in Uruguay. Until 1939, and for a few months later during the war, a number of Jewish refugees from Europe came to Uruguay. They were of different strata: youths without professions from well-to-do families, as well as various professionals.

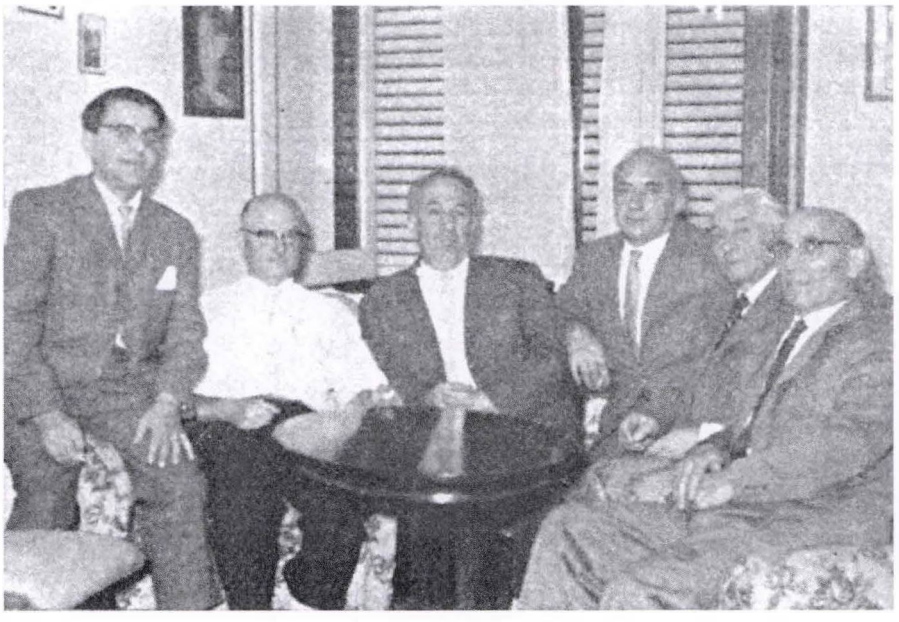
The number of Ostrolenkans in Uruguay reached ninety souls, among them families saved in Russia, as well as those who remained in Poland and were miraculously saved from the inferno.

The economic situation of our townspeople is not bad. There are among them wealthy people, owners of businesses and homes. Our role in public life is recognized. In all Jewish organizations, the Bund, YIVO and the Zionist parties – our representatives can be found. There were among us those who belonged to the extreme left wing. Party leaders left with the wealthy.

We eagerly respond to every call from Israel, as well as other places, especially for financial support to establish a charitable fund for needy Ostrolenkans.

We have established a Committee of the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka here, which meets from time to time to discuss various problems and, primarily, support for our people who require assistance. The Committee was established in 1953, after one of our townsmen, Eliahu Moshe Wajnkranc, of blessed memory, returned from a visit to Israel. Presently, the Committee is composed of the following members: Pinczas Zylbersztejn, Eliezer Segal, Lejbke Jabek, Mosze Gedanken, Icchak Wajnkranc, Alter Zyman, Zundel Zyman and Israel Mosze Lubin.

Alter Zyman



The Committee of the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Uruguay

From the right: A.L. Jabek, Alter Zyman, Y. Chamiel, P. Zylbersztejn, Moshe Gedanken, Z. Zyman



The Ostrolenka Yizkor Book Committee in America
From the right, seated: Herman Topol, Chairman, Mrs. S. E. Kalc, Kajman (Secretary), Chana Lewit (Szapira), Helen Lis-Wolkowicz (Treasurer)
From the right, standing: Menachem Flakser, Isidore Szlafmic, Harry Wolkowicz, H. Kalc, Philip Frankel, S. Kaczor, Leon Mendel

In America

Progressive Young Friends of Ostrolenka in America

On 12 May 1918, we established our organization. We held a meeting with the participation of ten Ostrolenkans and decided to establish an organization called The Progressive Young Friends of Ostrolenka. Membership dues were 10 cents a week.

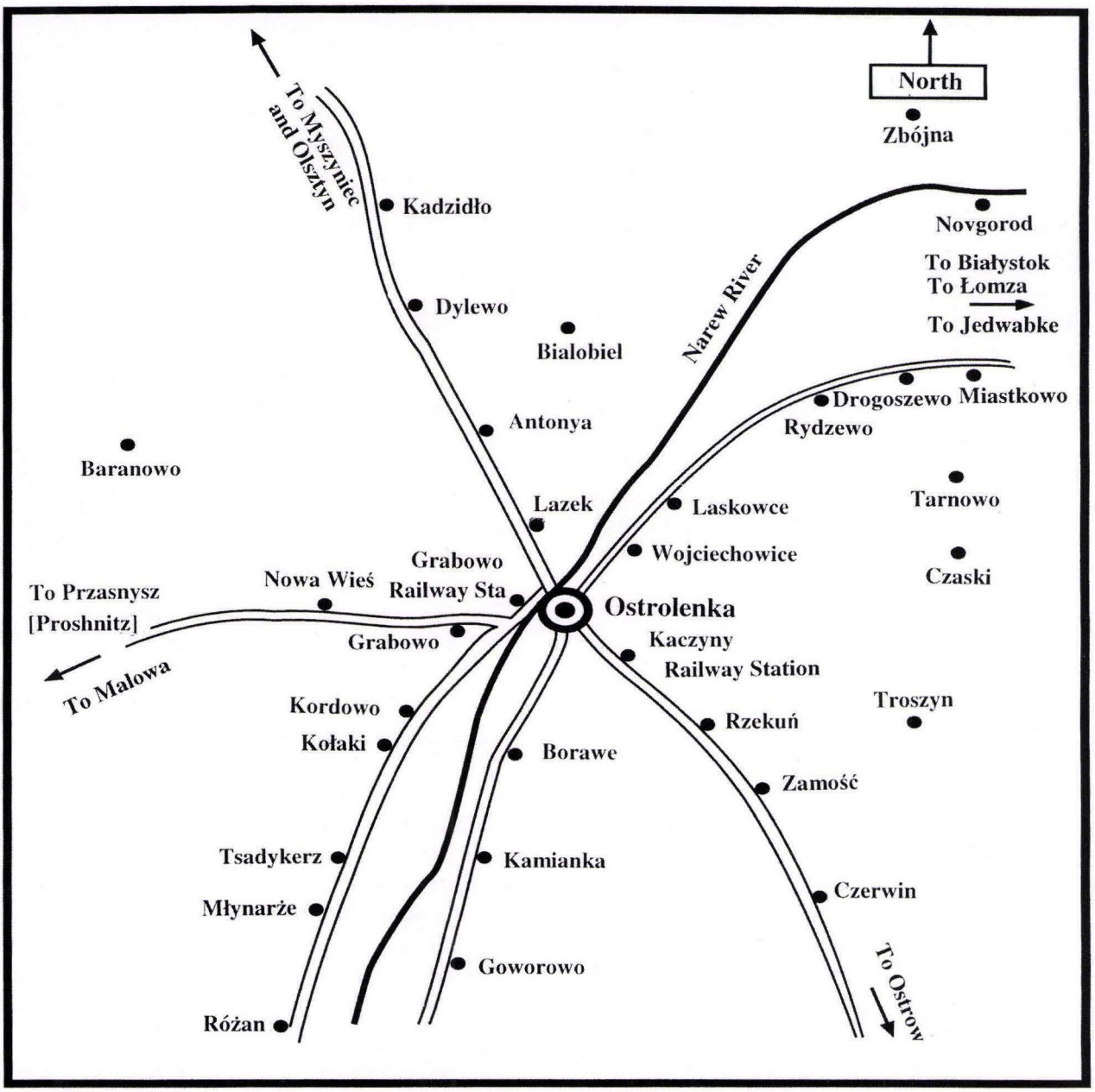
Today, our society numbers 175 members. Our goal is to help those members who are suffering, and to rejoice with those who are joyous. We also try to help various fundraisers for Israel – Keren HaYesod, the Histadrut's fundraiser, Keren Kayemeth LeYisrael, as well as local charitable organizations. After World War II, we contributed a large sum to alleviate the suffering of our brothers and sisters, the survivors of the Holocaust.

We believe it is our sacred duty to participate in the publication of the *Yizkor* book of Ostrolenka – a mission that our brothers in Israel have taken upon themselves, in order to erect a living memorial to our martyrs.

The Committee is composed of: Sam Cohen – Chairman, Irving Friedman – Deputy Chairman, I. Bikowski – Secretary of Financial Affairs, Sam Ismachow – Treasurer, Alex Lifshitz and Tejtelbojm, Nathan Lifshitz, Jay Minowicz.

In September 1962, we celebrated the 30th anniversary of our organization.

A map of Ostrolenka and its environs



Neighboring Towns

KACZYNY

Mark Rakowski (Warsaw)

Memories

Our house was in Kaczyny, a railway station about five kilometers distant from Ostrolenka. About thirty Jewish families lived there. (There were many more Christians.) Most of them were shopkeepers, carters, some workmen, including a blacksmith, two flour mill owners (windmills), some who engaged in *luftgesheft* [air business] and, besides these, a rabbi, a ritual slaughterer and a butcher. They all lived in small, one-story houses on the right side of the street, on the road from the city to the train. My father's house, and a few other houses belonging to Jews, stood on both sides of the street, on the road from Ostrolenka to Ostrowa. Our house stood on the main road from the city to the railway station. On the other side of the road, the train tracks led to the railway station's offices.

My Father, Jakow Meir, of Blessed Memory

My father was the grandson of the well-known Gaon, Rabbi Lejbele Plocker. He was not a Chassid, as he was described in the *The Forward* in America, but a Misnagid, a learned Jew, who had a general education and was not a religious fanatic. He had a short, pointy beard, shaved on both sides by a mechanical razor, and he wore a short jacket. His sons studied in a *heder* and, later on, with Hebrew teachers. He tried to provide them with higher education. After his marriage, fate brought him to Malkin, where he ran prosperous businesses. In Malkin, exactly as later in Ostrolenka, he took upon himself the building of a synagogue that would serve more than one kind of Jew. He was expert at obtaining building materials at cheap prices, and sometimes even for free. After the following incident, construction of the synagogue was completed at an accelerated pace. The Russian army held training exercises around Malkin. The only Jewish officer in the entire Russian army, Alfred Ginsburg, the son of the famous baron, Haradi Ginsburg, served in one of those regiments. On Rosh HaShana, my father invited him to pray in a private home, where he was honored with *maftir* [being called to read the final section of the weekly Torah portion read on Sabbath and holiday mornings in the synagogue]. To the astonishment of all the worshippers, he sang the *maftir* without missing a word and with the right cantillation. Of course, he paid well for that *maftir* and, when he discovered that a synagogue was being built in the city, he ordered that construction be completed at his expense.



Jakow Meir and Jenta Rakowski

My father was innovative and full of energy. At that time, the station in Malkin played an important role as a junction for trains on the Warsaw-Bialystok-Grodno-Vilna-Dvinsk-Petersburg line. In addition, a strategic track was built then, Malkin-Ostrolenka-Tluszcz, and the Malkin-Siedlce line, so that all the wholesale merchants from near and far came to Malkin. My father, of blessed memory, owned warehouses of kerosene, salt, herring and all kinds of legumes. They called my father, in the slang of that time, "Vagonczak", that is, "[Train] Car Owner", because he brought his merchandise in by railway car.

A number of years after he arrived in Malkin, he expanded his business and opened a branch at the Ostrolenka station (Kaczyny). He sent one of his friends, Awraham Zbar, there. The latter built a house there with my father's money and ran his business, as in Malkin. In later years, when my father settled in Ostrolenka, Zbar became his competitor.

Apparently, my father already felt then that he had to move to Ostrolenka, and therefore ordered that a

house be built there, as he did not have a house of his own in Malkin. Why was Ostrolenka suddenly more important to him than Malkin? Because Malkin had an abundance of railroad tracks, and in Ostrolenka and its vicinity, Myszyniec, Chorzel, Makow and Rozen, there was no train. In addition, the Ostrolenkan region constituted a large demand-market for grains, especially millet, which did not grow in Poland and had to be brought in from the far reaches of Russia. And so, in the beginning of the twentieth century, with all the family, my father moved to a permanent residence in Ostrolenka. He transferred his business in Malkin to a distant relative of his, Solomon.

Our house stood near the road, on the way to the train, so that all the wagons and pedestrians had to pass our way. We could see them from the window. But behind the house, marshes spread, reaching the nearby forest and the fields on the horizon. We, the children, were enticed by that place in particular, because of the storks that built their nests there, and because of the colorful reflection of the sun's rays between the branches of the trees. Therefore, we were always drawn there, although when we got closer – all the magic melted away.

Three Patriarchal Families of Carters –Of Eminent Kaczynyans

When we arrived in Kaczyny, it was "ruled" by three patriarchal families of carters, which included sons, daughters, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law and grandchildren. The most important was the family of Awraham Mordechaj Blumberg (he was named after one of the Gur Rebbes), a man in his sixties, with a long beard and the outer appearance of "the master of the house" [the local authority]. The family had two nicknames: "The Royal Family" and "The Medics". "The Medics" did not come from the root word "medicine", but from the word "meditation", as they were experts at different and ingenious contrivances and combinations – in order to outdo competitors.

At the head of the second family stood Hone Perkal, a man in his sixties, with a wide, red face, heavy eyebrows and a meager, short beard. He was not a great scholar, but enjoyed respect and esteem because of his son, Meir Josel, a fellow of eighteen, who was considered the strongest of all the Kacznynyans. To us, the children, he was the biggest hero in the world. He would lift the heaviest loads as if they were feathers, and walked around with them as if he were out for a stroll. Hone's prestige increased even more, when his son-in-law, Lejbel Szuster (shoemaker), arrived from England. He was dressed in an elegant suit and a red necktie, and strewed his conversation with English words that no one understood. In the bosom of this important family, Lejbel discovered that shoemaking was contemptible work compared to respectable carting. He therefore rolled up his sleeves and became a carter. But he could never get free of the name "Lejbel Szuster".

The third was Awraham Mosze Medzowicz, the richest of the three and the youngest among them. His beard was trimmed short and, sometimes, especially on weekdays, he wore a short jacket, because, as he said, the Messiah would arrive "shortly". But Awraham Mordechaj and Hone saw him as a spiritually inferior man. Because no one was ready to test them, no argument was raised as to spiritual precedence. None of the heads of the families worked. They just observed how the sons worked; sometimes, however, they could not restrain themselves and grabbed sacks and loaded them onto the wagons.

Their hatred of Awraham Mosze developed primarily on an economic background. He was a sort of contractor and richer than they. He built some houses and had a number of wagons and horses, while the others had only one horse. Their hatred became stronger when he "bought" a son-in-law, a young student who he maintained. He gave him a respectable dowry and fixed him up with a store. The son-in-law, Eliahu, was also a real scholar, and amazed the whole carters' study group with his hidden talents. Kaczyny did not have a good synagogue Torah reader, and Eliahu announced that he was ready to take this mission upon himself. And indeed, everyone marveled when he ascended the reader's platform and began to read in a sweet, trilling voice. His mouth produced pearls and gems. Later, he also demonstrated true cantorial ability on the pulpit. He captivated the Kaczyny community.

My father, of blessed memory, who was a scholarly Jew and conducted himself in the synagogue as an equal among equals, behaved politely toward Awraham Mosze and Hone, who were older than he.

My Father as a Jester

My father liked to joke and sometimes gave samples of his jests. Once, when I was talking to my

brother about our neighbors' scholasticism, he told a joke about two land leasers. In their old age, they looked for an objective, and decided to study Gemara. They began "The Four Archetypes ['Fathers'] of Damages" – and did not know how to continue. Where did Four Fathers suddenly come from, when everyone knew from the Torah that there were only Three Fathers: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? "Simpleton," said one of the leasers, after long consideration, "the intention is the Four Mothers: Sara, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. In the Torah, it sometimes happens that 'Fathers' is written, and 'Mothers' is meant, and vice versa. I'll give you a simple example. It is written in the Torah: *'Vekarot emo'* ['and you made a covenant with him' – he mistakes *emo* spelled with an *ayin*, meaning 'with him', with *emo* spelled with an *alef*, meaning 'his mother'] – what is the connection between 'make a covenant' and 'mother'? In the same way, 'Fathers' is written, and 'Mothers' is meant." That was the kind of scholars they were.

Awraham Mordechaj, Hone and Awraham Mosze occupied [places] at the eastern wall [of the synagogue, the most prestigious side] and felt at home there. Also at the eastern wall, stood Awraham the American, whose face was as red as a beet, and whose nose was blue from drink. He was nicknamed "the American" because he was an agent of a company in Ostrolenka which smuggled turkeys via the German border. He was rash by nature, even when he had large sums of money, which he distained. He paid a much larger sum than necessary for his place at the eastern wall. A joke was told, as if he went to the doctor to give him advice about his red nose. The doctor asked him how long he had been drinking, and when he told the doctor how many years he had been drinking, the doctor advised him to drink for many [more] years, until his nose would turn blue . . .

The Three Intelligent Families of Kaczyny

At the station lived three intelligent families, who were prominent for their short [modern] dress. They wore derbies, like my father, shortened their beards, and the main thing – they knew the Torah commentaries . . .

In the synagogue, there was friction and quarreling about the "fat" and "thin" *aliyot* [being called up to read a portion of the Torah]. My father refused to be appointed *gabbai*, because he knew that in one weekly Torah portion, there was only one *shlishi* [third *aliyah*] and one *shishi* [sixth *aliyah*]. He passed the honor on to the son of the Rabbi of Slutzk, Chaim Wolowski, who owned a store at the station. By the way, my father's avocation was *maftir* [the final section of the weekly Torah portion]. He did not read it in a whisper, like the Chassidim did, but aloud. He had the right of possession of the Chana *maftir* [from the Book of Samuel, which tells of Samuel's mother, who could not bear children], a "remedy" for women who had difficulties giving birth. He would not agree to pass it on to anyone. More than once, he was called in the middle of the night to a woman in confinement, who was in distress. But he would not rush over, and the worried family would send for him a number of times. My mother asked him why he took his time and did not run over immediately, the first time he was called. He answered, "You silly goose, do you really think it works? It's just a delusion. The later I arrive, the more effective the *maftir* will be . . ."

During times of *aliyah* disputes like these, each attacked the other's Rebbe. For example, the Worka Chassidim accused the Gur Chassidim, saying that their Rebbe belonged to the rich, who shared their income with him, while the Worka Rebbe gave everything to the poor, and he, himself, lived from hand to mouth.

My father, every inch a Misnagid, did not especially like Chassidism, and especially, its Rebbes. The tradition of his negative attitude toward Chassidism began in Plock, where his grandfather, the Gaon Rabbi Lejbele Plocker served as Rabbi. The Chassidim there persecuted him, mocked him and spread ashes on his seat in the synagogue, until finally he had to leave the city.

My Father Intervenes in Kaczyny's Disputes

In Kaczyny, my father tried to moderate disputes, but at the same time used stinging jests against the disputants. In this respect, Szaje Milner (the owner of the windmill), whose roots were Chassidic, helped him. I don't know whether this was because he had revoked his Chassidism or because of his bent for jesting, but he was always my father's faithful helper. He was a very intelligent man, and never laughed when he told a joke. One of his jokes is etched in my memory: in a certain town, where a Jewish flour mill owner lived, someone built another windmill. The miller immediately ran to his Rebbe and told him about it. When the Rebbe saw that the miller was prepared to give him a sizeable gift,

he accepted his invitation and agreed to come and deal with the matter on the spot. As they approached the town, the miller pointed out the mill's turret to the Rebbe. The Rebbe strained his eyes and said that he did not see anything. The miller, believing that the Rebbe suffered from short-sightedness, pointed at the new mill a number of times more, but the Rebbe always replied, "I don't see anything." Even when they arrived at the place, where even a blind man could not miss seeing the mill, the Rebbe rolled his eyes and said that he could not see it. The miller invited the Rebbe to dine, and said to his to his wife gaily, "You know, Sara, the Rebbe told me that he does not see the mill. This is a sign that it will turn into dust and ashes." So, what happened to the mill? – asked the Chassidim. Nothing happened. It is still standing today.

As I have said, there were three intelligent families living in Kaczyny – Lithuanians or semi-Lithuanians. They were educated, read *HaTzfira* and Hebrew books, as well as a Russian newspaper. Because my mother was from Russia and she had a secondary school education, we had many Russian books in our house. Thus, I had to borrow Hebrew books from others. Although reading Hebrew was not easy for me, I borrowed *Ahavat Zion*, *Ashmat Shomron*, *Kivurat Chamor*, *HaToeh BeDarkei HeChaim* and others.

One of the three, Pinczas Gewitzman, who was from Brysk, was my father's partner in the kerosene business, which he brought to Kaczyny. A wealthy relative of his, Kagan, had oil wells in Baku. My father liked to talk to him about politics, especially about the question of the Jews in Russia. He was a Torah scholar and an intelligent man.

The second was Kramer (I have forgotten his first name), a man of about fifty, sick and broken, who owned a small store for the sale of "everything in the world". He was also a Torah scholar, with a spark of Enlightenment. He had a large Hebrew library and loved to delve into philosophical matters, and often quoted the *Guide to the Perplexed*. Because of this, he was versed in the ancient philosophical methods of Plato and Aristotle. But this doctrine was not suitable material for the people of Kaczyny, and Kramer was forced to keep his knowledge to himself. By the way, Kramer had an adopted son, Chaim Kramer, who was my boyhood friend. As a young man, even before World War I, he immigrated to America and I do not know what happened to him later.

The third was Chaim Wołowski, mentioned above, the owner of a spice store, run by his valiant wife, Bejla. How could it happen, people asked, that the son of the Rabbi of Slutzk found his way to Kaczyny and became a spice shopkeeper, something that did not interest him at all? Evil tongues and wags said that he did not want to learn and loved dissipation, shaming his father. For that reason, the latter found his son a match, married him off and sent the young couple to settle down in one of Russia's distant districts. Spiritual happiness eluded him, but it was always merry in his company. Finally, he could not support his wife and their three children, and he immigrated to America. The townspeople said that he exploited his father's reputation there, and stood in the synagogue, wrapped in a prayer shawl, filling various religious functions.

By the way, in 1942, while in Kuybyshev (Samara), I met his wife, Bejla, his daughter, Rejzel, who is married to a factory manager, and his second daughter, Chaja, a doctor. Old Bejla told me that their son, Welwel, left Ostrolenka during World War I. While traveling on a train, a heavy suitcase fell on his head and he passed away a short time later.

We were friends of these three families. They visited us and we visited them. But besides us, these intelligent ones did not succeed in finding anything in common with the simple people of Kaczyny.

*

My Mother, of Blessed Memory

She lived quietly and died quietly.

When I strain my memory, I see my mother in different periods of my life, in the gallery of people, distant and forgotten, who pass before my eyes with the speed of a kaleidoscope. She stands there among them, gentle, silent, serene.

My mother was good to everyone, not just to my father and us, her children. Whoever came into contact with her appreciated and esteemed her. With concrete help, comforting words and a kind smile, she always cared for those who were needy or suffered. I cannot remember her angry or irritated, even if she had reason to be. She never lost her composure. There was a quiet, hidden piety in her. Her soul suffered when confronted with instances of injustice, and she implanted her good qualities in us during our childhood years.

My mother was from Samara (Kuybyshev today), from the aristocratic Jewish Frankel family. Her mother,

too, that is, my grandmother, was from the aristocratic Szeftel family. Her father, or perhaps her grandfather, was Rabbi of the city of Slutzk. Each of my mother's three brothers had a higher education. Two of them are engineers; the other one, a doctor, passed away two years ago in Stalingrad. One of her brothers, the Engineer Frankel, 85 years old today, is a veteran and honored teacher in the ORT school network and lives in Paris.

My mother had a secondary school education, and I remember that she read French novels. Two years before World War II, she passed away in Bialystok, where our family lived since World War I, when we had to leave Ostrolenka-Kaczyny because of the serious battles between Russia and Germany that took place near our city. She had a proper Jewish burial.

My father and some other members of my family were murdered, together with the six million. My father, who was then eighty-three, was killed in the Bialystok Ghetto. May God avenge his blood.

ZAMOSC

Hone Holcman
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Zamosc is a village nine kilometers from Ostrolenka. Most of the population was Christian. Fifteen Jewish families lived there, most of them related, except for the hatter, the tailor, the blacksmith and the shoemaker.

Besides these four workmen, all the rest engaged in agriculture and trade. They traded in geese, turkeys, grains, cheese, butter, honey, flour, fruits, leathers and more. The merchants marketed mostly to Ostrolenka; the rest they sent to Warsaw and, sometimes, to Germany.

Social and cultural life in Zamosc was very poor. The handful of Jews in the village found spiritual rest on Sabbaths and holidays, or on a memorial day for someone.

The little children studied locally with the *melamed*. The bigger ones traveled to school in Ostrolenka, Ostrowa or Lomza. Religious needs, such as a rabbi, a ritual bath and a cemetery, were supplied in Ostrolenka. They ate meat from the Kaczyny ritual slaughter. Sometimes a magid [storyteller], a Jew from Israel or just a beggar arrived, and they would stay for the Sabbath. On Sabbaths and holidays, young people from the surrounding villages – Troszyn, Chrostova, Rzekun, etc. – came to us and passed the time singing, dancing, playing group games and arguing. The more educated read the Yiddish newspaper or stories by Shalom Aleichem, Mark Twain or Peretz Herszbejn to the others. The attitude of the Christian population toward the Jews was friendly enough. Starting in the 20's, the economic situation changed for the worse. Anti-Semitism, rampant in Poland, came to Zamosc as well. The Jews began to immigrate, some to Israel and some to Ostrolenka. In the autumn of 1928, the last Jewish family left Zamosc.

Today, the Jews of Zamosc live in North America, Russia, Australia, Uruguay and Argentina.

CZERWIN

Shalom Wiater, Argentina

My Town of Czerwin

This was a small town near Ostrolenka, but in the Jewish sense, it had everything a big city had. In my childhood, it seemed to me that our town was the center of the world. Roads went out from it in four directions: northwest – 20 kilometers to Ostrolenka, southeast – 20 kilometers to Ostrowa, north – 14 kilometers to Sziadowa, west – 14 kilometers to Goworowo. We were 40 Jewish families, and very few Christians. The number of Jews did not change over the years. If someone left the place, someone new immediately came in his place. If someone passed away, a new baby appeared . . . It was said that a famous rabbi passed through the town once, a great saint, and he wished (I don't know if this was a blessing or a curse . . .) that the town would never grow or shrink, and that there would be no fires in it. And thus it actually was. There were all kinds of Jews in it: Chassidim, Misnagdim, religious workers, workmen, institutions. We even had a river of our own. The Chassidim were of the courts of Gur, Alexander, Otwock, Amszinow and Kotzk. The rest were Misnagdim. There was a permanent rabbi, a ritual slaughterer and a beadle. There were four stores that sold everything. The rest were workmen. The town supported itself from its environs. The farmers came, bought, sold and traded. The town had a courthouse, a local council and a large church. The synagogue stood about ten meters from the narrow, clean river, the Hirsz. Opposite were the ritual bath and the bathhouse. The synagogue was built of wood, and around it was an open space without buildings. It had large windows, a beautifully carved holy ark and a beautiful pulpit. Each of the *balabatim* had his permanent place of prayer, which was passed down the generations.

The *melamdim* taught the local children according to a "time" agreement. In the absence of a proper place to teach, the *heder* was held in the synagogue. The windows were open and the smells of the flowers, the fields and the river filled the space. Near one window, the Rebbe repeated a chapter of Psalms using a beautiful tune; near another, the *melamed* taught children the Bible by heart; near a third window, they already learned Gemara, in a sweet, warm tune that has not left my memory to this day. Sometimes, birds flew in through the open windows, and their happy chirps blended with our song. Sometimes, it seemed to me that the birds took a ritual dip in the river before they came through the window into the synagogue. Everything was so pleasant, so intimate. Life went on calmly, time did not oppress us. When there were no customers, the storekeepers opened a book and read aloud – using a happy or sad chant – but they sang. Thus did the tailor near his sewing machine, the shoemaker near his last and the carpenter in his workshop. Every day, they rushed to pray: in the morning – to morning prayers and, toward evening – to afternoon-evening prayers. Sometimes, after evening prayers, a magid, who had happened by, would preach. The magids went from one city to the next, stopping and preaching. Everything went on slowly. The day was great, the month was long and the year lasted a whole year . . .

Although there were six Torah scrolls in our synagogue, they began writing another one. Rabbi Gerszon Blumsztejn, the ritual slaughterer, wrote it. The writing took eight years, because every time he wrote a few lines, he went to immerse himself in the ritual bath. The completion of the Torah scroll was celebrated with great joy! We brought a band, the stores were closed and work stopped – the entire city celebrated for 24 hours. The band played, the congregation danced, food and drink were in abundance!

I will never forget the way our town looked on Sabbath nights. Candles twinkled in the windows of forty houses that faced the main street, announcing the arrival of the Sabbath Queen. On Sabbath morning, there were two *minyanim*. The Misnagdim prayed at 9 o'clock and the Chassidim at 11. I miss Sabbaths in our town – the Psalms reciters, the beautiful Torah reading cantillation, the youths' sweet voices.

On holidays, the synagogue was full – Jews from nearby villages came then. There was not a village in the area without Jews. In each of them lived at least one or two families. On Sabbaths, they met in one of the villages to pray in a quorum, but on a holiday, everyone came to Czerwin.

On the New Moon [first day of the month] of Elul, with the first blast of the *shofar* [ram's horn], the town became sad and happy sounds disappeared. Only Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur melodies were heard. The awe of the High Holy Days encompassed the city; from the shoemakers' chair, from the tailors' workshops, from everywhere. We had some of the finest public prayer leaders – most of them members of the Blumsztejn family, mentioned above. They led prayers unpaid. They were invited to big cities, but preferred to stay in their small town. I will never forget the appearance of our town on Yom Kippur Eve. No one worked that day. Everyone was either going to the ritual bath or coming from it. People who had borne a grudge during the year went to ask forgiveness of their adversary with cookies and liquor. They wished each other all the best, and opened their hearts by evening. "The fish in the water trembled", everyone prepared for the Day of Judgment. All the Jews from the neighboring villages locked up their homes and, with their wives and children, gathered in Czerwin and stayed there until Yom Kippur ended. Fathers wearing prayer shawls blessed their children. While lighting candles, with tears in their eyes and with great intentness, mothers blessed their families on the coming of the New Year. The synagogue's courtyard was full. The light shining from every window was reflected in the river, as if someone had set it on fire. Half of the Jews slept in the synagogue. Most of the Jews from nearby villages were awake all night, reciting Psalms. Everyone prayed and cried and was certain that their pleas would find an attentive ear in the Heavens. With the help of such good prayer leaders and advocates, they would merit a good year.

Thus it was every year, until Yom Kippur of 1939. The synagogue and the courtyard around it filled with people, as always: men and women, young and old. No one stayed home. Everyone's eyes were raised to Heaven in fear and trembling. The enemy was already near. With faint light, the windows were covered. With bitter tears and a broken heart, the cantor began the *Kol Nidrei* prayer. When he reached the "Ascends", the entire congregation sobbed: "May our supplication ascend from evening, and our cry for help come from morning . . ." During *Musaf* [the additional morning prayer], *Netaneh Tokef* and "Who will live and who will die" – tears flowed endlessly . . . At the [closing] *Neilah* prayer, the elderly Rabbi got as far as "Open the gates of Heaven" . . .

The enemy arrived right after Yom Kippur. His bloody work was easy. There was no place to hide, nor was there hope of resistance. We were weak and few in number. The Nazis assembled all the Jews of the town, little and big, young and old, and led them to an unknown destination. The Rabbi marched at their head. They understood their bitter fate; they knew that they were leaving their birthplace forever. The Rabbi ordered them to say the *Vedui* [final confessional prayer]. He began and everyone repeated after him. Then they said *Kaddish* [the mourner's prayer] for themselves, because they knew that no one would be left after them . . . And so the town was left empty of Jews.

Yes, the saint's blessing was fulfilled. The town remained intact, it was not burned, as he wished, but without Jews! The Jews! Who praised the name of God in prayer and with measureless faith. Who trusted that, when they were destroyed, some small salvation would come from He Who is in Heaven. They are no more, they have all been burned – as well as those who recited Psalms, and those who studied Gemara, the Rabbi, the ritual slaughterer, the dear sons and daughters, the saintly women and the innocent babes . . .

May God avenge their blood!

May my town be exalted and sanctified!

I commemorate you in the *Yizkor* book of Ostrolenka and its environs – which were obliterated – as an eternal monument to your memory!



A.S. Sztejn, of blessed memory (Tel Aviv)

A Mother's Refrain*

(Memories of the Area)

In the plains of White Russia, anointed with suffering, in villages and towns, in the heart of a nation of farmers, are planted the days of my childhood and the dawn of my youth. And also in "the capital" – the young center, Bialystok. Although the Jews made it a humming hive of industry, work and trade, social activity and spiritual effervescence, while it could no longer be called a town, it never reached the scope of a city.

Close to World War I, here stood the cradle of my birth, great-grandfather's house. I did not know him, but his memory lived in the family's heart, and in his writings which I found later, for he made notes on pages of tractates of the Mishna. By the way, in that same large bookcase which provoked the Nazis were also books of Hebrew enlightenment and of course, Russian books. I still remember Grandmother in her last days, when the new development already prevailed in the house. Of course, the house had an atmosphere of piety in the Misnagdic, humanistic style, the style of the lives of her brothers, the rabbis, and of her sister, married to Rabbi Jehuda Mosze Jehoszua Lejb Diskin, an exalted personality in the world of Torah, spirit and deeds, one of the gifted ones of the generation in Lithuania and in Israel. And here, in Grandfather's house, the house of my birth, with Torah and education seemingly wrapped about it, and Zionism's rays lighting and warming it, the personality of a young man was formed. He was from a nearby town, and had immigrated sometime ago (to avoid the draft requirement) to Galicia. From there, he emigrated to Israel and was one of the best teachers and thinkers in the Labor movement – Szlomo Shiller (Blanksztejn).

*

The sketches of my father's house are different. Grandfather, my father's father, his face adorned with a white, elegantly shaped beard – his livelihood was leasing the holdings of Russian and Polish land owners (including the estate of Przytali, well-known in the area and mentioned in Opatoshu's stories), among them high-ranking nobles and military commanders who spent their days in places of amusement in the west. He, Grandfather, administered their annexed farms, took care that their fields were cultivated, marketed their crops and paid land lease fees and other taxes and municipal rates.

Even today, I see the wide courtyard of the Jewish "*poretz*". At its center is a stone house, like a mansion, with many rooms, attics and cellars, and the smells of fresh hay, potatoes and pitchers of fresh milk standing in it, with intoxicating perfumes and jasmine bushes. Around it, on three sides, is a fruit garden that Grandfather leased to Jewish sub-lessees from a nearby town. Populating the barns and stables were large herds of cattle, sheep and oxen for work in the fields, and especially horses, which were greatly loved in my grandfather's courtyard. Work and riding horses, colts and horses for breeding and improving the stock. On moonlit nights, they were taken out to pasture in areas of the estate where lush grass and clover flowers grew near clear lakes, their hind legs tied, and shepherd boys, near the bonfire, watching them. It need not be said that among the herds of coarse beasts moved flocks of fowls, geese, ducks and turkeys, standing on the sides of the roads, on their horns and on any clear space.

And the wide threshing floor, the farm and work buildings, and the wooden well with the high shaduf, overlooking expanses of fields and forests colored blue on the horizon. Is this the dwelling of Boaz, a Jew of the days of the Kingdom of Judah, who came to this plain in the heart of the land of the Slavs? No, he is not Boaz the

* A.S. Sztejn, writer and journalist, came from the region of Ostrolenka. He passed away in Tel Aviv.

Jew, but a small-scale Jewish prince, whose principality is based on the benevolence of Gentiles and strangers and on the labor of farmers from surrounding villages. Its gates are open to every pauper, needy person and passerby, and it is the pride and joy of the Jews of nearby towns and villages.

*

In the house, Grandmother works hard and with her, sons and daughters, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, grandsons and granddaughters – an entire populace. The eldest son, who oversees the work on the farm, patrols the fields on his horse, keeping a close eye on flora and fauna, the produce of the fields and the gardens. The next oldest son keeps the books, engages in purchasing, selling and redeeming payments. The younger sons and the daughters must study their prayers, Torah, Hebrew and the language of the state, and the erudition of mathematics. Grandfather hires *melamdim* and teachers, maintains them at his table, gives them rooms in the house and pays the full cost of their salaries. Sometimes, however, the children prefer nature's pleasures and other chance activities on the farm, and it may be that the teacher, too, a former yeshiva student or well-born, prefers the delights of the scenery to diligently studying a book. One of them, whose soul is bound in love to one of the daughters, has manuscripts of "In the forests of Poland . . ." in his satchel.

There are joyous sunny days at the end of summer; golden ripe grain interwoven with colorful wild flowers spreads everywhere. The happiness of the harvest and the full granaries rejoices the universe. The fruit trees are loaded with ripe fruits – the apple and the pear, the plum and the nut, all sorts of berry bushes, vari-colored and -shaped, saturated with juice and nectar. And man is also happy. Behold! A large procession of many farmers, girls dressed in pure white at its head, wreaths of grain on their heads, sheaves of yellow stalks in their hands. A delegation of harvesters has come to Grandfather's house, to place an offering of the fields on the wide decorated wooden table. After exchanging blessings, Grandfather will offer them liquor and reward them with holiday money; then he will make a speech of congratulations. At night, bonfires are lit, and the harvest celebration will be carried away into circles of dance and songs of generations of laborers, whose souls are tied to the land and who take their bread from it.

For years, Grandfather lived on his leased estate. He was one of the last of the Jewish lessees of his kind. In the course of time, his status weakened and his subsistence declined . . . The sons and daughters left their parents' nest, those who went to distant towns, those who settled in nearby towns – in Lomza, Ostrolenka, Goworowo and Jedwabne. And many, many – even today – harbor in their hearts the sorrow of this decline, the sorrow of this tiny Jewish principality, the patriarchal dream that has disappeared.

*

When World War I broke out, my parents and their little firstborn son, the writer of these lines, found temporary shelter in the home of my grandfather, my father's father, on his estate. But the misfortunes of the time did not pass us by, as we were situated on a main road, along which the fighting armies streamed. So a chapter began of wandering and moving from place to place in neighboring towns and villages, disrupted by troops and endless calamities. Stories of plunder and theft, scorched fields, ruined houses, tumult and panic in Jewish towns along the Narew River, wandering in wagons, starlit nights on dirt paths – these are stamped in my memory.

Here is the town of Goworowo, a crowded, spurned and poor town, but how great is the light, the light of man, that shines on it. The paved main street crosses the market, which is open and exposed to the distant fields, to the forest, to the world of the Gentile farmers. Wooden houses, stores, workshops. Jewish youth, yearning and vigorous. And here, on the banks of the Narew, in this land, Father was laid to rest at the height of the war – and again a chapter begins, of the wanderings of my mother and her children. These memories are in my book, *Alim Terufim BaRuach* (Am Oved, 1952).

I don't know how the connection of my parent's homes, the home of my father and the home of my mother, led to marriage. Their portraits, pervaded by boundless Jewish beauty and grace, are preserved in my heart. A perfect Jewish home, with humane and Judaic qualities, inundated by the Divine Spirit. Sometimes, I look over the remnants of the correspondence my parents wrote before their marriage, written in poetic Hebrew, seasoned with verses from the Bible and the Gemara, in which both were expert, and I wonder at the awareness of the problems of the time and the spirit of

the love of Zion surging in them. Included in the letters is a bundle of notes from Adolf Shtand, the famous leader of Galicia's Zionists, who corresponded with my father – the Hebrew, the Talmudist, the Zionist, the man of Jewish benevolence in its full splendor, whose life was prematurely extinguished.

Here he smiles calmly at his son, his firstborn, who studies Bible and Gemara with his rabbi. (This is the veteran teacher, the protégé of Slobodka, Mr. Y.L. Grodzienski, who lives, as we do, in Tel Aviv.) He strokes my head and journeys with me in a conversation about ancient worlds. For this lad, I have prayed, he said, for Szmuelke, my firstborn – like ripe borage.

And here Mother sits me on her lap, Father near her. I listen to the songs of Zion that they love: "At the crossroads there, a rose tumbles around, a rose with reddish eyes . . ." or "Hammer, hammer bang", "You will be a rich man, my little seed" . . . And sometimes, warming herself with her back to the brick oven, on a cold night of a snow storm, she softly sings Peretz's song: "Lord of the Universe! Have we not suffered enough?/When, Lord of the Universe, will you understand/The deep depths . . .", as well as refrains echoing the Revolution of 1905 and, of course, prayer chants in abundance. Once, she said to me: "Remember, my son, that you came into the world on *Kol Nidrei* night, a time when our Jewish People pour out their pleas before He Who Dwells On High. Remember that you must keep faith with your people all your life and sanctify His Name, as your holy forefathers did . . ."

On Sabbaths, they stroll with me, up to the boundaries permitted on Sabbath, to the iron bridge over the Narew, near Ostrolenka. At this place, where the river overflowed its banks, reeds and water plants grow. A flock of geese and wild ducks fly by. Fishermen cast their rods. The river is impressive in its high tides, when it floods, when it storms. Rafts and barges glide by on its watery surface. But these serene days, the innocence and the dream are not long for the world. The storm of World War I destroyed my father's house. Until the stabilization of the new State of Poland, we were sated with distress and wandering. I can still remember the houses of my family, with the light of man spilling over them – in Lomza and in Ostrolenka, in Jedwabne and in Szczuczyna, to which we wandered. The refrain that Mother was so attached to still comes to my ears, and will not be forgotten:

"God in his justice is right,
We must never say that God does ill . . ."

*

Years have gone by. The son grew up and went out to learn Torah in distant towns, went out to find his God, and finally settled in Israel. An ocean of blood and tears flooded the dwellings of Israel there, including his own.

One night, in Tel Aviv of 1953, he imagined that he saw his mother dragged by the murderers to her annihilation. And he saw her near crowds in snowbound Treblinka, hidden among the forests. On that night, he took up his pen and wrote his story, *Atza Rakevet LeTreblinka*, and he heard her voice again in a song of a prayer acknowledging divine justice, of one who is taken to her death believing until her last breath:

"God in his justice is right . . ."

Wojciechowice – "Cegielnia"

(Brick Factory)

Yehuda Yitzhaki (Chomont), Haifa

Wojciechowice is about three kilometers from Ostrolenka. It is actually a beautiful suburb of the city, in the direction of Lomza. The Jewish families who lived there for generations supported themselves mainly from small trade. Most of the customers were army personnel from the local barracks. But there were also

Jews who engaged in different crafts – tailors, shoemakers, blacksmiths, watchmakers, barbers and just laborers.

Before it became a military center, Wojciechowice belonged to the owner of the estate, named Wojciechowski. He built a big factory for burned bricks there and supplied his product to the entire area. Almost all of Ostrolenka was built with his bricks. In time, the place was nicknamed "Cegielnia" (brick factory).

Jew lived there even when the estate was there. Their number grew greatly after the barracks were built, particularly in the last years, when the Polish Cavalry's Fifth Regiment and the 12th Cannon Unit camped there.

The Jews of Wojciechowice were active in all areas of public life in Ostrolenka. They participated in community elections, helped build the study hall which was burned in World War I, and took a large part in founding a charitable loan fund. The first sum was donated by a Jew from Wojciechowice, who lived in America.

Local youths were represented in all Ostrolenka's organizations. Rain, wind and snow did not deter them from coming to evenings of activities in the city. They did not cover the distance, Heaven forbid, in modern cars, but by foot. At six or seven in the evening, after a hard day's work and a hasty meal, they set out – some to Poalei Zion, some to HaShomer HaTzair, some to the Bund and some to the library to exchange a book or read a newspaper. With youthful fervor, with sincerity and faith, they devoted themselves to public needs and to fulfilling the Zionist idea.

It was said in Ostrolenka that Wojciechowice's youths returned home at 12 o'clock at night, and that they fell asleep along the way, while walking. More than once, Polish bullies attacked them and they resisted bravely. This did not prevent their coming to their organizations the next day and continuing to be active.

The Jews of Wojciechowice drew their spirituality from the same sources as the Jews of Ostrolenka. They also buried their dead in the same cemetery. One fate united them, and their tragic end was the same. Together with the Jews of Ostrolenka, they were expelled from their homes, wandered to ghettos and different camps, and were murdered by the Nazis, may their names be eradicated! Only a few survived. We say *Kaddish* with pain and, to this day, we ask, Why?! We will never forget our martyrs. May God avenge their blood.

Lejbke Jabek (Uruguay)

They called the place Wojciechowice, after its founder Wojciechowski, the owner of an estate and a wealthy industrialist; and also "Cegielnia" – after the burned bricks factory he owned. The estate owner employed all the area's inhabitants. "Cegielnia" supplied building materials to build houses in the city and also for the big barracks built nearby. It was a strategic location due to its proximity to the German border.

The factory drew work forces, including Jewish families from Lithuania and Russia. Over time, about thirty Jewish families settled there. They were divided into two categories, workmen and small merchants. Some supported themselves well, others meagerly.

Our rabbi, Rabbi Josef Maluszkiewicz from Grodno, filled his post voluntarily. For his livelihood, he had a small store. He fulfilled the verse "Love work and hate authority". Military business was represented by a contractor named Magryl, a warmhearted Russian Jew. In time, his family became the most extensive, as well as the richest in Wojciechowice. They will be remembered here as devoted and generous community workers, always ready to help individuals and the community in times of trouble.

When I was still a small boy, Magryl suddenly assembled the Jewish inhabitants, including women and children, led them to a certain place and pointed to a plot he had purchased as a gift to the community, to build a holy place on it. What he said, he did. Acceding to his request, everyone gave an amount according to his ability, in order to lay the cornerstone for the study hall, which was built entirely "at the expense of the rich man".

The well-known merchant and community worker, Reb Awraham Josef Jabek, was the study hall's first *gabbai*. He was chosen by a general election. The permanent prayer leader was Reb Szlomo Icchak Miller, a Lithuanian Jew, Chassid and Torah scholar, who fostered a generation of students and Torah observers.

I would like to mention a Jew named Beniamin Szlomo Bialik, the manager of a large wood warehouse, who supplied his wares to the local army. He was expert at Mishna, saturated in Torah, but did not have a happy family life.

As in all towns and villages, there were some Jews who were God-fearing laborers. There was a permanent *heder*, but every year a new *melamed* was brought in,

according to the situation and the level of the students. Studies reached the point of learning a page of Gemara from *Baba Metzia* and *Baba Kama* – no more. Continued studies were conducted in the city: in Ostrolenka proper, or in the Lomza Yeshiva. According to a special government order, for at least one hour a day, general studies were conducted as well in the *heder*. A teacher was brought "on behalf" of the government for this purpose. He provided us with general knowledge "in a nutshell", because this was all he was capable of doing. Local, educated Jews were an additional source from which we drew. Thus, a relatively educated Jewish youth was created, having wide horizons, each according to his abilities and potential.

So it was until World War I broke out with the invasion of the Germans, and later with the establishment of independent Poland and the revival of its army. But national liberation was only for the Polish people. Nothing changed regarding the Jews. They lived as in the past, and fought for existence. World War II destroyed everything. The Nazi beast eradicated all Jewish existence from its roots. Barely "one of a city and two of a family" remained.

May these lines be an eternal memorial to our destroyed homes, Ostrolenka and its suburb "Cegielnia", and to our martyrs, our fathers and mothers, our brothers and sisters, our grandfathers and grandmothers – a remembrance to future generations of places where lively Jewish life grew and flourished.

Kadzidła

Israel Lewinski, of Blessed Memory, Tel Aviv



The village of Kadzidła is situated midway between the district city Ostrolenka and the provincial town of Myszyniec. Only three kilometers separate the latter and the Prussian town of Rezyja (the distance between Ostrolenka and Myszyniec is 38 kilometers, and Kadzidła is situated at the end of the 17th kilometer). Until World War I, the road was primarily dirt and sand; only here and there was the land hard and rocky. Facing the village of Podgorze stood a hill of sand of not insignificant height. It was difficult to climb, even with a trio of strong horses. The road became especially disrupted in the beginning of the autumn, during the frequent rains, and at the end of the winter when the snow melted. But one cannot complain that the Ministry of Transportation of the Russian Tsar's government did not take measures to improve transportation for the good of its subjects. It actually had good will on this subject, but encountered factors that could not be predicted in advance. This is what happened:

Nikolai I, the Russian Tsar, who ascended the throne in 1860, decided to visit oppressed and occupied Congressional Poland after its rebellion in 1863. Ostrolenka was included among the places to visit. Here, in 1807, the Russian army fought a brigade of Napoleon's army. In 1831, during the first Polish rebellion, the Russian military leader, Skarzynski, fought rebels in that city. In the second Polish rebellion, the Kurpie companies (which will be described below) fought especially hard against the Russian brigades, and wiped them out. In memory of those battles, a large memorial monument to the Russian army was erected on the banks of the River Narew, and stood there until

World War II. Because of the possibility that the Tsar might extend his visit to the Prussian border, the Minister of Transportation decided to pave a gravel road on this land. Following a government tender, a Jew from Lomza won the competition to contract this work. Because the land was swampy, it was necessary to sink layers of stone into it to make it solid, something the road engineers had not predicted in advance. In addition, the farmers who inhabited the villages in the area refused to produce stones for a highway to be paved for the tyrant who enslaved their land and subdued them with angry cruelty. Thus, the Jew could not fulfill the conditions of the contract. After paving five kilometers, in which he invested all his capital, as well as foreign funding, he gave notice that he was leaving off work, losing the sum of money he had given as a security to fulfill the terms of the contract. And so the road remained unrepaired. The part of the road that was done was neglected and was just an obstacle for pedestrians and wagons. Bicycles, encountering this gravel obstacle uprooted from its place, would wobble and their riders danced about until their stomachs turned.

Kadzidła, situated midway between Ostrolenka and Myszyniec, served as an intermediate station, a sort of inn for passersby (the road from Ostrolenka to Myszyniec took seven to eight hours or more during [clement] days of the year, let alone rainy days and days of melting snow), where carters gave hay to their horses, tired from the toil of the difficult road, and watered them with chilly well water. The passengers would also stretch their limbs, painful and numb from cramped wagons. They warmed themselves with a cup of tea or milk, as well as a hasty meal at a Jewish home, near which were places for the wagons.

Kadzidła also served as an intermediate station for thousands of Jews who emigrated without government permission from all the cities of the Russian Pale of Settlement. Escape to America began at the time of the pogroms and riots against the Jews. (Those who helped them cross the border illegally led them to Prussian territory. The Russian police in Kadzidła turned a blind eye because of monthly bribes it received from them; from there, they reached their destination.)

Surrounded as it was by forests and groves of pine and fir trees on all sides, Kadzidła's air was clear and dry, healing to the soul and the body's health. It was a vacation spot for those from nearby cities such as Ostrolenka, Lomza and others. People from Warsaw also came to spend the burning days of the summer there.

Kadzidła was not laid out like a village. Some of its streets branched out and spread beyond it. The number of households in Kadzidła first reached 150 and, in time, 500-600 and more. The population in the neighboring area belonged to the Polish-Mazury tribe. They had settled in the forests of Ostrolenka and Myszyniec and were called Kurpie, after their sandals, which were woven from the bark of the linden tree or from strips of leather, which were called *kurpja* in their language.

The Kurpie were a brave and warlike tribe, having special and sometimes strange customs, different from the rest of the Polish tribes. They were zealous and pious. The Kurpies spread and reached the regions of Plock, Suwałki and Lomza. They were workers of the land, hunters and beekeepers (*bartnicy*). They had a tradition of rules and customs in matters of raising bees and making honey water, which they passed down from generation to generation and did not consider the government's laws at all. They called it *Bartne Prawo*... Once a year, on Św. Wojciech Day (the 23rd of April), their court was held in Prosnitz (Plock region), dealing with disputes among the Kurpies, matters of trade and competition, damages, etc. The judges, from among the elders of the tribe, judged according to their ancestors' tradition. This right was finally taken from them; in 1801, they were forbidden to judge in *Sady Bartne* . . .

The Kurpies often rebelled and fought the Polish government and its laws. In 1050, 1711 and 1733, Kurpie rebels entered Lomza, captured it and destroyed it. They fought Bohdan Chmielniski, may his name be eradicated, and expelled the Cossacks from the land of Mazowia. They expelled Cossack military companies from Lomza.

The Kurpies treated the Jews who lived among them well. They called them the People of the Old Testament (*Starozakonne*), traded with them and trusted them. During the war of Poland with Russia, and particularly in the rebellion of 1863 (*Miatež*), Kurpie companies crushed the Russians and wiped them out. In memory of the fallen Russians, a large memorial monument was erected on the banks of the Narew, as noted above.

Kadzidła was preferred over all the villages in the region. Although there were bigger and more populated villages, it became the seat of the region. A wooden house of worship was established in it, which served as

a house of prayer for all the villages of the area. A cemetery was also established. In time, when the populace grew, a new house of worship was built of bricks at the initiative of the head priest and with the encouragement of the Bishop of Warsaw. This building could hold over five thousand people. Construction was turned over to expert builders and well-known architects. When the land was dug for the foundations of this giant building, the excavators discovered the bones and skulls of humans. It was said that the place was a cemetery for Kurpic soldiers who fought the Polish government and, at the time of the rebellions, against Russia. The remains were buried with great honor and splendor. The seat of the village magistrate's court was also in Kadzidła, where litigation was conducted just for the inhabitants of Kadzidła's region, but other village regions as well. Even the inhabitants of the town of Myszyniec were subject to Kadzidła in legal* matters. A post station was also established in Kadzidła – not in Dylewo, a larger village than it was, perhaps double in size. Kadzidła was more deprived than Dylewo in only one thing: the government of the Gmina remained in Dylewo, despite great efforts by the Kadzidłans, particularly the Jews living there. But as has been reported, the Kadzidłans have recently succeeded in [changing] this, and Kadzidła has been decorated with the title of Gmina.

In its miniature institutions, the small Jewish community in the village of Kadzidła included the same units and foundations required for the existence of a Jewish settlement in a city having a larger Jewish population. The Jews of Kadzidła were not at all like the Jewish village type, the *yeshuvnik* [hick], who did not change and who did not learn. Among them were Torah observers who knew *Talmud* and Jewish law. Even those of lower status among them were expert in prayers and liturgical poetry, and did not "grind their teeth" during prayers. It also had the most crucial institutions of a Jewish community, such as a permanent place of prayer and a ritual bath. They also had their own prayer leaders for the High Holy Days, ram's horn blowers, ritual circumcisers and so on. It should be noted that some Torah greats were in Kadzidła, grand scholars of *Talmud* and Jewish law, such as Achi Yom-Tow, Alter Jagoda (who, after his marriage, studied blacksmithing with his father-in-law in Ostrolenka), Szlomo Dolowicz, Awraham Dolowicz, Mosze Szczawinowicz, Jehuda Cwi Gibalt, Josef Lewinski (my nephew) and others.

When did the Jewish community in Kadzidła begin, and what were the conditions that made it a magnet for the settlement of Jews there? To my regret, I do not have the data, nor can they be acquired, for obvious reasons. It may be assumed that the Jews were brought to this central village by its ruling *pritzim*, before the emancipation of the vassal farmers, in order to supply them with essential needs, such as clothes, shoes and the repair of work tools.

The first of them, as far as I know, were Jechezkel Gilda, my grandfather, Meir Lewinski (painter), Eliezer Gibalt (a tanner and a sheep leather worker), Eliahu Jagoda (tailor), Awraham Zylbersztejn (shoemaker), Aron Jakow Dolowicz (*melamed*) and his brother, Nachman (tailor).

The undisputed right of permanent settlement for these families was recognized with the emancipation of the vassals in the village. At the same time, they were allotted plots of land for the construction of homes for their families and for vital buildings, such as a barn, a granary and so on. Some of them also received plots of land near their homes to "till them and keep them".

When the dark reactionary forces in Russia strengthened, this right of the Jews of Kadzidła was not revoked even by the temporary decrees published by the Russian Interior Minister, Ignatov, our bitter enemy, according to which it was forbidden for Jews to settle in villages within 50 kilometers (*versts*) from the German border or from houses belonging to farmers. (This decree seriously harmed Jews who lived in villages; the sword of this decree hung over our families' heads for a long time.)

Housing problems did not permit the growth of the Jewish settlement in the village until 1905, when the Tsar granted his vassals a constitution, and Ignatov's "temporary decrees" were revoked. Many Jews began to settle in the village after World War I, when Poland was freed and became a free republic, and the Jews held rights equal to all citizens.

Forest Trade and Barges in Kadzidła and Sources of the Income of the Jews of the Village

The area around Kadzidła is rich in forests, extending for dozens of kilometers. The seat of the Forest Ministry

* The judge was the old *poretz* of Kadzidła and he was not appointed from above (at the time of the absolute government of the Tsar), but was elected once every three years by the inhabitants of the villages.

was in Suwalki; it had authority over the forests of the Lomza region and the Suwalki region. Every year, at the beginning of the autumn, it would publicly advertise forest plots in known sites for sale. Lumber merchants came to tour the plots offered for sale, and evaluated their worth according to the amount of wood that could be obtained from them. Only mature, thick trees, on which were stamped the forestry seal, were sold. The trees that were sold were felled, their branches removed, their outer bark stripped and the entire trunk prepared to be sent abroad for ship building.

Work was done in the forest only during the winter, when the ground was frozen and smooth, making it possible to take the heavy trunks out of the forest and transport them by sled. This could not be done in the summer, when it was impossible to transport them on the loose dirt road to the nearby river. The trees were lashed to barges and floated on the Rivers Narew, the northern Bug and the Visla to the coastal city of Gdańsk (Danzig), where the barges were unloaded. Shipping the processed trees to the river provided a great deal of income for farmers who had a team of horses and wagons adapted for this job. There were Jews in Kadzidła who engaged in forestry trade and also took part in the competition and bought forest plots at their own expense.

The sources of income of the Jews of the village – some of them were workmen, as mentioned above, and supported themselves from the work of their hands. When they were asked to do so, the village tailors worked in the homes of the farmers in the area. The farmer generously provided the tailor with his meals from the fruits of the land and the produce of his garden. The tailor worked for a week for one or two or three [farmers], and his livelihood was assured.

Shoemakers, tanners and leather workers did not go hungry either. Among the Jews of Kadzidła were peddlers who were sought after by farmers, who bought anything they could lay their hands on: a calf, a ewe, eggs, skins, pig bristles and so on. Each had right of possession of a specific village, which he visited regularly. No one tried to infringe on another's boundary. The peddler loaded his great variety of merchandise on a wagon rented from a farmer and brought it home. There, merchants from the city awaited him, and he would sell them his wares for a certain profit.

At the end of the summer, trade flourished in geese and honey. How geese? A wholesale goose merchant from Prussia would appear in Myszyniec at the end of the summer, when the geese, which almost every farmer raised, were big enough. From a merchant he knew, he would order a railway car of geese, that is, the number of geese necessary to fill a railway car. He would pay in advance. The second merchant, who had connections with Kadzidłan Jews who specialized in this trade, would divide the money among them, so that they could go around the villages and purchase the required amount of geese. The geese were brought to the Prussian border, where they were loaded on railway cars and sent to Germany. How honey? In nearly every garden near a farmer's house there were a large number of beehives. (As mentioned, the Kurpies cultivated hives.) Honey was collected from them twice during the summer. The honey of the first collection was very fragrant and clear, without wax. It was called lipa honey (after the lipa tree: linden tree, and perhaps after the month Lipiec – July). The second collection took place at the beginning of the autumn, when the bees prepared to winter in their hives (the beekeeper prepared food for them for the whole winter). The Jews of Kadzidła bought the honey from the farmers in the area and sold it in nearby cities.

In the winter, there were also merchants who traded in pelts (furs) of forest animals like foxes, skunks, etc. When the first snow fell, the foxes came out of their holes in search of prey. Hunters followed them to the entrances of their holes and placed poisoned meat or some other bait there, or they shot and killed the foxes. Skunks were also hunted, as was the mongoose, whose pelts were very costly. They were purchased from the hunters, who could distinguish between the pelt of an old fox and a young one. They hunted rabbits, which they sold to priests, village nobles and others. They dried and sold their pelts, and many were eager to buy their tasty meat.

The *Heders* and the *Melamdim*

Due to housing problems, there was no permanent place for a *heder* in Kadzidła. Therefore, the *heder* moved around from place to place, from one household to another, together with the Rebbe-*melamed*. The *melamed* did not live in Kadzidła permanently. He was invited to come from Myszyniec or Ostrolenka and was salaried for a "time period", that is, from the month of *Iyar* until *Tishrei*, or from *MarCheshvan* until the first of *Nissan*. He was boarded by the students' parents, each according to their share, arrived at by dividing the number of weeks of "time" by the number of students.

This caused great suffering for the parents, especially for mothers, in their small apartments. Despite this, they denied themselves, so that their children would not miss their Torah lessons and would not be ignorant. For example, our one-room apartment, although it was not very small, served as a kitchen, a dining room and a bedroom. For three to four weeks, a *heder* for seven to eight children was added, and with this, also the *melamed*, who resided in our home for the period of the *heder*. (This was the *heder* I learned in. I had a younger brother, whose *heder* also had to be accommodated.) In the *heder*, we learned from eight in the morning until nine at night in the winter. (In the evening, study hours were determined by the number of hours that a two-grosz milk [beef fat] candle burned). I remember how Mother, of blessed memory, tried so hard to set the *melamed*'s table with the finest foods, so that, Heaven forbid, she would not be slandered by others, who might say that, in our home, the *melamed* was deprived. The *melamed* ate alone, not with all the family. Bread was often a delightful meal for us and we filled our bellies with potatoes, morning, noon and night. The *melamed*, however, had white bread and eggs, drank liquor and ate dairy dishes for breakfast; for lunch – meat; and in the evening, again, the best of foods. So that we should not envy the Rebbe his feasts, we were sent outside in the summer. In the winter, we huddled in a corner or behind the stove, where two or three slept.

The *melamed* was hired by one of the parents, authorized to act for all the parents whose children learned in that *melamed*'s *heder*. The students were nearly of the same age, and their knowledge was comparable.

One summer brought relief of our crowding: Uncle Dow had a barn in his courtyard that stood empty in the summer. We moved to the barn, even though it was very gloomy, as light entered only through the door and a small window in one wall. Often, we rented a threshing floor, which stood empty until the harvest, from one of the farmers, and enjoyed the wonderful spaciousness. We could also learn and sleep there at night and on Sabbath afternoons.

Of the figures of the *melamdim*, three remain in my memory. Mordechaj Lamparpurdi (the meaning of his name is unknown to me) was my childhood *melamed*, with whom I studied when I was five years old. It was said that he was in the Russian army, kidnapped in his childhood, at the time of the reign of Tsar Nikolai I. He was old, the hair of his head and beard was white. When I came into the *heder* with my mother, he caressed me. To see if I would be obedient, he said that I had to bend over a chair with my pants down, to get "an advance" [spanking]. When I stood up, I sat near the alphabet that was spread out on the table, and pointed with the pointer in the hand of the *melamed* to the letters, while saying their names. In a week or two, I had learned the letters and vowels fluently, and had already begun to "*parpel*" (this was what we called reading combining vowels and letters).

The second *melamed*, whose memory I greatly honor and to whom I owe thanks and appreciation, was Awraham Dawid, a young *melamed* of about thirty from Ostrolenka, the son-in-law of a *melamed* named Icchak Zev. He had a red growth on his forehead, the size of a little finger. Besides the usual studies, he began to teach me *pasuk*, that is, the Early Prophets: Samuel I and II. He also taught me to write, something no other *melamed* had done. He had a wonderful handwriting and, to get me used to writing, he wrote letters to me as examples. He also taught us arithmetic. He was very dexterous in making and fixing anything. On Chanukah, for example, he made spinning tops in various shapes from wood and lead for us. And before Purim, with what artistry he would make the figure of Haman for us, and other wonderful things that symbolized the holidays. He would take a sheet of paper and make cut-outs of animals, birds and lamps that amazed anyone who saw them. Cut-outs like these were pasted on the eastern wall of the study hall. Who knows what an artistic talent was lost in him, without being expressed and discovered.

The third and last *melamed*, with whom I studied in our village, was completely different. His name was Chaim Meir, and he, too, was from Ostrolenka. He taught only Gemara. He was a great scholar and knew how to explain things, but he had one great shortcoming: he liked to drink. He ate little and drank a great deal of hard liquor, not mixed with water (90 or 95 proof alcohol), and not in small glasses. The alcohol was supplied to him by Prussian border smugglers in whole barrels. He drank many times a day and did not get drunk. He was healthy and strong. He used to walk from Kadzidła to Ostrolenka, leaving the village in the afternoon and arriving in the city a few hours before sunset.

These were my *melamdim*, who helped me with my studies. After Chaim Meir, I did not learn in Kadzidła anymore. I traveled to other cities to study, and reached Vilna.

The Story of a Torah Scroll That Was Found to be Unkosher . . .

Jealousy and hatred are listed in *Ethics of the Fathers* among the things that remove one from the world. In Kadzidła, these two bad traits caused an abominable and scandalous deed that shocked its hearers. This is what happened:

There were two village tailors in Kadzidła, Nachman and Awraham Aron. Both of them were childless. Nachman (the brother of Aron Jakow the Melamed) was of average height, good-tempered and polite. He was honest and observed the *mitzvot* [religious commandments]. He was not very educated, but was not illiterate either. He remembered his childhood education in the *heder*. His wife, Lejbe, called Aunt Lejbe (*die Mume Lejbe*), was taller than he. Her face was oval, with a thin-lipped small mouth and blue eyes that expressed goodness of heart and understanding. Aunt Lejbe was also an "educated" woman compared to most of the women of her generation. She was fluent in all the prayers in the *Korban Mincha* prayer book and the supplications in *Ivre Taich* [Hebrew translated into Yiddish-German]. All the books in *Ivre Taich*, such as *Tzena U'Rena*, *Kav HaYashar*, *Shevet Musar* and others were found in her home. The women, taking note of this, made her a "reciter" (*forzogeren*) at the time of prayers, to which she willingly agreed. In her clear voice, on Sabbaths, holidays, and especially on the High Holy Days, she would read aloud the prayers and supplications in *Ivre-Taich* to the women surrounding her. They repeated after her, word for word, and poured out the bitterness of their hearts before God in Heaven. Aunt Lejbe was gifted with many other virtues. She was "Mother Midwife" of the Jewish women in the village and a first aid expert in emergencies. She was a "healer" (before they called a doctor, she treated them) using herbs, plants and various roots and also knew how to whisper [a prayer against] the Evil Eye.

Nachman excelled in his faith more than all the tailors in the village. Aunt Lejbe, with her good taste and sense of beauty, advised her husband and remarked about every blemish and defect that she noticed in her husband's handiwork, and pointed out necessary repairs. She was especially careful that the villagers' colorful blouses should be sewn well, and because of this, he had customers in abundance. Nachman sewed also for men, but not with great expertise. When the Singer sewing machine appeared, Nachman bought one. His brother-in-law, Becalel, a women's tailor from Myszyniec, came to Kadzidła sometimes to teach him how to sew on it and take care of it; then Aunt Lejbe also learned to sew, and she helped her husband.

Usually, there was marital harmony between them. They loved and respected each other. To perpetuate their name (as they were childless), they decided to have a Torah scroll written. The completion of the scroll was celebrated very publicly. Many guests came from Myszyniec, the Rabbi among them, as well as from Ostrolenka. The couple gave the scroll to the Kadzidła community, because until then, the community had been unable to purchase a Torah scroll and was always dependent on the benevolence of the Myszyniec or Ostrolenka communities to lend it a Torah scroll for a specific occasion.

The second tailor, Awraham Aron, the son-in-law of Eliahu Jagoda, nicknamed "The Colt", was a tall, muscular man. His face, displaying pride and coarseness, was adorned with a small, sparse black beard; his short-sighted eyes were large and brown. He was a complainer, always jumping to the front of a line. He was arrogant and wore a long satin *kapote*, belting a sash around his waist. While he was not illiterate, he did not achieve the rank of a Torah scholar, and was a Chassid. His wife, Masza, was short, with a serious, sour face. Her green eyes, like the eyes of a cat, expressed strange fire and jealousy, her dress was sloppy. Because they had no children, and her husband was invited to other villages for purposes of his work, she was free of any burden. She walked around from house to house, while knitting a stocking, and gossiped, sowing disputes between people. The people of the village were careful not to "walk on her coals", and avoided coming near her.

Instead of buying himself a sewing machine, Awraham Aron was sanctimonious and traveled nearly every year to the Rebbe of Trisk, presenting him with "notes of redemption" and asking him to remember his barren wife. The Rebbe would accede, take the redemption and give him various medications and folk remedies to open his wife's womb, but the medications did not help. When he returned home, Awraham Aron was even more arrogant. He talked much about the greatness and honor of the Rebbe's house, and about his practices and customs with his Chassidim. The last time, when he parted from the Rebbe and poured out his heart and troubles to him, because they had not yet been blessed with the fruit of her womb, the Rebbe comforted

him and gave him an amulet for his wife, to wear around her neck. He blessed him, saying that in the next year, God would remember her, and released him with a joyous face. Masza, his wife, boasted about her husband the Chassid, and repeated all her husband's arrogant stories, but the amulet did not bring salvation to Masza. Meanwhile, the situation of Awraham Aron's livelihood weakened. The villagers deserted him and went to Nachman. Thanks to the machine, his sewing had improved. It was nicer and was completed in time, without foot-dragging (the well-known problem of tailors . . .). This led to the increase of Masza's jealousy and anger. Because of an unintentional, small imagined slight on the part of Aunt Lejbe, while reading prayers of supplication before the women, Masza became insulted and began to argue and quarrel aloud with the Aunt. The women tried to quiet and placate her, but to no avail. The noise got louder and reached the men's section [of the synagogue], where a quarrel also broke out among them, which quickly became a fistfight, where the full fury of Masza's brothers was felt.

Since then, the hatred increased, until Nachman's rivals decided to take out their anger on the Torah scroll. One night, they took the Torah scroll out of the house of prayer, erased a few words in different places in the weekly Torah portion, and returned it to its place.

On the Sabbath, before the Torah reading, the abomination that had been done was discovered. The distortion was impossible to repair – the scroll was rendered unusable, and the congregation finished prayers without reading from the Torah.

Although it was not clearly proven whose hand had done the crime, the suspicion was not a false one.

Kadzidła's Religious Workers

Of course, a small community like Kadzidła could not maintain a rabbi. Therefore, everything, from the simplest to the most complex, was brought before the Rabbi of Ostrolenka or of Myszyniec. The small community of Kadzidła could not even support a permanent ritual slaughterer, nor did it have a local butcher. Butchery was a sort of sideline of all the small merchants who wandered around the villages. A small merchant like this would slaughter a few thin animals and sell their meat. If the animal was found to be kosher, he would get a good portion of meat, the entrails, as well as the skins.

There was an agreement between the Kadzidła community and the community of the village of Czarny, that their ritual slaughterer, Mr. Szraga Fajwel, would come every Thursday to Kadzidła to slaughter the animals its butchers had prepared for slaughter. This arrangement was not the most convenient for Kadzidła's butchers, who had to prepare everything for a specific time and a specific place. In addition, because of there was no place for refrigeration, they only slaughtered enough to provide meat for customers for that day. There were those who dried out lambs' meat in an oven, as this meat could be preserved for a longer period of time. But not everyone had an oven and the utensils necessary for drying meat. The Jews of Kadzidła refrained from eating meat on weekdays. Whoever had a desire for meat or needed meat for a sick person or a new mother, had to make the effort of going to the ritual slaughterer in the village of Czarny. When the Jewish population grew in Kadzidła, the community decided to hire a permanent ritual slaughterer.

When the matter became known to the ritual slaughterer of the village of Czarny, Reb Fajwel, he did not want to give up his position. To pacify the Jews of the village, he agreed to come twice a week. Then the community of Kadzidła summoned him to a Torah law litigation before Rabbi of Myszyniec, and the Rabbi decided in favor of Kadzidła, explaining to the ritual slaughterer that if he could not go to Kadzidła every day, his position was forfeit.

The first ritual slaughterer hired by Kadzidła, Reb Motel, was the son-in-law of a ritual slaughterer in Ostrolenka. He was young, dexterous and very skillful at his work. He became well-known as a ritual slaughterer expert in checking lungs, having a light hand at removing defects in the lungs. He spared the money of his butchers and did not relish declaring meat non-kosher. Therefore, he was not in Kadzidła for long before he went to the city of Rozan, after the position of ritual slaughterer there was vacated.

After Motel, one of the members of our family from Ostrolenka, called Mosze Aron, was hired as ritual slaughterer in Kadzidła. He also excelled in his craft. In addition, he had a pleasant voice, and led the additional morning prayer on the High Holy Days. Once again, the people of Kadzidła did not have to ask for another prayer leader for those prayers (of course, the ritual slaughterer received a special payment for his work as a cantor). Mosze Aron also left Kadzidła after a few years, when he moved to the city of Malkin.

After him, Gerszon Sarny was the ritual slaughterer,

until the Holocaust came and destroyed him and the entire community.

Kadzidła Between the Two World Wars

World War I left its mark on Kadzidła. On the day war was declared, Russian regiments invaded Prussia, under the command of General Samsonov. When they were defeated near the Mazurian lakes, they retreated to a distance of three kilometers from Kadzidła. The Jewish inhabitants of Kadzidła were forced to leave their homes because they were confiscated for officers of the Russian staff, which entrenched itself in Kadzidła, and also because they were suspected of spying for the Germans. The Jews grabbed everything that came to hand and left for the nearby cities of Lomza, Ostrolenka and others. After the war, the refugees of Kadzidła returned, although they had found their livelihood for a time in their new places of residence. It should be noted that the Christian inhabitants of the village were glad that they had come back to Kadzidła, and returned to them the furniture that they had left, which they had taken care of all that time.

The Jewish community in Kadzidła developed because transportation conditions had improved, thanks to the road that the Germans paved between Ostrolenka and the border, and due to the narrow railroad track laid down in the region for strategic purposes and to transport "spoils" from the occupied territories to their land. Before the Holocaust, the number of Jewish families reached fifty. The Jews opened stores for the sale of textiles, agricultural implements and more. New craftsmen also came: tailors, shoemakers and carpenters. A new bakery was opened in the style of sophisticated city bakeries. Instead of the *minyan* previously found in a private home, a house of worship was built on a plot acquired from a farmer. It was licensed by the village council and given the permission of the local priesthood. During that time, they also wrote Torah scrolls for themselves, so as not to depend on the kindness of Ostrolenka and Myszyniec, which, until then, had loaned them Torah scrolls for specific periods of time.

The Zionist movement also returned to Kadzidła. The HaNoar HeChalutz and HaOved movements sent young people from their ranks for preparation for emigration to Israel (to Kibbutz Kolosowa). Movement leaders and speakers who visited cities in the area did not skip Kadzidła. The youth established a Yiddish and Hebrew library near the house of worship. Hebrew lessons also began.

But during the last years, before World War II broke out, when the Polish Andaks (National-Democratic) party came into power, the hatred of the Poles for the Jews grew. Their youths, incited by the priests, troubled and distressed the Jews; they placed guards near the stores of Jews and did not let Christians buy their merchandise. Polish craftsmen settled in the village, and drew the Jews' Christian customers to themselves, depriving them of their livelihood. But despite the incitement and propaganda, most of the inhabitants preferred buying from the Jews, because they knew that they could buy better merchandise for less from them. They also preferred the Jewish craftsman, whose skill and experience were superior to those of the Polish craftsman.

While the N. D. was busy persecuting the Jews, it was not looking out for the country's security. Meanwhile, the bitter Nazi enemy continued to eye Poland until it invaded it, occupied it and defeated its army in a few days. The Jews, the bitter enemies of the German Amalek, immediately felt its minions' cruel arm. The Jews near the German border drank first from the poisoned cup: ruin and annihilation were decreed on them.

There is no clear information as to the fate of the Jews of Kadzidła – where they fled and where they were at the time of the different "*aktzias*", until they were destroyed. Vague reports were received about Awraham Lewinski and his wife, Chana Lea; his son-in-law, Owadia Zylbersztejn and his wife, Sara, and their children, who were known to be in Ostrow-Mazowieck for a time, before they were sent to Oświęcim from Zambrow, together with the Jews of Lomza and the entire area. It is known that, for a time, the family of Josef Lewinski (his wife, Henja, his sons, Jakow and Cwi, his daughters, Cwija and Ester Rywka) was known to be in Jedwabne, which, after the division [of Poland], was under the Bolshevik government. When Germany declared war on Russia, the family escaped to the city of Nieswiez in White Russia. The mother died in Jedwabne. Cwija got a job in the post office in Nieswiez, and wrote letters from time to time to her sister, Nava, in Tel Aviv. But, with the Nazi invasion of Russia, all contact with her ended, and the fate of this family was the fate of the other Jews in the city. It is known that the Szmuel Burnsztejn Family fled to Lomza. Szmuel, who had a textile store, salvaged his

merchandise and brought it with him to Lomza. When the Germans broke into Lomza, he sent his wife and children to Vilna, and he moved, with his wares, to Bialystok. From Bialystok, he moved on to the city of Tobolsk, in the Omsk province of Siberia. There, he fell ill and died in the hospital in the city. The hospital issued a death certificate for the deceased, and sent it to his son, Dawid, who came to Israel as a pioneer, settled in Hadera and engaged in fishing.

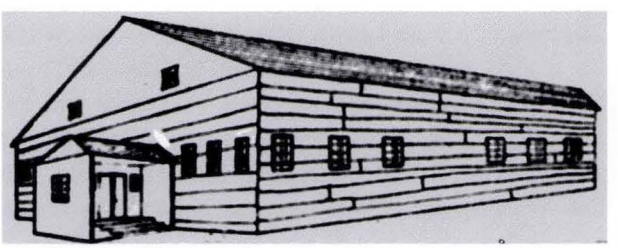
Thus the thread of the life of the Kadzidła community was severed. They were brought to an end in the world, together with hundreds and thousands of holy communities, with their study halls and synagogues, and all their public institutions, religious and secular.

May God remember the martyrs of Kadzidła, together with all the holy and pure ones destroyed in the Holocaust of the German Amalek, may its name be eradicated. May God avenge their blood.

MYSZYNIEC

A border town, a few kilometers distant the eastern border of Germany, and 38 kilometers from Ostrolenka. A narrow railway led from Ostrolenka directly to Myszyniec.

Nearly the whole town was squeezed into one long street. The houses were built of wood and had one story. Here and there was a two-story house, but built of bricks. After World War I, the Jewish population was 240-250 families, who came out of the places of hiding that they had run to at the time of the battles. According to statistics, in 1897, 1,800 Jews lived in Myszyniec. More than a few lived in houses owned by Christians.



The Myszyniec study hall

Myszyniec was a commercial town. It had extensive contacts with settlements in the area. Most commerce took place near the German border, and most people made a living by smuggling silk textiles, raisins, etc. This "black" commerce was based on an unwritten agreement with those in charge of the border guard, who made as if they were unaware of anything, in exchange, of course, for a high monthly "salary".

But, the city did not live off of smuggling alone. It also had stores and market days. There was a flour mill, too, powered by steam (a gas engine) which stood near the River Rozoga. The owners of the mill were Awraham Lejb Alterman, Gedaljahu Tikolsker (now in Israel), Mosze Josel Krieger, Hersz Ber Laska and Szlomo Laska. They sold white flour there on the spot. The chaff or (coarse bran) was sent to Germany.

Myszyniec was a town of unity – "one for all and all for one", as the following incident proves. Icchak Eli once brought a wagon from his town Chorzel (35 kilometers distant from Myszyniec), loaded with flour for sale in Myszyniec. Sales were sluggish and the carter, a farmer from a nearby town, lost his patience and began throwing the sacks from the wagon into the middle of the street. Icchak Eli was helpless. The inhabitants of the town saw this. In a flash, men and women, big and small, gathered and attacked the Gentile, untied the horse's harness and took the reins from him – until the Gentile asked for mercy and promised to act properly in the future. The event raised a commotion in the town and only strengthened the inhabitants' unity.

As to the parties in the town: among the founders of the General Zionists was Icchak Blumsztejn (now in Israel), as well as Netta Kramer, Berel Ulert, Mosze Peretz, Bercie Werman and others. They had a library. Later, the Poalei Zion party (Z.S.) rose. Its founders were Jechiel Alterman, of blessed memory, Jakow

Peretz (Israel), Szymon Kac, Y.L. Zyman (Mexico) and others. They conducted extensive cultural activity, with a library named after Y.C. Brenner.

I remember an incident from that period: once, on a Friday, an emissary from the center in Warsaw came to our Poalei Zion. After his lecture, he smoked a cigarette. When this became known to the religious Jews, they completely destroyed the Brenner Library and burned nearly all the books. Later, HeChalutz and HeChalutz HaTzair were founded. The activists were Zelig Baruch Kramer, Jakow Peretz, Azriel Elichowski, Dawid Peretz, Mosze Bergman, Dina Laska-Technay (Israel) and others. They also had a drama circle, a League of Workers in the Land of Israel organization and *Freiheit*.

There was also a group of leftist Poalei Zion, lead by Fiszel Tobjasz (now in Uruguay). There was also Agudat Yisrael, lead by Mosze Galina, Eli Lerman and others. There was also a Bejt Jakow school.

We also had a Mizrachi branch, and it had a house of worship – a separate *shtebl* (at Alter Chapnicki's). They prayed there in a *minyan* and also ran party matters. The head of Mizrachi was Zew Jerushalmi (Jeruzalimski), devoted to his party heart and soul. He was the authorized representative of Keren HaKayemet. To support himself, he ran a small factory for the production of oil. Fajwel Beckerman (a Hebrew teacher) also headed Mizrachi.

There was also HeChalutz HaMizrachi, headed by Mosze Blumsztejn (now in Israel) and Shalom Marcus, as well as HaShomer HaDati, HeChalutz and HeChalutz HaTzair, headed by Icchak Weisman and Azriel Elichowski.

During the last period, revisionist groups also appeared, but they did not have any influence. Despite this, anti-Zionist parties did not exist among us.

In Myszyniec, there was a local council, run by the head of the council and the secretary. These Jewish community workers cooperated with them: Joel Zyman, Awraham Lejb Alterman and others, who helped set municipal taxes. In Myszyniec, there was also a courthouse and a charitable fund run by Mosze Lejb Blum. Eliahu Lerman, the son of the Rebbe of Brok, represented Myszyniec in the tax committee in Ostrolenka, the district city.

Chassidim of all kinds worshipped at the *shtebl* of the Chassidim, the only one in town. Here Reb Reuwen Krieger, the son-in-law of the Rabbi of Zaremba, must be mentioned. He lived in his big house, and gave the small house in his courtyard to Chassidim as a gift. Half of it was used for guests, to whom he attended personally. There was also a *Linat HaTzedek* organization in the town.

The local Rabbi, Rabbi Jehuda Lejb Analik, had great influence on community life. He was the son of the Rabbi of Siedlce, Rabbi Szymon Ber, called "The Black Genius". He was a Torah great, and in addition, a fanatic of fanatics, who guarded *Yiddishkeit* and did not waive even the smallest detail. It was said that after the first library run by Icze Blumsztejn (now in Israel) was established in Myszyniec, the Rabbi appeared and burned all the books (as unfit and unacceptable). He also hampered theatrical plays and caused an uproar when the dress of a young man or woman was not modest enough in his eyes. On the other hand, he actually had a good heart, and was always ready to help a Jew in trouble. He did not take judgment fees from poor litigators. Even if one of the two parties was rich, he was also exempted from payment, so as not to embarrass the poor person, Heaven forbid. Every guest who came to him was warmly received; with his own hands, he prepared his sleeping accommodations. In Myszyniec, he established a yeshiva of four classes, where 60-70 boys learned, some from Myszyniec and some from the area. One of the students, Goodman, went to England at the age of 13, and later sent support to the Myszyniec Yeshiva and also built a new building for it. (His son, Harry Goodman, was recently head of World Agudat Yisrael and lives in London).

Reb Gerszon Blumsztejn was Myszyniec's ritual slaughterer and ritual circumciser. He was a learned and courteous Jew. He was also a scribe and wrote Torah scrolls, phylacteries and *mezuzot* [parchments inscribed with verses, affixed to doorposts in Jewish homes]. He was a musician, as well, and excelled as a warm prayer leader. He was also the ritual slaughterer in the town of Czerwin.

Reb Berysz Jablonowicz was the incumbent senior religious attendant. In addition, there was also an assistant beadle, Tuwja (the son-in-law of Alter Finkelsztejn), who did the grunt-work. Reb Berysz was a household name in town. He always engaged in community-administrative work, and represented Myszyniec's affairs before external government institutions, as a "deputy rabbi" of the town. It was said of him, that he once arranged a birth certificate for himself and deducted 13 whole years from it. When the head of the local council asked him, "Berysz, why did you conceal 13 years?" he answered thus, "In order to

avoid army service, I gave them to Tsar Nikolai, but today I am returning to my real age . . ."

He used to wear his *tzitzit* [fringes on the corners of a ritual garment] out [not tucked into his clothes]. When asked to explain this, he answered: The *tzitzit* are a kind of whip, reminding us that we are forbidden to sin . . .

Although Myszyniec belonged to the Ostrolenka district, the style of speech was closer to that of Lomza. In Myszyniec "*Gut* [Good]" was said, instead of "*Git*", "*Yeh* [Yes]" instead of "*Yoh*", "*Azey*" instead of "*Azoy*". This dialect also brought in elements of the Yiddish of villages in the vicinity, such as Kadzidła, Dylewo and others.

Sometimes theatrical plays were held on the shaky platform of the firemen. It had to be climbed onto with ladders. Most of the time, itinerant actors or troupes invited from out-of-town appeared there. There were also local amateurs: Baruch Kramer, Mosze Peretz, Szejna Alterman, Peretz Jakow, Frida Krieger, Rajchel Weisman and others. The director was Icchak Gerber.

Thus the Myszyniec community lived for generations, until the Nazi beast eradicated it from the face of the earth. It was said that, even before the entry of the Nazis, many of Myszyniec's Jews were killed by the bombs near the small railway station. The others were scattered in the different ghettos and camps, and there they gave up their holy souls.
May God avenge their blood.

(According to G. Tikolsker and M. Blumsztejn)

Mosze Blumsztejn, Secretary of the Jewish Community of Myszyniec in Israel

My Town

(Personalities and Way of Life)

Everything that was Jewish in Myszyniec is no more. The study hall, the cemetery, the Jews' homes, stores and workshops, where life sparkled for generations. No longer the voice of Torah, the clear voices of little schoolchildren in the *heders* of Szmuel Rafael Icel and Mosze Galina. There are no longer youths strolling on Sabbaths at dusk toward the [distant] pharmacy. Their voices and ringing laughter have been silenced forever. No longer the tumult of Myszyniec's youth movements, HeChalutz, HeChalutz HaMizrachi, HaShomer HaDati, which nurtured and instilled dreams and hopes for a shining future in the Land of Israel, *hora* dances and the impassioned singing of *We Are Going to Israel*. Those who, in innocence, believed and hoped – did not get there . . .

The happiness and mourning of Myszyniec's Jews, Sabbaths, holidays, charitable Jews, compassionate children of compassionate ancestors – all uprooted. Great destruction remains. The ruins shine with the memory of the martyrs of Myszyniec.

I see before me the martyrs of Myszyniec in the fullness of their lives – Jews of all kinds: learned Chassidim, with their deep eyes, high foreheads, groomed beards and pale faces; God-fearing Jews with *pilpul* [sharp analysis] of a page of Gemara; Jewish merchants with foreign contacts, buying and selling, giving God His due and hurrying to engage in beneficial work for the community. Secular Jews, as well as enlightened ones; Zionists dreaming of a Jewish redemption. In addition: simple Jewish laborers, healthy and strong, with calloused hands, always ready to help others and even to endanger themselves, if necessary. Simple Jews, but with a great deal of heart – ready to support the needy, but even so, not to push themselves forward, to the [synagogue's] western wall, who had never had the taste of receiving a *hakafa* [one of seven dancing circuits made with Torah scrolls on the *Simchat Torah* holiday] or an *aliyah* [being called up to read a portion of the Torah].

Here, I want to remember and dwell on these Jews, in particular, who are likely to be forgotten. Jews, types of the "common people", carters who transported everything from Myszyniec and to it, the living and the dead. Due to their bodily strength, they kept the city "on its feet", and raised the spirits of pale Torah scholars.

1. Chaim Ipeles

In the Zohar, it is written: "Everything depends on

luck, even the Torah scroll in the Ark". And indeed, a carter also needs luck. But Chaim Ipeles, with his two "lions" (horses), did not have luck in Myszyniec, may his "lions" forgive me. They were apparently not at fault, but he was, Chaim himself. He was not, apparently, a carter worthy of the name, because his mouth was too "weak". A real carter must spit out a curse the way it should be. His curses were not juicy enough, not according to the carters' rule book.

2. Mosze Papurza

He was a carter for generations, born with a whip in his hand. Even during his *heder* years, his best friends were stable boys. He related to his horse like to a pampered only child (even though he had never had an easy time of it in his life . . .). He behaved politely to his customers.

I remember Sabbath nights in Myszyniec. The setting sun weakens more and more toward resting at night among the mountains of Zdunska. Everything is immersed in darkness; only a few blazing rays, winding around the church spire, illuminate the distorted face of Jesus with a golden light. The Jewish mothers are busy with the final preparations to receive the Sabbath Queen; the fathers are clean after washing at the ritual bath, their faces crimson and their earlocks still dripping water. The daughters, with braids plaited after a shampoo, a sign that Sabbath preparations have been completed. In the houses, everything is sparkling and polished. Myszyniec did not need Persian carpets. Fresh, pale yellow sand is spread on scrubbed floors, creating an atmosphere of holiness and contentment. More fastidious mothers also sprinkled sand in front of the house, so that the Sabbath greeted you before you entered the house. The sand was provided for the Jewish housewives by Mosze Papurza. He took it liberally from the mountains in the area.

He had an additional job that was no less important, did Mosze Papurza. He was the only carter who connected Myszyniec not only with the living neighborhood, but also with "the world to come" – with the next world. If there was a funeral in town, may the All-Merciful protect us, Mosze came in the morning and brought the ritual purification board in his wagon. When the burial society finished its work, he came back and took the deceased on his final journey. Relatives and acquaintances walked behind the wagon, on the long, unpaved way to the old, quiet cemetery, with Mosze Papurza at their head.

His gaunt horse did not derive pleasure from its owner, although it lovingly received his curses and painful lashes. After a gloomy funeral, life returned to its usual routine. People forget, but a horse does not. Its back became even more bent, black bitterness overtook it. . . Poor horse, no doubt a bit of fresh barley would have put you back on your feet, returned you to life. It may be that in other hands you would look better, but you may feel easier when I tell you that not only your legs shake from weakness – your owner also lowers his head to the ground like you, despairing and hungry, but suffering in silence. His meals are poorer than those of his horse . . .

3. Icchak of Lejzorkes

Who does not remember him? Very tall, he walked among the other carters with special pride and self-importance. In the presence of his "pals", he was not generous with smiles. Healthy, strong, with a mouthful of sparkling teeth and flashing, shrewd eyes, he treated his colleagues, who seemed to him like idlers, with a hint of condescension. They lived from hand to mouth, and his life was different. At work, they wore worn-out clothes, but he was "elegant". His wife, too, often wore a new dress and a special ornament. In short, distinguished, strong and confident. He was a man who knew his own worth.

I remember that once, to my great surprise, I saw him broken, unlike his usual habit. Only the elect knew the secret: they caught him at the border with sacks of raisins and fine silk clothing. This shocked him and undermined his self-confidence. He sat in prison, as was proper, and after he was released, he began to engage in trade. His fellow carters regarded him as a traitor, while the merchants treated him like one of their own. They accepted his "Good morning", which was sometimes accompanied by a half-smile. At the synagogue, Tuwja the Beadle announced: "Stand, Reb Icchak the Tall, son of Eliezer!" He got a third-level *aliyah* on Sabbath for the afternoon prayer, but it was still an *aliyah* . . . and he showed the congregation with what ease and confidence the Torah was in his hands. Even so, when he told a joke, finicky Jews turned their heads . . . What else? Once a carter always a carter!

4. Eli "Pemp"

He was a carter – he spoke like a carter, cursed like a carter and his insolence was enough for ten carters. Despite all this, something was lacking in him –

originality and sincerity. A carter's horse must be part of its owner's soul, part of himself. A genuine carter will not sit down to eat if his horse has not yet eaten; he raises hell when his horse is sick, Heaven forbid. He rushes to the veterinarian and begs him to get his horse back on his feet. But it sometimes happens that a carter is nothing more than a dry professional, without a heart and without a soul.

In his youth, Eli Pemp was a carpenter. No one knew this secret. One fine day, he appeared in the market with a pair of horses, and became a carter. His other profession became like a second wife to him. Something drew him to "his first love". So, one day, in the middle of the week, he deserted his cart with the horses and returned to his saw and his profession.

5. Czombe

Czombe, "Pemp"'s son, was one hundred percent a carter. Every inch a carter. He suckled it with his mother's milk, and was respected even among the carters of Warsaw. Half the carters of Poland gathered in the courtyard at 17 Bonifraterska Street. Czombe's loud voice was heard there and everyone took his opinion into consideration. When he neared Bonifraterska Street, he would stand up from his seat, grab the two reins in his right hand and thus standing, enter the courtyard on his wagon like a tempest, like a warrior and like a victor. He lashed his whip in the air and greeted those present with a ringing "Good morning", accompanied by juicy curses. Despite this, who would believe that on a most usual of Tuesdays, they would look and marvel? For the first time in the town's history, a car appeared on the streets of Myszyniec. It arrived with enormous noise and loud honking, leaving behind a wake of thick smoke and the strong smell of gasoline. Most important, behind the wheel sat none other than Czombe, in person.

Some of the horses in the market began running wild, as if they sensed the appearance of a rival, standing on their hind legs and neighing out of anger and fear as one. But they gradually got used to the change, like all the town's inhabitants. From then on, Czombe did not hold reins ever again, and kept exchanging his car for a new one.

6. The "Derszyl"

Do you remember the "Derszyl" with his two "eagles" [horses]? Bright and early in the morning, his eagles were hitched to the wagon with the canvas canopy, their heads high, their cropped tails and groomed manes blowing in the wind, their iron hooves drumming on the stone street. With loud neighs, they invited the "Derszyl" to take his place on the high seat. When he appeared and seated himself, with only a quiet s-s-s and a light touch of his whip, the eagles began to gallop and transport clients from Myszyniec to Ostrolenka. It was quite a pleasure to travel with the "Derszyl", as well as a great privilege.

The "Derszyl" was punctilious. He always left exactly at the scheduled time. He never measured time by a watch. What for? Where would you find two watches that showed the exact same time anyway? With one, his watch was fast, with the other – slow, and the third one didn't even have a watch. Yes, "Derszyl" had a watch, but most of the time it sat at Mosze the Watchmaker's, waiting for an "operation". Therefore, the "Derszyl" set the time according to the prayers of the study hall *minyanim*. When the "Derszyl" decided: "We are leaving after the first *minyan*" – this meant the following: we will pray and then we will go. Breakfast was eaten on the road, in the wagon. When he went a distance from the pharmacy [at the edge of town], everyone opened his bundle of food and ate his fill.

It once happened that departure was delayed because one of the customers, who usually said a few chapters of *ma'amadot* [sections from the Scriptures, Mishna and the Talmud for each day of the week, recited after the morning prayer], was in no way willing to give up this pleasure because of the trip. Having no alternative, they waited for him, and those who waited had a chance to say the Traveler's Prayer before starting out. At that time, there were no longer wolves in our forests, and the danger of being beset by robbers was insignificant. Despite this, stories were spread in our town of "jesters" and "spirits" who caused carters to get lost, especially if their *tzitzit* [fringes on the corners of a ritual garment] were not kosher . . . Since I can remember, a trip with the "Derszyl" from Myszyniec to Ostrolenka always ended safe and sound.

Thus Myszyniec lived until the destruction of Poland's Jewry – a town that existed for generations and created a typical way of quiet Jewish life.

May these lines be an eternal memory of our martyrs and remain in the memories of all of us who have survived. As we do not know your place of burial, we will keep an eternal monument to you in our hearts.

May their memory be blessed and holy!

CHAPTERS OF HOLOCAUST AND DESTRUCTION

Yisroel Shtern*

Echo



I asked
the tree in the forest:
Where now is
my mother?

The tree
turned its head.

I asked
the chilly river:
Where now is
my mother?

The skies fell
on its neck
and begged: Do not say,
do not.

I woke fields
from their sleep,
I asked them:
Where now is
my mother, mine?

The grasses looked
at each other pondering –
I waited.
They, in the sun,
discerned, felt
and forgot.

Among black-green mountains
rambled an old man –
heavens and God.

In his eyes:
stars and night
in his eyes,
the old man rambled.

I asked of him: Tell me,
Where is my mother?

I held my breath
like the mountains all about,
and with eternal gravity
he directed my gaze
to the white path in the clouds,
like the mountains all about,
the old man said:
"In a still voice, she asks the day,
and to the night – whispers:
Where now is
my son?"

(From the Yiddish – **Chaim Chamiel**)

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* Among the great Yiddish poets. Born in 1894 in Ostrolenka, Poland. Studied at the Yeshivas of Lomza and Slobodka, and was close to the Musar Movement [a Jewish ethical, educational and cultural movement]. He lived most of his life in Warsaw and was killed there in the Ghetto during the Holocaust.

Chaim Chamiel, Jerusalem

God of Vengeance

The enemy was arrogant and ended all that was dear,
Ruined, destroyed, shattered and slaughtered.
Cities became ruinous heaps,
And dwellings – the provocation of despots.
And the Jewish Diasporas were filled with those who were hung
And those stabbed by the sword, the daughters . . .
Oh, the daughters, of them I will sing,
And weep and wail and bemoan and lament;
Of the ninety-three daughters who were torn to pieces,
Ninety-three sacrifices that were offered,
Innocent and pure burnt offerings that were sanctified,
That body and soul spurned defilement
And justice was not demanded for the blood and we were not pitied.
Oh, dear daughters! For years upon years,
You sowed faith in God in hearts,
You guarded the burning embers of Israel's purity,
And bore the song of vision in your mouths,
Holy light poured out of them –
And the earth swallowed your spilt blood, too.
And what did you whisper, heroines, when you died,
When you stood erect before your torturers –
When death sanctified you in moments of purity –
You said: – Yea, Israel will avenge our blood,
Surely man, surely the world, when they hear they will wonder,
And a judge who will prosecute and execute his judgment
At that time, they said "They will come and not see us?!"
And an angel did not call from Heaven "Do not send!"
And he did not stop, and did not grow faint, and the murderer did not refrain –
And he slaughtered and he murdered!

God! Now end mercy,
Or did the quality of law find in their favor, or praise
A nation that mincingly dances on the slaughter,
Despoiler of order, confuser of thoughts?
Forget . . . and remember, until the poisoned cup was emptied, I drained completely.
Send lightning and thunder! Empty on him the refuse of wrath!
Bring perdition and inferno, the bitterness of desolation,
Gather fury, vengeance which ignites me inside,
Give gnashing of teeth at the outrage in my heart,
Strike him, astound him with the dismay of annihilation,
Smash him, crush him, before he ceases to ravage.
Stop the maw of horror with gaping slander,

To joy, to scorn, to the blood that pours
Revenge God of Vengeance ridiculed groans,
The voice of the blood that shouts, let us recount the heroism;
The heroes of Warsaw and Krakow and all the places –
To sanctify the name of your nation, they were stronger than lions,
They subdued abhorrent monsters with their spirit.
Blood stirred, corpses quivered,
And the heavens roared with a shout of rage:
Revenge!

Gather, Lord, their rage and the anger of maidens,
Butchered in public, and dropped into pits;
And the tumult of the terrified, the screams of the tortured,
The bleat of babes led to the slaughter,
Assemble, din, bombard, make a noise,
With powerful thunder, sulfur and fire.
Beat the head of the viper with a hammer,
And pour the torments of the shadow of death on him abundantly,
Nullify his apostasy, gouge out his gaze, pluck him, annihilate him,
May his daughters rot, may his pregnant ones be devoured.
Strike him greatly, grind his bones.
Avenge the innocent lass, thrown on the butcher's block,
Her plaits were cut off with the scalp's decapitation.
The lass was hurled, skull smashed,
And she gave up her soul with staring eyes.
Fiery and terrifying . . . revenge!

Do not be silent, Lord, and do not restrain Yourself!
Remember the schoolboy who clung to You,
In the merit of his breath the world exists –
When flames caught the walls of the hall,
The minions of annihilation and religious persecution surrounded him.
He fled with *Mesilat Yesharim* [*Path of the Just*] in his hand,
And sang "*Yesod HaChassidut*
VeShoresh HaAvoda" before One God –

This is the song of freedom of the soul that longs, yearning heavenward,
And the little one walks in a furnace of flames, with joy, with rejoicing,
Singing before his God, he made hearts tremble,
Bursting into sobs before Your heavens with desperate supplications –
And lead pierced his body like a sieve,
And fainting, they looked at an inflexible heaven,
And the path of the just is traced in blood . . .

God of Vengeance! If the deaths of children You also despise,
And from joy of soul and pure yearning You hid Your face –
Here You have not yet locked the gates of tears.
When the man-eaters went wild on the Night of Atonement;
They burned temples, brandished swords, crushed babes,

They came to a small, adamant congregation,
Who entreated You: "Because You are All-Forgiving and the Master of Mercy"!
They shed tears, knocked on Your gates,
Raised their eyes to heaven, implored You;
Begged for their lives, trembling, fearful,
Because they saw that their arm would not save them,
Their eyes were lit with a mighty flame,
And their hearts and souls sang to the Living God –
Machines of hell were sent, the fire of annihilation,
And they gave up their souls in holiness and purity.
Torah parchments were uncovered and burned,
And the fire consumed the walls of the house,
To the sound of calls for vengeance in the poems they prayed.

Groan from Your heights, God, like a woman giving birth,
Do not allow the blood to soothe Your heavens!
In the spilt blood, come down, immerse Your hand,
And lay it on the malicious ones who did not know You.
Fill them with dread and they will shudder, curse them, because You are the Lord;
Send Your sparks, sparks of devouring flame,
And light the world with a blazing heat
Until sin will be cleansed and all sin purified,
Until malice will cease to exist and the malicious will be convicted,
And the whole universe will know:
That the God of Vengeance has come!



Yehuda Chamiel, Tel Aviv

On the Brink of the Holocaust

a. The Holocaust Draws Near

On the evening of 31 August 1939, a lively discussion took place in the "nest" of the HaShomer HaDati organization about the international situation. As one, we all felt that war was about to break out.

Rumors followed rumors. It was said that the Germans had invaded a few places in Poland and were repulsed. Members of the "nest" competed among themselves in spreading rumors. Apparently, the hysterical stories about wars in Poland encouraged them to believe that the Poles, supported by the British and the French, would beat the Germans in a few days. And that is the reason that they were building the dam on the River Narew in Ostrolenka, to stop the German invasion of our city by flooding the vicinity with water.

We decided to close the organization's house earlier than usual, because a restless anxiety prevailed everywhere and we did not know what the day would bring.

I closed the hall. The key squeaked in the keyhole. More than usual, we heard the sounds of our footsteps moving away, and they echo in my ears to this day. This evening, I felt, something special was happening which would determine our fate. The place where we had woven most of our dreams was becoming more and more distant with each step. The street lay in surprising darkness before us, as it was already forbidden to use lights in the evenings. It was hard to recognize those passing by.

Here is Mlynarska Street, where I played in my childhood. The street has shrunken in the darkness. Only the clatter of the machines in the flour mill can be heard. Before me is the electric station; the noise of its machines can be heard at a distance at night.

When I got home, I found Father, Mother, my brother, my sisters and neighbors sitting and talking about the war that would begin any moment. Father was very nervous. When he saw me, he fixed his eyes on me and asked: "*Nu*, what? What are they saying in the street?" Before I could answer him, we heard someone's voice, calling my father. This was a Gentile who came to call my father (Father had been appointed in-charge of the blackout of our street, called Kilinskiego) to check the blackout of the street. After my father went down, everyone became silent. Some left, leaving behind a heavy groan. Others stayed and sipped tea that Mother served them.

The war broke out on 1 September 1939. I was 17 then. When I woke up in the morning, I saw airplanes in the sky, leaving tails of white smoke behind them. They flew very high, until the sound of their engines could not be heard. The Poles came out of their homes and shouted: "Ours! Ours!", but the opposite was true. These were German airplanes, which bombed Warsaw and Polish army lines.

On the same day, a family from Myszyniec came to us, in all their poverty. They settled themselves in any available place they could find in our home. For the children, this was joyous. They got organized immediately and went out to play a war game.

On this Sabbath Eve, we did not go to the synagogue to pray. We all stayed in our homes, gripped by fear. Father said *kiddush* [sanctifying the Sabbath or a holiday by reciting a blessing over wine] in a broken, trembling voice. The *zmirot* [Sabbath and holiday songs] had always beautified the table and delighted their listeners, until the people of the city stood outside the windows and listened. This time, it was as if they were swallowed up into space, without exciting the "extra soul" [granted the Sabbath observer].

b. The Escape from the City

On the second day of the war, on Sabbath morning, a rumor spread in the city that the Germans were approaching and were about to bomb the city. Great panic gripped the city's inhabitants. Anyone who had a means of transportation grabbed whatever he could, loaded it up and left, to wander on ways from which many never returned home.

We, too, got a wagon, loaded it with whatever we could, and left. "Where are we going?" I asked my father. "With the flow!" was the answer. Mother and the little ones sat in the wagon, and my father and I walked after it, because there was no more room in it.

Along the way, I looked around and saw that everyone was moving: some riding and some walking, with knapsacks on their shoulders. It was hard to recognize the *balabatim*. Just yesterday, everyone had hung on their words, and now they were walking, helpless, frightened and angry, unable to save even a tenth of their property and honor. Here was Mosze-Natan, the Rebbe of the *Chevra Torah*, a tall, respectable man, whose white beard reached his sash, his stick in his hand and his prayer shawl under his arm, walking alone and not glancing toward either side, as if afraid of his shadow. I remember him, when he sat at *Chevra Torah* between afternoon and evening prayers and taught a lesson in *Mishnayot* in a singsong voice to the city's *balabatim*. I remember his *Kol Nidrei* prayer, where every word excited and awoke awe, his face suffused with the radiance of an angel. Now the man was silent; apparently, he had dealings with the Lord of the Universe.

The journey lasted for kilometers. Hundreds of wagons, on each, a family and its tragedy. Children cried. Angry mothers screamed. Night came. Everyone was tired. The little ones fell asleep in their mothers' bosoms, and only the creaking of the wheels on the road could be heard. The city was already behind us. We left behind homes, schools, synagogues, clubhouses, as well as the cemetery, where our relatives and dear friends rested. I shuddered when I thought of this, but I was silent. I was in another world, in which no one had a share, a world of questions and answers. Suddenly, I felt the urge to cry, to hug my father, whose face was so gloomy. He sensed my emotion and asked me: "Are you hungry?" "No," I answered. He did not go on asking, and could not continue because he had to choke out his words. I looked at him and asked, "And if I will be hungry, what will I eat?" He groaned and said, "God takes care of all his creatures, and will also take care of us."

c. With the Refugees in Czerwin

At midnight, we, the townspeople, arrived in Czerwin, a small town on the way to Ostrow-Mazowieck. We spread out all over the town like gypsies, and found places to shelter from the night's cold. Tired, we slept on our bundles in an attic in the home of acquaintances, whom we found by chance.

In the morning, we awoke exhausted and frightened. Now I began to feel the taste of war. No home! No bed! No shelter! People ran around the town, looking for a loaf of bread, which was hard to find. When we found bread, we ate it with appetite, as if it were a delicacy.

Father went to the city and told us to wait for him! Later, he came back with a wagon, loaded some belongings and household goods on it, and sent my mother, my brother and my sisters to the town of Sziadowa, where members of our family lived. I stayed with my father. Together with the Rabbi of our city and his family, we got on another wagon with our belongings and went to Ostrow-Mazowieck.

d. With the Rabbi of the City on the Way to Ostrow-Mazowieck

The Rabbi's face was worried. He talked about the war with my father. I heard him mention the War of Gog and Magog, "We do not have the power to determine the order of the world, and if it allows corruption, it will know no bounds!" said the Rabbi. "Surely, the redemption will come, but who will attain it?" he ended with a question.

The wagon traveled slowly. For a moment, my eyes explored fields not yet harvested. Unlike nature's usual way this month, the summer sun warmed us and imbued me with a happy feeling. Suddenly, I felt a kind of certainty in my heart that all this would pass, that it was nothing more than a passing nightmare . . . I wanted to tell my father this, but I did not, out of respect for the Rabbi, as I thought my words would seem foolish in his eyes. The Rabbi's daughter began a conversation with me, and we discussed different subjects, as if we were only on a trip. I did not even realize that we had entered the gates of the city of Ostrow. We went directly to the Rabbi of Ostrow, who referred us to one of the city's *balabatim*, an ironware merchant named Wissotzky. We settled in at his home. I will never forget this man's kindheartedness. To this day, in my eyes, he is an exemplar of a good-hearted man.

e. In the Road to Sziadowa

We stayed in the city for a few days and waited for the outcome. We wanted to know how things would turn out, so that we could go home. Unfortunately, the situation worsened, and there was no sense in staying in Ostrow, while my mother and the rest of my family were in Sziadowa. We decided to join Mother. On 5 September 1939, we left Ostrow in a carriage. With us rode a Polish woman, who was petrified to the point of shock. We heard about the German's heavy bombing of

Lomza from her. Many of its townspeople had departed, bereft of everything. Those who had not managed to flee were buried under the collapsed houses. She cried bitterly and said continually, "We are lost! We are lost!" In a bad frame of mind, we reached Sziadowa. From the distance, we heard heavy bombing: the Germans were bombing railway cars full of ammunition. The family was glad to see us. This time, we decided to remain together to the end.

But fate decreed otherwise. After a few days of heavy bombing, the Germans approached the city. When I heard this, I decided to flee in the direction of Bialystok, from there to the Romanian border and from there to Israel.

f. I Part from My Parents

I parted from my parents with a heavy heart. This was the first time I had ever done so. I suddenly felt that I had to escape. I equipped myself with a knapsack and a water canteen. I took a few shirts and at daybreak, I left, together with my cousins Szlomo, Szymon and Mendel Zyman.

In order to hide from the Germans, we went through the Czerwoni-Bor Forest. In the forest, we met many escaping soldiers. We saw corpses of people and horses lying everywhere, and heard the croaking of the ravens swooping down over our heads.

In the afternoon, we reached the village of Puchala. We stayed with a farmer woman, who was alone in her house because her husband had been drafted into the army. She was glad to put us up for the night. She cooked potatoes with onions for us. She knew that we were Jews and, therefore, did not serve us pork.

Suddenly, heavy firing on the village began. The farmer woman crossed herself and remained standing near the stove to cook and prepare the food, saying that we, the Jews, were her guarantee that nothing bad would happen to her. After a shell came through the door, passed over our heads and went out the window, she crossed herself again and kneeled before us, saying that now she was convinced that we were angels sent to save her. When we got up to go, she begged us to stay one more night, but according to our calculations, we had to run from there, because if we didn't, who knew what could happen that night. We promised her that nothing bad would happen to her and left, but got stuck at the other end of the village. The farmers advised us not to leave, because the Germans were attacking in the vicinity.

A goodhearted farmer let us in to his granary. We stayed there that night, during which the thunder of the bombing and shelling of the area did not stop. In the morning, we learned that the nearby village of Gac was shelled during the night and that many people were injured or killed, among them Jews who had fled Lomza because of the bombing.

In the morning, we decided to go to the village of Gac to see what had happened there, and to look for a way of escape. When we got there, we saw a village full of wounded and dejected people wandering around like ghosts, not knowing what to do.

When they saw that we were new, they asked us for a slice of bread, because it was hard to find bread in the village. We, who had taken only a little bread from Puchala with us, could not fulfill their demand. Suddenly, among the refugees, we discovered our cousin from Lomza, Szymon Chmiel, with his wife and two sons. They were very hungry. We could not bear their words "We are hungry", and when we gave them part of our meager bread, their eyes lit up. I will never forget their shining eyes. Not even one crumb went to waste. When a crumb fell on the floor, it was immediately picked up and eaten.

g. The First Encounter with German Soldiers

Meanwhile, a rumor went around that the Germans were surrounding the area and preparing to enter the village at first light. With no other way out, we decided to return to Sziadowa.

We finished eating our last slice of bread and left by the road leading to Lomza. The morning had brought a beautiful summer day. All around was absolute silence. We walked as though nothing in the world had happened, as though we were there just by chance. We even began telling each other jokes. Suddenly, as if sprouting from the ground, some German soldiers popped up, surrounding us on all sides. They shouted, and we raised our hands above our heads. They searched our gear and when they did not find anything, they ordered us to stand with our hands up, until they got far away. They also ordered us not to go into the forest, but to continue on the road. We thought the danger had passed, and that it was not so terrible with the Germans. Indeed, they had treated us well enough. After half an hour of walking on the road, we met Germans again. They asked immediately whether we were Jews, and when we answered "Yes!", one of them

looked at me and said, "What a shame! You don't look like a Jew, because they are dark and you are blond." I did not answer. They searched our clothes and took our money, saying that they were taking us to headquarters, because they suspected us of firing on the German Army. We were brought into a Polish farmer's courtyard, where we found many Jews and Polish soldiers, surrounded by German soldiers. After a thorough investigation, we were cleared of the suspicion of taking part in the shooting at Germans. We were lined up in rows and ordered to go to Lomza.

When we asked what they wanted of us, we were told that they were taking us to Lomza to clean the city's streets, and that we would get money and bread there. As soon as we reached the road, the Germans began to abuse us. We were about five hundred people. To make us walk faster, they pushed us and beat us with their rifle butts. All the way, they goaded us with shouts: "Polish pigs! Jewish scum! Right! Left! Fast! Fast! Cursed dogs!" Until we got to Lomza, the German soldiers marching on the road sang German songs and mocked us. I felt that things were not right – that there would be no work, no money and no bread waiting for us. I remembered the Germans' concentration camps. I became heartsick and quietly told my cousin that I suspected that they would take us to a concentration camp.

h. The Germans March Us to Lomza – The Meeting with Father

I stopped talking when a German approached me and yelled, "Shut up, dog, pig!" I evaded him, and went on like a "good boy". There was no time to think. One had to keep body and soul together. I waited for the moment when we would reach Lomza, when we would escape. But when we arrived and I saw Lomza, burned and plundered, and the German forces surrounding us, my hope of escape was disappointed.

In Lomza, we were put into a German church. They promised to give us food and, indeed, people from the German Red Cross arrived. We stood on line and they began distributing slices of bread to us. We also saw that they were photographing us. When the photographers went away, so did those who distributed bread, and we remained hungry. They began beating us, saying that there was no bread for Jews. We retreated then, and sat on the ground. A few fell asleep for the moment; others looked confused and terror-stricken.

I, too, dozed off. Suddenly, I felt a push. I opened my eyes and saw my cousin pointing toward the door: "Look, Jehuda, new ones are coming." And indeed, I saw many Jews and Poles being led toward us. Old Jews, in their sixties and seventies, dragging their feet, breathing heavily. Among the Jews who had arrived, I found my father and my Uncle Icchak. My whole body trembled and sweat covered me. "They caught you, too, Father?" I screamed and burst out crying. "Yes, my son!" my father replied. "They are taking us for work. They said just for two hours and, meanwhile, they brought us here." My father hugged me and said, "It's a good thing I found you. God wanted me to find you. They said that they had killed you and all the others. We were already mourning for you. Thank God, you are still alive. Now I hope that God will not leave us, and that we will yet go home." I calmed down a bit, as I was with my father. Courage returned to me, and I felt that I had to look after my father now.

Candles were lit in the German church where they put us, illuminating the face of Jesus there on the platform, looking at us. Here, I thought, stands the image of the man, before his brothers from whom he had parted and from whom he was descended. In his name, we had been abused for centuries and centuries, our blood spilt like water.

i. The Germans Torment Us

Consuming the ruins of Lomza, bonfires illuminated the darkness of the night and penetrated the church windows. The Germans ordered us to sleep and I fell asleep immediately on my father's knees. I suddenly woke in alarm, hearing shots that the Germans fired at the walls of the church. At first, I thought they were firing at us. After they stopped, however, and began again after about a quarter of an hour, and then stopped again, and then fired again – I understood that they were tormenting us, and that they intended to harass us all night and not let us sleep.

At three in the morning, the Germans woke us and ordered us to form rows. As we were tired from moving around during the day and from the long walk, we were slow to carry out the order. Then German soldiers burst in, and began striking all the laggards with their rifle butts. I was pushed outside, together with my father, my uncle and my cousins. In the crowding, many of those who were pushed stumbled and sprawled on their faces on the ground, until a pile of people accumulated. The Germans abused them. Some were killed or wounded. We somehow managed to get organized and, when we

were finally standing in rows, they ordered us to get moving. I saw Lomza burning. Tongues of flame rose heavenward. Whatever the bombs had not destroyed, the fire finished, with no one to put it out. We walked on shards, on fragments of furniture and household items. The darkness of the night gave the scene the dreadful form of hell. It seemed to me that they were leading us straight into the fire's maw.

The Germans' shouts goaded us to quicken our steps. We crossed the ruined bridge on the way to Piontnica. It was hard to cross. Some fell into the Narew and drowned. Others, who could not cross, stopped. The Germans shot them and they fell into the river.

One old Jew begged the Germans not to shoot him, because he did not have the strength to cross, but the Germans shot him immediately and he fell. There was no opportunity to cry and to resist. We were busy. "Fast! Right-left!" scream the Germans. In the face of all this, despair beset me. I raised my eyes to the heavens and shouted, "My God! My God! Save us!", but the stars looked at me indifferently. Nevertheless, I recovered for a moment, because it suddenly seemed to me that I heard a voice saying: "Yes, we have seen man's distress and his suffering. We have seen how the Jews are beaten and persecuted for no reason; going into exile for no fault of their own, tortured in the cellars of the Inquisition, dismembered and murdered in pogroms. Yet the Jewish People has not been destroyed. It continues to exist and hope. Therefore, be strong, young man, be strong and of good courage!" Suddenly, I heard Father's voice whisper to me: "You must hold on. We must live." The words of my father, enforcing the voices that echoed in my head, reduced my fear of the future and of the night to some extent. "Yes, Father", I answered, "I will try!"

So the Jews of Ostrolenka and its vicinity went on ceaselessly, dumbfounded, bent and frightened – but to where? No one knew. When we reached the stream near Kolno, we rested a bit. We were hungry. We had not eaten for two days. We were thirsty. Many stormed the stream and drank from it, but the Germans did not let them be. They shot at those who drank, and there were casualties again.

While we rested, I began digging in the earth – perhaps I would find something to eat. Indeed, I found potatoes, carrots and beets, and we ate them uncooked.

j. In Kolno – The Help of Brothers

After a quarter of an hour's rest, the Germans began to make us run, while behind us soldiers rode on motorcycles. We had to hurry and run, so as not to be run over. This was a terrible and shocking spectacle. Only the will to live, to survive and see the downfall of the Germans strengthened us to hold on in this situation. We approached the gates of Kolno at a rapid pace. When we entered the city, German soldiers stood on both sides and made sure that no one escaped from the line. They shouted at us in derision: "Cursed Jews! Polish pigs! Chamberlains, we will show you how to fight us. We will suck your blood from your bodies. We will shatter your heads with paving stones!"

I believed them. But the inhabitants of the city did not. Spontaneously, they came out into the street and began throwing bread, apples and anything else they had at us. I succeeded in catching many apples and bread. I was young and agile then, and could do what the adults could not. We divided the food among family members and other acquaintances.

I remember a Catholic priest, who pushed himself into the rows of captives and distributed bread and fruit among them, without discriminating between religions or races. When the Poles complained that he was also giving food to Jews, he answered that all were the children of God.

After a time, we heard that the Germans had tortured and executed him. Like him, many Jews who could not withstand the hardships of the road were killed.

k. On the Way to Prussia

At 5:30, after an exhausting fourteen-hour walk, we arrived at the Prussian border. In one village, we saw that the Polish Army had invaded it on the first day of the war and had burned part of it. The Germans, however, boasted that they let them in intentionally, and that they had destroyed them to the last man with their machine gun fire.

In the same village, the name of which I have forgotten, they let us rest for about a quarter of an hour. We got only water to drink. Then they pushed us, like animals, into freight cars and closed the doors on us with curses and blows. Poles and Jews were together in the cars.

Inside the car, the Poles demanded that the Jews give them their tobacco; thanks to decent Poles with common sense, a "mini-pogrom" was prevented in the car. They maintained that we were brothers-in-trouble together and, therefore, we had to be united. A few, who

were very worn out, fell asleep on the floor immediately, while others stood for lack of space, changing over from time to time, in order to rest. I could not fall asleep. Only one question gnawed at my mind: Where were they taking us? From time to time, groans broke from anguished hearts. Everyone tried to delude himself that they were taking us to Germany to work, and that we would stay there until the war ended. Suddenly, the train stopped and the doors opened.

l. We are Put on Display in Rastenburg

Out! – we heard the screams of the Germans. Fast! Fast! The sign at the station told us that we were in Rastenburg. We began to jump out of the cars. Here, the Gestapo, in all its glory, awaited us, as well as German youths who clapped their hands and shouted "Heil, Hitler!" several times. "Here is the defeated Polish Army!" I laughed to myself, "I, who have not yet seen sixteen springs, am being exhibited as a soldier in the Polish Army." This is what Hitler, may his name be eradicated, wanted – to consider civilian captives as soldiers, in order to boast before his people.

The lights of the city of Rastenburg winked at me, encouraging me to leave everything and enter the city, as if this was the city of Ostrolenka and I was now returning home with my father. But the Germans' shouts dispelled my illusions. I was on German soil, given over to the benevolence of these cursed Germans. The German youths began to sing: "*Wenn das Yuden blut fun das messer shpritzt*" (When Jewish blood drips from the knife). My father began to weep. "Alas for us! What have we come to!" he sobbed, while I looked at these youths, as though from childish innocence and curiosity alone.

Marching in rows, we passed through the city, while on both sides of the streets, crowds of Germans stood, cheering the German Army, until we reached the German Army camp. This was a tall building of a few stories, with halls and rooms for the Army. It was one o'clock at night. Each of us received a piece of bread and some drinking water. Although I could not believe that I had truly been given bread, we were so exhausted that we could not eat, and so we laid down on the stone floor and fell asleep.

At five o'clock in the morning, they woke us. Once again, we were ordered to form rows. We stood in the courtyard for a few hours, exposed to the blows and spiteful actions of the Gestapo. But between blows and shouts, we got slices of bread again, and were warned that this slice would have to last us all day. Among us were Jews with earlocks and *kapotas*, as well as yeshiva students, who immediately began to derive a "*kal vachomer*" [all the more so]. They saw the Finger of God in it – for if they [the Germans] warned us, this was a clear sign that they also cared about us.

m. To the Stalag 2 Camp

When we were all standing in rows to the Germans' satisfaction, we moved at their order to the city's streets. We were warned to maintain a uniform pace, so as not to lag behind – thus not awakening the enemy's wrath. I looked around me. I saw a pleasant and clean town. The stores were nearly empty of merchandise. I saw signs hanging near the entrances to kindergartens, and on them was written: "Entry is forbidden to the Jews to the third generation". People standing in the streets ridiculed us. Again, we arrived at the railway station and they pushed us into the cars. The doors closed on us, and we were squeezed and crowded in, without air to breathe. We traveled all day and all night. People who could not control themselves relieved themselves, and the stench, the crowding and the horror caused many to faint. A few sat and talked about the past. Others wanted to die, rather than continue living like this, but the most painful question was: Where are they taking us? Thirst plagued us.

At five o'clock in the morning, the train stopped. We heard chains clank and the doors opened, revealing faint morning light. Through a thin fog, we saw a small railway station. I did not see its name. A large army camp sprawled near the station. Once again, we were arranged in rows and moved without asking. We crossed a bridge. Above it was a statue of a soldier, throwing a hand grenade. A few German soldiers standing near it screamed "Kike! Kike!" We moved away from the main road and entered a thicket of dense, tangled bushes. The thought crossed my mind: "Perhaps they want to kill us here" . . . I expressed this thought aloud. My father tried to silence me, and asked me to wait patiently, but I calmed down only after we came out into an expanse of plowed fields. Noisy tractors plowed the land. A machinist, who sat on a tractor near us, ridiculed us. He had a fat, coarse face, with a potbelly, like "a barrel filled with a lot of garbage". We did not pay any attention to him, and walked until we reached a gate on which was the sign "Stalag 2", and near it the notation "To Königsberg".

Beyond the gate, we saw many captives, Jews and

Poles, citizens and army personnel, who had arrived before us. They sat on the muddy ground, uncaring.

Yes! We were brought to camp Stalag 2 and given food. Incredibly – a whole smoked fish, white bread, margarine and black coffee, prepared from beans.

This was cunning on the part of the Germans. The hungry Jews and Poles fell on the food and, after gorging themselves for three days, many of them died. Only the cautious hung on. The Germans promised to put up tents and houses where we would live. They also promised work, they promised the earth, but they did not keep any of their promises. Meanwhile, we slept outside, given up to the heavens' good graces. At night, I hugged my father and he me, and thus we slept until the morning light.

The Germans exacerbated relations between the Jews and the Poles in the camp. Intentionally, they gave food to the Jews first, and the Poles had to wait their turn. The hungry Poles could not stand this, and attacked the Jews while they were getting their food, so that a great struggle took place between us and them.

We did not give in. We defended ourselves with a tight front, leaving no breach in the center. The Ostrolenkans in the camp consolidated around my father and always guarded each other. My father would comfort one of the Benedon sons, who often felt total despair.

n. Casualties of Heaven and Man

I will never forget the third night in the camp. As always, I fell asleep, my father and I hugging each other. Suddenly, I felt something strike my face. I awoke and was amazed: a strong rain was pouring down. There was nowhere to hide. We began to get wet. All the Jews gathered, clinging close together, thereby warming each other. The rain did not stop. We began to shout, but our voices were answered only by the thunder. The rain, lightning and thunder blended into our shouts, and it seemed as if the earth shook beneath us.

A voice passed through the camp: "Jews, rebel!" As one, we all ran in the direction of the fence. When they saw us breaking out, the German guards aimed their machine guns at us and fired into the air. We retreated. We began to search in the dark for something to give us cover. And then we discovered that the Germans had brought boards. The Poles attacked us and wanted to steal the boards from us. A bitter fight took place in the darkness of the night. Teeth stuck into strange bodies, biting and fighting. A war of despair brought useless sacrifices on both sides.

Finally, dawn came. We were dirty and soaked to the bone. We came out of our hiding place. I began to look for my cousin, who had gone astray during the night's confusion. Mockingly, the Germans asked after our health, and how we had passed the night. Our answer was silence.

With the morning, I saw black bitterness on every face. Everyone sought refuge and counsel. During the day, about sixteen Jews died.

We could glimpse their graves over the fence. Their number increased from day to day, oppressing us more and more all the time. Each of us thought about the end, when his turn would come to die. My father, looking at those fresh graves, burst into tears. He hugged me, sobbing, "No, my son! No, my son! You will not die! You will yet succeed in reaching the Land of Israel, you will succeed in fulfilling your life's dream. Do not believe the Gentiles. Only with your strength, only you, the young, will overcome and build. Do not leave your land. Try with all your might to live in it." "Yes, Father!" I answered. "I promise you that if I succeed, I will know what to do," I continued.

o. Terrible Days in the Camp

Meanwhile, the situation got worse daily. Amid all these troubles, Rosh HaShana arrived. Without holiday or regular prayer books, we recited the prayers and supplications by heart.

Yom Kippur came and, as if in its honor, the Germans put up tents for us to live in. We conducted our prayers without the Germans and Poles bothering us.

It is difficult to describe praying in that camp. Jews, bent and broken, eyes full of puzzlement, stood silently or murmured something in a whisper. When the cantor began "Light is sown for the righteous", everyone burst out with a great and terrible broken cry. They fell to the ground and banged their heads against it. My heart became petrified. I could not cry. I stood silently. Like a rebel, I looked at the faces of my father and my family, asking myself: Why, in fact, are we suffering? Why should we ask? Is it easy for Him, for God, to humiliate us completely, so that we will come to him, and ask and supplicate? No!, I said. Not one word! If God wants my prayers, then only silence can express them!

I was silent during all the prayers, while my eyes penetrated a great abyss and, at the same time,

wondered at the way a man must travel. And here was a shocking spectacle: A Jew raised his twelve year old child, also brought here as a captive, and kissed his face and head. He then raised him again and screamed: "God, in the merit of the little children, who have not yet sinned, have mercy on us and save us. Return us to our homes, to the bosom of our families." I began to cry. We all prostrated ourselves on the ground and tore our clothes in mourning for the martyrs who had fallen just a moment before, as well those who had died during prayers. We remained lying down, without strength to get up, and cried bitterly.

p. The Poles Rampage in Their Usual Way

Meanwhile, the Germans decreased our food rations, until we reached a state of actual starvation. They also stopped giving us drinking water. Many Jews, who could not stand the trial of thirst, drank the filthy water coming out of the Germans' bathhouse. They were infected with typhus and died.

Lice and all the many other troublesome misfortunes stuck to us. Our suffering grew. It was not unusual to see Jews and Poles standing and delousing themselves whenever they were not working.

One day, I stood and looked over the fence, and saw Jews forming rows. I knew that it was not time for food distribution. I went over and asked them what had happened and where they were going. I learned from them that the Germans had ordered them to get into rows, because they were about to release those who were over fifty years of age or under eighteen. I ran quickly to my father and cousins, and told them about the rumor I had heard. We went to line up immediately. I also discovered that the Poles were forming rows. I had not yet turned around and gotten into a row, when the Poles attacked us. They began to hit us and take our clothes, and anything else they could. Suddenly, I saw some Poles attack a Jew from among my townspeople (who, by the way, is now in Israel, but whose name I do not remember). They stole a gold watch that he kept in his pocket from him. I ran to his aid and began to resist the thieves. When the thieves saw this, they left off the Jew and attacked me. They especially beset my boots. I struggled with them, I bit their ears, but they struck my head with a log until I fell and lost consciousness. When I woke up, I saw my cousin standing near me, shouting, "Come, Jehuda, your father is looking for you." I went over to my father, walking barefoot.

When he saw me, he broke into bitter tears, and screamed, "What did they do to you?" We both wept, as this was all that remained for us to do. My father wanted to tear up his coat and make it into bandages for my feet, so that I would not catch cold. I did not let him. I laughed and said to him, "It's nothing, Father. I will find rags and fix myself up. We still have time to tear the coat." And that is what happened. I somehow got out whole, while others were simply stripped naked and remained, some in their underwear and some only in shirts.

Despair hit us very hard then. All that was left to us was to pray and to cry.

q. The Poles Learned a Lesson

Two days after the Poles' pogrom in the camp, we were fortunate enough to see something that we had not believed possible. When we got our regular supper, we saw many German officers looking at us, to our great amazement. As usual, the Poles stood in a separate line and waited until food was distributed to the Jews. Encouraged by the pogroms of the day before yesterday, and seeing that they were not punished, they thought it right to show the German officers their hatred of the Jews. They attacked us, in order to steal the food we were given. At that moment, the Germans attacked the Poles with drawn swords, striking left and right, and shouting: "Polish pigs, how dare you beset your Polish citizens? What kind of a State are you at all, that you live only by robbery and murder?!" Meanwhile, German civilians photographed every step of the battle and the chaos. The Jews were not touched. Later, their intention became clear to us. They wanted thus to show the democratic world, who it was protecting in its war against Germany.

On that day, which cost them losses of some killed and wounded, the Poles began to understand who their real enemy was. Since then, friendly relations prevailed between us, and only our common problem – freedom – rested in our hearts.

r. The Ostrolenkans are Loyal to Each Other

Meanwhile, rumors spread that they were about to release us, but this was hard to believe. The rumors, in and of themselves, strengthened and encouraged us. Unfortunately, days passed and with them, victims increased, dying of exhaustion. Stealing bread from each other was a kind of "sport", but for those who were starving, the danger of death was an expectation of this

"sport". In the middle of the night, we woke to a victim's shouts: "Where is my bread?" We did not have enough strength to get up, and fell asleep again. The Ostrolenkans guarded each other and, in this way, prevented great troubles.

One day, the Germans announced that anyone from "such and such" towns should form rows, because they were about to be sent home. Although Ostrolenka was not on the list of towns, Lomza was, so we got into the row of Lomzans. "The most important thing", we thought, "is to get out of here! Freedom! Home!"

s. Homeward Bound

Again, we were put into cattle cars. The doubt still rested in our hearts: perhaps they were transferring us to camps again. Yet the feeling that we were leaving this terrible place satisfied us and we placed our fate in God's hands.

After traveling for 44 hours, the train arrived at the Ostrolenka station. We were tired and hungry. They opened the doors for us, and when we saw that we had really reached our city, we were revitalized. Ordered to stand in rows, we entered the city by the bridge, which was sunken in the water. We passed 3rd May Square, while Jews, Poles and the German Army stood on both sides. A military band played and we were ordered to walk straight and laugh. Suddenly, I saw my mother and my aunts, as well as my younger brother. They were calling: "Efraim! Jehuda! Father! Come! Get out of the row and slip away, for they are leading you to the Russian border. From there you will be transferred to Lomza and they will deliver you to the Russians!" Then we understood that Poland was divided in two, and that we must get to the Russian side.

When we passed near the municipal park and the prison, I told my father that it might be worth trying to ask the Germans to leave us in the city. My father told me to try. I spoke to the German sentry and he agreed, on condition that we go straight and not by way of the fields, or they would kill us.

My Uncle Icchak and my cousins got into town easily, but they did not want to let my father in and told him to go back. Therefore, I did not go in either, and we went on a bit further. Suddenly, my Aunt Gitel, of blessed memory, appeared with my sister. They brought tea, bread and cakes. We ate some and entered the city together by way of the fields.

It was hard to believe and get used to the idea that the Germans controlled the city. Jews were taken out to the streets to sweep and clean them. Jews were brought to the jails to clean the toilets in them with bare hands. A broom was put in their hands, they were led to the streets and ordered to sing *HaTikva*. Ostrolenka's Jews, gripped by fear, tried to hide and stay in their homes. At night, I woke up and saw fire rising from the synagogue. We were afraid to go out. Once again, I didn't care about anything. I wanted to sleep like a human being at least one night. In the morning, we discovered that the Germans had poured gasoline on the walls of the synagogue and had burned the beautiful pictures that adorned it.

t. The Expulsion

On *Simchat Torah*, the German regime issued an order, that the Jews must leave the city within three to four hours. Whoever would remain – would die.

We didn't care. We wanted to get quit of them, and did care about property. The main thing was that we would no longer see the monstrous faces of the Nazi murderers.

We left the city. I will never forget the words of the Deputy Mayor of Ostrolenka to my father, when he came to the road to say goodbye to him. He cried, and this is what he said: "Now, Panie [Mr.] Chmiel, I see that we have lost the war and Poland."

The horses lowered their heads, as if they, too, were pondering the downfall of Poland. The whip lashed their backs and Ostrolenka, "a city that is a mother in Israel", was behind us.

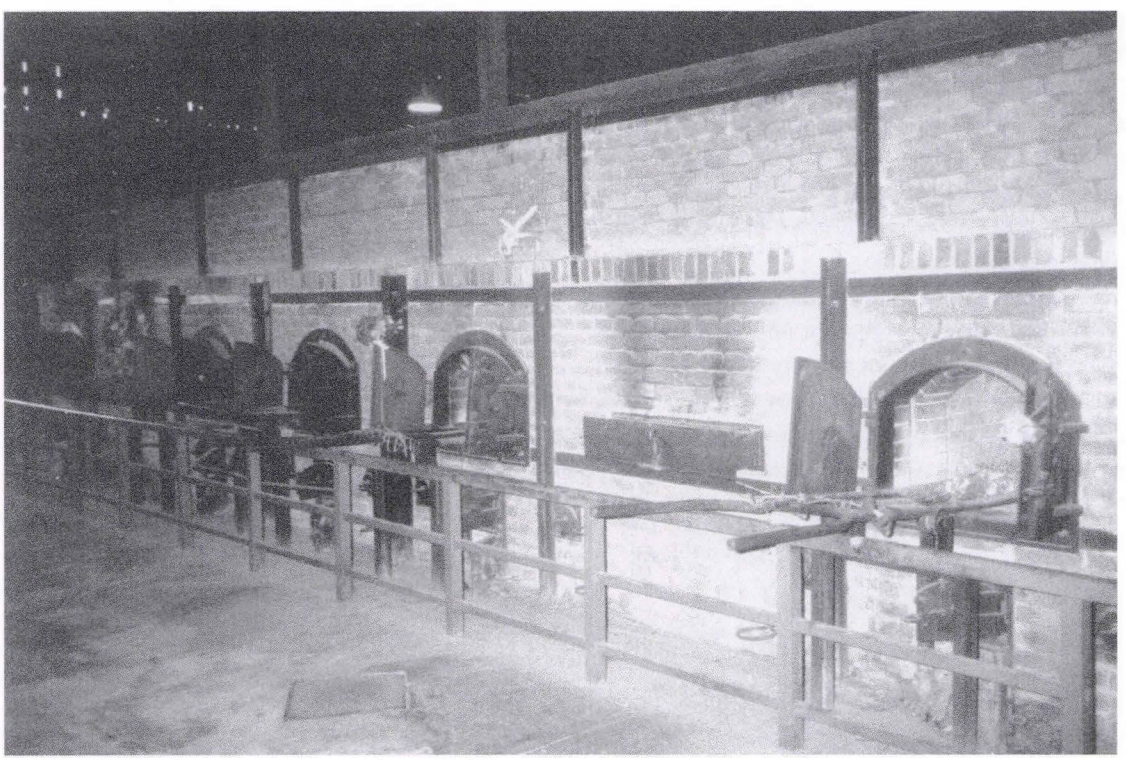
Arcie Nowinski, Argentina

Our Share in the Crematoria

When Hitler, may his name be eradicated, rose to power, the skies darkened over the Jewish people. The corrupt Polish government, instead of repairing its rotten administration, began to imitate Hitler's barbaric measures and adapted to bestial anti-Semitism with the pogrom in Przytyk and other places. The Polish government itself was rife with anti-Semitism, more than enough. The tragic epilogue came in September 1939. When Hitler's army invaded Poland, our city, because of its proximity to the German border, was one of the first cities occupied.

From the first day, the Germans began to implement their satanic program of destruction. They forced the Jews to leave behind everything they had acquired over the years through great effort, and to take up the wanderer's staff. According to news that reached me, most of our townspeople were brought to the city of Slonim, where they were forced to dig pits – graves for themselves. They murdered them cruelly. The entire family of the writer of these lines was thus destroyed.

At the crematoria of Auschwitz, Treblinka and Majdanek, as well, Ostrolenkans had a respectable share. Here is the authentic testimony of a relative of ours from Lomza, who was saved after the terrible death march. He related that on 10 January 1942, 5,000 Jews were brought to Auschwitz, among them many from Ostrolenka. There he saw my wife's parents and her two sisters, Chajka and Rejzel, who was in an advanced stage of pregnancy, the wife of Eli Zusman with her son, Chawa Wajnkranc with her children, and many others. When the sealed freight cars were opened, the Germans called: "Is there a painter among you?" He responded to the call. Fate apparently wanted him to remain [alive], to give living testimony to the terrible evil.



Yitzhak Zohar-Wylozny, Holon

An Ostrolenkan Youth's Prolonged Journey of Great Suffering, Pain and Vicissitudes. The Chronicles of an Ostrolenkan Family. Ghetto Vilna – Concentration Camps – Israel 1939-1948



Although the story of our townsman, Icchak Zohar-Wylozny, does not appear in the original *Yizkor Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka*, we decided to include it in this second edition in Hebrew. To us, this story is especially important. It comprehensively reflects the way of life and history of a "common" Jewish family, working people, [tracing their lives] in Ostrolenka until 1939, during World War II, in particular – during the Holocaust and, finally, the arrival of some of its children on the shores of Israel, their participation in the War of Independence and the establishment of the State of Israel.

Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel Committee
Spring 2001

In Ostrolenka Until 1939

Ostrolenka is an ancient Polish city, not large, recorded in history, on the shore of the River Narew, 120 kilometers northeast of Warsaw. Around it is a plain, some hills, forests, creeks and many villages. I was born there on 22 January 1922, at Berek Joselewicz Street 34, near the small market. There I spent my childhood and the years of my youth.

Our family: my father, Aron (Arcie), my mother, Rejzel (Rosa), of blessed memory, five brothers (I am the fourth in the row in the picture, and cousin Bluma, who lost her father). My father, "Arcie", had an expert artisan's degree in shoemaking and ran a shoemaking workshop. He was licensed to teach apprentices the profession. A workshop in one room, a bedroom in the other, the kitchen and the cellar – all this was situated in our little wooden house on Berek Joselewicz Street. This was the floor plan of our house during the day only. At night, the whole house became a bedroom; in every corner, a bed was placed and, often, two slept in one bed. Only one wall, near the oven, was built of fireproof bricks. One had to go down a few steps to the oven, in which Mother baked black bread in large 4-5 kilogram loaves (from rye flour mixed with potatoes, the dough of which my father kneaded with his strong hands), potato pancakes, cakes and *challot* [bread loaves] for the Sabbath. We bought common dark bread from Jalowicz on Goworowskie Street. Every Monday, we brought fresh milk from Grabowo or other villages in the area (toward the end, by bicycle) and from it, we prepared yogurt, butter and cream. We brought water from the nearby spring, and when we needed a large amount for laundry, my big, strong brother Zalman, did the work. Then, on a small wagon we had put together ourselves for this purpose, we took the laundry to the River Narew about half a kilometer away, to be rinsed and wrung out. The cellar served as a refrigerator in the summer for different foodstuffs, and for storage of a large quantity of potatoes, beets and carrots for the winter. In the courtyard, there was a barn-storehouse,

and in it were wood and coals for heating, and flour. There was always a big barrel full of sauerkraut there. We also raised chickens and ducks, which I, especially, tended. During winter freezes, they "resided" in the room, near the oven.

More than any of my brothers, when I was still a boy, I helped my mother with housework and my father with shoemaking. As I have said, we were five brothers. The eldest, Mosze Beniamin, who was 27 years old in 1939, sewed shoes in his own workshop on Kilinskaga Street. Meir, 22, and Zalman, 19, also worked with him as sewers. I, Icchak, 17 then, already worked with my father in the workshop as a shoemaker. Chaim, 12, learned at the Yavneh progressive religious school.

Our family – a Jewish family of workers, the like of which there were many in Ostrolenka – belonged to the middle socio-economic sector. We all worked hard and barely eked out a modest living, which enabled all the children to receive a basic, general, traditionally Jewish education. My father, a shoemaking artisan, employed some workers in his workshop, among them Poles, who studied to achieve a shoemaker's apprentice degree.

Most of our customers were Poles, primarily rurals. In addition, the workshop manufactured and sold its products – English-style shoes, "*offitzkeri*" officer shoes and others, twice a week in the market, on Tuesdays and Fridays, and at annual fairs in Ostrolenka and communities in the area.

A few words must be dedicated here to our communal life with the Poles in the city of Ostrolenka and its vicinity. I think it can be described as satisfactory and amicable between neighbors. Each side was, in a certain respect, dependent on the other, so that each complemented the other. The Jews, as all kinds of merchants, peddlers and craftsmen, supplied the needs of the Polish public to a great extent, especially the village people in the vicinity, while most of the Poles filled municipal and governmental clerical positions in the police and the army, and also produced foodstuffs. As mentioned, our workshop always employed a number of Polish students and workers. The relationship between us was good, and sometimes even friendly. Often, we bartered our products for foodstuffs, such as potatoes, meat, etc., increasing bartering transactions between manufacturers and customers. Among our workers were Poles from the city and from villages. The city workers went back home for the night, while the rurals ate and boarded with us. Staszek Gronek, who lived in the sandy area near the pig market, worked for us only in the winter. In the summer, he fished and brought us fish for the Sabbath every week. Sometimes it happened that he forgot to do this before a holiday and then, on the eve of the holiday, he would come running to bring us fish. I still remember Kochanek from Koscielna Street, and Kondewicz and Napiorkowski from Lenczysk. Staszek Kosiorek came on the train from Grabowo every day. Others, who did not have transportation links with their villages, lived, ate and boarded with us. In exchange, they brought us grain seeds, potatoes, dairy products, fowls and fruit. As mentioned, relations between us were most friendly. They came to us on the Sabbath to eat gefilte fish. Mother baked cakes for religious and national holidays for them, while Father and one of my brothers joined them at their Christmas feast. It is hard to believe, but it is a fact that most of them spoke to my father in Yiddish, particularly in professional matters. It should also be mentioned that my brother and I spent our vacation times with them in their villages, and helped with work in the fields, and gathering fruit and fishing.

When discussing the family and villages, I would like to add that some of our relatives lived in villages around Ostrolenka. In Mlynarska, on the way to Rozan, lived my Uncle Zalman, my father's brother, with his wife and their six children. He was a shoemaker and also worked his plot of land and was loved by the rurals in the area. Our relatives lived not far from there, in Kolaki and in Sadykrzu-Szlachecki. In Borave, on the way to Goworowo, lived a relative of my mother's, Dawid-Aron Laska and his large family. They engaged in agriculture only and owned a large farm. They dreamed that they would have a similar farm in Palestine. On my mother's side, we had another relative who lived in Laskowce, beyond Wojciechowice. He worked as a shoemaker and a merchant, and also had a small agricultural farm. All of them had good relations with their Polish rural neighbors in the area. My older brother, Zalman, and I often spent our free time with our families in the bosom of nature (as we did with our workers, and even with our customers). We helped them with farm work, and they sometimes came to us.

Our family observed Jewish tradition and my father fostered our sentiments for the Land of Israel. On Sabbaths and holidays, my father went with us to the house of prayer at Pesach Hochberg's on Gomolicka Street. He also participated in group Talmud lessons, was active in charitable institutions, was a member of the community committee and participated in the

tradesmen's amateur dramatic group. Like my brother, I studied first at the *heder* and later at more progressive schools, like the Culture School or the Yavneh School. I also succeeded in finishing the government Jewish popular school on Lomzynska Street. Influenced by the traditional Zionist atmosphere prevailing at home, when I was a boy of ten, I had already registered for the HaShomer HaTzair Zionist youth organization, which began operating as a scouting organization in the framework of the Polish scouts. Of course, all activity required that our entire class stay together in the bosom of nature, as well as the fitness training required of the scouts. This captivated me greatly. I loved this activity very much. I will always remember the camps, the bonfires, the assemblies and parades in the vicinity of Ostrolenka, especially in the forests of Lazek and around Lomza, Zambrow and Myszyniec. In time, HaShomer HaTzair became a leftist organization. Its primary goals were to strengthen the spirit of the Jewish youth, change its Diaspora way of thinking, and prepare it for emigration to Israel, then Palestine, to participate there in the essential work of an independent state, of the Jewish people and when necessary, to fight for it as well.

I advanced a great deal in HaShomer HaTzair, so much so, that at the age of 15, I was already the leader of a class younger than me – 13 year olds, "*Bnei Midbar*" [Children of the Desert]. Right before the war, at the age of 17, I became the leader responsible for the entire organization in Ostrolenka. This happened after Jakow Sztejnberg, and after him Shalom Chmiel, went to *hachshara*. Membership in the organization was conditional on the agreement of anyone between the ages of 18-19 to go to *hachshara* – a period of preparation for emigration to Israel.

These young people worked in agriculture and other physical work there, enabling them to support themselves in the place at the time. My brother, Meir, for example, was released from the HaShomer HaTzair organization because he would not agree to go to *hachshara*. I would also like to add that, at the convention of the party in Bialystok, Shalom Chmiel (the chief leader then and a known activist – living today at Kibbutz HaMaapil in Israel) turned to me with the suggestion (like an order) that I should learn the shoemaking profession from my father, because, as a shoemaker, I would be able to work on a kibbutz in the future. This is what I did, because I considered myself a soldier of the resurrected State of Israel. In that connection – while I was very attached to Ostrolenka, the city of my birth, and to its region, to the Poles and the state of Poland – my heart belonged to the Jewish people, to the Land of Israel. I believe that every nation has the right to its own state, and so my family thought. To my sorrow, it did not succeed in realizing this. The gates of our ancient homeland were closed to the average "common" Jew, and my family did not have the capital required to fulfill the dream. Of course, Poland's deep anti-Semitism strengthened my desire to emigrate all the more, because I felt myself a strange body, unwanted in Poland.

In general, the situation of the Jewish population in Poland during the pre-war years continued to get worse. One may get the impression that the policy of its neighboring country and the anti-Semitic-racist movements there, influenced our situation in Poland. Thus, the N.D. (Andaks) party's increasing activity – boycotting Jewish stores and tradesmen, posting guards near their doors, their stalls and places where peddlers sold in markets and at fairs. Our stall in the market in Kadzidła was destroyed, and my father and his worker were beaten severely while they were sitting on their wagon on the way home. But in Ostrolenka, in comparison to other cities, these phenomena were not felt so much. There, this atmosphere did not influence our relations with customers or Polish workers. A statement of a well-known Polish minister proves that anti-Jewish activity was accepted on national levels. He said, "It is forbidden to kill, but to boycott – why not?" And so, we approach the outbreak of World War II, on Thursday, 1 September 1939. The family returned to Ostrolenka after a few days (see the reports of my brother, Zalman). The Germans were not yet there, nor was there a real Polish government, except for an *ad hoc* civilian police. The rurals, in their desire to exploit the existing situation, broke into our house to steal. I remember well that, in the most fortuitous way, the railway man, Gruszko from Grabowo, appeared in our house. He turned to the rurals and said, "Poles, shame on you! We are now all at war. These are our neighbors, who have served us loyally." The rurals were silenced and left the house immediately. The railway man, Gruszko, was our customer and knew my father and often praised his workmanship in making shoes.

Lomza – Bialystok – Vilna

As is known, on 4 October 1939, the Germans

expelled the entire Jewish population from Ostrolenka, first, in the direction of Lomza. At the outset, we stopped temporarily at the settlement of Laskowce, where a relative of my mother's lived. Acceding to my mother's request, I went back to Ostrolenka illegally, to persuade my stubborn brother, Mosze, that he must leave the city immediately, together with his family. The errand finally succeeded, after much effort. I took them by side routes along the River Narew and we reached Laskowce safely. This was a very dangerous operation, although I was unaware of the danger involved. I saw the city empty of inhabitants, then and, for the last time, peeked at our "dead" house. I felt deep pain when I saw what had happened to the place that was so dear to me. Even worse, I did not know if I would ever return to Ostrolenka, the city of my birth.

After a number of weeks passed, we moved to live in Lomza, which had been destroyed. We lived in a damaged house there, near the main road, opposite an army camp. Father began to work as a shoemaker and we helped him. Although we made a living, after a time and despite my leftist education, I arrived at the conclusion that life in the Soviet Union was not suited to us. First, because of its Jewish and Zionist anti-nationalistic policy, because of its economic policy and, in general, because of the universal chaos. Therefore, I went to Bialystok to look around and contact the underground representatives of our HaShomer HaTzair. Two of my brothers, Meir and Zalman, and I, actually received appropriate orders and were referred to the city of Vilna, which was then annexed by the independent Lithuanian State. Indeed, our goal was to go from there to Israel (Palestine). After lengthy and difficult discussions with our parents and our younger brother, Chaim, we parted with the family's agreement, and went on our way. We reached Lida by train. From there, after contacting our people, we reached the border town of Drzebieniszki on 1 January 1940. From there, a rural guide led us to the Lithuanian side. It was an extremely cold day – less than 30°, and because of our relatively light clothing, we had to be on the move continually. After a pleasant meal with some rurals, we left for Vilna, this time on foot, following a sleigh on which we had loaded our knapsacks. In Vilna, we contacted the HaShomer HaTzair Kibbutz Center at 3 Tartaki Street, the former location of the Polish Border Guard headquarters. There, we were warmly received. There was a large dining room, workshops, the party administration and a number of residential rooms. I began to work in shoemaking there and lived at 27 Mickiewicz Street, where the "*maapilim*" [illegal immigrants to Israel] kibbutz was located. I also went out to work and even worked in a factory for the manufacture of shoes with wooden heels. We lived a rich social life then. Our group numbered 50 members, boys and girls. Together, we studied and had fun, debated and dreamed about Zion. There, for the first time, I met Abba Kovner, leader of the HaShomer HaTzair branch, and then head of the Jewish partisans in the Vilna region. My two brothers opened an independent workshop for shoe production, and I helped them in the profession in the afternoons. The American Joint also supported us. So, in general, our economic condition and Zionist activities were satisfactory, and our chances of accomplishing our emigration to Israel were quite good.

But suddenly, in July 1940, things changed for the bad. Independent Lithuania ceased to exist and was annexed as a republic by the Communist Soviet Union. For reasons of security, our youth organization was forced to disperse into small groups, with a loose connection between them. For a short time, I worked with a superb professional – the Russian shoemaker, Pataf. Meanwhile, the Belarusian border opened, and we could visit our parents in Dereczyn, and our brothers, Mosze and Chaim, in Slonim. It should be noted that the great majority of Ostrolenka's Jews who took Soviet citizenship on themselves were forced to evacuate to places 100 kilometers from the border with the Germans. Thus, Ostrolenka's Jews were spread over all the territories of Belarus. Their primary place of settlement was the city of Slonim.

While we were still in Vilna, we met Ostrolenkans (except for refugees who already lived there) who came from Belarus to purchase various commodities that they were lacking (as was usual in the Soviet Union). My older brother, Meir, who helped them with their purchases, was caught by the authorities and imprisoned in the jail. After many efforts and bribery payments, we managed to have him released from prison. Now, we could visit our parents in Dereczyn, near Slonim. It is impossible to describe our first meeting with them, especially with Mother. We were all excited and happy to the point of tears. Of course, we brought all kinds of goods, everything in small quantities, so that they should not suspect us of trading. It was very dangerous – I myself sold leather boots and shoes, as well as coats of high-quality leather, for a high price and left

the money for my parents.

My mother was satisfied because she was able to cook in a big pot again, like in Ostrolenka . . . After a short time, we visited our parents again. We traveled by train to the town of Zelva (Ostrolenkans lived there, too), and from there we went to Dereczyn by carriage. The Jewish carter suspected us of smuggling and demanded an excessive price. Finally, after Zalman slapped his face, he agreed to take the accepted payment. But that same carter prepared an unpleasant surprise for us. Relying on his testimony, the police arrested us as smugglers and imprisoned us in Wolkowysk. Conditions there were terrible, and our treatment by the jailers was very cruel. They shaved our heads, we did not get enough food, we slept on the floor, without straw mattresses. There, for the first time, I had a taste of a dictatorial regime and of the "power of tomorrow". Only because of my mother, who hired an attorney, our trial was hastened and we were freed. And again, joy – we met our family, which we planned to move to where we lived. For now, we brought only Father to Vilna.

It should be noted that about 15,000 Jewish refugees, who had fled the occupied territories of Poland, already lived in Vilna. From the day the war broke out, in September 1939, until the entry of the Germans in June 1941, 6,500 refugees succeeded, among them several Ostrolenkans, to go to Palestine, the United States or other countries. The Soviet Union permitted them to pass through its territories.

In the Vilna Ghetto

After a few days, we felt as though we had been suddenly hit by strong, deafening lightning. The Germans attacked us again, this time on 22 June 1941, in the Soviet Union. The city of Vilna was heavily bombed. Panic erupted; no one knew what to do. We decided to flee east, toward Minsk, but in vain. Even before we got 30-40 kilometers from Vilna, German paratroopers had already occupied Minsk. The four of us – my father, my brothers, Meir and Zalman, and I – returned to Vilna. A large part of the Jewish youth also tried to escape from Vilna, but most of them failed. Quite a few were shot by the Germans along the way. Only about three thousand Jews succeeded in crossing and entering Russian territory.

Before the entry of the Germans, about 57,000 Jews lived in Vilna. The condition of the Jews deteriorated even before the entry of the Germans on 24 June. The voluntary Lithuanian militia abducted Jews in the streets, as if for work – from which no one returned. The Germans and the Lithuanian police ordered the Jews to wear a yellow badge on the front and on the back [of their clothes], forbade the Jews to walk on sidewalks and allowed them to shop only during permitted hours and in special stores. The worst were the kidnappings and murders, which continued. During the month of July, Germans from *Einsatzkommando 9*, supported by Lithuanian volunteers (the *Ypatingasis*) kidnapped about 5,000 Jewish men from their homes and from the streets, took them to the nearby Ponary forests and murdered all of them there. It was very dangerous to go out. We four continued to live in our room with the Beck Family at 4 Kijovska Street, and continued working at the shoemaking workshop at 13 Wingry Street in the city center. Although the workshop was not far from our room, we were afraid to go out and often slept in the workshop. A Lithuanian – a *Ypatingasis* – once came to the workshop and wanted to take us. We convinced him that we were laborers, ready to do all kinds of work for him. He dragged away with him only our friend – an engraver – who never came back. And so, the Lithuanians – the *Ypatingasis* (the *Hapunes*) skipped us and for now, we survived . . . Then Kobi Kagan from Vilna visited us, bringing [work] orders for the Germans. In exchange, he brought us food and a permit – to work and to walk in the streets.

At the end of September and the beginning of October 1941, the Germans and the Lithuanians carried out a terrible expulsion of the Jewish population, about 8,000 people, from a particular quarter, with the intention of executing them in the Ponary forests. This *aktzia* ["aktion", rounding up people to kill them] was called the Great Provocation, because the Germans staged a "shooting" of German soldiers, as a pretext for the expulsion. There, in the expulsion quarter, on 6 October, the Germans organized two ghettos, the first of 30,000 people, and the second of approximately 6,000. Again, 6,000 Jews were murdered in the Ponary forests.

One morning, we awoke and heard tumult and noise all over the city. The streets were full of Germans, Gestapo functionaries, Lithuanian police and the *Ypatingasis*, who expelled [the Jews] with small bundles from their homes, and drove them with blows in the direction of the ghetto, which had just been set up. The four of us were also expelled to the ghetto. There were a few streets where entry was permitted; by chance, we

entered the third and furthest street, Szpitalna. The next day, we discovered that whoever had entered the first streets was taken to the Lukiskės Prison, and later murdered in Ponary. Again, we were miraculously saved . . .

The four of us settled into a partially furnished room. The next day, Kobi Kagan came to us again, offering us work at the German supply base. Of course, we agreed immediately, but it was necessary to move our workshop. So, Inspector Miller came with his friend, a Gestapo officer, and with a truck, on which we loaded all our tools required for work, including machines. The neighbors called the Lithuanian police, but when the police saw the Gestapo officer, they saluted him and left. Finally, when the Germans demanded the payment we had promised them, I raised the floorboards and gave them part of the leather skins we had there. Later, in the workshop, I also prepared boots for the officer. In exchange, he brought us various foodstuffs.

We began working at the German base, which supplied the German Army that was going east. Together with a group of porters, we left the ghetto every morning, escorted to our place of work by soldiers from our base. Thus things continued, as we carried out work with the permission of Base Commander Rizfeld and, in addition, secretly engaged in private work, in order to make a living. At the camp, we received only soup and two loaves of bread a week. I worked as a shoemaker and my brother, Meir, worked as a sewer of shoe parts. Kobi Kagan was the liaison between the Germans and us. My father worked at a shoemakers' workshop in another unit, and my brother, Zalman, guarded our meager property at the ghetto and prepared food for us. Tailors also worked in our workshop – six people all together. One evening, after work ended, Inspector Miller appeared with yellow permits. He explained to us that, from now on, new yellow permits, and not the white ones we had until now, were valid. Each of us received one of the yellow permits, called "life certificates", and we returned to the ghetto. In the ghetto, the mood was very bad, because people sensed that those yellow notes conferred temporary permission to stay alive. Every bearer of a yellow permit could add a wife (or husband) and two children, up to age 14.

And then we faced a serious problem, because Father and Zalman did not have these cards. Luckily, my girlfriend from my former kibbutz had a card, and she agreed to register and add my brother, Zalman. Saving my father was possible only if I would give him my card and he would add me to it as his fourteen-year-old son. The next day, we arrived at the gate, near which German S.S. and Gestapo officers stood. They carefully examined those who were leaving and their permits. Suddenly, the gate closed, and the number of people waiting greatly increased. When the gate reopened, the examination was easier because of the press of people, and so I succeeded in going out with my father and getting to my workplace. In the evening, when we returned to the ghetto (also couples with two children), it was empty, because anyone who did not have a yellow card was expelled from the ghetto to Ponary – and there they were all murdered.

That night, I slept at the workshop. I was afraid to go back to the ghetto, because I did not have a genuine yellow card. At the workshop, there was no water and no place to sleep; even worse, the Germans did not know I was there. The next morning, Inspector Miller arrived for a routine inspection. When he saw my father, he asked who this old man was. I replied that he was my father, who could help me with the large amount of work that had accumulated. Miller answered, "I didn't see anything" – and left. And so things continued for many days. Nevertheless, I decided to return to the ghetto to wash, eat and meet my girlfriend. Near the gate, I showed the Lithuanians a piece of yellow paper, and this succeeded a few times. But then, a Lithuanian guard discovered that it was not a real card. He arrested me on the spot and put me in jail with a few other Jews who did not have yellow cards. Somehow, Kobi Kagan managed to pass my father's yellow card to me through the bars. When the inspecting German officer asked me why I was in prison, I told him that it was because of my brother's shoes, which, luckily, were with me. I had taken them along to fix in the workshop, as an expert worker on a German base. The officer believed me and released me. Despite the stunned Lithuanian guard, I was released and saved again. It is worth noting that for a "crime" like this, the punishment was death. I continued to work at the workshop, and Inspector Miller got me a yellow permit.

During that period, when I worked at the German supply base in Vilna, at the rear of the huge German-Soviet front, I met many Germans. They were army personnel of various ranks, most of them from supply and other support units. I must admit that among them were bad and cruel people, but there were also human, innocent and even good ones. I always had the

impression, however, that the moment an order would be received, they would all be ready to act as one and destroy the whole world . . .

As mentioned, in exchange for work, we got soup every day and two loaves of bread a week from the Germans. It was impossible to exist and work hard from this. Therefore, we did additional work for the Germans and, in exchange, we would get foodstuffs. Most of them sought to contact me, as I was recommended by other Germans. Needless to say, all work ordered by high level officials was done without compensation. We were, of course, interested in being associated with them, because they were connected to the food supply and other items in demand. Here are some examples. A junior officer, Alderbaum, who supervised the leather and shoe storehouses, had free access to refrigerated meat, and would bring us bundles of meat and pig fat. I, in exchange, made officers' boots for him and even gave him silk stockings, watches and leather clothes, which he sent to his family. More than once, I heard him say that he did not know that Jews were good craftsmen and that they worked so diligently. The second was called Hopf. In exchange for our work, he supplied us with potatoes in large quantities (from the same sources confiscated for the German Army) on sleighs that returned from the ghetto with refuse. From another German, we received many bottles of vodka, in exchange for our work. I remember that once, a high-ranking Gestapo officer came into our workshop with a large briefcase in his hand. According to Hopf's recommendation, he came to me (he called me Icek and I trembled with fear), requesting that I make him officers' boots, like Hopf's. I got foodstuffs from him that were very much in demand during this period of general starvation, like sugar, coffee, honey, sausages, rice and bread. Everything went well. I had unpleasant and dangerous contacts, however, with Inspector Wache. From that same Alderbaum whom I have already mentioned, I got leather skins to make boots for the Inspector and his family. When he came to take the order, he suspected that I had put cardboard into them, instead of leather. I explained to him and, somehow, he believed me when I said that my life was in his hands if it turned out that his suspicions had foundation.

After a short time, a soldier from a neighboring unit (a cook) came to us and saw officers' boots on the table. He tried them on and liked them. I asked him to bring an authorization, as well as leather skins. He came again, this time with a sack full of expensive foodstuffs and, of course, he left with the boots. Suddenly, the door opened, and – I almost had heart failure – Inspector Wache came over to my father and me while the expensive foodstuffs were in our hands. He looked at them carefully and went out, as if nothing had happened. . . I could not understand – I needed psychiatric treatment then . . . and again, we were saved.

We also did work for the camp commander, Rizfeld, a calm German of the older generation, and his family. In this case, the initiative was mine, as I approached him in his office. At this opportunity, I succeeded in arranging a place of work for a number of girls – my friends from HaShomer HaTzair – as housemaids for some of the officers' families.

Once, a unit of transport trucks arrived at our camp and parked near us for a short time. The soldiers and officers had a large number of leather skins and we made all kinds of things for them, with and even without approval. Among them was an officer named Fischer. I befriended him and we even discussed the subject of the Jews. During the conversation, I hinted to him that I would willingly join him on a trip, if he made one, toward the city of Slonim, to visit my brother and my mother in nearby Dereczyn. One day, his unit got an order to move to another camp in a short time, and so we tried with all our might to finish the unit's orders. At the last minute, that same Fischer whom I knew, asked me to make him a pair of high shoes for his mother, for, without them, he would not dare return home. I told him it was impossible, and then Fischer threw in my face, "And if I take you to your mother, will you do it?" "Yes", I said. Then Fischer added, while gritting his teeth, "You, Jew, who change your words every minute!" I explained to him, "Our fate is already sealed and no compensation can tempt me, so why should I take the risk of night work without approval? But to see my mother once more in my lifetime – then the strength latent in me may give me strength to do the nearly impossible and the very dangerous." Fischer looked at a map and said, "We are leaving early tomorrow." To make all this happen, acceding to his request, I asked the officer of the unit to lend us his small car (in exchange for payment, of course). And that is what happened.

I worked all through the night at the workshop, with the windows covered from the inside and, at daybreak, I presented Fischer with the shoes, which he liked very much. Even before this, late at night, he knocked on the door (I was very frightened, of course) and brought me

a full pan of fried meat and potatoes and a small container of real coffee, adding, "A man who works needs to eat". The next day, at the end of November 1941, I left in a private car in the direction of Slonim. Fischer and his friend sat in the front, and I, without a yellow badge and with a bent head, sat in the back. (When we met border guards or an army barricade, I made myself as small as possible.) It was a very cold winter and dark. The entire area was covered with snow, which, together with the moon, lighted our way. We passed Lida, which had been destroyed, and arrived in Slonim. I had the address of my older brother, Mosze Beniamin, but it was dark all around and silent, and there was no one to ask. Suddenly, we saw a light flickering in the distance. I went there with Fischer. The watchman of a factory for the manufacture of cigarettes explained and showed us the way to my brother's. He pointed out that half of the Jewish population had already been murdered, among them many Ostrolenkans. Shouting, I banged on the window (I recognized the house from when I had been there before). A Polish woman came out and said that my brother was now in the Jewish quarter. We went back to the watchman and he referred us to an Ostrolenkan, Szlomo Grynberg, a good friend of mine from school. We asked him repeatedly, and he finally agreed to go with us (although there was a curfew), on condition that Fischer would bring us back. I knocked on his door, but my brother did not want to open the door for us. "Brother Mosze, I am your brother Icchak. Don't you know my voice?" I said to him, and then he opened the door. We fell into each other's arms. Things looked terrible, the apartment was in complete disarray. In the middle of the room was hand luggage, in the event of evacuation. My brother's face looked very bad and his wife, Necha (*née* Czapnikiewicz) was in the final weeks of her pregnancy. I tried to consult them as to what I should do, but a dispirited and indifferent person stood before me (he, who was always known as energetic and resourceful). In fact, he himself added that now he was no longer the same Mosze Beniamin. I told him that I had decided to take my mother and my little brother, Chaim, with me to Vilna. I gave him a bundle of dollars and gold (which I had actually saved for Mother) and added, "Perhaps this will help you." Heartbroken and in tears, I parted from him forever.

In Slonim, we found my little brother, Chaim, and took him with us to the car while he still slept. On the way, I explained to him the situation that had been created. He led us to Mother, to the town of Dereczyn, about 20 kilometers from Slonim. It was very dark. The synagogue was full of refugees, among them the Michelson Family (see their memoirs in this book). In a den-like corner, lived my mother. Still sleeping, I carried her in my arms to the car, too (with her prepared suitcase, of course). Mother was stunned and could not distinguish between dreaming and waking. On the way, however, when we both calmed down, we were very happy and cried with great joy. The Germans, too, were touched, and Fischer watched me all the time and helped me.

Now another problem arose: how to move my mother to the ghetto without approval and without a certificate. Fischer repeated that, to his regret, it was not in his power to change the general situation, but that he would do everything he could to help us. I dared to suggest a plan of action to him. We would approach the gate of the ghetto before morning, at a place far from the Lithuanian guards. He would kick me hard and, cursing, throw me, my mother, my brother and the bundles in the direction of the Jewish police. There, my brother Zalman awaited us. Everything went as planned. Our joy was boundless. All six of us were here together: my parents and four of the brothers. And then we went to work.

As I have already mentioned, I always tried everywhere to get us essential foodstuffs. Getting them into the ghetto was dangerous and problematic, and not a few people paid with their lives for trying to do so. I had a pair of specially sewn pants for this purpose. In the camp, I tried to be the last to leave, to avoid inspections. Once, when I did this, a German officer called me over to him. He inspected me carefully and found fresh fish – carp – and other foodstuffs from the army food warehouse tied to my leg. I was imprisoned and sent to an empty, special cell in the infamous Lukiskės Prison. (It later turned out that my father, to my mother's question, replied that I was already considered lost). The next day, I was taken for questioning. Because they wanted to discover the source of the food from me, I was severely beaten. I said that I found a package . . . After a few days, they took me to Gestapo Headquarters on Mickiewicz Street. This time, my situation was nearly intolerable, as two Gestapo men pushed me from one to the other with murderous blows. Stubbornly, I stuck to my first version, because I did not want to turn in Officer Kan and myself. Moreover, as a Jewish prisoner, I got only half a portion

of bread (100-150 grams) and soup a day. Later, I went through a similar Gestapo questioning. Once, after cruel questioning, I especially asked the interrogator to give me a piece of bread and he brought me a few slices (there were some good Germans like him). After two weeks, the Jewish police commander, Dessler, and the ghetto's Gestapo commander, Martin Weiss, came to my cell. Dessler vehemently demanded that I reveal the whole truth. When I stuck to my earlier version, he began hitting me with a stick. Despite this, I did not break. When Dessler hinted at a message from my family, saying that Officer Kan had received a relatively light punishment, I understood his hint and confessed. Later, he told me that I was to be released in the near future and asked what I wanted. Bread, I said. The next day, I received a two-kilogram loaf of bread, which I had to divide among the prisoners. Before Christmas 1942, after three weeks of imprisonment, I was released from jail. I was in critical condition; on my body were already signs of swelling from starvation. With the money returned to me, I bought a two-kilogram loaf of bread in the market and finished it on the way to the ghetto. It is hard to describe the family's joy and excitement when they saw me resurrected.

Many people came to visit me, among them Abba Kovner, the commander of the Jewish underground organization and leader of HaShomer HaTzair. It was said that I was released due to the intervention of the ghetto's orchestra conductor, Durmaszkin. It may also be that relative, general quiet prevailed even before this. Clearly, I did not go back to work on the German base. I began to work in the workshop of a Lithuanian who made shoes with wooden heels. Together with my brother, Zalman, we made a tolerable living. One may get an impression of the condition of the Jewish population in Vilna from what I have described thus far. The period from the beginning of 1942 until the spring of 1943 was fairly quiet. Life in the ghetto was tolerable. In fact, there were no large *aktzias* and most of the population (about 14,000 people) worked in productive jobs. There was social and cultural activity, and even a Jewish theater. The *Judenrat*, headed by Jakow Gens (formerly police commander), was guided by the thought and hope that if the Jews worked for the Germans, and were of use to them and cooperated with them, they would have better chances of survival. In reality, however, our condition was tragic throughout the entire period. Since the entry of the Germans in June 1941 and until the end of the year, the Germans, with the Lithuanians, succeeded in murdering 34,000 people, that is, 60% of the entire Jewish population – and in just half a year. Before our eyes, a deliberate and planned holocaust, the destruction of our entire nation, took place. We knew we were living on borrowed time.

In the Vilna Ghetto, two underground organizations were established, the F.P.O. (the *Fareynegte Partizaner Organizatsye* [the United Partisan Organization]) and a smaller one. In the beginning, the main organization planned an armed rebellion (insurrection) in the ghetto if a large *aktzia* or acts of extermination by the Germans in particular, took place. In the beginning, the second organization engaged in transferring people to the forests to fight with the partisans (see Zalman's report in the next lines of this book). My group belonged to the F.P.O. Starting in 1942, we underwent military training and drilled using simulated weapons (because we did not have real weapons) – iron implements and acids in lantern holders. A few units were formed, each numbering 250 fighters, men and women. We unanimously decided to fight in the event of an *aktzia* or the extermination of the ghetto. We were prepared to physically resist and protect ourselves, and even more than this, to protect our personal honor and that of our nation. Both my girlfriend, Szprinca Szwarc, and I belonged to the second unit.

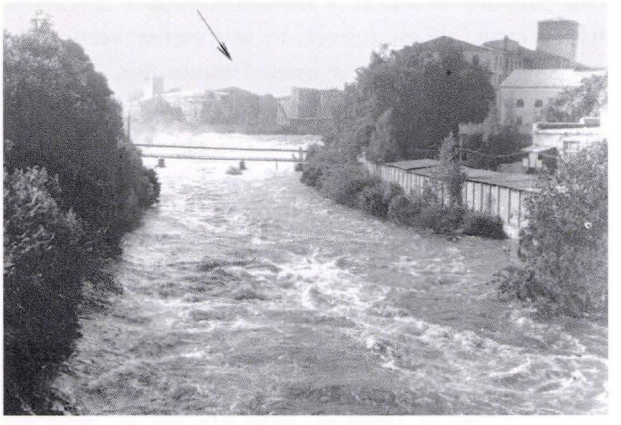
When we woke on the morning of 1 September 1943, we saw that the ghetto was surrounded by many German and Estonian soldiers. It was hermetically closed. Without waiting for a signal, we appeared at the agreed-upon place. The entire unit arrived. In the ghetto, the abductions of Jews (this began again in August) to a work camp in Estonia had continued. At the time of a battle, one of our commanders, Jechiel Szejnboim, fell. We gathered in the courtyard at 4 Straszon Street, although we had no firearms and no organized communication with our headquarters. The situation was nebulous. Suddenly, the Germans broke into our courtyard (apparently, some traitor opened the gate for them). In their hands were weapons, aimed at us. They ordered us to assemble in an indicated place. The German Gestapo commander said to us, "You are still young. Don't be foolish. Don't endanger your lives. We are only taking you to do work." At the same time, female messengers arrived (women were not abducted for work, but many women later joined their relatives) and passed an order on to us from headquarters, to march toward the *Judenrat* at 6 Rudnicka Street. We had just started out when, once again, we found

ourselves surrounded by Germans with weapons aimed at us. Instead of left, we turned right, and had to get into army trucks covered with tarpaulins. We thought that this was our end. In absolute despair, I cut the tarpaulin with a knife, and jumped from the truck first and tried to escape. But the Germans caught me and hit my head with a gun, until I lost my sight in one eye. We were surprised to discover that the Germans were not taking us to Ponary, but to the railway station, where we were forcibly thrown into closed freight cars with an opening in the floor. We left under the strict surveillance of armed troops. As it turned out, during August and the beginning of September, approximately 7,000 people, men and women, were evacuated from Ghetto Vilna to concentration and work camps in Estonia and Latvia. From 22-24 September 1943, Ghetto Vilna was completely destroyed. Of 12,000 people, 3,700 were sent north to camps; over 4,000 children, women and old people – to the Sobibor death camp. A few thousand others employed by the Germans were murdered at the beginning of July 1944 in the Ponary Forests, ten days before the liberation of the city by the Soviets. At the time of the destruction of the ghetto, a small number of a few hundred Jews, among them my two brothers, Meir and Zalman, succeeded in escaping and joining the partisans working against the Germans. My brothers survived.

In Concentration Camps in Estonia, Poland and Germany

From the outset, I must note that in the course of a year and a half, I was in seven concentration (work) camps in Estonia, one in Poland and in Nazi Germany, with all typical characteristics and purposes: to exploit a prisoner to the last drop of his strength under inhuman conditions, in order to finally exterminate him.

We traveled for a few days until we reached Estonia. The first camp was in its breaking-in period, built of barracks in a semi-circle. We slept on a floor covered in crushed straw and received daily starvation rations of 300-400 grams of bread, a piece of margarine, cheese powder and teaspoon of jam, as well as thin soup. We worked from early morning until sundown in anti-tank excavations and trenches, because we were near the Leningrad front. In addition, we were full of lice and could not sleep. There were also musters outside, morning and evening, in all kinds of weather, supplemented by different "exercises" (removing hats, bowing down and more). For every "sin", we received 50 strikes on naked buttocks with a special baton, usually carried out by Commander Panuker. To my regret, the Jewish commander of the camp, Dyler, often helped the Germans, or he hit the prisoners himself, until they lost consciousness.



Photograph 2
Concentration-work camp on the banks of the river in Narva, Estonia.
The arrow shows the camp building (photograph from the 1970s).

Many of us were from the F.P.O. underground organization and HaShomer HaTzair, and we tried to give mutual aid to each other. We were tempted by thoughts of an underground and even contact with the partisans, and perhaps this strengthened us. Yet some others and I, especially when the situation got worse, asked ourselves: How did we get into this situation, which we so wanted to avoid. And even worse – who ordered us to leave the courtyard in Vilna – and in row formation, yet? For there was a decision to resist, in the event of an *aktzia* in the ghetto! The tragic death in July 1943 of our underground commander, Icchak Wittenberg, a popular man, loved by us all, pained me. To all these questions, I did not receive answers. After more than a month, I parted from most of my friends, because I was transferred, with a group, to other camps. After a trip of two days in open cars, we arrived, a group of 800 people, at a new camp built of stone in the city of Narva. It was late autumn in cold north Estonia. We were hungry, tired and frozen. At that moment, a boy of about twelve came over to me and asked in Yiddish, "What are you doing here? – for you were

supposed to be with partisans." It turned out that this was Reuwen, a friend of my younger brother, Chaim, who Mother used to feed in the ghetto. After a few minutes, Reuwen returned, in his hands a large bowl of soup and a piece of bread. Together with my good friend (Mosze Podjazd from Mlawa), we ate everything with appetite. The same thing happened a few more times, and we even got soup coupons from him. After we returned from work in the rain, in the snow, in mud up to our knees, he was a lifesaver. I would like to note that our situation was very bad. It was no wonder, then, that people tried to get work under a roof. The cruel commander exploited these instances to strike those wretched people on their heads, until they fainted and lost consciousness. He did this with great pleasure. Returning from work, for a few kilometers of the way, we carried the older people, who could not walk on their own. They burned these same sick and old people in a large furnace in the cellar of the former factory. I remember one particular incident, at the end of 1943, when Panuker, Schnabel and others, among them drunken officers, came to the camp to celebrate New Year's Eve "joyfully". At their command, a muster of all the prisoners was held, the healthy and sick alike. Anyone who could not stand for a long time was laid down on the snow and ice. This horrible spectacle continued quite a long time, so that later on, the Carabkin Family (they worked at the oven) had a great deal of work.

As I have mentioned, we were plagued with lice, which even caused a typhus epidemic. People fell like flies, and again the Carabkin Family worked overtime... I, too, became ill. No one paid attention to me. I lay naked under a light blanket in a hallway in the winter. When the Germans also got sick, they carried out a strong disinfestation. All clothes were collected for disinfestation under high heat. Anyone who wanted to get clean clothes back had to go naked to the nearby village's bathhouse, and come to work the next day, as usual. Meanwhile, the number of prisoners decreased, until an entire block in the camp was destroyed.

Miraculously, I recovered, but I knew that I faced danger if I did not continue to work in shoemaking. In the camp, there was a shoemakers' workshop, which did work for the Germans – to which I was not accepted. I did not break. I found a hammer, shoelaces, a knife that I sharpened on a stone, and the carpenters brought me nails. In the welding workshop, I asked them to make me an iron shoemaker's last. And so, I began to work and repair shoes at night, to the light of a small lamp near the person in-charge of the block, and this after a day's work. In exchange for my night work, I received thick soup from the one in-charge of the block, as well as bread, potatoes, etc. My condition improved and I did not suffer from starvation any more. The truth is, that even before this, we got potatoes and cabbage (from the field and the rurals' barns) from time to time. We cooked soup in a big pot on a bonfire, which I usually lit. (I had experience that I acquired from my mother, as well as in scout camps near Ostrolenka.) Therefore, the Germans gave me the nickname "Feuermeister" (fire artist). They sometimes used those bonfires.

Meanwhile, news reached us of the defeat of the Germans. We were witness to the swift rout of the Germans. Although they left behind all the trenches and excavations we prepared for them, the Germans did not forget us. We returned to the camp and left the city of Narva. I even managed to build a sled for myself quickly (according to the Ostrolenkan model) and loaded all my work tools on it. We left by foot. On the way, I transferred everything to an abandoned iron sled (the Germans, too, put their knapsacks on it). Together with others, we dragged the sled along the difficult road, in the bitter cold. After a day, we reached Kivioli. There were two camps there, Number 1 and Number 2. We settled in the second. When I went to work, I met prisoners from the first camp, among them many from the Vilna Ghetto, and most important – my younger brother, Chaim. Our meeting was extremely emotional. From him, I heard of the murder of our parents in Ponary, and of the escape to the forests, to the partisans, of my two older brothers (Meir and Zalman) and my girlfriend, Szprinca.

There, in Kivioli, we worked in a factory for the extraction of oil from yellow, bituminous rocks. Conditions there were also very hard. There were two commanders, S.S. Commander Wirke and another. When only one of them was present, the situation was tolerable. But when they were together, each one wanted to prove the extent of his cruelty to the other, and so they beat us mercilessly and tortured us cruelly with all kinds of "exercises". Of course, the older and weaker ones among us could not hold out . . .

Stubbornly and unswervingly, I fought to survive. Because I owned work tools, I began fixing shoes in secret at night. One night, Commander Wirke burst into our barrack, shouting, "Who here is preventing people from sleeping?" I was already prepared to be punished –

a flogging, at least – but, to my great surprise, he came over and began to take an interest in what I was doing. He asked what I did during the day and left quietly. The next morning, during muster, he called me and told me that from then on, I would work as a shoemaker in the camp. On that very day, he brought me the officer boots of a friend of his, from an air-force unit, to repair. From then on, of course, I was given better food, slept in the workshop and was treated better. Commander Wirke arranged the transfer of my brother, Chaim, to our camp. We were together and he, too, enjoyed better food and treatment, and was sent to do relatively easier work. Things continued thus for a certain period.

At the beginning of the summer of 1944, my brother and I arrived at a new, isolated camp, in the north of Estonia, near the Gulf of Finland. We were only 300 people, men and women. There were four barracks altogether, surrounded by electrified barbed wire, with all the other features of a concentration camp. We all worked in the strip mine. We took out and transported rocks on a small railway, for paving roads and other army installations. The camp commander was none other than that same Panuker we knew from the camp near Narva. Because he had had bitter experience on the subject of lice, he took care that there was a permanent bathhouse at a rural's place in the area. This time, however, hordes of mosquitoes annoyed us, as we were near the ocean. They did not let us sleep or rest after an exhausting day's work. In general, our situation eased a bit, despite the fact that starvation continued to plague us. Meanwhile, summer approached and we got an easier deputy commander, who we nicknamed "Giraffe". (Panuker was more occupied with his personal affairs.) I continued working at shoemaking at night (to the natural light of the polar nights), and therefore received additional food, which I shared with my brother. My situation improved when I decided to work officially as a shoemaker in the camp. This did not continue for a long time, because, meanwhile, the German-Soviet front approached.

We also witnessed the Germans' rapid retreat and saw German soldiers returning wounded from the Leningrad front, with amputated hands and feet. These sights made us joyous and filled our hearts with hope and feelings of revenge. One day, Dr. Bodman came to us from the main headquarters, to carry out a selection-classification and choose 10% of the weakest, to be taken in trucks. All the rest would be evacuated on foot. I was also intended for transport, because my face looked pale. My pleas, my requests, my declaration that I was healthy and strong, and that I did not want to part from my brother, did not help. When others, too, were not willing to accept his judgment, and demanded that he change it, Dr. Bodman, under heavy pressure, took out a gun and fired in the air as a warning. In this instance, too, my good luck did not disappoint. One of my acquaintances asked me to switch with him, because he did not want to be separated from his older brother – and thus I could stay with my brother. I agreed immediately, and arranged things with Giraffe (the man was tall, with a long neck), for whom I repaired shoes.

After muster, all sorts of rumors about the 10% of the prisoners chosen by Dr. Bodman spread. Even the camp's internal Jewish administration, in an effort to calm our mood, finally determined that everyone would leave the camp on foot. After two days, following an order, all of us returned from work in the afternoon. Increased forces of soldiers suddenly arrived at the camp and with shouts and force, threw people on trucks, according to Bodman's list, and drove away with them quickly. That very night, Giraffe told me that if I would have gone with them, I would no longer be alive. At that moment, I understood that my life had been saved again, but at the painful price of another man's life. I had pangs of conscience, but neither of us had known anything – this was simply the game of our fates. Late at night, we received additional proof of the elimination and murder when Commander Panuker returned, covered in blood.

After a few days, we arrived at Kivioli by foot, and went from there to Riga by train. From Riga, on the cargo ship *Mar de la Plata*, we reached Gdansk (Danzig) and from there, by rafts along the length of the Visla, we reached the large and terrible camp in Stutthof, where there was a crematorium. Conditions there were the most frightful, difficult to describe. Not many got out of there alive. Unbearably exhausting work, little food, torture and endless beatings. People simple fell under the yoke. After a month of workdays, they chose 1,000 healthy and strong men from among us, loaded us on open railroad cars and took us north. It was said that we would have to work in mines to extract fuel from rocks for the Baltic Company, which had a similar factory in Kivioli in Estonia. After two days, we arrived in Stuttgart in western Germany.

From the Schonberg railway station, we walked a few kilometers to the Dautmergen concentration (work) camp, surrounded by mountains. It was autumn, and we

were very hungry. On the way, we saw many trees full of fruit. The Germans immediately shot anyone who tried to gather fruit from the ground or pick it from trees. There were many casualties among us then, who we brought with us to the camp. There were already many prisoners in the camp – political, criminal and others, from different nations, such as German, Polish, French and Norwegian. From the beginning, I must state that conditions there were most difficult, and that a large number of prisoners did not withstand them. Even at first muster, in the charge of a senior Polish prisoner, Mundak (who reported to the German commanders), we heard curses and terrible forecasts from his mouth: "You, the Jews – here will be your end, none of you will leave here alive". In actuality, the senior prisoners ruled the camp. Their conditions were better. They wore high rubber boots and did relatively easier work, for example, in offices and the kitchen, in charge of blocks, etc. Among them were many Poles, French and others who did hard work, like ours. The land in the area was muddy and, in many places, one could sink to one's knees, because water flowed continually from the mountains. Our work was extremely exhausting. We had to prepare concrete and take it in hand barrows through lanes leading, in a high, winding line, to the mountains. We also worked at erecting steel structures. Food was poor and insufficient; there were terrible housing conditions. In the barracks, formerly stables, we lay on triple bunk beds. Lice moved from one to the other without stop. There was no clean water, not for drinking and not for washing. Therefore, we drank from pits into which water flowed from the mountains. We went to the nearby village to wash and, there, after a long wait, we got disinfected clothes (this happened only after the arrival of a more humane commander). To all this must be added many curses and cruel beatings. It is no wonder, then, that people felt bad, and were weak, hungry and exhausted. Many of us could not stand these conditions. Despite everything, we finished building the factory and even began producing fuel.

Like others, I arrived at the camp weak, despairing and, of course, hungry. I thought this would be my last stop. At the very beginning, wandering around near the kitchen, I noticed a prisoner with a big stick in his hand, guarding a pile of potatoes. I approached him, and looked at him. This healthy man turned to me angrily, "Run away from here fast, before you get a blow on the head from me with this stick." Then our glances met, and I addressed him personally: "Mr. Wacek Staczulski, will you be able to do what you say?" He demanded again that I move away immediately. And I: "Mr. Wacek, you must recognize me, too. I have not touched anything. I just want to check whether my brain is still working."

Wacek lowered the stick and asked, "Who are you?" And I answered him, "I am the son of the shoemaker, Arcie, from Ostrolenka. You, Sir, bought from us size 45 'English' boots in our house, on the last night before the expulsion from Ostrolenka. Together with my grandfather, I am the one who brought them from where they were hidden at 1 Czlopicki Street." "Yes", he said, "it is I, Wacek, and I also remember you and especially your father. And now, get out of here, but tell me where you are to be found and I will come to you at night." And that is what happened. To my amazement, the in-charge of Block 2, the Pole Bolek, called me to the entrance at night, and there Wacek waited for me, with a big four-liter pitcher of thick soup. From then on, he brought me a pitcher full of soup every night, because he worked in the kitchen. (Pitchers like them are in the museum in Auschwitz, because Hungarian Jews collected goose fat in them for the trip, as they thought they were going to work.) At that time, I thought and, today, looking back, I am certain, that Wacek, at that most critical moment, saved my life, as well as the life of my brother, Chaim, and perhaps the lives of a few more friends, because people fell lifeless from starvation then.

After a time, my condition improved, because I began working as a shoemaker in the camp. And then I could also thank Wacek; I sewed shoes for him and helped him in any way I could.

To understand what that camp was, it should be noted that in March 1945, 23 prisoners were murdered there (one of them was hung) – German priests, Soviet officers and others, who had arrived there the month before.

The Liberation, Leaving Europe and Emigrating to Israel

In the final phase of the war, in the [second] half of April 1945, when the Allied forces advanced toward us, an order was given to evacuate all prisoners by foot in a march toward the Dachau concentration camp. Even before, the factories at Dautmergen were bombed from the air and completely destroyed. Our march was difficult and very dangerous, because the German

guards fired on the spot at anyone who deviated from accepted military order. It was no wonder that many casualties were left along the way. After a few days' march, my brother, Chaim, did not feel well. He was very weak. (I was also weak, but less than he.) Therefore, we found a hiding place in the attic of a small house in the town of Symaringen. After a few days there, we were liberated by the French, on 22 April 1945. We were very happy and excited, and very weak. In the beginning, it was hard to believe – we were free men again!

After a short time, we arrived at the German-Austrian-Swiss border, and succeeded in crossing into Switzerland. There I was told by the French military rabbi about the partisans from Vilna in the area of Milano (Milan) in Italy. I was told that my two brothers (Meir and Zalman) survived as partisans and had joined the Jewish *Nakam* Unit led by Abba Kovner (the poet and former leader of the partisans), operating in Germany, particularly against members of the S.S. A group of *Nakam* members and I settled near the headquarters of the Jewish Brigade (which fought alongside the Allied forces) in Belgium. We operated from there, but in Brigade uniforms.



Picture 3
Yitzhak Zohar Wylozny in the Israeli Army during the War of Independence 1948

In 1946, I left Europe and arrived in Israel (then Palestine, under the British Mandate) as a stowaway on a passenger ship, the *André Libanne*. I disembarked at Haifa, in the guise of a fuel porter. I was accepted by Kibbutz Ein HaChoresh in the center of the country, and there met my three brothers – Meir, Zalman and Chaim. It is hard to describe our feelings at this meeting. After a year, I settled in Holon (a Tel Aviv suburb). Here, my brother, Zalman, and I opened a shoemaking workshop. At the same time, I signed up with and worked in the Haganah military organization. In 1948, I was drafted into the Israeli Army as a combat soldier in the 45th Infantry Battalion, Kiryati, in mine activation. I participated in the War of Independence in various operations. By the end of the war, I had achieved the rank of sergeant. Together with my unit, I operated in the area of Jerusalem.

At the end of 1949, I was released from the army and married Ester from Lubartow. I am the father of three sons and the grandfather of seven grandchildren. I operate a small factory which produces orthopedic shoes, made according to three of my own known patents. Our products are sold in Germany and the United States, among other places.

Reflections and Completion

From the outset, I will say that I am not an historian, an expert on nations, a psychologist, a legal prosecutor or a hero. I was a young Ostrolenkan, of the "common" folk, a Polish citizen of the faith of Moses, very attached to the city of my birth and my second homeland – Poland. But with all my might, in my heart and soul, I was bound to my nation and first homeland – the Land of Israel. In fact, I was a simple soldier of my people, ready to fight for its honor and its historical homeland and even to sacrifice my life, if necessary. There were very many people like me at the time of the Holocaust. I did everything possible to survive and stay alive, but I never strayed from the straight and narrow toward activities that deviated from my conscience. I was always ready to fight for my needs, but also and especially for the interests of the Jewish People. Therefore, when I arrived in Israel immediately after the war, I reacted with pain when Israelis repeatedly asked us "Why did you go like lambs to the slaughter? Why didn't you fight?" Looking at myself and seeing myself as an example, I know that to anyone who looked at the Holocaust from the outside and asked, this is a justifiable question, and not a small one. Anyone who was in that inferno, however, knows that the real answer to that question is very complex and, for those who ask it, hard to comprehend. During the years following the war, with the increasing interest and thought, and

research being conducted in Israel and other countries, this question is not asked in its initial form any more. In general, the tragedy of the Holocaust is evaluated and examined in a completely different light. In any event, I have told the whole truth about what I went through, what I saw and what I thought. My thoughts are based solely on my personal experience.

Already in September 1941, after we were transferred to the Vilna Ghetto and after the first mass murders in the Ponary Forests, we knew that the entire Jewish nation was sentenced to extermination by Nazi Germany. Therefore, we began to undergo and learn combat training, and to prepare for the struggle and resistance. Later, when sad and chilling news reached us of mass murders in various areas of Lithuania and Belarus, and especially of the burning of the Warsaw Ghetto, we were certain that we were sentenced to annihilation in Vilna, too. Therefore, after our armed battle with the Lithuanian police in July 1943, we freed our beloved commander, Icchak Wittenberg, from their hands. Our tragedy reached its peak, however, when he came under the intense pressure of the *Judenrat* and the ghetto's population. With the F.P.O.'s agreement, he was forced to present himself to the ghetto's police. When he was arrested, he committed suicide. Later, when the Germans began abducting people to Estonia, the situation reached armed resistance again. Another F.P.O. commander, Jechiel Szejnboim, fell in battle. The call of the underground to resistance and general rebellion was not accepted by the *Judenrat* (under the leadership of Gens). An reaction awoke in the population, afraid that such a rebellion would lead to the total destruction of the ghetto, which numbered more than 20,000 souls. It was under these circumstances that our unit, numbering 250 people, presented itself according to plan, to fight using underground methods, and was evacuated and sent by force to concentration and work camps in Estonia.

This is the big question: "Why did they not fight with all their strength in the Vilna Ghetto?" The answer to this question is complicated and even more difficult!

1. I thought then and, especially now in Israel, I think that the entire strategy of the F.P.O. and its leadership was incorrect and unrealistic, at least until the last period. Not to mention the fact that, after the tragic death of Wittenberg, a brave and charismatic leader did not arise. The accepted strategy was based on preparation for armed rebellion, and for an armed uprising in the ghetto in the event of a large *aktzia* against the population. In light of the enclosed, small territory and the constant presence of the police and the army against the wretched, unarmed population, constantly humiliated – the chances of the ghetto's warriors were less than zero. Battling and uprising with any chance of success was possible only outside the ghetto, in the partisan units in the forest, and this had to be already planned by the end of 1941. Under the ghetto war plan, we became, in fact, hostages in the hands of the cruel, murderous and devious Germans, because the fate of the entire population was contingent on our every movement – and certainly on an armed uprising. It is enough to note that of our 250 members in Unit No. 2, fifteen remained in the ghetto. Of the 1,000 young and healthy people evacuated to the Dautmergen camp, about 100 remained. If, out of those who escaped, organized and fought in the forests, 1,000 survived, that is many more than those in the ghetto.
2. A second and important thing is that the situation in the Vilna Ghetto from the beginning of 1942 until late spring 1943 was relatively stable and organized. With the consent of the Germans, even plays were held in the Yiddish theater. Orchestra concerts were held and a social committee operated. Fourteen thousand people, about two-thirds of the populace, worked and engaged in productive work for the German war effort. All this contributed to calming the situation and strengthening the chances of survival of the members of the *Judenrat* and the population. For after all, and despite everything that had occurred until then, the Germans were known and recognized as a cultured and progressive nation among the nations of the world. Many, and among them my father, still remembered them in a good light since World War I. It was almost inconceivable that, precisely in the heart of Europe, they had decided to murder our entire nation, as well as other nations.
3. Third, let us return to the other possibility, a guerilla war of the partisans in the forests. We must not forget for even a moment that we did not have any weapons at all, and that, without weapons, it was impossible to join the partisans or even live in the forest. All sorts of robbers and groups of Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Poles and others swarmed there and, first and foremost, searched for Jews with

the intentions of theft and murder. Most important, the area was very hostile and, in the best case, indifferent to our tragedy. So, in fact, we were forced to fight not only Germans.

4. And another thing – many of us were bound to our families, our children, our elderly and/or weak parents. How was it possible, in so dangerous a situation, to leave them to their fate and save ourselves? In the most obvious instances, when it was clear that death awaited us, many preferred to share the fate of relatives and families.
5. Fifth, Nazi Germany was then the strongest power in Europe and the world, controlling all of Europe and almost all the world. Following a meticulous and absolute program, it had decided to carry out the genocide of an unarmed, starved and weakened nation, and this without apparent reason. To carry out the plot, it used ingenious and devious means. In addition, and not less important, the murderous work of this power was accepted and supported by masses of helpers, volunteers from among European nations, such as Lithuanians, Ukrainians and others.

Was it possible to expect any other results, in light of the items enumerated here? We must stress the fact that the only concentration camp where an uprising bore fruit was Sobibor, a camp designated solely for Jews. There were other concentration camps for Soviet war prisoners in Mauthausen, Austria, where a rebellion also broke out, ending in total defeat. The Jewish people demonstrated its readiness and ability to fight to the whole world when it was recruited in all the armies that fought against the Germans in World War II and, later, in the War of Independence, for the right of the State of Israel to exist. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising should also be mentioned here, when Jewish fighters sacrificed their lives, first and foremost, to protect their honor and the honor of the entire Jewish people.

If we are talking about me – of myself – I think, as my brothers do, that we survived primarily due to our profession, shoemaking, which was useful and necessary for the Germans then. (I remember my father's words: This profession will not make you rich, but it will always ensure your daily bread.) To this must be added my ability to decide and act, as well as my natural optimism, which prevented me from breaking down psychologically. In addition, and especially in three instances – thanks to fate. As for my youth, health and good physical condition, all these qualities together could not guarantee anyone's life then. And finally, I am unable to explain the favor of fate and other metaphysical forces.

After I came from Dereczyn and Slonim to Vilna, and then to Israel, I often pondered and thought about my behavior then, and even more, of the German, Fischer. That trip could have ended in disaster for all of us. At first, Sergeant Fischer must have thought about the gift for his mother. I, too, thought first about my mother, of seeing her and of the possibility of saving her. That is, we had a special and mutual feeling for our mothers, he – a son of a nation of murderers, and I, a son of a nation sentenced to destruction. In addition, he, as a transport unit officer, was surely used to different trips and experiences. His behavior during our trip to Dereczyn and the Slonim Ghetto, however, testified that he was not overly poisoned by anti-Semitism, but that there dwelled in him not a little exalted humane feeling. I do not have the answer, however, to another question – how would Fischer the German have acted in other circumstances?

* * *

I will never forget my chance meeting in the concentration camp in Germany with Wacek Staczulski, of blessed memory, a Polish Christian from my city of Ostrolenka, and, especially, his noble actions toward me. This is for three reasons. First, there can be no doubt that he saved my life and that of my brother, Chaim. Second, in the reality of the concentration camp, he demonstrated toward me the great strength latent in our both belonging to the city of our birth, Ostrolenka. Third, performing his noble and most dangerous deeds in such a camp, he risked his life. I will say even more: his noble deeds constitute proof for me, that the shared, common life of the Jews and Poles in Ostrolenka was not completely in vain. It must also be said that, with his deeds, Wacek Staczulski saved the honor of the Polish nation. In that very same camp, another Pole, Mundak, already from the first muster, prophesied extermination and annihilation for the Jewish prisoners.

After the war, I maintained contact with Wacek. We even sent each other pictures and I tried to send him gifts for Christian holidays. In August 1991, at the time of the unveiling of the monument in memory of the Jews of Ostrolenka, I visited his family, but Wacek Staczulski was no longer alive. May his memory be blessed. May he rest in peace in paradise, in that special place for Righteous Gentiles!

As to the fate of our family:

My parents were murdered in the last phase of the destruction of the Vilna Ghetto in September 1943. To this day, the question tortures me: Why did not my father, at least, succeed in escaping and reaching the partisans – he was still relatively young, health and strong.

My older brother, Mosze-Beniamin, was killed, together with his wife, Necha, and their baby in the Slonim Ghetto (it may be that he fell with the partisans).

My two brothers, Meir and Zalman (see the following pages) survived among the partisans. They came to Israel and raised families here.

My younger brother, Chaim, who I brought from Dereczyn, and who was with me in the camps until the liberation, lives in the United States. He has raised a family and runs a plumbing concern there.

I must note here that, despite the loss of our parents and my eldest brother's family, our family is unusual, because the remaining four of us stayed alive. Above all, of most of the Jewish families from the Ostrolenka that was on pre-war Polish land – there is no remaining trace. At best, only individuals survived the Holocaust. For example, of all our many relatives who lived near the city of Ostrolenka, only one cousin from the village of Mlynarska remained alive. He lives in the United States.

* * *

After the war, in 1956, I gave testimony at a trial against Nazi criminals in Germany – Eschingen versus the commanders of the Dautmergen concentration camp and their helpers.

Commander Hofmann (who came from Auschwitz) was sentenced to life imprisonment. Hofmann's deputy, named Kruth (who also came from Auschwitz), who was responsible for all the Polish prisoners because he spoke Polish, was sentenced to 12 years imprisonment.

Epilogue

The conclusion. I went through all sorts of experiences and vicissitudes of fate. The cycle of my life began in Ostrolenka, the city of my birth, and closed in Israel, the old-new homeland. That is, a Jewish youth from Ostrolenka, who always dreamed of his homeland, Israel, and finally reached it – not by a straight road, but by a tortuous road as a tortured Jew, via the Vilna Ghetto, via concentration camps in Estonia, Poland and Germany – who even got the chance to fight for the independence of the State of Israel. This fact heals all the suffering and pain of the past, and fills me with pride and peace of mind. The dreams of the days of my childhood and youth have finally been confirmed and fulfilled in the last phase of my life, which clearly and finally determines my identity.

How painful and what a shame it is, that so many young men and women of our dear Jewish nation did not attain this exalted moment, were not able to live in their independent homeland, Israel.

May their memories be blessed!



Fajwel Serok, Bat Yam, Israel

When the Germans Came

(In memory of my father, Eliezer Dawid Serok, and my brother, Jakow Serok)

At the age of 32, I am attempting to remember things that happened to me between the ages of four to ten, especially events of my early childhood that are engraved in my memory forever.

I remember how my father took me to the *heder* for the first time at the age of four, and how the angel threw me a candy . . . The *heder* was near the pig market in the Benedon area. The house was divided into two by a partition of wooden boards. In one part was a grocery store where the Gentiles bought their staples on market days and, in the second part, was the *heder*. We sat there, a quorum of children, on benches around a long table. A whip in his hand, the Rebbe sat at the head of the table and taught us the alphabet. Sometimes, he left us and helped his wife with her business with the Gentiles in the market. We, the students, repeated meanwhile "*kamatz alef aw*" [rote learning of letter-vowel combinations] . . .

When the tumult and enthusiasm in the *heder* increased, he would burst in, waving his whip right and left . . . Later, recess came and, like sparrows, we all went out in the direction of the pig market and the water pipe, and played different games.

Instead of a bell to signal that recess was over, the Rebbe ran around and shouted aloud that we should go back into the *heder*. But we played hide and seek, and did not want to return to our studies.

Thus ended my first "year of schooling" in Ostrolenka. After that, I entered *Talmud Torah* in the first grade, with the teacher Jaloszke. My second teacher was Mendel "Brodacz"; the third – Jechiel, and after him, Lazer Chanoch the *Warszawa*. Everything happened in the blink of an eye, and then the period of troubles, suffering and torture began.

How good it is to remember my young years in a world that was and is no more, the quiet moments of our past. Tears flow even at the memory of a fragment of our personal lives. Here is the *Talmud Torah*, with the study hall and the "community *shtebl*", the old, destroyed synagogue and, opposite it, the burial society's "ark" [coffin], conveying the holiness of a small town that, like a big city, contained a whole world.

World War II broke out. Everything holy to us was defiled in the coarsest and cruelest way possible.

When the Germans invaded our city, they ordered all the Jews to leave their homes. I went into the *Talmud Torah* then, to part from its familiar walls, from the bench I sat on for so many years. I was drawn there, to look at everything for the last time, although I knew I would not find anyone there. Everything was neglected and abandoned. In the street, they were publicly burning Torah scrolls, and Jewish blood flowed . . . They indiscriminately fired at adults and children, whose only guilt was that they belonged to the nation that "You have chosen" . . . Why is it forbidden for Jews to ask questions? How were the Ten Martyrs [ten rabbis martyred by the Romans during the period of the Second Temple destruction] answered behind the curtain: "This is my decree, accept it! If not – I will turn the world into chaos." It is forbidden to ask.

When I left the *Talmud Torah*, a spectacle appeared before me that shook me to the depths of my soul. It was the most appalling moment of my life: the old, wise man I loved – my father, of blessed memory – stood in the entrance of the "community *shtebl*" and a German, may his name be eradicated, cut off his beard. Another German memorialized this event with a movie camera. My father stood like a hero and did not look into the German's eyes, but doubtless, his heart bled at that moment. I stood petrified and dumbfounded near the wall of the *Talmud Torah* and did not know how to act. Should I go to my father and hug him, or run to my mother and tell her what had happened? God in Heaven, if I could have, I would have strangled the two Germans and ripped them to shreds. Instead, I ran, crying bitterly.

This was just a drop in the vast ocean of our suffering. We were a large, extensive family. I had a grandmother, uncles, aunts and cousins. None of them remained alive, not even my brother, Jakow Serok, of blessed memory, a prodigy who had received rabbinical ordination. Like thousands of Ostrolenkans, they were

not buried in a Jewish cemetery according to Jewish tradition.

Where will I find the proper words to express my cry of despair?!

May this *Yizkor* book perpetuate the [Jewish] Community of Ostrolenka, and may the following simple words, from the depths of my heart, be an eternal monument to our martyrs. Remember always and never forget! Remember and be comforted in the building of our State – the State of Israel!

Chaim Drezner, Bnei Brak

The Day of the Expulsion

Friday, early morning. My head is as heavy as lead, my feet cannot carry my body, which shrivels more and more every day. My eyes are red from sleepless nights, and my constant thought is "From where will my help come?"

I go to the window looking out on Ostrowa Street, draw the curtain, and try to open it. The sun has not yet risen. Perhaps it also rebels and does not wish to extend its golden rays over a world so sinful.

I have almost forgotten what happened here two days ago, when the "bearers of the culture" of Europe, the members of the "superior race" and their whores invaded Jewish homes, broke and smashed closets, drawers and mirrors, and stole clothes and valuables without restraint. Clothes, undergarments, bed linens that Jewish mothers had sewn, embroidered and meticulously safeguarded as a dowry for their daughters – all this was defiled and stolen by the impure hands of the Nazi beasts.

I remember a normal Friday in Ostrolenka. Pictures of yesterday rise before me from the sparkling daily life of the city, still quivering. I see Lew's bakery on Ostrowa Street. The window on the second floor is open and there sits the *mara d'atra*, the Rabbi of the city, Rabbi Icchak Bursztejn, of blessed memory, a Torah scholar and author of important books. Even before morning prayers, he has studied the *Debates of Abaye and Rava*. Then the beadle, Yonatan, arrives. His beard and moustache have already lost their natural color and are yellowed from frequent tobacco sniffing. He takes the Rabbi's prayer shawl bag and accompanies him to the big study hall.

From the courtyard of Srolke Szron's house and the narrow alley, Reb Irmijahu Grynberg, the Jewish law adjudicator, comes out, also on his way to morning prayers after having already studied the Talmud or the Commentaries. The large study hall resembles, *lehavdil!* [but different!], a big railway station with trains going in and out, as Jews with big prayer shawl bags stream into it from all parts of the city. Friday is market day and the Jewish people need to make a living. Before they get down to secular business, however, they must commune with the Lord of the Universe. Before one *minyan* [prayer quorum] finishes, another has already begun.

Not far from here is the yeshiva. The windows are open and young men sit, bent over large Gemara tomes, occupied by the *Debates of Abaye and Rava*. What takes place in the street does not interest them. The most important thing is to repair the world under God's sovereignty, trust and faith, and to observe "eat your bread with salt and place your efforts in Torah".

Here comes old Granowicz, opening his workshop and waiting until Szymon Czapnikiewicz arrives, wearing a short coat and shining boots, with his stick in his hand – satisfied, quiet and serene. After an unrestrained "Good morning", they go into the store, sit down and converse until the apprentices arrive. Then they get to work with great energy.

Opposite, Szmuelik Markiewicz opens his store. With a corner of his beard in his mouth, he looks with pleasure at the women's coats displayed in his store window, as if they were the latest fashion fresh from Paris. Pinie Gedanken comes from Siwak's house, hurrying to the printers and to the paper store of Jankele Krymkiewicz ("Bolshevik"), who waits for him at the door and treats him to a fragrant cigarette, which Jankele has made from the finest tobacco. They chat for a few minutes and then Josele Lewkowicz arrives,

straight from the early risers' *minyan*, with his big prayer shawl bag, and he, too, gets his "daily dose". Joska Jabek stands on the opposite pavement, near his shop, and sips his glass of tea with pleasure.

I feel like running to Krawiec's courtyard, to the butchers with their white aprons and their long knives in their hands, ritually preparing meat for the Sabbath. From there, a glance at Skrobacz's house near the bridge, at the fishermen near the bridge, at the live fish flapping in baskets, as if they were trying to jump back into the river. From there, to the pig market, where the Jews have now spread their wares on stalls – small sewing notions and cheap fabrics. Like an uncrowned king, Symczele Dublin wanders among the wagons and horses with a straw in his mouth, dressed in a musty smock shiny with dirt, feeling the bags of grains in the farmers' wagons. Where are Paja (Perkal) and her two daughters, standing guard in order to take the empty bags from the farmers almost by force, and fill them with sugar, salt and different grains.

And where is Sara Hinda, dragging pitchers of milk? All week she bears the yoke quietly. Her voice is heard only on Fridays: "Women, quickly, give me your pots! Today is Friday and I have to prepare for the Sabbath!"

Srolke Szron opens the rear gate of his courtyard and in come the wagons of Jewish carters, loaded with merchandise, slates and coal. If a horse is too lazy to carry a load, the carters themselves lend a shoulder on all four sides, and the wagon moves from its place, almost without the horse's help.

On Ostrowa Street, the Jewish carriage owners stand on their high seats, each on a different corner. Today is Friday, and the Jews are not going to the train, but perhaps there will be a chance trip to Kaczyny?

Motel Jakres sits and his lips whisper something – apparently, he has not finished his prayers in the study hall. Icze Meir holds an old evening newspaper in his hand and reads studiously, sitting at his ease in his big carriage with the iron wheels. All the other carriages have already been equipped with rubber wheels, but Icze Meir does not accept the new fashion. He does not drive to the railway station with less than a *minyan* of passengers.

Later, Jewish children, fresh from a night's sleep and with their knapsacks on their backs, hurry in different directions: some of them to the government school located in the house of Lejbel Sredni, some to the Yavneh School, others to the *Talmud Torah* in the study hall courtyard. A few of the company are late in arriving, because they were praying in the synagogue and grabbed hold of Mosze Sechtoni, who sang *Tzur Yisrael*.

Suddenly, Fiszel Goldwaser's truck arrives from Warsaw, loaded with merchandise for the Jewish stores. The broad-shouldered porters, already a little bent from years of carrying loads, are ready to lend their backs to lugging any load.

On the sidewalk near the post office, is Fiszel, with the young, thin bookkeeper, Icchak Dancyger, who does not seem to know how to open his mouth, although on the High Holy Days, his pleasant prayers bring thoughts of repentance. The two of them follow the truck on the sidewalk without exchanging a word, as if they were angry at each other. In the stores near the market square, they wait for customers. The farmers from the villages have not yet sold the merchandise they brought to the city, so they are in no hurry to buy, and Jewish customers do not come on Fridays.

Walking back and forth are Icel Sojka, with his prayer shawl bag under his arm, and Aron Zusman, a Bund representative, who, in his outward appearance and clothing looks like a *poretz*, but in his soul is a true representative of the workers. Stubbornly and diligently, he fights for the improvement of the workers' condition. Apparently, in the coming days, the city council will deliberate on some Jewish issue, and, despite the differences in their outlooks, they are consulting as to how to protect the Jews.

It is ten o'clock. The train from Warsaw has arrived. Our cultural worker, Jechezkel Kilinski, with the delicate facial features. Under his arm, a bundle of newspapers and notebooks, and around him some of his many children. He also carries around with him thick account books that he inherited from his father, in which are written the debts of those who take newspapers on credit, in the event that perhaps someone will want to pay his debt . . .

What happened? Who could have stopped the lives of the Jews of Ostrolenka on one Friday with such a cruel hand? I hear the heavy steps of hobnailed boots. The sound is familiar to me from somewhere. They are the steps of a modern Haman, who has made it his goal to destroy and to cause all the Jews to perish.

It is twelve o'clock. I look out of the window and see Jews passing along the walls of the houses, like shadows, reading a sad verdict with tear-filled eyes, that the Jews must leave the city within two hours. For

generations they have lived here together – grandparents, parents and grandchildren, born and educated in the same city. The gravestones in the cemetery testify that for hundreds of years, Jews lived here and helped build the city. Is there such a force, each of us thinks, that can expel us from our established homes, which we have built with our own hands? Like birds pasting grains of sand one to another, we, too, built our nests. Where is virtue and justice?

Meanwhile, the farmers came with their wagons and horses, and waited with pleasure until the Jews paid them 15 or 20 times more than the regular fee to load the children with the bundles and take them out of the city, which they built with the sweat of their brows. Whoever did not have the amount demanded had to give them everything that was dear and holy in their eyes, an inheritance from a father and a grandfather, in order to leave the city as quickly as possible. These were no longer familiar farmers. The Jews were strangers to them now. A long time ago, it seemed that every Gentile had his Jew, and that he would be ready to give his soul to save him.

How could people created in God's image, who lived for generations with Jews – we thought we were engrained in them – how could they shed their skins overnight and show them coldness and cruelty?

With wagons loaded with bundles and children, we left the city. Parents walked behind wagons like a living funeral. Tears choked their throats. Many did not restrain themselves, and burst into bitter tears. The children sobbed in one great chorus. Their heartrending cries reached the heart of the heavens. Like a stone torn from the ground, we became one great weeping mass, moving toward an unknown fate. When we left the last street, the desire to turn my head and cast a last look at the place where we were born and educated woke in me. We did not have a chance to visit our parents' graves, to bid farewell to mother and father, and tell them that we had to leave them and did not know whether we would return to visit their graves and shed a tear there.

I think in my heart: where now is the great mourner, for example, Irmijahu (Jeremiah), who will take in the terrible spectacle and perpetuate it in the history of the Jews, so replete with blood and tears?

Night has descended, we are leaving Wojciechowice. Today is Friday, Sabbath Eve! Memories arise: not long ago, on a similar evening, crowds of Jews left the study hall, dressed in Sabbath clothes, happy and joyous. The Sabbath hovered over us and pervaded everything. The sweet song of *Lecha Dodi Likrat Kallah* was heard, and everyone rushed home to the modest, yet festive meals that the mothers had prepared with grace and love. The smells of the food filled the air. *Shalom Aleichem Malachei HaSharet* [Peace be with you, Ministering Angels].

Now, in place of joy – mourning, tears and lamentation. All pray that the angels who accompanied us and protected us on our way home from Sabbath prayers, will accompany us now on our road of pain and save us from extermination, so that we may again establish our homes, so tragically destroyed and annihilated.

Copy
(Testimony no. 2309/2353)

Taking the Testimony of

Wolf Wisocki, Weiren, 1917
From 1940-1945 in Russia

On Monday, 10 September 1939, I left Wyszkow, where I had hidden in a pit in a farmer's field. An acquaintance of my father's came to me and told me that the Germans found all the Jewish men and had shot them. The Germans were promising to give gifts to anyone who turned in a hidden Jew.

I went though the forest, on winding paths, and on Wednesday, 13 September 1939, I reached Goworowo, where our relatives lived. I went to their home and told them about the great disaster that had occurred in our city. They said to me, "True, we are still in our home, but we can sense that danger is drawing near us, too." They also told me that soldiers were going around with Polish women, walking into Jewish homes and giving the women anything they liked in them. There were also incidents where they shot some Jews to death, for no reason whatsoever. One elderly woman was shot in her bed. All the Jews were expelled from neighboring towns. This morning, they had been driven away from bread lines near bakeries and had been given severe beatings.

As expected, the catastrophe was not late in coming.

On Friday, 21 September 1939, at ten o'clock in the

morning, soldiers, assisted by the local Catholic population, drove all the Jews out of their homes and into the market square. They did not let them take anything with them. Two soldiers, with thick clubs in their hands, entered the house where I was staying at the time and beat me, with shouts of "*Raus!*" (Out!). The woman ran from the house with her two children. In all the confusion, she forgot to take her six-month-old baby, which remained in its cradle. After a minute, she remembered and turned back to take him, but in vain. They would not let her come back in! Crying and pleas did not help. They threatened that if she came into the house, they would kill one of the children outside. Meanwhile, her six-year-old daughter entered the house by the back door and brought the baby out. Throngs of soldiers and local Catholics stood outside, among them, women. They led us to the synagogue, with blows and abuse. Many military personnel were gathered there, among them high-ranking officers. Some of them ran about with guns in their hands, ready to fire. Others, with sticks and whips, made us run to the synagogue, which was already full, including the women's section and the attic.

At a certain point, they locked the two entry doors and sealed the windows with boards. We screamed loudly, but they continued their work. Army convoys passed near the building. They must certainly have heard our cries of distress, but they did not stop. Jews who were in the attic said that many of them asked the soldiers what was happening. When they were told, they burst out laughing and continued on their way. Suddenly, we saw thick smoke and flames coming out of the other side of the synagogue. We waited for a terrible death. It was clear that they were about to burn us alive. Many tried to break the doors down, but in vain. Suddenly, one door opened. We burst out. While fleeing, we trampled some elderly people. After we were saved from a terrible death, the Nazis told us how it had happened. By chance, a senior military man had passed by in his car, and asked what was happening. When he saw what they were about to do to us, he said, "That is too cruel!", and ordered them to open the doors immediately. Each of us wanted to rush home, but they blocked our way. They held us in the street for a few hours and we watched as the synagogue and some nearby houses burned down. Then they drove us (approximately 1,500 people) into an open field outside the city, with threats that they would shot anyone trying to escape. One woman asked, "How can we get food here for ourselves and our children?" One of the officers answered that we were sentenced to die!

A few brave ones escaped to look for food and even reached their own homes, but found them empty. Gentiles were already living in a few of them.

At night, Gentiles from nearby villages came to us in secret, and brought us bread, milk and a bale of hay to lie on. On the third day, two soldiers came and ordered us to leave, stressing that if a Jew would be found in the city or nearby – he would be executed. Some went to Ostrow and Maz, but most turned toward Ostrolenka. We walked in small groups, through fields and forests. We were afraid to walk on the main roads. When we passed through villages, there were farmers who pitied us and gave us slices of bread. Others chased us away, adding that we should thank them for not turning us over to the Nazis, as they had been ordered to do with any Jews they caught.

Toward evening, we reached Ostrolenka. Quietly, we sneaked into the city, but we did not find a single Jew there. We went into one of the empty, ruined houses and stayed there all night. The next morning, we went out into the street. No one bothered us. Gentiles even brought us bread and potatoes, in exchange for suitable payment. We hoped to pass the winter this way. Some even thought of finding work, in order to earn a living.

One day (it was during Succot [a holiday]), we gathered in one of the houses to pray. Suddenly, we heard a cry of distress from the street. We saw Jews being beaten and expelled to the Russian border, four kilometers distant. We wanted to run home to get some food, but all the ways were blocked. Only the road to Russia was open. Outside the city, we met all the Jews. They told us that they had been robbed of everything – money, jewels and valuables. We were about 500 people. We crossed the Russian border and breathed with relief.

(The Verden Historical Committee, 26 July 1948 – S. Fracht)

Eyewitness Testimonies

Chaya Lis-Wolkowicz, Brooklyn

In 1939, when the war broke out and the Germans expelled all the Jews from Ostrolenka, my husband, Lazer Zlocisty, and I moved to Bialystok. There we met many Ostrolenkans: Ben Cyjon Pianko with his family; his older brother and his family; the Flamenbojms and their daughter; the wife of Shalom Rozen with her children; her daughter-in-law, Chana Fejga Chmiel; Lea and Chaja Markiewicz; my neighbor, Beniamin Symcha Ma-Towu with his family; Chaja Sojka with her husband and children (now in Israel), and other townspeople.

In May 1940, we had to leave Bialystok. We moved to Zelva, a town in Belarus. From there, we moved to Slonim, a bigger city, where about eighty percent of Ostrolenka's Jews were concentrated. There, I met Icel Sojka, the entire Szron family, Noske Jabek with his family, and the Gedanken, Frydman, Zylbersztejn, Bomsztejn, Dorfman and Lachowicz (I was with them in the ghetto until the last minute) families. Among my relatives were: Jankel Dancyger with his family; my uncle, Daniel Medzowicz; the Perkal family; Jakow Herszel Zamelson with his mother and his wife; Czapnikiewicz with his daughter; the Skrobacz family; the Sredni family; Miriam Sztejnberg with her daughters; Reuwen Nachum Gercek with his family; Fajczarz the Barber with his family; Perel Nadborny with her husband and children; the Roszeniak family; the Benedon brothers with their wives and children; Gutman Grosman with Chana and the boy; Necha Roszeniak with her husband and their son (I was also with them in the ghetto until the end); Sara Gercek, her husband Zalman and the children; my mother-in-law; the Chomont family from Wojciechowice; the Szafran family; Kaplan the Shoemaker; Czila Sniadowicz with her children, and many other Ostrolenkans whose names I do not remember. I was with all of them until 1941.

Within two weeks after the Germans invaded the area, they carried out the first pogrom. One thousand, two hundred Jewish men were killed then, most of them young. Among them were forty Jews from Ostrolenka, including my husband, Lazer Zlocisty, Icchak Zaborowski, Chaim Benedon, Filar, Adonolam, Stelmach and others.

In November 1941, the second pogrom took place. There was great panic. The Germans made the work easy for themselves. Those who could work were gathered in a few streets; those who were not fit to work were separated from them.

One cold November day, the murderers surrounded the city and took out those who were unable to work. Women, men and small children were driven out of the city, where pits were already prepared. They threw them into the pits and threw grenades at them. After they finished their work, they lit fires around the pits, drank themselves drunk, sang and went wild. Two girls from Ostrolenka, one from the Bocian family and the second – the daughter of Reuwen Nachum, who sewed shoe uppers, succeeded in escaping from the pits. At night, they reached the city and entered the ghetto.

Many Ostrolenkans were killed in the second pogrom; only a handful remained. I was saved by chance. The next day, when things calmed down a bit, I went out into the street and what I saw made everything go black. I saw smashed doors, ruined apartments, all property stolen. Out of 36,000 people, only a few Jews remained, stunned, bereft. My cousins, Chaim Perkal from Mlawa and Reuwen Perkal from Makow, who were in Slonim at the same time, helped me, as did, my cousins, the Holcman brothers from Kaczyny, and the ritual slaughterer from Kaczyny, Reuwen Nachum Szlos and his family. Things continued this way until July 1942.

Then they surrounded the ghetto again, this time with the intention of eliminating all the Jews, to the last. They set fire to one part of the ghetto and people were burned alive, among them many Ostrolenkans: my cousin, Bazke Frydman with her husband, Szmuel, and her daughter; my cousin, Perkal from Makow, with his son, daughter-in-law and their children; Jakow-Herszel Zamelson, with his wife, Fejgale, and her father, Czapnikiewicz. I hid in a pit in the ghetto and lay there

for twelve days. I peeked out of the hole every day and saw the ghetto burning. In the same courtyard, there was an old people's home, in which were Chaim Szyman and his wife, as well as Szaje the Butcher and his family. When it was quiet all around, I tried to get out of the pit slowly. Like a flash, I passed the place where Jews had been shot lay like flies. I quickly entered my hiding place in the pit and hid there. When it got dark, I came out of the pit and, with great difficulty, entered the small ghetto, where there were about 600 people and some small houses in half a narrow street. There I met the four sons of my cousin, Jankel Danzig (the parents were no longer alive), Chawa Bomsztejn and Czila Sniadowicz. Her children were already murdered. They gave me my first slice of bread. The family of Lachowicz the Carpenter was also there. They were the only family that had remained intact. I met Lea Sojka, Necha Roszeniak and Chana Benedon, all without their children and husbands, who had all been killed. Frydman, his son Zundel, his daughter-in-law, Peszka Finkler; Chomont and his wife, and Rywka Topola, who was married to Roszeniak's son. There was also Meir Gercek's daughter-in-law, Szejna Bloumenkranz (the daughter of the ritual slaughterer) from the Kaczyny station. This handful of Ostrolenkans was among the 600 Jews in the small ghetto.

I began to look for a way to escape, but to where? The partisans were spoken of there. I knew that my brother, Herszel Wolkowicz, and his wife, Chaja, were in Lomza. But my brother, Jankel Wolkowicz, with his wife, son and daughters, were in the town of Zelva. Aron Zusman with his family, Topola the Tailor, Welwel Gilda, my cousin, Icze Medzowicz, with his family, and others whose names I do not remember, were there, too.

I decided to run away from the ghetto. These joined in my decision: Michael, the son of my cousin Jankel Dancyger, Jakow Szlomo Lachowicz, Necha Roszeniak, Peszka Lewin and three other people – one from Slonim and two from Wyszkow. To my sorrow, not everyone did what we had decided. Jakow Szlomo Lachowicz, a healthy, strong man, gave up the idea of escaping under the pressure of his mother's pleas. She did not want to separate from her son. Necha Roszeniak and Peszka Lewin did not go either. I did not have anything to lose. I ran away from the ghetto, together with Michael Dancyger. With the help of a Gentile from Belarus, we "stole" over the border (of course, we paid him well).

We arrived in the town of Rozan, where the situation was still quiet. There, too, I met my fellow townspeople: my cousin, Jankel Perkal, Nachum Kaczor and his children, Dawid-Jehuda Finkelsztejn with his wife, Rachel, and their daughter, Chajale. The joy of our meeting was boundless. Everyone invited me to stay with them. Finally, I stayed with my cousin, Jankel Perkal.

When I was in Rozan, I tried to bring my three cousins (the sons of Dancyger) from Slonim there, but to my sorrow, none of them was alive anymore. And not just them – the entire handful of Jews that remained had been destroyed by the murderers. I stayed there only a short time.

Together with my cousin, Michael Dancyger, we continued to "steal" across the borders. We walked a bit, and part of the way we hitchhiked in the Germans' cars, until we reached Wolkowysk. There, too, in the ghetto, we found Ostrolenkans: Josel Litwer, his wife and children, and Szlomo Czapnikiewicz. I stayed with him for a few days. In the Wolkowysk Ghetto, I met Aron Zusman. I was with them for a few days. There I met his aunt, broken and sick, who lived on the Lomza Road Street and who was saved from the pogrom in Slonim. I was with them for a few days. Finally, I succeeded in getting a permit and left. At first, I went on foot, and then I continued in German cars . . . I knew I was endangering my life, but I did not have a choice. I was barefoot, minimally dressed and did not have anything to lose.

Finally, I got to Bialystok. I wanted to get into the ghetto, but that was not so easy to do. Sixty thousand Jews were in the Bialystok Ghetto then. I wandered around all day with my cousin, Michael Dancyger; only towards evening did we succeed in entering the ghetto. There was a terrible panic in the ghetto, because news had come of the murders of Jews in forests in the area.

In the Bialystok Ghetto, I met Dr. Gutman and his wife, Ben Cyjon Pianko and his family, the Flamenbojm family, the two Markowicz sisters and Janek Gedanken. Dr. Gutman was sick and broken, and when I told him about the Slonim pogroms – he collapsed completely. I had to cut the story short. Flamenbojm's daughter treated me just like a sister, which I will never forget. I was completely bereft. She told me not to feel embarrassed and to tell her if I needed money and, if so, she would give it to me. I did not want to take anything. I aspired to one thing only: to get to Lomza, to my

brother. With the help of Ben Cyjon Pianko, I managed to send a message to my brother, Herszel Wolkowicz, in the Lomza Ghetto, that I was alive and wanted to get to him. The letter reached Zyskind Zusman in the Lomza Ghetto and he gave it to my brother. His joy cannot be imagined, because he knew that all the Jews in Belarus had been killed. My brother obtained a permit for train travel for me and passed it on to me, so that I could travel to Lomza. I sat on the train with my yellow badge and trembled with fear. I came with Michael Dancyger. When we got to the Lomza Ghetto, it caused an uproar among the Ostrolenkans there. Everyone came to visit me. I knew that the apparent quiet would not long continue, and that the pogroms would also come here. I was happy to have succeeded in joining my brother and his wife and children, before I was murdered. Everything else was unimportant – although I did have a strong will to remain alive. In the Lomza Ghetto, I met Zyskind Zusman and his family, and Szajke Aszer and Josel Aszer and their wives. They all sat and cried about those who had been murdered. Rywczak Nadborny was also there, and I tried to avoid meeting her, so as not to have to tell her that her entire family was killed. Krymkiewicz the Electrician with his wife the teacher, and the Rebbetzin and her daughter, Syma, were also there. My brother helped many people, as much as he could.

I did not stay in the Lomza Ghetto for long either. From there, I went to my brother, who was in a village. After two weeks, the unavoidable took place: the destruction of the Lomza Ghetto.

While I was at the village, on 2 November 1942, early on a Sunday morning, they got us out of our beds and did not allow us to take anything. Then I knew that all was lost, that there was nowhere to run and that we had to go to our deaths.

My brother, Herszel, and his wife were stunned and did not know what to do. What did it mean, to get up, to get dressed and to leave everything?! I recovered first, dressed the children and gave each of them a small bundle. I kissed them, because I knew that the end had finally come.

The gendarmes noticed that I had not lost my wits, and therefore watched me, so that I would not escape. They loaded us on wagons and took us, together with other Jews who lived in the area of Ostrolenka-Lomza, to the village of Miastkowa, where I took advantage of the opportunity. The minute the gendarmes went to eat and left Poles to guard us in their stead, I got out of line, tore off my yellow badge and hid. When everyone else went on their way – I fled to the nearby forest. It was very hard for me. Where should I go now? I did not have a brother anymore, I had no relatives, no friends.

I lay in the forest all night, in the pouring rain, hungry. I trembled with cold. I lay curled up near a tree, at night, soaked to the bone. The whole time, I thought: What have I done? Why didn't I go with them? Where will I run to now? How much time can I lie here in the forest like this?

In the morning, I began to walk, posing as a Pole. I wanted to reach some farmer's hut. This went on for two days, until I came upon a farmer woman in the forest and told her who I was. She took pity on me, let me into her house and gave me food. Later, she took me to the hayloft, where I laid for eight days. Then, she came and told me that she was afraid to keep me there anymore, and ordered me to leave. I was at my wit's end. Where would I go? I decided to turn myself in to the gendarmes, because I had no other choice. I wet the straw in the hayloft with my tears.

This was on Sunday, toward evening. I asked the farmer women to let me stay with her one more day. I thought: It would be good to live another day. Suddenly, she came with news that my brother, Herszel, and his son were in the village, and that she had already told him that I was hiding with her. At night, my brother came to me and told me that he had slipped out of the ghetto because he knew that I had escaped – only he did not know where. From then on, we two hid ourselves in pits in the forest, together with a few more Jews who we met along the way. For twenty-four months, we hid in the groves around Ostrolenka. We were forced to move from place to place and dig new pits, because there was someone who discovered our hiding place every time.

We were in terrible distress: hungry, dirty, shivering with cold. I could write a long story about those twenty-four months that would curdle the reader's blood in his veins. We did not die, however, from all of this. We did not even get sick. We were strong. With us hid the Rucki Brothers – one of them was killed; Rostker and his son, too – the son lived, the father was killed; Meir Krymkiewicz and his family; Berel Zabludowicz and his wife, Rachel, and his children. (There was a rumor that the Gentiles in Ostrolenka killed him, when he, together with Pesach Hochberg and Mendel Szlafmic, tried to return to the city after the war); Cytryniarz the

Barber and the Przystanczyk family – all these were killed in the town of Molczat, near Baranowicz. The Piaseczny family and Nowinski the Hatter were in a village near Slonim. The Bajuk family was in Brysk. My brother, Chackel Michael Wolkowicz, was in Pinsk, with other Ostrolenkans.

On 8 September 1944, we were liberated by the Russians, and our suffering came to an end.

Herszel Wolkowicz,

the Brother of Chaya Lis-Wolkowicz (Brooklyn) Recounts:

In 1939, when the war broke out and the Germans occupied Ostrolenka, they expelled the Jews from the city. Many of Ostrolenka's Jews went to Lomza. In February 1940, the Russians ordered the entire population to register to receive passports and to indicate where they had lived until 1939. Of course, everyone reported his true place of residence.

Before Passover, they began to issue passports. For anyone who indicated that he resided in a place occupied by the Germans, a special clause was written in his passport, saying that he was a spy and that he could not live here [Lomza], but at a distance of 100 kilometers from the border. The final date for fulfilling the order was Passover. Therefore, on Passover Eve, my cousin, Jankel Perkal, and I went to Slonim to get an apartment there. Unfortunately, we did not find an apartment, because the city was already full of refugees like us. Finally, we found an apartment with a Gentile outside the city. We rented a small room for two families and gave him an advance payment. When we returned to the city, we found that all the synagogues and study halls were filled with refugees. We decided to return to Lomza. There I learned that I could exchange my passport. People were prepared to pay a fortune for the right to stay in Lomza. I was the only one who could do so, because I had a bus permit, and on the license was clearly written: The Warsaw-Bialystok route, via Lomza. Thanks to this permit, and with the addition of bribery and "influence", they changed my passport.

In Lomza, I met Ostrolenkans: Eli Zusman and Zyskind and their families; the brothers, Motel and Icze Szrejter, and their families; Josel and Szajke and their wives; Jechiel Rozenblum and his wife; Symcha Dublin and his daughter and son-in-law; Chana Granowicz and her mother and her children; Chana Wajnkranc, her husband, Tobjasz, and their children; Dr. Karbowski and his family; and Krystal and his family. Alter Granowicz and Chaim Pedowicz and their wives were in Kolno. Old Symcha Pianko (who died in the Lomza Ghetto), his wife and daughter, and the Widow Bobcia and her children (a son should be in Israel).

On 22 June 1941, when Hitler invaded Russia, many fled to Slonim, thinking to evade the Germans this way. It turned out, however, that the Germans got there even before them. On the way back to Lomza, the Germans caught Eli Zusman and Chawa Tobjasz's husband.

In September 1941, a ghetto was established in Lomza, and the Jews were taken from there for forced labor in Ostrolenka. They worked on the destruction of the border around the cemetery and were held there all winter. I was told that a Gentile bought the ruined synagogue in Ostrolenka from the Germans, dismantled it and used the bricks for building material. They turned the study hall into a garage for car repair, and the *Talmud Torah* into a tin smithy. They also dismantled the houses in the old market, from the side of the bridge until Kilinskaga Street – the houses of Skrobacz, Josel Wajncymer, Thylim, Zylbersztejn and Frydman.

At the beginning of the summer of 1942, they took Dr. Karbowski and Josel Aszer out of the ghetto and brought them to Ostrolenka. According to the story of one of the Poles, they were held in the prison and taken out every day for forced labor. Later, they were not heard of anymore. When the doctor's wife heard that I had spoken to the Pole about her husband, she asked me in the ghetto if I could talk to the Pole and ascertain her husband's condition.

In 1941, posing as Gentiles, the Rebbetzin and her daughter, Syma, came to the Lomza Ghetto from Warsaw. In the summer of 1942, a Gentile brought me a letter from my sister, Chaja, who was in the Bialystok

Ghetto, and I made efforts to bring her to me. After two weeks, she arrived, disguised as a rural. She told us that the Germans caught her husband, Lazer Zlocisty, together with other Jewish men, immediately after they got to Slonim. Even before she came to Bialystok, she had been an eyewitness to two pogroms in Slonim. She stayed with us for about two months, until the final destruction of the Lomza Ghetto on 2 November 1942. Chaja went through a great deal before she arrived in Lomza. She was miraculously saved from the Gestapo more than once. I told her that if she had to escape from the Germans again, she should run to a certain village, and there seek out a Gentile whose name I gave her.

My oldest son, thirteen years old then, and I, plus another three Jews from Lomza (two bachelors and a married man) hid in the ghetto in an attic. On Monday, 2 November 1942, all the Jews were taken out of the ghetto. We laid in our hiding place from Monday until 7 o'clock on Sabbath Eve. We knew when the guard changed – and we decided to come out then. We drew lots as to which of us would go out first. We wrapped our feet in rags, so that our footsteps would not be heard, and went on all fours, so that they would not see us.

After we left the ghetto, we hid in the cemetery for a few hours, and then headed in the direction of Ostrolenka, where the roads were familiar to me. I was sure that I would find my sister with the Gentile I suggested that she should seek out.

On Sunday morning, we reached the village that was our destination. Our three escorts stayed in the forest. With my son, I went to a farmer I knew and asked him to sell me a loaf of bread. I took it immediately to our friends in the woods and returned to the village. I asked the farmer to let me stay with him until evening. I told him that my sister was apparently in the home of the head of the village, and that I would go to her at nightfall. He advised me not to go there that evening, because a party was to take place at the home of the head of the village, to which many police officers from the town of Miastkowa were invited. I heeded his advice and stayed until dark.

Suddenly, there was knock at the door. My son and I hid behind the large oven. A woman from another village entered and talked to our farmer about the war. I heard her say, "Since the Devil has taken all the Jews – the war will end very soon." He escorted her to the exit and told her that I was with him.

The Gentile woman told me to come to her in the evening, knock on the window. She would come out and tell me exactly where my sister was. I did as she asked. She came out and took me to the barn where my sister was hidden in a pile of straw. A great miracle had happened! Two days earlier, she had ordered my sister to leave, but at the latter's request, she had let her stay until Sunday. If she had not visited the farmer's house where we were hidden and said, "The Devil has already taken all the Jews" – my sister would not be with us today. My sister did not know the farmers in the area or the winding roads that I knew – without me, she would surely not have survived.

We left together in the direction of Ostrolenka. Near the villages Przytali and Rydzewa, we dug a pit in the forest and camouflaged its entrance with a board covered with a layer of sand. Thus we laid and suffered for 23 months (!), until the Russians liberated us.

Zalman Wylozny (Taking Testimony)

a. World War II and the Expulsion from Ostrolenka

At dawn on Friday, the 1st of September 1939, the war broke out. In town, panic broke out. A rumor spread that the Fifth Cavalry Regiment invaded German territory, near Myszyniec, and carried out a great slaughter there. After the Poles retreated, the Germans entered Myszyniec and cruelly slaughtered men, women and children – without distinction. That same Friday, the Germans reached the village of Dylewo – 12 kilometers from Ostrolenka. In the city, the rurals appeared with loaded wagons and told of the Germans' cruel deeds.

Panic broke out among the Jews of our city, and everyone thought about how to escape. To leave the city

as fast as possible, many asked the Gentile farmers to rent them their wagons and horses. Many Jews went in the direction of Goworowo or Czerwin.

On Sabbath morning, I saw the [Jewish law] judge sitting in a wagon, going in the direction of Kaczyny. When he was asked why he was doing this, he answered: "This is a matter of life and death, and I advise all of you to do the same."

The Germans did not attack Ostrolenka, but went in the direction of Rozan, 26 kilometers from our city. My family and I turned toward the village of Borawe (nine kilometers from Ostrolenka), where our relative, Aron Laska, lived. On the way, we saw the Polish Army digging trenches all along the road. The soldiers told us proudly: "We'll show them!" That Sabbath, the German air force bombed a train on its way to Goworowo. The train managed to evade them and was not hit. For the first time, I saw the Polish Army fire at airplanes with anti-air cannons.

With my eldest brother, Mosze Beniamin (May God avenge his blood!), I went back to the city to see what had happened there. It was like looking at a cemetery. Only a few Jews had remained. I met Motel Dolowicz, our neighbor. He was in despair. We returned to Borawe, to our family. At night, we heard cannon fire. I saw Goworowo burning and the Polish Army fleeing in panic. My father said, "Children, we must run from here." We took a little food for the road and went in the direction of Czerwin. I steered the bicycle on which we had loaded our bundles. In the village of Choiny, through which we passed, we saw many dead and wounded Polish soldiers.

At dawn, we reached Czerwin. Its Jewish inhabitants were already gone, and in their homes were refuges from the area. We grabbed the first empty apartment we saw. I will never forget the sight of Awraham Seke the Shoemaker, who walked with his wife and eleven children in the stream of people. Unable to rent a wagon with a horse – he harnessed himself to the wagon and so dragged his children and all the bundles behind him, until they got to Czerwin.

We stayed in Czerwin for a week, until the German Army attacked the place. They came to our house and asked whether we were citizens or military personnel. My father answered them in German (he knew the language well). They checked the rooms to see if there were any army personnel hiding there. Then, they gathered all the Jews in one apartment, under heavy guard. They threatened to kill us, just because we were Jews. "The Jewish Rothschilds, the rich, brought the war", they said.

Panic took hold. Fathers put on their prayer shawls, and said the *Vedui* [final confessional prayer]. Mothers cried and little children screamed. They kept us for a whole day, without food and drink.

Then, a German general in his car passed by and asked, "What are these people doing here?" When the German guards answered that these were Jews, he ordered, "Release them immediately!"

The next day, a rush began back to Ostrolenka. The entire area was already full of the German Army. We rented a wagon and arrived in Ostrolenka on the same day, but the Germans were not yet there. The first reconnaissance company arrived only on 10 September 1939 from the direction of Lomza. They encamped in 3rd May Square. Their first mission was to plunder all the liquor stores, including the well-known wine shop of Bednarski. In exchange, they paid a few pennies.

On the same day, the Army regulars entered. Toward evening, they assembled representatives of all the areas of the city and announced, "For every German who is murdered here or who disappears – we will execute ten inhabitants." A curfew was announced – it was strictly forbidden to be on the street after six o'clock in the evening. The first victims were Jews, of course. Right on the first night, thirty Jews were taken hostage, among them, Motel Czapnikiewicz the Miller, Aron Wylozny and Eliezer Mejrann. They were imprisoned in the city hall until morning. When the Germans saw that nothing had happened in the city, they released them.

Together with the Germans, the Poles began visiting the stores of the Jews and demanding merchandise. Of course, they stole it all without payment. The Poles organized a civilian police and apprehended Jews for forced labor. First, they took them to Wojciechowice to clean the barracks and prepare them for German soldiers. Many refugees began to return from Ostrowa, Zambrow and all the other places in the area. A rumor spread that, on the way to Warsaw, the Germans killed the Hebrew teacher, Rozenblum (the former teacher of the Culture and Yavneh Hebrew schools, and an excellent chess player), and his daughter.

Eleven to thirteen kilometers from Ostrolenka is the village of Choiny, where a few Jewish families lived. Among those who fled from Ostrolenka was Awraham

Izrael, a horse dealer, who found temporary refuge in the village. His son and nephew were shot to death on the road, while escaping. Poles who knew the parents buried them near a tree at the side of the road. When the parents returned to Ostrolenka and a Gentile they knew told them what had happened, the mother fell, completely paralyzed. Awraham asked the Gentile to bring the murdered bodies back, in order to give them a proper Jewish burial. When the two bodies were brought back, the wagon was hidden from the Germans in the pig market. A few friends of the family gathered, myself included (the son, Reuwen Izrael, was my schoolmate at the *heder*). The wagon advanced, behind it those accompanying it, but everyone walking separately, so as not to arouse suspicion by walking in a group. At the cemetery, the graves were dug and they were buried in their clothes. I remember how their heads – which had been shot at – looked. The father was unable to say *Kaddish* [the mourner's prayer], and the grandfather, Julke Israel, said it in his place.

Meanwhile, the High Holy Days approached. We did not pray in public anymore, in the study hall or the *shtebl*; but everyone in his home, by himself. Many Jews were imprisoned in the jail in Ostrolenka, and every day they were taken out for forced labor, without food. Suddenly, a rumor spread that the Red Army was in Lomza and was expected to come close to Ostrolenka. The Germans had already removed their flags from municipal buildings and other institutions. After a short time, the reconnaissance company of Russian vanguard entered our city – one armored and two transport truck [units] – and encamped in the city square. The Germans asked if they could photograph them, but the Russians aimed their weapons at them and warned them not to dare to do so.

In the city, great joy broke out. The Jews especially were happy, knowing that their fear of the Germans was removed. To our regret, our happiness did not last long. After a few days, we learned that, according to the famous agreement between Molotov and Ribbentrop, Ostrolenka would be in the zone of the Third Reich, and it must be *Judenrein* (clean of Jews).

This was on the Simchat Torah holiday, 1939. At two o'clock in the afternoon, an order was published to the effect that the Jews must leave the city within two hours. Suddenly, the city filled with the wagons and horses of the farmers in the vicinity – they arrived on time, intent on stealing the property of the Jews from their emptied homes. Immediately, a representation of Jews was organized; it approached the German commander. On his office door, however, hung a sign: "Entry is forbidden to Jews". The guard was unwilling to let them in. Finally, they persuaded him of the importance of the matter and he agreed to let them enter. The commander received them and extended the time of the expulsion by 48 hours. Then, the Jews opened negotiations with the Gentiles regarding transportation of their belongings by wagon. The carters were unwilling to accept money for transportation, but demanded valuables, such as expensive fabrics, boots, suits, etc. The borders were open and the Germans conducted cruel searches, breaking and destroying all moveable objects. The Jews tried to find places to live with farmers they knew in villages in the Russian zone. Lomza was completely destroyed because of the intense battles that took place there between the Polish and German Armies. We settled in the village of Laskowce.

I remember that the winter was very hard. When we crossed the border, the Germans robbed us and left us bereft. We traveled in the direction of Lomza. My father and my eldest brother, Mosze Beniamin, went there first, in order to earn something. They found a ruin, without a door or windows. Father moved us all there and the place served us as a shelter. After we were in the Russian zone for about two weeks, Father began to work in his profession – shoemaking – and we had a livelihood.

After a time, the border between the Germans and the Russians closed, thus creating an opening for "black" merchandise smuggling. The Poles, primarily, engaged in this. As far as I can recall, the Germans expelled the Jews from the towns of Rozan, Makow, Poltusk and their environs, and did not allow them to take anything with them. When they arrived at the closed border, it was the Russians, in fact, who did not allow them to enter. And so, they wandered around the demilitarized zone, in the terrible cold of a hard winter. Many froze to death. Those who tried to go over to the opposite bank of the river drowned or were caught and chased back toward the Germans.

When we were in Lomza, Mother decided to bring her sister (a widow with five children) from Wolomin, which was on the German side. Her sixth son grew up with us. I took the execution of this mission upon myself. For this purpose, I met with two Gentiles we knew, who engaged in smuggling and knew all the borders. I packed a few personal belongings and we set

out. We reached Ostrolenka, in which there were already no Jews. We stayed in the home of the Krap family for the night. The next morning, I went out into the street and saw that our study hall had become a horse stable. A similar fate was visited on the church. I met a few Gentiles who knew me from birth, and they asked me, "What are you still doing here?" I explained my purpose to them. They told me that when all the Jews of Ostrolenka were expelled, one mute person did not want to leave the city. The Germans took him out by force and shot him to death among the weeds on the riverbank. "If you do not want the same fate to befall you – run away from here as fast as you can", they told me. I immediately left in the direction of Kaczyny. On the way, I passed near Staronia's drug store, in Srolke Szron's house. I peeked inside and was stunned: the druggist, Staronia, was hanging by a rope, and his body swung in the empty drug store . . .

I continued on my way to the Kaczyny railway station, in order to reach Wolomin. I wanted to get on the train, but encountered some Polish railway workers who demanded that everyone identify themselves. I tried to board without presenting my papers, but the Poles began shouting "*Judeh, Judeh!* [Jew, Jew!]" I immediately ran and decided to make my way on foot. I walked more than thirty kilometers on that day. I passed the town of Goworowo, which was completely burned, and its cemetery destroyed. Meanwhile, night had fallen and by six o'clock, curfew was in effect. At Pasieki (a railway station six kilometers from Rozan), I went to the *poretz* and asked permission to sleep there. He asked me, "You are a Jew – how did you get here?" I told him that my goal was to get to Wolomin and to this he replied, "You Jews like the Bolsheviks. Why don't you go to them?" I did not want to tell him that I had already been with them, so I just asked permission to stay for one night. He refused and stressed that every night the Germans came to him, and he could not possibly allow them to see a Jew with him. He suggested that I go to one of his servants. And so, the servant prepared a bed for me to sleep in, gave me food and also warned me that I must leave before morning. Only then did I go on my way. I got as far as Wyszkow. Two kilometers before Wyszkow, I met two Poles. They said to me, "Jew, give us your money". I told them that my money was hidden in the forest, and that if they would come with me, I would give it to them. I went deep into the forest with them. There, I took a heavy branch of a tree and "treated them" to respectable blows. Then, I began to run in the direction of Wyszkow. At the entrance to the city, were two bridges, one for pedestrians and the second for trains. Both had been bombed. On the side was a temporary wooden bridge. A German stood there, checking everyone who passed over the bridge, so I found another way, thus avoiding inspection. Luckily, because of the tumult of the market on that day, I succeeded in escaping in the direction of the city of Radzymin.

Wyszkow, too, was destroyed because of the intense battles between the Poles and the Germans that had taken place there. All the Jews had been expelled from the city to the opposite bank of the River Bug, the borderline between the Germans and the Russians. I decided to go toward Radzymin. On the way, I saw convoys of Jewish refugees, all of them from Warsaw and the area. Their only goal was to reach the Russian-occupied zone (if I am not mistaken, this road led to the Treblinka railway station). Jews asked me why, in fact, I was going in the direction of Warsaw, when everyone was running away from there. I replied that I had already been on the Russian side, and that now I was returning, to bring my aunt and her five children. Most of the refugees were young people, young men and women with knapsacks on their backs. This was Friday. I reached Radzymin and immediately continued in the direction of Wolomin, a distance of nine kilometers. I saw German gunners, and they shouted, "*Die Yuden werden alle erschossen!*" (All the Jews have been shot to death.)

Night fell. After six o'clock, a curfew was in force, and it was forbidden to be found outside. Despite this, I decided to go on to Wolomin. I arrived there at eight thirty in the evening. I had to pass near the big railway station, which was under heavy German guard. Still, I took a chance.

I arrived at my aunt's on Sabbath Eve, and the joy was great. I told them that I had come to take her and her children to the Russian zone. I bought a horse and a wagon. We loaded everyone on it, together with their bundles, and left. I got as far as Jadow (about 30 kilometers from Wolomin) with them. The entire road was full of many young Jews. All the convoys hurried in the direction of the border, around Malkin.

While we were in Jadow, rumors reached us that the border was closed. People wandered around the narrow strip of unclaimed territory. The Russians did not allow people to enter their zone; on the other hand, the Germans allowed anyone who wanted to, to return.

The refugees' main goal was to cross the border to the Russian side, come what may! There were those who hired "people who knew the way", and thus succeeded in slipping in. Russian soldiers also allowed people to cross, in exchange for a watch or another valuable. Many lost their lives because of the bitter cold.

When my aunt heard this, she decided that she preferred to return home to Wolomin. She thought that she would not be able to withstand the hardships of the trip with her five children. Having no other choice, I took them back. I sold everything of value and left her a sum of money for subsistence. I myself returned to my parents in Lomza. When I arrived in Radzymin and passed near the city hall there, a German arrested me and threw me into a cellar in which I found fourteen other Jews, some of the town's wealth people. They were sentenced to death. The Germans demanded all their money. I saw that my fate was sealed. I had a gold watch with me. I spoke to the German who guarded us and told him that anyone who freed me would get the gold watch. The German replied that he would do this, but only at five o'clock, when it got dark. And that is what happened. (Later, I found out that all fourteen of the Radzymin Jews were shot to death.)

I went in the direction of Lomza. Near the border, around Ostrolenka, they caught me, with a few other people. This time, it was a Russian soldier. In exchange for a watch, he released us and we reached Lomza safely.

b. The Vilna Ghetto, the Partisans, the Land of Israel

From Lomza, I went toward Vilna with my two brothers. We knew that Vilna was annexed by Lithuania, and that, therefore, it would be easier to get to Israel and the wide world from there.

In Vilna, out of the tens of thousands of refugees from all over Poland, more than twenty of us were Ostrolenkans. We elected a committee from among ourselves, headed by Reb Mosze Aron Kaczor. The committee immediately appealed to our townspeople and relatives in America, requesting help. Sometimes we received help from them. Some of us succeeded in emigrating to Israel; the others stayed there until war broke out between the Germans and the Russians in June 1941.

When the Germans entered Vilna, two days after war broke out, most of the Jewish youths fled the city on their way to Russia, but the Germans caught them. My father, my two brothers and I were also among them. Many young people were shot by the Germans on the road. Our treatment by the farmers on the way was the worst. They claimed that every Jew was a Communist. Sometimes, they agreed to sell slices of bread for huge sums. My father, my two brothers and I returned to Vilna. On the roads, we were exposed to mortal danger.

Helped by the Lithuanian police, the Germans began abducting Jews for forced labor. I worked at the railway station, loading Russian weapons on German railway cars. We worked 14 hours a day, without food and without water. The Germans and Lithuanians endlessly "treated" us to murderous blows, with shouts of "Damned Jews, you made the war! Rothschilds!"

In a short time, an order was issued that Jews must wear a white band with the Star of David on their left arms, to distinguish them from the Aryan population. The Germans and the Lithuanians had a special system for catching Jews for work. They arrived at five in the morning and asked the house porters in which apartments Jews lived. After they got the apartment numbers, they knocked on the doors and took all the Jewish men out to work. The families were happy when the fathers came home in the evenings – hungry, dripping blood, dispirited.

Later, they ordered the Jews to bring in all items of gold and silver as well as another large sum of money. Immediately, a Jewish committee was organized, headed by the well-known public figure, Dr. Jakow Wigodski. He tried to intervene and explained to the Germans that the Jews did not have such a large sum as that demanded. The German commander opened the door and threw him down the stairs. After a few days, Dr. Wigodski died of his injuries.

After a short time, another decree was published: Jews were forbidden to walk on the sidewalk. They could walk only in the road. In addition, they had to wear a yellow badge in the shape of the Star of David, ten centimeters in diameter – one on one's back and a second on one's chest. Another decree was to take Jews who were caught to forced labor outside the city; any Pole or Lithuanian who caught a Jew got a kilo of salt or sugar. When the Jews stood on line at the bakery to buy bread, they had to stand on the right side, and the Gentiles on the left. The Poles exploited this situation and began to kidnap Jews.

We found out that the Lithuanians and the Germans were taking groups of 100-200 Jews into the forest, a distance of thirteen kilometers from Vilna, and shooting them. This information was brought by the rurals in the area.

My father, my two brothers and I worked in the shoemaking workshop and, thanks to this, we remained alive. We received an official permit under our father's name and, therefore, they did not touch us. We worked for them and they gave us the leftovers of their food. After September 1941, the Germans and the Lithuanians besieged certain Jewish quarters with a population of 8,000-9,000 Jews, took all of them out to the Ponary Forest and shot them. Their homes were closed and sealed.

After a week, early on Sabbath morning, German and Lithuanian police surrounded the entire city and began expelling Jews from their homes toward the quarter where the Jewish inhabitants had been murdered. They were forbidden to take anything, except a small bundle of clothes. The Poles exploited this, pillaging and plundering property from the empty houses. This happened on 6 September 1941, the day the Vilna Ghetto was established. (There were two ghettos, the first and the second.) Immediately, a Jewish committee (*Judenrat*) was organized, with departments for matters of work, housing, etc. The Jews tried to work outside the ghetto.

As far as I can remember, it was on Yom Kippur, when the Germans took 16,000 Jews out and shot them in the Ponary Forests. Thus, one ghetto was completely destroyed. Reb Mosze Aaron Kaczor and his wife, Motel Dolowicz and Menachem Zabludowicz were there. They were murdered in this *aktzia*.

The second ghetto remained. Different work groups were organized to work for the Germans. Every morning, the Germans came to the gate of the ghetto, and each of them took "his" Jew. At night, he returned him to the ghetto. While working outside, each Jew tried to develop a personal contact with a German, Pole or Lithuanian, in order to get bread and various goods. At the entrance to the ghetto, however, everyone had to undergo an inspection, and it was not easy to smuggle food. Often, the S.S. guarded the gate, and sometimes even Murer himself, the Deputy District Governor. Whoever had goods on him was beaten cruelly or imprisoned and shot to death in prison.

This was the daily picture near the ghetto gate.

Over time, the Germans decided that, in the entire city of Vilna, no more than 16,000 Jews would remain, primarily the "necessary ones" – professionals who worked in German institutions and private companies as well. All these were furnished with special yellow permits, which the Jews considered "life certificates". A man who had such a certificate was allowed to add a wife and two children to it. A woman who had a profession in demand added a husband and two children.

The "yellow certificate" operation was carried out this way: anyone who had a permit went out to his place of work early in the morning. Those who remained in the ghetto were loaded on trucks, taken by the Lithuanian and German police to the Ponary Forests and executed there. The few who managed to hide in attics, in chimneys or in double walls enjoyed a brief existence. The tragedy cried out to the heavens. Families were torn apart – fathers from their sons, women from their children.

The ghetto youth, as well as the Zionist movement, from the right to the left, and the Communists, began to organize as an underground. Two movements arose in the ghetto to fight against the Germans. One was the F.P.O. (United Partisan Organization). Their goal was to resist with weapons in hand when the Germans decided to destroy the ghetto, and to fall in battle as heroes. On the other hand, the second group, the Partisans, were for taking Jews out of the ghetto to the forests, to join the general partisan movement. Thus, they could avenge themselves on the enemy at a cost of fewer losses.

At the head of the F.P.O. stood Icchak Wittenberg (a Communist); his deputy was Abba Kovner. At the head of the second movement were Fried (from Warsaw) and his deputy, Ring (from Wyszkow). The ghetto people began arming themselves with weapons. The ranks of the fighters were joined by select youths, who could be relied on – unfortunately, in the ghetto there were also elements that cooperated with the Germans . . .

In time, the F.P.O. saw that their plan to fight inside the ghetto had failed. Therefore, they began searching for ways to get their fighters out to the forests. At that time, a group headed by Fried had already gone out to the Rudnicka Forests.

I belonged to the group that supported war in the forests. We received information that the first group had arrived safely and we were asked to send new fighters.

As far as I remember – the famous Nazi criminal, Kittel (an actor by profession) arrived to destroy the Vilna Ghetto. He had participated in the destruction of the ghettos in Warsaw and Bialystok. Now, it was the turn of the Vilna Ghetto.

By the way, in early 1943, when we were in the Vilna Ghetto, a man named Szaje Rozen came to us. He was an Ostrolenkan, formerly a wood and coal merchant. He told us that all of his family and many Ostrolenkans were killed near Baranowicz. Another Ostrolenkan, a young man named Hone. His father was a porter.

At mentioned, the F.P.O. began sending its fighters to the forests. They sent reconnaissance companies there. I remember that such a company clashed with a Lithuanian-German platoon and a battle developed between them. Some of our people were killed and the rest reached the forest. Today, it may be positively stated that the F.P.O. method was illogical. They sent people to a forest approximately 180 kilometers from the Vilna Ghetto. On the way, they were supposed to pass by Germans, Lithuanians, Poles and Ukrainians, who were worse than the Devil himself. Therefore, they paid with a great deal of blood. In comparison, the second organization made contact with the partisans in the Sorok Tatarow Forest, only 14 kilometers from Vilna.

I remember: on the morning of 1 September 1943, the Germans surrounded the ghetto and the *aktzia* began. The fighters of the two groups immediately organized for the purpose of armed resistance. Some were caught, because they had not received an order from their headquarters to act. They were loaded on trucks and taken to the railway station. The *aktzia* continued all day. People were taken out of the ghetto and loaded on freight cars. They were told that they were going to Estonia to work. In this *aktzia*, Ilia Szejnbojm, the commander of my unit, was killed.

Most were actually taken to Estonia, to a work camp. Later, in the ghetto, we received letters from them. My brother, Jakow, was among them. In his letter, he stressed that it was preferable to go to the forest – the way, to his regret, that he had not chosen. The underground organization I belonged to began to organize to go out to the forest.

On 13 September 1943, I received an order to be ready to go out to the forest at six o'clock in the evening. We were a group of twenty-seven people. We left the ghetto for the price of 300 gold rubles, which we paid to the Lithuanian Gestapo commander and his driver, who took us to the Sorok Tatarow Forest (Forty Tatars) in his truck. I knew the forest well, because I used to chop down trees there. From there, a guide named Kuzminski took us to the group of fighters that had left the ghetto a day earlier. Among them was my brother, Meir. We stayed in a small grove until the next night, when we proceeded and reached the virgin forest called Puszcza Rudnicka. There we met all our groups that had left the ghetto. I remember this detail: in the forest, Russian partisans met us and asked, "Why did you come here? To hide? You worked for the Germans all the time. You Jews are cowards." We tried to explain the situation to them, that until now we did not have the opportunity to reach the forest to fight. Our main problem was weapons. We looked for ways to acquire weapons from the farmers in the area and found some in exchange for money and threats.

We were 270 fighters in the forest, all from the Vilna Ghetto. We split into four units under the united command of the staff. Another problem arose: how to get food. In total, we had fifteen rifles and ten guns. We got food from the farmers in various ways, primarily, with the help of weapons. They would not have given us food out of good will, so they became our sworn enemies.

In time, we made contact with Moscow and began to get weapons that were parachuted in. (They were not necessarily meant for the Jewish groups).

In the summer of 1944, on my way to a mission, I met Mosze Bonciak, an Ostrolenkan, who was also a partisan. We were very glad to meet unexpectedly. He told me that most of our townspeople had been killed in Baranowicz, Slonim, Molczat, Lachowicz and the area.

That same summer, we were liberated by the Red Army.

We arrived back in Vilna, where the Zionist movement began to organize. From Vilna, which belonged to Russia, we went to Poland. We arrived in Bialystok and then we went to Lublin, where the temporary Polish government had already organized, although the war was still going on.

In Lublin, I saw a spectacle that I will never forget. In the beautiful I. Peretz building, I met the first Jewish women released from the concentration camps. All of them had shaved heads and were dressed in their tattered and filthy prisoners' uniforms. Plagues raged and many people died – even after the liberation.

I left Lublin, equipped with a Polish document from the International Red Cross, as a Greek Jew. My brother, Meir, was also with me. We went through Czechoslovakia, Hungary and arrived in Romania. There were already emissaries from Israel there, who arranged emigration in two ways: *Aliyah* [emigration] A (legal) and *Aliyah* B (illegal). On Rosh HaShana Eve 1945, I arrived in Israel from Italy, as a soldier of the Jewish Brigade.

Holon

My Sisters Tell

Reported by **Hone Holcman**, Buenos Aires

This is what my three survivor sisters, Sara, Henja and Rachel, tell about the destruction of our city and the fate of our townspeople.

Sara

On Friday, 1 September 1939, I was a girl of ten, preparing for the start of school studies after summer vacation. Suddenly, I noticed that something was happening and that the atmosphere in the house was not as usual. I heard strange words, unfamiliar to me until then, such as: war, Nazis . . . we must escape, etc. My mother lit Sabbath candles, but her prayer was different. She prayed more than she ever had and cried more than she ever had. Suddenly, Father came in and, instead of making *kiddush* [sanctifying the Sabbath or a holiday by reciting a blessing over wine] – he extinguished the candles. I did not understand this, for it is forbidden to extinguish candles on the Sabbath. In a short time, we had already loaded a wagon with bundles of our household possessions. The entire city did this, and on the Sabbath yet! And here I was, sitting high up on the wagon and we were on our way. Many Jews were traveling. We had already passed the last houses of Ostrolenka. I was cold, I was afraid . . . I fell asleep. When I woke up, it was already dawn. Around me, I saw bodies lying on the road, overturned wagons, scattered possessions . . . I listened to the grown-ups' conversations. They had bombed here. The Nazis had fired at escaping crowds. We must hide . . . The Nazis caught Jews and abused them.

We were in Ostrowa. Out of curiosity, I went out into the street. I saw soldiers putting ribbons with the swastika on their sleeves. They took some Jews in the direction of the market and I ran after them. I hid at a corner and watched what happened. The soldiers ordered them to run, to fall; they pulled their beards and beat them with their rifle butts. I was frightened and ran home crying. I was terribly afraid of those soldiers.

And again, wagons and horses, and again we were traveling. Marching toward us were soldiers – they, too, with swastikas on their sleeves, but goodhearted . . . They tossed rusks at us. We arrived at the grove and stopped to eat something. My father said that he had once traveled the same road, and that he thought that it would not be so terrible. They were not chasing us and not beating us (he referred to the German invaders in 1915-1918). Therefore, we returned to our Ostrolenka. It is difficult to describe my happiness. Again, we were home, again we saw the chestnut tree opposite our window. I also saw new people who were our guests. Mother said that these were homeless refugees, and asked me to take pity on the children and not to hit them . . .

On the Simchat Torah holiday, large notices were hung in the city, in German and in Polish, announcing that all Jews must leave Ostrolenka within 24 hours. The grown-ups were very worried. Again, we packed and left. Although it was Simchat Torah, the atmosphere was like Tisha B'Av [the dates of the destruction of both Holy Temples, the 9th of Av, a major annual Jewish fast day], if not worse. At the exit from the city, the Nazis stopped us, searched Father and took all the money he had with him. Mother thanked God that they released us.

We arrived in the town of Czerwin, in the Russian-occupied zone. We met many Jews from Ostrolenka there. I remember: my father's partner, Szmuel Klejnman with his family; our cousin, Berel Lisowicki with his children; my friend, Jochka Przystanczyk with

her parents; her uncle, Dawid Jehuda Finkelsztejn with his wife, Rachel, and their little daughter; our aunt, Sara Rywka Lisowicki with her six children. We stayed in Czerwin for the entire 1939-1940 winter season. Before Passover, we began traveling again, this time to Kopisk (a village near Lomza), where father engaged in agricultural work and my older sister worked in a cooperative. We, the little children, went to school and learned Russian and Polish, until the miserable date of 22 June 1941.

Henja

It was on Sunday, at dusk. A *blitzkrieg*. Echoing cannon roars, the noise of airplanes above our heads. Endless army convoys, tanks and trucks fill the roads, and we, too, go on and on without rest, day and night. Where? Day and night, on Sunday, on Monday, on Tuesday . . . On Wednesday, the Germans showed us what they were capable of; members of the Gestapo took Jews for forced labor, among them my father.

In the evening, a Jew entered our home, beaten and wounded, his clothes torn and matted blood on his face – it was my father, who had returned from his work. It was barely possible to recognize him. Mother washed his wounds. We, the children, looked at him and a howl with a curse was torn from us. Lying on his bed, Father told us about his "work". The Nazis gathered a few Jews, took them to a deserted barrack, forced them to climb up and then to jump down onto a pile of sharp stones. This was a sort of selection, an experiment to see who among them was able to work.

The next morning, Father woke me. I got dressed. The four of us left in the direction of Lomza. Chaim and Sara also joined us. Chaja Frejda had left before us. That same day, Rachel came running to Lomza, barefoot and bruised all over. She told us that a minute after Father and the children left for Lomza, the mayor of the village, Kopisk, came and asked to see Father. When we replied that he was not at home, he left and returned immediately with a group of S.S. men. They lined up in the courtyard in two rows and ordered all of us to come out of the house and pass before the rows.

At first, they just laughed and mocked us. Then, one of the Nazis ordered us to line up in a row – me first, then Grandfather and Grandmother, and last, Mother. He ordered us to walk, to run, to stop and to run again, faster – and so on. Finally, they showered us with murderous blows with their clubs. We ran quickly to prevent the blows from landing on our heads, but we became entangled and fell on each other. The blows were more frequent and harder. Blood flowed from us, but they continued beating us. Mother fell, fainting, and they ordered one of the soldiers to bring a pail full of water and spill it on her. They waited, they had time. No one prevented them from enjoying the game. They sang: *"Wenn Yuden blut oifn messer shpritzt"* (When Jewish blood sprays from the knife's edge). Running again, beatings again. Grandfather and Grandmother fainted, Mother fainted again. They poured water, but no one got up. The Germans locked us in a deserted storehouse and placed a guard before it. Meanwhile, I waited, trembling from not knowing what would happen to me. After a few minutes, they also put me into the storehouse, so that I would see that everyone was alive, and then they took me out. I was given an order that within an hour, I was to bring Father, and if not – they would murder them all.

Sara

I went to Kopisk with the four work-cards that our sister, Chaja Frejda, had obtained for us. In the home of the mayor of the village, I saw S.S. men. They sat there, gorged themselves, drank and laughed loudly. I presented the work-cards to the mayor of the village and he handed them to the Nazis. I stood there, frightened, my whole body trembling, my teeth chattering. Every minute seemed like an eternity. Finally, the Nazi ruled: "The seal is missing!" I ran back to Lomza. Chaja Frejda took the cards and arranged for the seal to be affixed. This time, Henja went to Kopisk. We waited in dread for her return, but she did not come back. We overturned heaven and earth until we saved everyone. Finally, she arrived and we were all in Lomza.

Henja

When I gave the papers to the mayor of the village, they told me to go. I wanted to know if Grandfather and Grandmother were still alive, so I hid behind the stable. A Nazi caught me and put me into the stable. When Mother saw me, she burst out crying. "All right", she said, "We are already lost, but you, young girl, why did you walk into the lion's den?"

Sara, Henja and Rachel

On the streets of Lomza, they caught Jews, loaded

them on black trucks and took them to a place unknown. The Nazis demanded money and gold. To save themselves and their dear ones, women gave them their wedding rings. Severe plagues of typhus, dysentery and other illnesses raged without stop. Lacking any medical assistance, people died like flies. More Jews came from towns and villages in the area. There was a great shortage of apartments. More than one family lived in each room. Every day – new decrees. Jews must wear the yellow Star of David and they are forbidden to walk on the sidewalk.

A ghetto, *Judenrat* and Jewish police were established. Jews were abducted for forced labor and if someone returned – it was regarded as a miracle.

The Jews who came from the towns told us terrible things. Rywka Kurc (now in Australia) told us that in Jedwabne, the S.S. enclosed all the Jews in a hayloft – men, women, children and old people, among them her husband and two children. They set fire to the building and everyone was burned alive. Similar things were told to us by survivors from Stawisk, Szczuczyna, Grabie and the area.

In the Lomza Ghetto we met Jews from Ostrolenka: the Krystal family; Krymkiewicz the Teacher and her husband; Fisz the Carpenter and his family; Michael Dancyger, who had come back from Belarus, where his entire family was killed; Fejga Gercek, who was in Auschwitz and survived. Golda and Aszer Zusman and their son (we saw them for the last time on 1 November 1942); Rejzka Zusman; Nana Zusman (the daughter of Aron Zusman, she passed away from dysentery in the ghetto); the Goldsztejn family (their son, Adek, was saved); Dr. Karbowski was imprisoned in the Lomza jail. Awraham Zelig Nowinski and his wife, their son and two daughters; Awraham Zelig was caught by the Germans. Zyskind Zusman and his family; Chawa Wajnkranc and her children – her husband got lost; the widow Granowicz with two sons; Zlocisty the Shoemaker; Chaja Zlocisty survived, as did Wolkowicz the father, and his son, Noah; Mosze Lang; the widow Zlotowicz and her son.

The S.S. man, Mankin, a beast in a man's body, imposed fear and terror on all the Jews of the ghetto. Every time he came into the ghetto, he was accompanied by a light truck, which left the ghetto full of Jews or their stolen property. He used the Jewish police to help him steal. Mankin was not a common thief; for him, stealing was an amusement and a real pleasure. He used to go into a Jewish home, sit down on the sofa and rock. Meanwhile, he ordered the Jewish police to empty out all the contents. He ordered elegant furniture belonging mainly to rich Jews, put in the truck.

He ordered used and damaged things thrown away. Finally, he would defecate like an animal in the middle of the house, in front of everyone, and burst into a great laugh . . . To shoot the Jews in the ghetto – this was his pleasure. He would order a Jew to run and then shoot him in his back.

Rachel

Once, something happened in the ghetto that was talked about by everyone. The S.S. came to the ghetto to abduct Jews. From the window, I saw the truck approach our house. They took out our neighbor's young, beautiful daughter and put her into the vehicle, and then they were already at our home, and took Father. I hesitated about what to do. Why was I still standing there? Father was already approaching the vehicle. I ran outside and faced the Nazi. I asked, I pleaded, I cried. He burst out laughing and released Father.

I remember something else that happened when they carried out a search. A Jewish policeman whose name I have forgotten, a young man of about 18, was ordered by the Nazis to enter a house and take all the elderly Jews out of it. The young man entered and left immediately, saying that he had not found any elderly Jews. Not content with this, the Nazi went into the house himself and took two elderly Jews out of it. Then, without saying a word, he shot the young policeman to death.

Rachel, Henja and Sara

In September 1941, the Nazis hung notices in the ghetto, that all Jews from the age of 14 who did not have a work card must present themselves on 17 September in the city square, to receive a work referral.

On the appointed day – it was a Tuesday – Father, Mother, Grandfather and Grandmother went to the square where the selection was held. Then black trucks came and one thousand, five hundred Jews were loaded onto them. They were taken in an unknown direction and never heard of again. There were rumors that they were taken to Treblinka. Some said that they shot them in the forest near the city. Our mother was miraculously saved and returned home. After they annihilated three members of our family, we thought we would not be

able to overcome the catastrophe. The pain even increased when we discovered that no examination was held as to whether all those who did not have work cards had presented themselves. "They went for no reason", we cried. After this, we were in the ghetto for another 13 months. "We lived" like everyone else did – about this, more than enough has been written and told, and we would not contribute anything new here.

On Sunday, 1 November 1942, we saw a suspicious sort of movement of Germans in the ghetto. They came to the workshops to get work they had ordered and, in many instances, took unfinished work. We sensed that something terrible was about to happen. We asked neighbors, acquaintances, but no one knew anything. Everyone was worried. In our house at the time was Chaja Etka Dronzek, her two-year-old son and twelve-year-old stepdaughter, Rojza; Rywka Kurc; our mother, Fejga Lea; our sister, Chaja Frejdel; our brother, Chaim Judel, and the three of us. We were helpless, we did not know what to do.

Our apartment was on Senatorska Street, and the courtyard bordered on Dworna Street, which was outside the ghetto – one of Lomza's beautiful streets. Many Christians lived there and the barbed wire fence that separated us was near our house. In a house near the border lived a Gentile named Przechodzien, who we knew. We had a secret passageway in the barbed wire fence, exactly opposite his house, through which we would go out and smuggle food into the ghetto for our family and those living with us. On that very day, Chaja Frejdel went to the Gentile and persuaded him to let us hide in his apartment. Not everyone agreed to this plan, however, maintaining that it was too dangerous. Perhaps it was just a false alarm? Chaja Etka Dronzek was especially opposed to the plan. But the events that followed tipped the scales toward escape.

Security was increased in the ghetto. The *Judenrat* announced that tomorrow, that is, on the 2nd of November, all Jews must present themselves at the "Green Square". Everyone was permitted to take only five kilograms of baggage. We waited until it got dark. Our nerves were stretched tight. Suddenly, crisscrossing searchlight beams continuously lit our passageway, until we nearly gave up on our escape plan. Brave Chaja Frejdel, however, encouraged us and we decided to go. She counted the passing seconds between the times when the searchlight fell on the spot, and decided that in the short pause, when the passageway was dark, one person could succeed in getting through. She, herself, went first; after her, Henja (who had just recovered from typhus), Sara, and Rachel with Chaja Etka's son.

We were already in Przechodzien's house. A minute went by, two went by, ten minutes, an hour and more, but no one came. We did not know what had happened. The child cried. The Gentile went out into the street to see what had happened and when he returned, he told everyone to go down to the cellar. He was frightened and ordered us to be quiet.

Toward morning, he came down to us in the cellar and told us that notices were posted in the city's streets, warning the Christian population that if someone hid a Jew and was caught – he and his whole family would be executed. Whoever turned a Jew in, however, would get a prize of three kilos of sugar and a kilo of salt. We were silent. We did not know what he intended to do with us. He calmed us and gave us instructions as to how to get to his friend in the village.

We left through a breach in the shed in his courtyard – four sisters, the oldest 20 years old and the youngest twelve, and, with us, Chaja Etka's two-year-old son. We went to the village.

The farmer had just returned from Lomza, and told us about the shocking spectacles that took place there. The road to Lomza and the streets of the city were strewn with corpses of Jews who tried to escape. The Gentile told us: "Take whatever you want and get out of my house. If you stay here, it is dangerous for you as well as for me."

We wandered through the fields and forests. Along the way, we met a farmer. He told us that in Sziadowa, too, the same thing had happened as in Lomza. He told us to hide in the forest, in the hope that it would not go on for a long time, and we could come out.

For two days and two nights, we wandered around the forest with the little boy. We decided to take a chance and go back to the first farmer to whom we went from the ghetto. There, we met our mother and our brother, as well as those who had lived in the apartment next door. Przechodzien had brought them there. We all went to the forest. Przechodzien helped us dig pits in order to hide in them from the Nazi beast. He promised to provide us with food. Indeed, he helped us a great deal, until . . . The farmers from the nearby villages began to harass him. They called him "the servant of the Jews", they cursed him, they threw stones at him. After the Liberation, we found out that they had killed him. May God avenge his blood.

We lay in the forest all that winter. The long nights

seemed endless to us. During the day, we prayed that night would come, and at night, we craved the coming of the day. Every rustle of the wind, of the birds or the squirrels, frightened us. We told each other about everything we had gone through and experienced.

Rojza

When I crossed Dworna Street, a Gestapo man caught me and brought me to the police station. They interrogated and tortured me there and, finally, returned me to the ghetto. Immediately, we began building a hiding place from boards and we all hid there. Toward morning, the destruction of the ghetto began. In our hiding place, different sounds reached us – crying, shouts, curses, shots. This continued all day and into the night. When silence prevailed, I came out of our hiding place. Through the passageway between the barbed wire fence, I went to Przechodzien. After he told me what had happened, I returned to the ghetto to calm Mother. The next day, all of us left the ghetto.

All Three Sisters

Winter 1942/1943. We laid in the forest. Everything around us – the trees and the fields – was covered with a thick layer of snow. We were nourished by the poor food that the good and merciful farmers brought us. They gave us a little bread and sometimes some slices of pig fat, too. They put it in a prearranged place and, at night, we took it. We were a large family and this was barely sufficient for us. The farmers were already tired of giving. Other hungry Jews were hidden in the forest. We sometimes stole pigs or chickens from the farmers at night.

Chaja Frejdel went to a distant village. We waited for her to return for a long time. We thought something had happened to her. She came back dressed in a coat, wearing boots and wrapped in a large scarf. She looked like a real farmer woman, and brought bread, a little flour, salt. Mother divided the bread equally among us, and put the flour and salt aside. Chaja Frejda said that, from now on, we should call her Helka. We must get used to this name and, from now on, we must speak only Polish, in order to acquire a pure accent. She intended to find us places with farmers, so that we could hide with them. We studied Christian prayers diligently and practiced pure Polish speech. We got places in villages, staying there as Poles. We looked like Aryans and this helped a great deal. Only for Mother no place could be found, because of her typical Jewish appearance. Chaja Frejda did not want to part from Mother and stayed with her in the forest.

We had to change hiding places often and, because of these changes, we went through enough troubles and mishaps. We will tell about this below. Before, however, we would like to tell about someone we met in the forest:

Szlomo Gurfinkel – a small boy, barefoot, dressed in rags, bleeding and dirty. We met him in the forest, we spoke to him in Polish and he did not answer. He only made motions with his hands. We thought he was mute. We brought him to our pit and Mother asked him in Yiddish what his name was. Now, his eyes lit up with joy and he answered immediately: Szloimke. We washed him and dressed him in girls' clothes (we did not have boys' clothes). Out of great happiness, he began to sing. "I am a person equal to any other." He had a pleasant voice, and he sang us songs in Yiddish and entertained us. We settled him with a Polish farmer as a mute, because his Polish was bad (Mother hoped to take him with us to Argentina after the war, but she passed away and did not succeed in doing this. A Jewish officer in the Red Army took him to Russia.)

Szlomo Gurfinkel, nine years old then, was the son of a watchmaker from Goworowo. Later we met the families in the forest: Henja Geluda; Fajwel, Mendel and Herszel from Drogoszeva; Rachel Perkal from Zarzy; Aron Koen from Ostrow-Mazowieck; Mendel Piasecki from Makow; Bolek Szedler and Henjek Wajncyer from Warsaw. Zalman (to my regret, I have forgotten his last name) from Tarnovo, a carpenter by profession, his family lived in Israel until before the war. Rywka Kopyto from Szczepankowa (now in Israel); Duwcia Kachan from Dlugosiodla; Mosze Chassida from Stawisk; Chaim from Luby; Fiszel Kafko from Tarnowo (now in Australia); Shalom Lipinski and his father from Lomza (now in Argentina); Golombek from Lomza (he survived).

Henja

My first hiding place was with a Christian family in Tszasek. They were nice people and treated me well. They prepared a hiding place for me in the barn, so that I would have a place to hide if necessary.

Once, toward evening, their son, Stasiek, came running and called to me: Geniusia (I had changed my name from Henja), hide quickly! I peeked out of the

window and saw German gendarmes approaching. I could not have gotten to the barn, so I climbed up into the attic. Stasiek came up after me, covered me with a pile of rags and laid an old mattress over them. I held my breath. A minute after Stasiek went down, I heard steps climbing the ladder. They spoke in German and removed the mattress. I thought: I am lost. I lay without moving. They searched every corner and finally left. I went down and saw Stasiek beaten and bleeding. It turned out that the gendarmes found the hiding place in the barn, and they beat him so that he should tell them for whom the place was prepared.

The next day, I had to leave their house. I roamed the fields all day. Toward evening, I went to another village and knocked on the door of a house. A woman opened the door, let me in and gave me food. After the meal, we prayed; she splashed me with holy water, and we went to sleep in the same bed. This "happiness" continued for two days.

Sara

For some time, I hid with a poor Christian farmer woman. Many Jews came to her poor home. Each received a slice of bread here and, on winter days, they warmed themselves near the oven and cleaned their filthy clothes. Her name was Golobiescicha. In the summer, I went out to the pasture with the cows; in the winter, I carried wood and water, heated the oven and listened to her curses . . . Finally, she drove me away. I wandered around the fields and met Helka (that is, Frejda). She took me to the forest and then found me a place with another farmer. He also drove me away and I went back to Golobiescicha.

A month passed and I did not hear anything from anyone. I began to worry. I looked in the direction of the forest all the time, in case someone appeared.

On Passover 1943, Helka came again. We went into the nearby grove. The lads had "organized" a bit of flour, meat and horseradish for the holiday (although we did not lack bitter herbs). Mother kneaded dough from the flour, rolled it out into the shape of sheets and baked on white-hot rocks. Thus, we had "matzo". In the evening, we held a "*Seder*" [Passover ritual feast], we recited the "*Haggadah*" [the book containing the order of the Seder] and prayed "to leave the forest" and for a quick downfall for the Nazis. I told them that the daughter of Golobiescicha had arrived from Warsaw and had told me that the Warsaw Ghetto went up in flames, that the Jews fought against the Germans and that the Germans took many of their own fatalities out of the ghetto. It is hard to describe our joy. Helka immediately went to the forest with this news. When I met her again, she told me that the news about the uprising in Warsaw so excited the lads in the forest, that they decided to organize self-defense. After consultation, they decided to exchange Mendel Piasecki's suit for a handgun . . . They set the exact place for the deal with a farmer they knew, but the Gentile set a trap for them. When they approached the place, Polish bullies from the *Armia Krajowa* [Home Army] beset them and murdered the three of them – Mendel Piasecki, Bolek Szedler and Henjek Wajncyer. May God avenge their blood.

Rachel

I did not have the luck to be a "Christian" because of my "deplorable appearance". All the farmers I went to drove me away. I stayed at the first place only two days. They were afraid of informers. Others drove me away in the middle of the night. I wandered around barefoot in a snowstorm and the freezing cold, my shoes in my hand because I had not had enough time to put them on. Once, I tapped on a window. Even before I could say a word, the farmer began shouting "Get out of here, Jewess! My dogs are hungry for Jewish meat. If you don't get out of here now, I will treat them to a good meal!" I ran away quickly.

The wind calmed a bit. I was completely covered in a cold sweat. In the distance, I saw twinkling lights, like small stars. I drew near and saw that it was a village. Afraid to tap on a window, I went into a cowshed and the warmth of the cows enfolded me. I was tired and wanted to sleep. I found a place on the floor clear of cow dung, sat down and fell asleep. The crowing of a rooster woke me. I quickly put on my shoes, which had no laces, tied them with something and went on my way.

In the middle of the day, I came to another village. I met a farmer and he let me into his house. Through the window, I saw two German gendarmes approaching. The Gentile forced me to run away. I left with quick steps, but not running, so as not to arouse the gendarmes' suspicion.

On the road, I sensed that someone was following me. I thought – I am lost. I turned around and saw a fellow with a forelock of hair falling over his forehead

and a large beard. I stopped. "I am Jewish, too", he said in Polish, but I did not want to believe him. "What do you want?", I asked in Polish. He tried to convince me that he was indeed a Jew and that I should not be afraid of him. "Then speak in Yiddish," I tested him. Thus, I met Mendel Piasecki, who was shot by anti-Semitic partisans, as related above.

Szlomo from Zbojna (after the Liberation, Rachel married him in Lomza) **recounts:**

Immediately upon the outbreak of the war, Zbojna was occupied by the Germans. Our family escaped to Rutek and then to Tarnovo, which was given over to the Russians. After two years of the Russian regime, on 22 June 1941, we were occupied by the Germans again. On that very day, they carried out a pogrom against the Jews. The ritual slaughterer, Reb Szabtaj, and many other Jews were killed then.

Until the destruction of the Lomza Ghetto, we were in Tarnovo. On 1 November, all the Jews of Tarnowo were gathered together and they took us to the Miastkowa Forest. I succeeded in escaping and hid in the Christian cemetery. The next day, I went back to the forest after I "organized" some food in a nearby village. In the forest, I met Mendel Piasecki.

This is how I met the Holcman family. One very dark night, I went to a farmer in a nearby village to ask for bread. Near the barn, I saw a figure wandering around. I wanted to run away, but immediately I heard the voice of a woman, which calmed me. Thus, I met Chaja Frejdel ("Helka").

After I met the Holcman sisters and their brother, Henjek, we decided to unite into one group, in the hope that our lives would be easier this way. We dug pits and organized a workshop for the production of felt boots, which we exchanged with the farmers for food. Henjek had a typical Aryan appearance – blond hair and blue eyes, and he became our liaison.

In the summer, we were afraid to stay in the forest because the Gentiles often went there, so we moved our place to the marshes. In the marshes, the water came up to our knees and, sometimes, to our belts. We began to put up a shack there, using a method of crisscrossing poles over trimmed tree branches, on which we put straw and leaves. The roof was made of the tall grasses that grew there abundantly. We put up three shacks like these, 100 meters distant from each other. We were twenty-five people then. On the night of 6 June 1944, a gang of "heroes" from the *Armia Krajowa* beset us and killed twelve of us. Mrs. Holcman was wounded and stayed in the shack, and burned when the bullies set fire to it. All the others fled. They succeeded in catching Aron Kon, one of the lads of our group, tall and strong, and turned him over to the Germans. They interrogated and tortured him and then shot him in the marshes.

From the outset, we agreed that, in the event of a catastrophe, we would flee and meet the next day at the same place. And so we met the next day and saw the extent of our destruction. The victims' bodies were torn to pieces. We wept silently and clenched our fists. We were afraid to bury them, lest we be discovered. After a few days, when we went there again, the bodies had already been buried. We covered their graves with leaves (Chaja Frejdel and Henjek were also among those killed). Then, we wandered among the wheat fields in small groups until the Liberation. On 5 September 1944, a soldier of the Red Army came upon Rachel and me in the forest. Rachel wore a dress made out of a sack. She was barefoot and had wounds on her legs. I looked just like her. The soldier took us to the village where the army headquarters was. A Major, a Jew, took an interest in us, and ordered that we be fed and given clothes.

The redemption did not come all at once. There were still wanderings and difficult experiences to come. We were in Sziadowa, Zambrow, Bialystok and Warsaw. In Lomza, I married Rachel, and then we were in the Landsberg displaced persons camp, where our eldest son was born.

In 1948, we arrived in Argentina.

*

22 June 1941 – 22 June 1961.

Twenty years have passed since them. Did we indeed go through all that? Is it possible? Did it happen to our generation?

To this day, we mourn our brothers and our sisters, Grandfather and Grandmother, our friends and acquaintances – all those who were martyred by the German murderers; all those who were tortured and humiliated, shot, slaughtered, hung, burned and buried alive!

In those dark days of horror, we did not just cry and clench our fists. With all our instincts and every inch of our bodies, we sought a way to save ourselves, to exist, to stay alive – to fulfill our father's Will.

He said:

"Children, hard days are coming. A rabble of beasts of prey in the image of men has risen up to destroy us. They want to erase us from the face of the earth. Remember: if you see them taking your father or killing your mother, brothers, sisters – do not cry, just look for a way to flee, to escape, to save yourselves – so that you will remain living witness to tell everything and revenge their blood. There must come a day of revenge, a day of judgment!"

Did we revenge ourselves?! Did we judge enough?!

The rescuers, the Christian farmers should be mentioned here favorably. They risked their lives, the lives of their families and their property, and helped persecuted Jews with shelter, board and food, and often hid them in their houses for long periods. Sometimes their lives were taken for this by the Germans, and also by their Christian brothers, anti-Semites and enemies of Israel. This was more than mercy on their part, this was devotion! A human spark in hours of cruelty of the worst kind. Thanks to these goodhearted farmers, we were saved – the three sisters and, with us, other Jews from Ostrolenka and other cities. To them we give our blessing and our *Yizkor* prayer. To the poor farmer woman Golobiescicha – although, from fear of the Germans, she cursed and threatened to drive away those she had hidden. Despite this, many Jews found shelter for many months in her home.

To the farmer Zyskien, who hid one of our sisters in his bed during a sudden visit of the S.S. He did not imagine that, meanwhile, they would rape his twelve-year-old daughter. Despite this, he still kept our sister until the Liberation.

To the Christian lad Stasiek, from the village of Stasiek, who absorbed murderous blows from the German, but did not turn in the Jewish woman he hid!

To the holy and goodhearted man, the Pole Przechodzien from Lomza, who sacrificed himself for us and for many other Jews, and helped us with food, clothing and advice. His house was a "free point" for the Jews from the Lomza Ghetto. Therefore, he was persecuted by his own people, who finally killed him.

To them, to the many other unknown Righteous Gentiles – honor to your memories! May God remember you favorably and avenge your spilt blood!

Among the Partisans in the Naliboki Forest

(Reported by Hanan Czernowin [Hone "Szczot" Klezmer from Ostrolenka, he passed away in Israel]. He was born in 1910 in Ostrolenka as the son of Jechezkel Meir. He was in the Baranowicz Ghetto, and then in the Oszmjanski work camp, from which he escaped to the forests. He joined the *Kadima* partisan unit, in the Siberiak Platoon in the Naliboki Forest. After the Liberation, he fought in the Red Army and lost his right leg. Lately, he has resided in Bialystok.)

In 1939, when war broke out between Poland and Germany, I was drafted into the Polish Army, 18th Division. We fought near Ostrolenka, near Myszyniec-Dombrowa. After the defeat of Poland, I was taken captive by the Soviets near Czerwoni-Bor. After a short time, I was released and went to look for my wife.

In September 1939, the Germans published an order that all the Jews of Ostrolenka must leave the city! I went, with my family, to Baranowicz . . .

June 1948

(The Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw)

Adolescence During the War

The Memoirs of a Girl Who Lived Among the Partisans

By Ester Michelson-Choniak, Tel Aviv

The memoirs of our townswoman, Ester Choniak-Michelson were not included in the first edition of the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka*, 1963. For two reasons, however, we decided to publish them in this Hebrew edition of our book:

1. **Ester's story demonstrates the fact that not all of the Jews in the Holocaust, and among them our townspeople, went like sheep to the slaughter. It is true that those who fought were a tiny minority, but under the conditions and circumstances of the Holocaust period, it was nearly impossible to change this reality.**
2. **Her memoirs – the life story of our townswoman, a young girl growing up, which extends from Ostrolenka through the Holocaust, fighting with the partisans, arriving in Israel and establishing a happy family there – contain a mixture of very tragic elements, as well as optimistic ones.**

Her life story symbolically and tangibly demonstrates the tragic period of the Jewish people in the Holocaust, but at the same time, the renewal of its independence and statehood in the Land of Israel, as well.

Committee of the Organization of the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel

I was born in Ostrolenka, on the bank of the River Narew. I lived the first twelve years of my life in this district city. About five thousand Jews lived in the city of my birth. The primary school which I attended was a government school and we were taught in Polish, but all the students were Jewish. My parents, members of the middle class (my father was a grain merchant) were not satisfied with the education that their four children acquired in school. Therefore, in the afternoon, we studied Torah and prayers at *Bejt Jakow* [a Jewish school] and, a few evenings a week, a private teacher came to our house to teach us Hebrew.



A picture of Grandfather Josef Dawid Szodlowicz

My family lived at Mr. Skowronski's, at 13 Goworowskie Street. Our lives ran smoothly until 1939. In the summer of that year, as every year, my family went to the dacha [country house] in the village of Kadzidla, in the heart of the forests, for vacation. We returned home after two months. Clouds of war darkened the skies and word of mouth in our city was that it was not advisable to stay there. In World War I, a great battle was waged in the area and this could happen again. We had already loaded possessions on a horse-drawn wagon and left our home, but father did not want to abandon the house and the grains. After two weeks, we returned. Two weeks later, the Germans came. An irony of fate: it happened on Simchat Torah . . .

As Ostrolenka was included in the zone of the Third Reich, the Germans decided to hurry and cleanse it of Jews. We were expelled to the east. Our family traveled in a horse-drawn wagon to the city of Lomza, where Father rented a room for the whole family. As soon as

we settled in, I was sent to study in the Goldblut Gymnasium, where we learned Hebrew, Yiddish, French and Latin. After a short time, we moved on to Bialystok, a big city with a large Jewish population. After a time, the Russians enacted a law, according to which refugees had to accept Soviet citizenship and distance themselves one hundred kilometers from the border; they were forbidden to live in the capital cities of the Soviet republics. Mother tried to find a place of residence for the family and returned after two days with news: she had found an apartment in the town of Dereczyn, near Slonim. This town bustled with Jewish life. About thirty thousand Jews lived there. The entire center of the city was Jewish.



Ester Michelson with her former partisan commander, standing by the memorial monument at the place where the entire Jewish population and her family were murdered. Dereczyn, August 1991.

Father worked at any job that came along and we did not know poverty, although our extended family around us shrank – our grandfathers and grandmothers from both sides, as well as aunts and uncles. I accepted this matter-of-factly: so long as Father was by my side, I would not lack for anything.

I was registered immediately for the local Russian school, where they learned in Russian, a new language for me. During my first school year in that institution, however, I got used to Russian and even excelled at my studies. On the "Day of the Revolution" 1940, I was asked to greet the inhabitants in the name of the students, from a stage erected in the city square. I received warm applause and all those present in the square were impressed by "the little refugee who expresses herself so well in Russian".

We did not know that the quiet life we were living in the town was just the calm before the storm. In June 1941, Hitler betrayed his ally, Stalin, and invaded the Soviet Union. Terrible rumors spread. It was said that the Germans killed all the Jews in the nearby town of Halinka. Some tried to calm things down and explained

that this was not a massacre. The town was damaged because a heavy battle was waged between the Red Army and the German Army in the area. Then, the Germans occupied the town where we lived and inaugurated their occupation government by executing one hundred Jewish inhabitants. Later, they took all the men out of town for three days. We did not know what had happened to them. When Father returned safely, he told us that the Germans took them to the forest and ordered them to dig large pits. They returned hungry and exhausted.



Chaja Bracha

After a time, the Germans established a ghetto in the town. Our family, like the other families, was forced to live in one room. The synagogues filled with refugees. Jews were taken out for forced labor every day. Then the Gestapo came, escorted by a Belarusian militia, and the ghetto's Jews were insulted and beaten daily. Every day, our number decreased. Hunger began to frequent the ghetto, but Father made sure that we did not starve.

Rumors flew that Russian captives who had escaped captivity were in the forests near town. Many youths were tempted to escape from the ghetto to the forests and join the escaped prisoners. Other youths also wanted to escape to the forests, but they were not prepared to leave their families behind.

Time after time, rumors of massacres and the destruction of entire towns crept in, but the Jews of our ghetto calmed each other: "Nothing will happen here." The more time passed in 1942, however, the more the hope in our hearts faded.

On the Eve of Tisha B'Av [the dates of the destruction of both Holy Temples, the 9th of Av, a major annual Jewish fast day], we went to bed. In the middle of the night – on Friday – I heard the rumble of the motors of trucks entering the ghetto. Pandemonium broke out. Those who lived in houses with attics tried to



Jechiel

hide in them. The Germans succeed in finding everyone and chased them out with clubs and shouts. I managed to slip away and squeezed myself into a corner. There I froze, paralyzed and dumbfounded by the sounds of screams, weeping and blows. The Belarusian militiamen broke furniture, overturned drawers, searched for "treasures". Some of them came very close to me, but they did not see me. Finally, silence prevailed, but I did not move from my place until nightfall. When it got dark outside, I crawled out of my hiding place and peeked out of the window. I saw Gentiles taking bodies out of the courtyard. I went out into the street, left the ghetto and met a young girl, Pesia Abramowitz, who worked for the Germans and therefore had a pass to move around – a "*schein*".

"Esterika!", she called excitedly, "What are you doing outside? Quick, come with me!"

That night, I slept in her bed, safe from harm.

The next day, my "hostess" said to me, "Stay here and I will go to see what happened at German headquarters."

In an hour, she returned running and burst out breathlessly: "Run away now! The *aktzia* is still going on!"

"Where should I go? And what will happen to you?", I asked. "I'll manage," she said. I learned from her then that the Germans and their helpers took the entire Jewish population, including my family, to pits (which had been dug because of the German bombings) in the center of town, and there mass murder was committed!

I was just a girl of 14 then. I did not know the area, but I had no alternative. I decided to cross the market square, which was full of local Gentiles and German soldiers. I crossed safely, just like the Jews who crossed the Red Sea when they ran from the Egyptians. It was as if an invisible hand led me and a heavenly angel watched over me.

I left town and entered a field of grain. The grain was high and hid me. I ran as far as my legs carried me. I heard shooting. I thought they were shooting at me, but, in fact, I was very close to the place where the murders of the Jews of Dereczyn, including my family, continued. I was afraid to raise my head. I ran until I was out of breath and my legs felt like lead. I tried to run following the telegraph poles, which I assumed stood along the road – and a road always leads to a populated area.

The shooting stopped and I thought I was the only one left in the world. A moment of weakness came upon me. Should I return to Dereczyn, perhaps? I decided not to do so. I continued onward!

That night, I reached a small village. I was afraid to enter it. I laid down to rest near a bush. Perhaps I could get to the partisans? I saw a Gentile farmer and asked him were the village of Aziorki was. I had heard about it in the ghetto. He indicated the direction. To my surprise, it did not occur to him to turn me in, although the Germans had promised a prize to every local inhabitant who turned a Jew over to them.

Another day went by without food and drink. Dogs barked at me and I was dazed. Toward evening, I saw people running in the distance. Partisan refugees? I did not have the strength to catch up to them, however, and I was alone again. I wanted to cry, but I forbade myself to break.

On Sunday night, I reached Aziorki. I saw piles of boards with a narrow space between them and pushed myself into it, to sleep a little.

Toward morning, I renewed my steps toward the forest. I met a farmer on horseback, holding a sickle. I asked him, "Do you know where the partisans are?" He pointed at the forest, then turned his face backward and pointed to a big, roofless barn. "There are partisans here, too," he said.

I approached the barn and saw a young man armed with a rifle and a young woman, who ran toward me with open arms and excited cries. "Esterika!" It was Sara Agolnik (now Wechler, in Israel) from the town from which I had fled. A local inhabitant, she used to wander around the area on her bicycle and knew all the roads. She brought me to the barn, which was full of Jewish refugees, about a hundred in number, many of them wounded. All of them had fled from the *aktzia* in Dereczyn. Prominent among them was Szmuel Bronsztejn, a schoolteacher in the town.

I was in the barn for a number of hours. It was raining and we all got soaked to the skin because there was no roof on this country structure. The next day, the partisans came and took us to the forest. This was the start of the partisan organization. There were a few soldiers from the Red Army, and many youths from villages and towns, who had escaped from forced labor. I was alone, but not for long. In the forest, I met Sonja Manikow and her mother the midwife, who knew me in Dereczyn. The daughter said to me, "Join us!"

I learned that when she was in her hiding place in town, her baby began to cry, and finally, it choked while still in her arms. The Germans did not hear its cries! When we were in the forest, we were sent to gather food in nearby villages. Since we did not have money, we used valuables, mostly clothing. My companion took the baby's clothes out of her bundle – and burst into bitter tears.

In the heart of the forest, we set up two camps – a camp of families and a camp of partisans. The young men were divided by the partisans into companies. Some young women joined each company. There were two groups of Jews. The commander was a Russian officer, Grisha Kozajew. He added Sonja and her mother to his unit. "And what will happen to me?", I asked anxiously. "What can a young girl like you do?", Grisha queried me. "I know how to cook, to sew –

I'm ready to do anything, just don't leave me alone." He fixed me with a critical look, and finally said, "Let it be. . ." The second group was under the command of Dr. Atlas.

In retrospect, it turned out that, as far as I was concerned, this made the difference between life and death. About a month later, the Germans discovered the family camp and wiped out the one hundred and twenty souls in it.

The fighting unit I joined set up a field hospital in the forest. Sonja and her midwife mother were posted to serve in the hospital, and I made the utmost efforts to prove that I was an asset and not a burden.

One day, our commander disappeared and, for some time, we were without a commander. Then a new commander, Wanka Abramow, appeared. He instilled a fighting spirit in our partisan companies. The two Jewish groups felt the need to achieve more than the other units. The Jewish partisans obtained weapons and ammunition and began going out on operations. One of the first was a revenge operation on the Germans stationed in Dereczyn. Not all those who went out on this operation had firearms. Those who did not armed themselves with sticks, knives, any deadly weapon that came to hand. They knew exactly where the German headquarters was located and where the quarters of the anti-Semitic Belarusians were. Non-Jewish partisans joined the raid, in which many Germans and Belarusians were killed. The ghetto was set on fire and many Belarusians who cooperated with the Germans were taken prisoner.

"For this revenge, it was worth staying alive!", said the Jewish partisans, who brought a great deal of plunder back from Dereczyn, including a car. It should be noted that with me in the unit was another Ostrolenkan fighter, named Herszel Cukerman. Girls, too, went out on the next operations. They gave me a short assault rifle, because I was so young. On the eighth of March, "Women's Day", a unit of partisan women went out on an operation in which German telephone lines were cut. Our situation was very difficult. We had to move around a lot, so that the Germans would not discover our whereabouts; we used to walk backwards in our footprints, in order to confuse their trackers. More than once, we were without water and had to drink water that pooled in the ruts of the wagon wheels, though handkerchiefs. There were days that we envied the dead, because their suffering was behind them. On other days, however, we found satisfaction in the revenge we took on the Germans. The Jewish partisans carried out the most daring operations, derailed trains and destroyed military headquarters, while dressed in the uniforms of German soldiers and officers.

The longer the war continued, and the more the partisans' struggle developed, the more the organization improved and the level of performance increased. By now there were weapons in the hands of every fighter, and each of the battalions was composed of a few companies. Each company had a company commander. I was in Eli Lipszowicz's company, which derailed a German train carrying supplies, weapons and German soldiers. We set up ambushes and wiped out many Germans. [Eli's] brother was the partisans' supply commander. After the war, Eli Lipszowicz was murdered on Polish soil.

To survive the months of snow and frost during the first winter, we had to set up a permanent camp. Every company dug bunkers for its people, who lived in tents until then. In the winter months, we organized brigades from the battalions, and the Red Army dispatched a supreme command to White Russia for all the partisans. During those months, we did not stop initiating raids. In the evenings, the fighters gathered around the campfires and told their comrades about the revenge operations they had carried out.

The problem was, the situation got worse daily. In 1942, the Germans already stood at the gates of Moscow. Sometimes, the chilling thought stole into our hearts: "We will not get out of this war alive . . ." Immediately, however, another thought came fast on its heels: "So long as we are alive, we are free – and we revenge!" Every additional day that we survived and struck at the Germans we saw as another victory over them – in the spirit of the motto "*Iberleiben!*", that is, we will live longer than you and dance on your graves, filthy Germans!

We confiscated food from the farmers, whose fate was bitter because the Germans also confiscated food from them. And then 1943 came – and the wheel of fortune turned back.

After the Stalingrad Campaign, contact was made between the partisans and the Red Army general staff in Moscow. We began to receive supplies and weapons by parachute drops and parachutists joined us as commanders and leaders. Our operations grew. A region controlled by the partisans was created. The Germans responded by imposing a siege on the forests and with

heavy bombing, but the forests were large and dense. We were familiar with them, while the Germans were strangers to them. The Germans' vehicles and tanks got stuck in the snow and the mud, and the partisans extricated them and used them against the enemy.

One day, a Russian prisoner escaped from captivity and brought with him soap, on which was written "RJF" – pure Jewish oil. He told of the wholesale slaughter the Germans had carried out against Poland's Jews. The news was hair-raising and heart-stopping, but on the other hand, news came that the German front had been broken through. The Germans were in retreat. A gleam of hope was kindled in our hearts.

One day, we heard artillery fire. All night, the ground shook beneath us from the heavy shelling. In the morning, we saw tanks. We were already considering escape, but suddenly a tank stopped and an armored forces soldier called to us from the turret, in Russian, "Girls, where are you from?"

It was 24 July 1944. A stirring meeting on the banks of the Niemen River.

The Red Army liberated us. Each of us received a certificate marking our service as partisans. The fighting still continued, but now it was organized fighting, in which only the men in our units participated. Most of them fell during battles on the front. We, the women, were told to return home. Home? Where? I did not have a home to return to; moreover, I already knew that my whole family had been murdered. So I went back to Dereczyn. I was less than sixteen years old. A field hospital had been set up there. We tended the wounded and asked each of them if he knew someone from our families. Soon enough, we despaired of finding relatives and decided to go to Baranowicz, a large district city. We worked at the local Communist party center. Conditions there were good, because we had living quarters and there was a restaurant for party activists.

During my entire stay with the partisans in the forest, deep in my heart, I hoped that, despite everything, someone in my family had remained alive. This hope strengthened me and enabled me to go on, until the Liberation. By the time of the Liberation by the Red Army, and especially when I got to Dereczyn, I was completely convinced that I was alone. My whole world collapsed and I wondered if there was any reason to carry on. On second thought, however, when I became myself again, my decision was firm – to continue, no matter what, in order to assure the continuous existence of my family.

On the 9th of May 1945, a celebration of the victory over Nazi Germany, defeated in the war, was held. The Russians celebrated and we cried. The Russians arranged the return of Polish civilian refugees to Poland. Simultaneously, emigration to Israel began to be organized. Sara Nishmit, whom I met during my "partisan period", was a Zionist and I was greatly influenced by her. I went to my employer and told him that I was leaving. "It is not worth it for you to leave a comfortable place like yours," said this good man. But I was bound and determined not to remain on Polish soil anymore. With one of my friends, Szyfra, and her parents, I went to Lodz, where the emissaries from Israel worked on organizing groups for emigration. We met a friend who told us that one of the partisans, Leja Ablewicz, was a leader in Kibbutz Dror. We went to her, and she invited us to an *Oneg Shabbat* ["*joy of the Sabbath*"; a celebratory gathering on the Sabbath, often with food, singing, study, discussion, and socializing]. We dressed up in our finest clothes, went to the meeting place and saw young women and men singing, dancing and greeting each other with "See you again in our land". Before we parted, I said to Leah, "I do not want to join a kibbutz, but I will join you when you leave."

We left with the *Aliyah* B – the illegal one – first for Germany, where we stayed for a few months in the kibbutz camp. From there, we traveled to Prague and from there to Italy, walking eight kilometers in the Alps. On this trip, I met Szaul Michelson, my future husband, who was a native of Sviencian and had also been in a partisan unit near Vilna. We met in Germany. He had also joined a kibbutz just to emigrate to Israel.

We arrived in Milan and rubbed our eyes: in shop windows, we saw food in abundance, fine clothing, jewelry. Suddenly, in the city center, my friend, Sara Agolnik from Dereczyn, came walking toward me! This was the second time that fate brought us together, as if by a miracle.

From Milan, we were referred to *aliyah* emissaries in Rome, where we lived in Castel Gandolfo while waiting for the ship that would take us to Israel.

We lived in Rome for seven months. We went to the movies and to the circus. Bakenstejn, a relative of Szaul Michelson, worked at the Joint in Rome and invited us on a three-day tour of the city. He offered Szaul work, but the answer was an absolute "No!". We were bound for Israel. Work in Rome might tie us to Italy. Szaul was not ready to stay in the Diaspora even one extra day.

Finally, we were told that a ship was waiting for us at the port of Bari. This was the first time I saw the ocean. The ship, *Moledet* (*Patria*) [Homeland], was anchored outside the harbor and we sailed to her in rubber boats. She was actually a fishing boat, not meant for transporting passengers, but we crammed 1,500 men and women into her, like sardines. The sleeping bunks were shelves, placed one above the other. We were forbidden to go up on deck, so as not to be discovered by British reconnaissance planes circling the Mediterranean Sea and hunting illegal immigrant ships on the way to Israel, whose gates were locked by the British Mandatory government.

We did not succeed in evading the British. In mid-ocean, two destroyers intercepted us and pressed-crushed us between them. When the *Moledet*'s engine died, the British towed us to the port of Haifa. They demanded that we transfer to an expulsion ship. When we refused, they said our ship was sinking. We responded with a thunderous rendition of *HaTikva*. The ship began listing on its side. The British stretched wooden gangplanks from their deck to the *Moledet*'s. We threw anything that came to hand at them – loaves of bread, pots, shoes. In vain. While our eyes still yearned to see the lights of Haifa, the British transferred us by force to an expulsion ship, which took us to Cyprus.

For a year and a half, from the 1st of April 1947 until the 24th of July 1948, I was in Cyprus. There, in a refugee camp, I married Szaul. We lived in one tent with my friend, Sara. Szaul worked at the Joint and I worked as a nurse. Icchak Arad (at one time Chairman of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem), "Tulke", a friend of Szaul's from the partisans, had already emigrated to Israel and volunteered for the Palmach. He wrote to Szaul "How beautiful is our little country", but we could not verify this with our own eyes. Every month, the British allowed a limited quota of refugees to go from Cyprus to Israel. Golda Meir, one of the heads of the Jewish Agency and the Yeshuv [the Zionist community in Palestine] leadership, visited Cyprus and rebuked the British: "Why are you keeping pregnant women and infants here?!" The British yielded to her, but some of the camps' inhabitants complained: "While there is justice in the emigration to Israel of pregnant women and mothers with infants, advancement on the list of immigrants pushes others back!" Finally, Szaul's and my turn came. From the boat, Szaul went directly into the Israel Defense Forces, which was already in the midst of the War of Independence. I settled in Pardes Chana, as close as possible to Szaul's family, which lived in Afula. We also had relatives in Binyamina. I was pregnant at the time, and they suggested that I join the family in Afula. Szaul, who participated in the conquest of Nazareth, was later posted to serve in a children's village near Afula, in order to be near me. In Afula, I gave birth to my eldest daughter, Chaya, and after three years, to my son, Yechiel (Hilik).

Szaul's parents came to Israel. His father, a businessman in Poland, decided to try his luck as an entrepreneur in the new homeland. He chose to settle in Tel Aviv. We decided to purchase an apartment near Tel Aviv, and bought one in Bat Yam.

Looking back on this period of the decades in my life after the Holocaust, I have come to the conclusion that only the hand of fate led me to this, so that something would remain of the family and that continuing generations would come into being: children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

For the first time since the war, I visited Ostrolenka, the city of my birth, in August 1991, on the occasion of the unveiling of a memorial monument for the Jews of our city who were tragically killed in the Holocaust.



Bluma Gedanken, Montevideo, Uruguay

Ostrolenkans in the Slonim Ghetto



Bluma Gedanken

1

In September 1939, when World War II broke out, many Ostrolenkan Jews fled to Ostrow-Mazowieck, hoping to be saved from the Germans. But fate decreed otherwise. Conditions in Ostrowa were very difficult. My father, remained in place: the army's general staff was located in Leszcz and Litwer's stone house; Pinie Gedanken, was opposed to running away. "To run to another land", he maintained, "is another matter. But to leave our house for a distance of just forty kilometers is not worth it." After two days, the murderers were already on Polish soil and began to institute their kind of "order". In Ostrowa, an order was suddenly published, that all men from 15 to 60 [years of age] must present themselves in the secondary school courtyard. It also ordered them to run to the assembly place with raised hands. And indeed, all the men of those ages went there. It was terrible to see children, fathers and grandfathers running together, not knowing what to expect. The women, mothers and sisters, went to see what would happen to their loved ones. They saw the following picture: all the men laid on the ground, one on the other, as in a cage. Around them were Germans with clubs in their hands. The tortured made motions with their hands, signaling that they were thirsty and begging for a drop of water or a slice of bread. Although they endangered themselves, the women tried to give them what they wanted.

At the same time, curfew was announced. It was forbidden to be out in the streets after six in the evening. Our men were detained until seven in the evening. Only then did they use the rubber truncheons. They hit them on their heads, their hands, their shoulders. Then they released them, and began to chase after them in the city's streets. While running, they opened machine gun fire on them. The next day, on Sabbath morning, after the curfew, we saw the streets of the city strewn with the bodies of our men. This happened on the first day they came.

After two days, there was an additional decree: all those from other cities, who did not have proof that they were born in Ostrowa, had to return home. Our Polish neighbors from nearby villages exploited this and demanded hundreds of dollars for a wagon. Whoever did not have dollars gave other valuables: down comforters, blankets, sewing machines, etc. Our "good" neighbors helped the Germans destroy the Jews' existence – physically and morally. Chaja Wajnkranc, Rywka Wajnger, Perla and I rented a wagon together, in order to return to Ostrolenka. The road was full of wagons. When we reached Komorowa, I had a colitis attack. There was no choice but to take me to the German military hospital. My daughter, Fejga Chmiel (who was killed later), and I remained at the hospital and our wagon continued on its way. This time, fate smiled on me. The doctor who treated me was a friend of the Jews. At first, he tried to do everything to refrain from operating. He sat on my bed and began telling me about his private life. His wife was Jewish and, when Hitler came to power, he was forced to separate from her and his children. Finally, he said, "I promise you that you will not be fed by the Germans with silver spoons. I am very sorry for your fate." After a few days, he told me that I must leave the hospital and return to Ostrolenka, and that it was possible that our city would be transferred to Russian rule.

I arrived in Ostrolenka with my daughter two days before Yom Kippur. The entire city – doors and windows, gates and shutters – was closed tight. All around, a deathly silence prevailed. You could hear a pin drop. Everything the gendarmerie – in Sredni's

home on Lomza Street; the field police – at Aron Zusman's, and the notorious S.S. – in Krymkiewicz's home on Lomza Street. Members of the government from all these departments ordered the Jews to deliver elegant furnishings and new mattresses to them. The order was carried out without delay. They threw anything that they did not like out of the windows. Our Polish neighbors, both urban and rural, immediately pounced on the discarded furniture and items as a real find, and collected all the Jewish property.

Rumors reached us that Ostrolenka would be transferred to Russian rule. Therefore, each of us hoped that an end to our troubles would come soon. I was brave and did not fear the dangers (perhaps I survived because of this). I worked at S.S. headquarters as a cook, and they gave me a little food to take home for my family. One day, I came to work and pretended to be very sad. When the S.S. man asked me why I was sad, I told him that I had heard that the Russians were to receive control of the city, and that I was afraid of them. He burst out laughing and calmed me, saying that Ostrolenka would never belong to the Russians, but only to the Third Reich. I felt that our last hope had vanished. I told the Jews the "good" news.

Before Yom Kippur, an order was published that on Yom Kippur, all men must report for work. Only the older men came. The young ones hid. To the Germans' question as to the whereabouts of the youths, they received a reply that they had been drafted into the Polish Army. The older men lined up in rows in front of the city hall and waited for orders. We, the women, went out into the street to see what they would do to them. At about ten o'clock, they brought a pile of brooms and distributed them to 150 of the Jews, ordering them to sweep the streets. Immediately thereafter came a new order. They had to lay down the brooms and, holding hands, dance and sing, each to a different tune. Anyone who has not seen this, cannot imagine the appalling sight: 150 men, dancing and singing, while over them raged the enemy with rubber truncheons, striking without distinction. Things continued thus until five o'clock in the evening. Then, they put everyone in prison. The women were in despair. In her heart, each had already parted from the man who was dear to her. In the morning, we discovered that they had imposed a task on the men: to clean the prison of filth such as no man had ever dared touch . . . As the Jews, in their eyes, were not included in the category of "people" – they ordered them to do this. Then they released them.

The Germans quickly took over all of Poland and began persecuting the Jews. The first to suffer were the Jewish intelligentsia. The Germans drove them from city to city, with the intention of getting them to Germany. They were concentrated in Ostrolenka. We saw them, dirty, in worn out and torn clothes, unshaven – like animals. One's heart broke from such shame. We, the Jewish women, decided to help them. From time to time, we threw them a slice of bread, a carrot, a beet or an onion. When the unfortunates ran to pick up the food, they were struck with rifle butts and clubs; [the Germans] raged over the backs of those who dared to bend down. Whoever lagged after the others was shot on the spot, and the rows advanced.

After three days, an order was published: all the Jews must to leave Ostrolenka. We were given three days to cross the border to the Russian side. Of course, no Jew wanted to remain under German rule. Entire families were unable to walk to the border on foot, however, and needed wagons. Again, the "finest hour" of our Polish neighbors came. They demanded hundreds of dollars for a wagon and there were Jews who paid. There were also many, however, who could not pay. Even after many left, there were still Jews who remained in the city after the deadline for leaving had passed. These were very poor families, as well as the handicapped. Moshe Ma-Towu and I decided to approach the mayor of the city for help. Our contention was: if you want Ostrolenka to be *Judenrein* (clean of Jews), you must take care of those who cannot pay for transportation. We are forbidden to remain here; we do not have the nerve to jump in the river. No matter what, you will finish us. He heard us out and promised to help. The next day, he placed fifteen wagons at our disposal, and thus the last Jews left Ostrolenka. Our joy was great – we were going to Russia, to the land of freedom . . . When we arrived at Wojciechowice, the Germans robbed the refugees of anything they saw that they liked.

2

When we arrived in Rydzewa, the Russians received us very well. They gave us sugar and tobacco. The way to Lomza was not easy. The road was full of wagons and pedestrians. When we got closer to Lomza, we saw a terrible sight: the entire beautiful city was burned and destroyed. Smoke rose among the ruins and actually choked us. The streets were so full of rubble,

that it was impossible for the wagons to get through. Wagons that left Ostrolenka two days earlier still stood on the road. It was already one o'clock in the morning and we could not move. I was always brave and did not fear anything. I got down from the wagon and asked where the municipal police [station] was. I reached the place indicated, far from the city center. It was a small house, faintly lit. I walked and fell, tearing my dress, injuring my hands and legs until I reached the Police. Immediately upon entering, a strong wave of heat struck me, spread by the over-heated stove. The smothering air was full of smoke and the smell of tobacco, and I saw a strange picture: men lay on benches and on the floor. I began to complain to them, "You are here to maintain order in the city. Your job is to stand on the roads and ease matters for the streams of refugees, and to provide food and drink for the little children. Instead, you lie here at your ease, smoking and drinking. The red ribbon on your sleeves certainly does not testify to a warm heart in any of you." They apologized, jumped up immediately from where they lay and asked me to show them where our wagon was. Three men accompanied me and immediately began to work. They took us by another route and we finally entered the city. I told them that my husband was mobilized into the army, and was immediately given a room.

The condition of Ostrolenka's people was very bad – we were refugees. We had arrived in a burned, destroyed city, and it was hard to get work. We were comforted by the fact that when we went out into the street, we saw the familiar faces of our townspeople. The problem, however, that troubled all of us was, how would we support ourselves? It was easier for those who had a profession. The carpenter, Srolke Frum immediately got work at the army barracks. Perla and his family, their son, Dawid, and his wife, Fejga Szyser, knew Russian and did not do badly. Noske Jabek opened a watch repair workshop. The Szrejter family fixed bicycles. Ester Zusman' husband, Aszer, worked as an electrician. I got work running a big restaurant on Ostrolenka Street. I hired Fejga Perkal, who had married someone from Wyszkow. She was in Lomza with her brother; her husband and her brother were murdered by the Nazis immediately upon their entry to Wyszkow. They tied them to a motorcycle and dragged them along the streets, and they died. The ritual slaughterer, Fajwel Chacek, the son of Welwel Chacek, was also killed in this terrible way by the German murderers.

In time, our lives normalized. The Russian regime assisted us a little. The elderly received pensions, the wives of mobilized soldiers received financial aid. Many began engaging in trade, even though this was forbidden by the Soviets. Those who did were Mosze Sarniewicz, Chilke Szafran, the son of Mendel Cuker and the son-in-law of Szlomo Alter. They paid for this dearly: they were summoned for questioning – and disappeared. Searching did not avail. Only in Slonim did we learn that they died in prisons somewhere in Russia.

Lomza became a place of refuge for many Jews expelled from German-occupied territories. Men and women worked alongside Russians, in the hope that they had reached heaven on earth. The hopes, however, quickly vanished. People became embittered and expressed their dissatisfaction openly. But "the walls had ears" and "the fields had eyes" – the words of the dissatisfied reached the "right" places.

One day, notices were put up, directing those who wanted to return to the Germans to come to register within three days. There were many applicants and they stood on line to register day and night. Each of them remembered their good home and the satisfying life they had left. The Russians gathered all those who yearned to return, put them on trains and banished them to Siberia . . .

3

One day, the Soviet regime published a notice that anyone who was not a permanent resident of Lomza had to register to receive citizenship, and then leave the city and distance themselves at least 100 kilometers from the city. Cities at that distance were Bialystok, Slonim, Stolin, Rozan, Pruzany, Zelva, Molczat, Pesewa, Wolkowysk and others. The regime placed trains at the refugees' disposal and required them to choose for themselves among those cities. Most Ostrolenkans went to Slonim. A few families remained in Lomza: Eli Zusman, Mejlech Grosman, Szajke Aszer, the Szrejter brothers, Dawid Tobjasz the painter, Szmuel Josef Segal and his wife, Lejke the Baker and others. To Slonim went: Mendel Bialy; Motel Bialy; Reuwen Nachum Gercek with his family; the Szafran family; Bluma Gedanken, my father, Pinie Gedanken, my daughter, Fejga Chmiel, of blessed memory, and I; Mendel Gedanken and his family. The Mejrann, Wygoda, Zamelson, Markiewicz, Szron families. The Szyman family with their daughters and sons-in-law; Sredni; Fejgel Laska; Noske Jabek; Frydman the Scribe;

Mendel Cuker; Jakow Dawid Leszcz; Sojka; Frydman; Zylbersztejn; Blum the Watchmaker; Naftali the Ritual Slaughterer and his family; Chaja Zlocisty *née* Wolkowicz; the Benedon family; Grosman; Roszeniak, Dan the Elder; Siwak the Tailor; Gitel, the daughter of Mosze Noskes with her husband; Mosze Aron Edel; Brum the Fisherman from Wojciechowice; all the Perkals; Welwel Haczek; Awraham Haczek and his wife; Czipke Haczek and others.

In time, Slonim became part of Ostrolenka. It was not easy for us to get there. First of all, the train trip took about two weeks, in closed cars. When we arrived there, a housing problem arose in the city. The people of Slonim were clearly unwilling to deal with us, the homeless. They did not want to rent apartments or rooms to families with old people or small children. After a great deal of suffering, the problem was resolved, either with the help of money, or with the assistance of the city council. Many, such as the Bulkarz family, settled in schools or study halls. Some moved to small towns in the area. Then, the problem of a livelihood arose. Some worked in their professions – shoemakers, tailors and dentists. Others engaged in trade. There were those who received government jobs. I worked as a supervisor in a merchandise warehouse. My job was to send merchandise to the entire Slonim area, and I even earned decently. Jankel Dawid Leszcz was night watchman, at a salary of 300 rubles a month. People began to go to Lemberg and to Vilna for profiteering. Whoever was not caught was lucky. Rejzka Szafran, Necha Roszeniak and the children of Mendels traded on a large scale. Gradually, we got used to the new conditions. Mendel Gedanken did not work; only his wife, Rachel, worked. Her two sons and her daughter also worked in a government office.

So things continued until June 1941, when Hitler's armies beset the Soviet Union. Young people fled, all the roads were full of people. Millions died while wandering the roads. On the first day, Slonim was already occupied by the German murderers.

4

Now the wandering of the Jews of Slonim began, including the Ostrolenkans. My apartment was on the road leading to Baranowicz. The owner of the house was a Christian. When the German tanks passed in the streets, the Gentiles placed pictures of saints in the windows, as a sign that Gentiles lived there. One of the tank drivers came into the landlady's house, where I lived with my daughter. His first question was whether there were many Jews in Slonim. To our affirmative answer, he passed his hand across his throat, a sign that they would slaughter us all. This foretold perdition.

Immediately upon the organization of headquarters, a notice was published for the civilian population: all corpses lying on the sides of the roads must be collected, as well as weapons. Everyone did this work willingly, in the hope of discovering among the dead some relatives or acquaintances who had escaped before the entry of the Germans into Slonim. (The eldest son of Noach Szewarcz was also in my group). While working, we suddenly came upon an overturned truck. After we raised it up, the bodies of murdered men were revealed to us. At first, we could not identify them. The sight was horrifying. We looked into their pockets for identification documents. It turned out that our townspeople were among those killed: Eli Zusman, Dawid Tobjasz, Szlomo Wajnkranc, the sister of Chawa Wajnkranc, a boy named Jankele who lived at Chawa's (since Chaja, her sister, lived in Stolin and was sick, the boy was brought up by her; the boy's father, a tailor named Mosze, is in America). We gave the documents and money we found to Kalman Wajnkranc, who lived in Slonim. The question as to how they got to the area of Slonim when they lived in Lomza was resolved in a few days. Eli Zusman's wife and Chawa Wajnkranc said that they had gotten lost on the way and thought that the men had gone on ahead. Then we decided to return the documents and the money to them, because they were about to return to Lomza. This, however, was not a unique incident.

Meanwhile, gradually, they prepared decrees. One commandant left and a new one arrived, and troubles began again. The shoemaker Pepka and his children had a Gentile landlord, and were not badly off. One day, an order was published that anyone who had a bicycle, motorcycle, radio or foodstuffs, like cocoa, butter, chocolate, alcoholic beverages – must turn them in to the authorities. Whoever failed to do so would die on the spot! Of course, anyone who had those things in his possession turned them in, and even stood on line to do so. The Gentiles, however, did not rush to fulfill the order. Pepka's landlord had a motorcycle and he hid it in the cellar. When the Germans came to check and found the motorcycle, all the Gentiles said that it belonged to the Jew, that is, Pepka. The Germans took Pepka and his son, tied them to the motorcycle with a rope and dragged them this way throughout the streets of the city,

until the two of them died a terrible death (all this took place near the headquarters building). After a time, notices were put up in all of Slonim's streets – especially for the Jewish population – that within 24 hours, they must assemble in a certain place. This was the beginning of the Slonim Ghetto. The problem arose once more of "moving house" . . . Here, again, the entire Christian population came "at the right time"; whoever had a wagon and a horse appeared in the market square, ready "to serve". They did not ask for money in exchange for service, but for possessions only: furniture and anything else they liked. The Jews loaded the wagons with all their belongings and the convoy started out. The Germans stood on both sides of the road, up to the place designated as the ghetto, but they did not allow the Jews to take everything. Every wagon was inspected before entering the ghetto. They took whatever they wanted: fur coats, clothes, blankets. Of superb quality, all of it went right into the possession of the Germans. (To this day, deep scars remain on my right hand from the cut they gave me when they approached my wagon and I dared say just one word . . .).

In the ghetto, six to seven families lived in one room. The most difficult thing was the cooking. For 20 people, there was one cooking facility (fueled by wood). As I mentioned earlier – at the time of the German invasion, Mendel Gedanken's two sons had jobs. Chaim was a teacher and Judel worked as a chemist. They worked in Lida. The two of them went to Slonim, to be with their family. The Germans bombed the roads and the younger brother, Judel (or Jurek) was killed. Chaim arrived at his parents' home, safe and sound. To their question as to Judel's whereabouts, he replied that he had gotten lost on the way. In fact, he had buried him in a field.

One Wednesday, a panic began. The market square filled with Germans. On their sleeves were swastikas, the sign of a skull on their hats. Their cars and motorcycles were covered in black cloth. On that day, in fact, they treated the Jewish population well, distributed food, even lemons and honey . . . This was really a ploy, so as not to arouse panic.

Thursday came. The morning was beautiful and clear, and only the sun witnessed their cruel murders . . . Suddenly, the German military police appeared and, with them, hoodlums from the local population, who pointed out the places where rich, intelligent, educated Jews lived. They gathered about 800 people and murdered them cruelly. These are the names of the Ostrolenkans who were among those murdered: Motel and Mendel Bialy; Szmuel Markiewicz; Chaim Benedon; Icchak Zaborowski; the son of Fat Bina; Brum the Fisherman from Wojciechowice; the young son and also the son-in-law of Big Icchak; Grynszpan the Tailor; Szepsel Szron; Josef Thylim and many others who I do not remember.

The German-controlled city administration claimed that they were taken to work, but a Gentile woman told us what the fate of the 800 Jews was. They took them to a place about 15 kilometers from the city. Because we were forbidden to leave the city, we disguised ourselves as old grandmothers. We were a few women: Fat Bina, Golda Markiewicz, Necha Roszeniak, Chaim Benedon's wife and I. We arrived at the place she had indicated – a big, deep pit. With our hands, we removed the upper layer of earth – and a great stream of blood burst out. The first of the victims we recognized was Szmuelik Markiewicz.

5

In August 1941, control of Slonim was transferred to the S.S. and the gendarmerie, who issued new orders and decrees. The first order was that a *Judenrat* was to be established, composed of important persons of the city. The *Judenrat* included the following people: Berman, a Jew with a long beard; Munszkowski, an aristocratic person, a textile merchant, and others, whose names I do not remember. In addition, Ostrolenkans got in: Menachem Frydman, Icel Sojka, Mosze Markiewicz and Noske Jabek. The S.S. got the list and suggested adding the three Rutkowski brothers, whom I will tell about later.

An order was immediately issued, forbidding the Jews to leave the city. They had to live in a separate quarter. Walking on the sidewalk was forbidden; they could only walk in the street. Within 24 hours, every Jew had to wear a yellow badge on the left side. All this aroused great panic and we walked around under a black cloud. The names of the S.S. and gendarmerie commandants immediately echoed in our ears: the chief enemy was named Hick, a 26-year-old brute of the rank of Colonel, Officer Schulz and First Lieutenant Magela.

In the beginning, they took us for forced labor. The allocation of work places was arranged by the *Judenrat*, by order of the S.S. For the most part, the city of Slonim was destroyed. A few hundred men and women were immediately recruited to sort and clean weapons that

had been scattered on the sides of the roads. According to their professions, Jewish workmen were assigned to various workshops that operated for the S.S., the gendarmerie and the *Wehrmacht*. Jewish women and children also went to work, because everyone who worked got half a kilo of bread a day through the *Judenrat*. Women and children were employed to sort whole bricks that remained in the ruins, and to organize them on parchment sheets from Torah scrolls that the S.S. had taken out of synagogues and study halls. This was what the enemy, Hick, ordered. While doing this exhausting work, the women and children also received blows if the work did not find favor in the eyes of the enemy. We tried to keep the bricks away from the Torah scrolls as much as possible. The rubber truncheons flew over our heads like hail. Hick stood with his dog, which he called *Jude* (Jew), and laughed a sadistic laugh. "They do not like this work," he said, "because I mock their God. But we carry our God with us everywhere. On our belt buckles is written '*Gott is mit uns*' (God is with us) – and not with you". Among the Ostrolenkan workers were Chana Benedon, Necha Benedon, Bluma Gedanken, the red-headed Chaja and her sister, Ester Szafran, Peszka Gercek and her daughter, Lejke – the daughter of the shoemaker (her father was already not among the living), Golda Markiewicz, Cecylia and her daughter, and the wife of Mosze Bomsztejn. In the main, the soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* guarded us. There were also among them "good" Germans, who let us buy foodstuffs.

One day, when we went to work, we heard the Germans talking among themselves that they had already conquered the whole world. I approached them and asked: *Nu*, have you also conquered *misa mishuna* [Yiddish, an unnatural death]? One of them took out a map and looked for the spot "*Misa Mishuna*". Then he answered me, "It will also come . . ." "Yes," I answered him, "it will come . . ." Thus we joked. We wanted to laugh a little in the sea of troubles. (At every opportunity, I was the one who set the tone for joking, for exchanging humorous words with our guards, who were not always cruel to us.)

Szrejter, Lachowicz, Grosman and Blum worked as carpenters then. The tailors were Siwak – the father and the son, Icchak Markiewicz and Szepsel Markiewicz. Watchmakers were Noske Jabek, Baruch and Mosze Burnsztejn. Needleworkers were Lachowicz (at the time of the war, he married the daughter of Bluma Chmiel), Szafran, Gercek, Makowski. All these worked outside the ghetto, from six in the morning until six in the evening and, in exchange, received half a kilo of bread daily. The *Judenrat* had to supply everything demanded by the gendarmerie, the S.S. and the *Wehrmacht*.

Once, all Germans appeared in the ghetto, causing a great panic. They announced that in three days, we had to provide them with 20 leather coats (ten brown and ten black), 20 dozen socks, five women's furs, 50 skins for making shoes and other things. They appeared each and every day with "orders", and those in the *Judenrat* had to rack their brains as to how to acquire the money required. The well-to-do Jews saved their money for better times. It was necessary to receive the Germans' approval to go to Bialystok or Warsaw to buy the things demanded by them. An entire delegation such as this was always escorted by two Germans. Nachum Gercek and Szepsel Markiewicz went to Bialystok. To Warsaw – Bluma Gedanken, Rachel Gedanken, Lejbe Rachel Zylbersztejn and Chaim Dorfman. There were also substitutes, because everyone was interested in going.

6

In the month of September, the *Judenrat* posted notices that within 24 hours, the Jews had to bring four kilos of gold, all valuables and silver objects, and an additional one hundred thousand rubles. Relief was felt to a certain extent, because it was clear from the notice that whoever would not turn in his jewelry of his own free will, would pay with his life for this. We asked for a three-day extension of time and put together a committee of representatives of all the towns in the area: Ostrolenka, Kolno, Lomza, Ostrowa, Wyszkow and others. The Ostrolenkans in the committee were Mosze Markowicz, Gercek, Jabek and Jankel Szafran. When the money was collected, there were unpleasant scenes, quarrels and blows – because of the exploitation of influence. Everyone wanted to avoid paying the sum determined that he should pay. After a great deal of suffering, quarrels and scandals – the capital demanded was collected. A wagon overflowing with gold, silver and Jewish property from past generations, escorted by gendarmes and police, rode slowly through the Jewish streets. Pearls and precious stones were carried separately in big suitcases. Gold weighing more than four kilos was collected.

At a secret meeting, the *Judenrat* decided to give the Germans less than what they had demanded, in order to prove to them how very difficult it was to collect

valuables. The Rutkowski brothers, who the Germans suggested should serve in the *Judenrat*, participated in the meeting. It was decided to hide the rest of the gold under a board in the floor, for future troubles. The silver and gold were given to the gendarmes and all the other valuables were brought directly to the S.S. chief commandant – Hick. Everything exceeded the amount demanded, except that the weight of the gold was three and a half kilos, instead of four! The enemy jumped up from his armchair, stamped his foot and shouted, "*Warum?*" (Why?). We tried to explain to him that the short period of three days did not permit the collection of a large amount. The murderer, however, did not calm down. He immediately shot the first victim, Munszkowski. The others went with Hick to the *Judenrat*. There, Hick immediately pointed to the place where the extra gold was hidden. It was clear that the Rutkowski brothers had informed. Hick, together with the S.S. people, burst into shouts, "If I do not see Jewish blood spill – I will go crazy, I can't live!" It is hard to describe the morbid impression his words had on everyone. We sat withdrawn and did not dare go out to the street. Deathly fear gripped us. Of course, Hick took the hidden gold. He sent all the members of the *Judenrat* to prison, where they were killed. He ordered a new *Judenrat* organized, composed of new victims, on condition that the Rutkowski brothers would continue to participate in it. The Germans placed complete trust in them . . . And again an order was given that, within 24 hours, we had to produce two kilos of gold for him. From where? First, no gold was left in the place, and second – it was not advisable to show the Nazis that it was possible to obtain gold with such great ease. The *Judenrat* advised them that there was no more gold in the Jews' possession. The German commandant ordered that all gold teeth be pulled from the mouths of the Jews. To carry out this task, the *Judenrat* recruited the dental technician, Mosze Markiewicz, and others helped him. Anyone who had crowns or gold teeth in his mouth stood on line and waited for this painful and humiliating operation . . .

7

After "Operation Teeth" it seemed to all of us that, from now on, the situation would be calmer. In October, in the rainy season, they suddenly stopped the work in the street. My daughter and I lived in the camp on Slonim Street. Our job was to clean weapons collected on the roads. Eight hundred women and 1,000 men worked at this, supervised by the *Wehrmacht* and directed by the Gestapo. They took us to and from work under a special guard. Among the guards was an officer, an expert technician, who taught us how to clean the weapons. There were weapons of different kinds and we had to know how to take care of each kind, for example, hand grenades and others. He was friendly to us and regretted our melancholy situation . . .

A woman from Lodz, an actress named Sonja (I have forgotten her last name) worked with us. She was dark-haired, short, and used to compose songs on subjects of life in the ghetto. The officer stood on the side, listened to her songs and recitations and expressed sorrow that such a young and talented girl was wasted here . . . At every opportunity, he would speak to her. She lived with us. Taking advantage of every opportunity when he had to come to the *Judenrat* while on duty, the officer came to us in his car and left us packages of food. I make special mention here of the decency of this German officer, to point out that, in the great darkness of those days, there were also some points of light. The officer still had a mother. His father had passed away at a young age and he remained an only child. He wanted to bring his mother a present – a fur coat. We got him the coat willingly, and he paid us well with food, cigarettes and other commodities – everything from the warehouses and, of course, in total secrecy. He left for a ten-day vacation. After he returned, he asked us for a written endorsement that the coat was not stolen from anyone, in order to send it to his mother as proof that the coat was obtained honestly. Of course, we signed the endorsement for him. He showed us a picture of his mother – a beautiful blond woman, with a lively expression on her face. On the picture was written, "I am proud of my son's behavior and attitude, as opposed to all the others. Therefore, I send him my wish that he should be happy and blessed in his work." In a short time, this officer received an order to find and destroy Russian and other partisan units in pits and hiding places in virgin forests, along a front of dozens of kilometers. This officer was expert in ferreting out partisans. He worked using a special method: when he saw a nest of partisans, he drew away from the group of Jews, distanced himself from those who accompanied him. They called to the partisans in Russian, "Don't be afraid, we are Jews. Don't shoot, we are with you!"

The partisan camp stretched along seven to eight kilometers. They saw two rifles and a great many books,

some of them arranged on shelves and some of them scattered on the floor. Apparently, this was the partisans' headquarters. When these details were told to him, he ordered them to camouflage the dugout again. These Ostrolenkan Jews accompanied him: Jankel Szafran with his son, Symcha; Gercek's son; Chaim Dorfman and his nephew; my nephew, Jankel Gedanken; Awraham Frydman, Zundel Frydman and a few others from Slonim. The German officer was satisfied with his group of Jews that accompanied him. He refrained from harming the partisans, and there was food in abundance, too. They went out on their way early in the morning and returned to the ghetto towards evening. Of course, he had to show his superiors results of his pursuit; most of the time, he brought back weapons he had gathered on the roads.

8

Despite strict censorship, news of the big pogrom in Vilna reached our work camp from the Germans themselves. Youths, aroused from stagnation, began to think seriously about their situation. Secret consultations were held about the possibility of our resisting, so that they would not slaughter us like sheep. Precisely then, when we debated resistance, Russian partisans disseminated proclamations in Russian in this style: "Jews, the Germans intend to murder you all! We, the partisans, are fighting against our common enemy! Come with us! Bring with you the rest of the money remaining to you, so we can purchase everything necessary and will not have to steal from the farmers. Jews, do not delay! Join our ranks as soon as possible!"

The news of the pogrom in Vilna and the Russian proclamations spurred us on to the struggle. Young female and male comrades set real operations. The next day, however, they had already been killed by the Gestapo. It was clear to us that out of every three persons, two were traitors. Every victim who fell because of informants weakened us and delayed our activity for a time.

About three to four kilometers from Slonim was a small town where many homeless people lived. They received permission to come to the city to do various kinds of work for the Germans.

The High Holy Days arrived. The elders prepared for the holy holidays and came to the city. Like thunder on a clear day, we were smitten with the terrible news of their murder. Hick, the bloodthirsty Nazi dog, and his helpers got to them at five in the morning and shot them, about 300 souls! I do not remember the exact date, except that it happened about two days before Rosh HaShana. Among the homeless people were Ostrolenkans: Chaim Szyman and his wife, his son, his son-in-law and their children; Frejdka Szafran and her husband; Awraham Chaim Dorfman and his two children (he had a workshop for bicycle repair); Ita Sredni, her daughter, Zajftel, and her husband, Meir, and two children; and Chana Sredni, her husband and son. Naftali the Watchmaker and his daughters, sons-in-law and their children. All of them were killed. Among the murdered was also Zyskind Sredni (the son of Ita), who had arrived as a guest a day earlier.

9

The great suffering in the ghetto did not prevent the Jews, both religious ones and those who observed tradition, from celebrating Jewish holidays properly. Children stood on a side lane and watched for the appearance of the gendarmerie or a truck – which always boded ill. The Jews wrapped themselves in their prayer shawls and prayed for a speedy salvation, for release from the Hitlerian hell. My father, Pinie Gedanken, and Icel Sojka led prayers before the congregation on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. My father led the morning prayer and Icel Sojka the additional prayer. These were prayers of torment and blood. It is difficult to describe the ghastly impression of these prayers. The imagined silence, however, did not continue for long. Menacing and foreboding rumors suddenly spread: Danger! The women's section received an urgent order to prepare blue permits, which caused panic. Then, they ordered changes of places of residence. The "productive" workers, that is, the good professionals, were concentrated in a separate area across the river. Tailors, shoemakers, needleworkers, glaziers and watchmakers lived there, a total of about two hundred people, including their families. Jews employed by the *Wehrmacht* lived in barracks the size of Cyganska Street in Ostrolenka. Members of the *Judenrat* began "trading" in permits designated for workers. Jews with no profession paid hundreds of dollars for the desired permits and permission to live in the district of the privileged. Others tried to get to villages and, for a handsome payment of money and property, to find a hiding place with farmers. I do not remember their names, because this was conducted in secrecy. I will only mention the names of our family members. Mendel Gedanken's wife and her daughter,

Pola, and young son, Jankele, who hid with farmers after the father of the family, Mendel Gedanken, and his two sons had already been killed. Pola worked in the German hospital as a nurse (she had completed a nursing course during the days of the Soviet regime), and therefore, she always knew the latest news. Sara Dwora Zylbersztejn and her daughters, Cwija and Lejbe, also lived with Gentiles.

The panic and worry about how to be saved from the Nazi murderers' claws continued for about two weeks. Meanwhile, the Rutkowski brothers began their contemptible informing activity and, with them, their sister and another Jew named Bayer, from Lodz, the foreman in the gendarmerie's carpentry shop. As soon as these informers told the Germans about the panic rampant among Jews who were seeking hiding places, and about youths escaping to the forest, they immediately placed a heavy guard on all the roads. Hick called the members of the *Judenrat* and demanded that they immediately stop the flight from the ghetto, so that all the panic would stop. He asked them to announce that there was enough work and that working hands were lacking. This announcement was published on 10 November 1941, but it did not bring about quiet. News on Thursday, 13 November, at six in the evening, that all those who were to live in the workmen's quarter had received blue certificates for their families, served as proof of our suspicion. Simultaneously, we learned that additional murderers had arrived from other cities.

It is difficult to describe our morale that night. The next morning, the Jews left their homes, intending to go to work. This was Friday, the 14th of November. The Germans preceded them with the call, "Today is a vacation day! Go home! Today you do not work!" . . . I write this now, not with ink, but with my heart's blood.

The Nazi, Hick, and his dog, *Jude*, together with Brigadier Schulz, entered the ghetto. They informed the *Judenrat* that all the Jews of the ghetto would be sent to work in the city of Pruzany today, and that everyone should report to the following concentration points: 1. Krasnoarmiejska Street and 2. the big market square. Of course, everyone took the most precious things and those essential for daily use with him. In the house where I lived with my late father, Pinie Gedanken, also lived Shalom Roszeniak and his family, Old Dan and his family, the wife of Szron and her family, the fisherman from Wojciechowice, Old Lady Benedon and her sister Malach and her children. All of them went to the concentration points. Those who did not go were my daughter, the actress I mentioned, Szron's daughter-in-law and her small son, Old Lady Benedon and I. We found hiding places and hid. We laid there in inhuman conditions, plunged in mortal fear. The prevailing strong cold helped us, in that the dirt and feces that accumulated froze, the smell did not disturb us and the danger of disease was removed. From time to time, I went out to bring a little food, warm clothes or a blanket to cover ourselves. My father, of blessed memory, did not want to go down into hiding with us, maintaining that the Nazis would finally discover and capture us. He prepared for the "trip", put on warm clothes, took tea and a great many cigarettes (he was a heavy smoker) with him, and went to the concentration place.

I crawled out to see what was happening there and I saw that our neighborhood was completely cut off. Suddenly, I was in the hands of the Nazis and could not return to the hiding place. A throng of Nazis, as well as Belarusians and Lithuanians who helped them, ran about searching for hiding places, in order to catch every Jew who had hidden. My situation was hopeless; I was also afraid that my daughter would come out of hiding. I saw crowds of Jews in the street, waiting their turn to be sent to work. Escape was impossible. The first trucks were full of men, women and children, traveling slowly – old people and the sick went on foot. A river flowed through Slonim, with a bridge over it. When the truck reached the bridge, the Nazis took little children from their mothers' arms by force – and threw them into the waters of the river. The screams of the mothers and the infants penetrated the heart of the heavens! The sight was terrible. The Germans' interpretation: you, the adults, are useful for work; as children bother their mothers at work, we are throwing them into the water... When the order was given for all the Jews to turn over their valuables, costly clothing and furs – it was clear that they were being taken to their deaths. This was certain.

The trucks traveled about three kilometers from the city and arrived at pits that had been prepared in advance. The back door of the truck was opened and people were thrown from it directly into the pit. A volley of fire from machine guns ended their lives . . . We, about 400 pedestrians, remained in the field. Here, we went through selection: the men separately and the women separately. Again, we were required to turn over our valuables and remove our clothing. In front of us

were piles of valuables. Raszka Wygoda, Szafran's daughter-in-law (her husband's name was Jankel), also was in that *aktzia*. Her hands were wrapped in bandages. She explained that her hands were covered with sores. Later, we learned that, in fact, she had hidden all her valuables under the bandages. With us was also Wajncyer and his wife (their nickname was Kapczuch). His wife received a murderous blow because she refused to take off her fur coat.

The Lithuanians drank to intoxication and also received special energy injections, increasing their cruelty toward the victims. I tried to walk in the last rows. The Nazis did not oppose this; they knew that it was impossible to escape. I decided to save myself. Perhaps I would find an opportunity for this at the last minute? I saw my father dragging a heavy bundle. The cold "burned" mercilessly. All my thoughts were concentrated now on the convoy of the "living dead" marching toward the place of destruction. The satanic precision of the murderers was striking. They had a list of 10,000 who were sentenced to death. When it turned out that there were in fact 10,001, they took one eight-year-old blond boy out of the lines and took him back to the city, so that the number would match. By chance, this was an Ostrolenkan boy, Naftali the Ritual Slaughterer's grandson (they had a bicycle store in our city).

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As I have said, 400 of us were left, the remnant of the *aktzia* of destruction. I asked God in Heaven to make a miracle. According to German precision, the *aktzia* was said to end at three in the afternoon. The skies were red from all the blood that had sprayed upward. We expected a miracle, but it did not come . . .

Meanwhile, they filled special trucks with crates of gold, silver and diamonds, as well as furs and valuable possessions. When the murderers moved off, the Lithuanians removed their helmets and filled them with gold. They shoved dollars into boots and pockets. Although they were drunk, almost passing out, they had enough sense to attend to their own needs. We heard one say to another in Russian, "We will not cover the pit today; we'll do it tomorrow morning." Here we were, approaching the pit, which was about 700 meters away from us. I do not remember what I thought about at that moment. I only felt that I was thrown into a huge pit full of sand. Then – two or three volleys of automatic fire – and there was silence. No one knew if he was alive or not . . .

When night fell and complete darkness prevailed, a groan was heard from time to time from the pile of corpses, sometimes a shout, "*Gevalt!* Someone! Help!", which lingered like a voice calling in the wilderness. Who would come to help? We, the few who had remained alive, were unable to pull those still alive out from under the crush of bodies. We ourselves could hardly stand on our feet, after we had crawled out of the pit of the dead. There were twenty-eight of us. Each of us went in another direction. I only remember that it was already late at night. We were wet with blood, and we were doubtful as to whether we had remained alive. We could not all go in the same direction; it was the only way that there some kind of chance to be saved. I walked – I don't remember where my legs dragged me. I saw a weak light in the window of a house in a village. I walked in the direction of the light. I knocked on the door. They opened it for me. They let me wash the blood off my clothes and I dried them until daylight. This was Saturday, 15 November 1941.

In the morning, I went to my daughter first. Had she remained alive in our hiding place? I found everyone safe and sound, and told them what had happened to me. Their joy was indescribable. I immediately took her out of that filthy place. The street was desolate. No one knew if the *aktzia* was already over. I recounted everything I had seen and everything that had happened to me. We ourselves looked like the dead. It is hard to describe the tears and the screams. In the street, a few abandoned children wandered around, here a woman, there a man . . . Each one sought for a relative. Suddenly, I met Jankele, the son of my brother, Mendel. He was looking for his father.

Of the twenty-eight survivors, not all remained alive. The informers, the Rutkowski brothers, told Hick and Schulz that Jews who had been saved from the killing pits had returned. (The [Germans] wanted to convince everyone that we went to work.) On Sunday, 16 November, at four in the afternoon, they took fourteen Jews of the twenty-eight to the Jewish cemetery and shot them to death.

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Terrible experiences still happened to us, the few survivors, until the day we were liberated. I lost my only daughter and witnessed the tragic end of Ostrolenkans. I note all this down with my heart's blood, for the

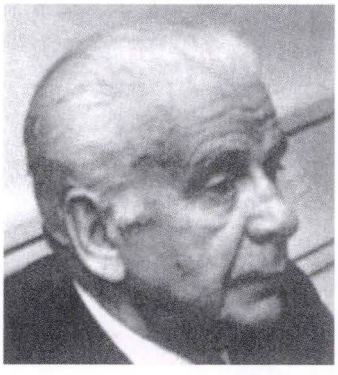
generations to come after us: Never forget what evil the German Amalek, the destroyers of the Jewish people, did to us.

Bluma Gedanken sent the continuation and end of this interesting and unique material about her experiences at the time of the Holocaust very late. Therefore, many facts are missing and the testimony is incomplete. The last continuations were received when the Holocaust section was already printed and, therefore, were not included in the book.
(The Editorial Staff)



Dr. Noach Kaplinsky, Tel Aviv

The Slonim Ghetto – The Final Phase of Its Destruction



Dr. Noach Kaplinsky

Because we did not succeed in obtaining the continuation of the documentation of our townswoman, Bluma Gedanken, of "Ostrolenkans in the Slonim Ghetto", we decided to use the description of the final stages of the Slonim Ghetto destruction written by Dr. Kaplinsky here. This is important and vital to us, because most of Ostrolenka's Jews were murdered in the Slonim Ghetto, where they lived after receiving Soviet citizenship. According to a rough estimate, approximately 2,500 souls, comprising more than 50% of our townspeople, were scattered over the length and breadth of what was eastern Poland then. In Poland at that time, lived a large portion of the Jews from cities and towns around Ostrolenka, such as Ostrowa, Mazowiecki, Poltusk, Wyszkow, Goworowo, Rozan, Myszyniec and others. Until the Nazi occupation in June 1941, 30,000 Jews lived in the city of Slonim. Beginning in 1939, when Germany occupied areas of Poland, half of them were refugees.

Dr. Noach Kaplinsky was born in 1909 in the city of Slonim in eastern Poland – today, White Russia. He received a national-traditional education and was a graduate of the medical faculty of the University of Vilna. He was active in student circles and Zionist organizations. Until the German occupation, he had his own medical practice and operated a maternity hospital in Slonim. After the occupation, Dr. Kaplinsky worked as a doctor in the ghetto and in camps, maintaining a semblance of humanity and helping others to the best of his ability.

The war cruelly separated him from his wife and son (their little daughter and the rest of their family was killed in the Holocaust). The family reunited in Israel. Here, Dr. Kaplinsky integrated quickly. For twenty years, he was a member of the Holon municipal council, and was one of the heads of the progressive party. In addition, he worked in the Kupat Cholim [health fund] framework of the Histadrut and Maccabi, served as Chairman of the Israeli Medical Association, was among the founders of the medical faculty of Tel Aviv University and filled other public roles.

Our thanks to Zvi Shefet, Chairman of the Association of Slonim Jews in Israel, for his permission to use this valuable documentary material.

Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel Committee

This description is quoted from two sources:

a) *Pinkas Slonim*, Vol. 2, from page 45
b) *Keshet Be'anan*, by Dr. Noach Kaplinsky, published in 1988, from page 163.

Dr. Kaplinsky

15 November 1941. On this day, the matter became known in all its details. The mysterious curtain was raised, not just on what happened only yesterday, but also on the events of the 17th of July. Gentiles came, among them Poles and Germans who were witnesses to the slaughter, and related that all the Jews were taken to the fields of Cieplova, where they were shot and buried in three pits.

We were thunderstruck and did not believe what we had heard, until messengers came from the graves themselves. Wounded and broken, but still alive, they succeeded in escaping from the killing fields and came back to Slonim. They told the terrible truth. Now things

were completely clear as to the murderous intentions of the Germans toward the entire Jewish people.

The first was Fuksman, a nurse from the hospital. The doctors who were on duty on that day did not know anything about what had happened until the nurse came, collapsed and fell on the bed. More and more came after her, people whose eyes reflected death. They came from the graves, half-dead, and then the fearful picture was described to us in all its aspects.

When they were transported from the city, people still deluded themselves and thought that they being taken to some Jewish enclave, where all the Jews were being assembled. By the fourth and fifth kilometer, however, they knew where they were being taken. When the cars passed over the bridge of the Szczara River, the Germans grabbed children from their mothers' arms and threw them into the water. Among the passengers was Welwel Berman. When he saw that the cars were veering off the main road, he stood up and began shouting, "Jews, they are taking us to our deaths! Jump out of the cars, you have nothing to lose!" He was the first to jump, and a bullet hit him immediately.

When they reached the fields of Cieplowa, they saw three big pits, three huge excavations in the soil of Cieplowa, ready to receive the victims of the great slaughter. Who had prepared these common graves?

In September, Hick ordered sixty men to work. This did not arouse any particular suspicion, since orders like this were daily events. When they did not return in the evening, their families began to be concerned for their fate and pressured the members of the *Judenrat* to get information about them. From then on, they began to knock on Hick's door daily, to ask about those sixty people. Hick's answer was, "Don't worry. I am responsible for the people I take to work. They will return safely." Only now, on the 14th of November, was the role and fate of the sixty clarified. They dug the common graves in Cieplowa and, when their work was finished, they were shot and thrown into the pits. They were "the pioneers who went before the camp". They dug graves for themselves and for those who came after them, nine thousand people, men, women, old and young . . .

With murderous blows from rifle butts and bayonets, the people were taken out of the cars and their clothes removed. They were made to stand near the open pits, naked as the day they were born. Then the killing began. The Germans, Lithuanians and Belarusians sat around campfires, long tables before them, drinking to intoxication and gorging. Between each glass, they let loose a volley of shots in the direction of the victims standing by the pits, and dropped them into the graves. Piles of bodies accumulated in the pits, layer on layer. Many were not killed immediately. They twitched for long hours, until they choked. There were also those who remained alive and made efforts to move from one layer to the next.

The murderers could not get enough. They sang and played musical instruments in order to drown out the screams of those who were killed, which rose to the heavens. Even the Devil had not conceived of this revelry.

The Germans did not stop oppressing their victims the whole time. They demanded that they sing Jewish tunes. As they laughed, joked and mocked the Jews, the city's beadle, Reb Awraham Mosze Melamed, who was among the victims, stood up. He recited *Kaddish* [the mourner's prayer], which everyone repeated after him, word for word. Before he was killed, Reb Awraham Mosze said the *El Malei Rachamim* prayer [for the peace of a departed soul], the last memorial prayer for the congregation of the Jews of Slonim. This well-known beadle of the city remained true to his congregation and to himself to the final moments of his life.

The killing continued all day. The shooting did not stop and the screams of the buried were heard by all the inhabitants of the area. Toward evening, their work finished, the murderers announced that anyone remaining alive could come out of the pit and go home. Many believed them and came out of the graves. They were stood up again near the graves and shot. At nightfall, the gang of murderers returned to the city. The next day, shipments of clothes from the killing field began to arrive in Slonim.

It turned out that the number of survivors reached the hundreds. Of them, many were not injured at all, and succeeded in escaping directly to their homes in the Jewish quarter. Many of them, who were wounded, fled to the municipal hospital to receive first aid. We arranged the required operations, but it was not possible to leave them there. We returned the wounded to the Jewish hospital, where they continued to care for them. The next day, the German gendarmerie came to the municipal hospital and began to investigate where the wounded were. When they learned that they were moved to the Jewish hospital, they went there and made up a list. That same night, they took the wounded out of

their hospital beds, loaded them on trucks, took them to the Cieplowa Fields and shot them again – this time – finally. No one returned.

The man in the gendarmerie who informed on the escape of the massacre's survivors to the hospital was Wanya Nasyuk, the eldest son of the former secondary school caretaker.

Nine thousand people were killed in that massacre on that short winter day of 14 November. Among them were all the residents of the old age home, as well as all the children and workers at the orphanage. It was a cold, clear day. The sun shone and the slaughterer slaughtered . . .

These are the events of the first five months after the German invasion of Slonim. And yet, the Jews of Slonim did not conclude from everything that had happened to them that the Nazis had decided to annihilate all the Jews, according to a pre-planned and prepared method. Some said that Hick the murderer did this of his own accord, and that he was harshly reprimanded by the authorities in Berlin. Others said that this was a response to the United States' decision to enter – or that it had already entered – the war. Various outlandish explanations sprouted from stunned minds. The Jews walked the streets, crushed, conducting self-examinations. Who was missing and who remained?, each asked and questioned the other. The loss of a reason for living and despair reached their heights.

While the Germans' cars continued to bring the spoils from the killing fields, the Gentile inhabitants raided homes that had been emptied of their Jewish tenants, enjoying their forfeiture. Convoy after convoy, the farmers came from nearby villages, as if they were going to market day, to a big fair. The rurals brought sacks to fill with plunder. First, they took furniture, then they took clothes and personal belongings. At a later stage, they began to dismantle the houses themselves. They removed windows, doorposts, doors and anything that could be moved.

A *Judenrat* of One Man and Constant "Panic"

A new quarter was established, fragmented and smaller. Hick again demanded the establishment of a new *Judenrat*. Of the former *Judenrat*, no one was left alive. Hick announced that there was no need for a broad *Judenrat*, or even for a panel of five people. He would make do with one.

This was a Jew named Jaliszewicz, formerly the owner of a hotel on Bridge Street, who volunteered to serve on the *Judenrat*. He had never been a community worker, but now he demonstrated self-sacrifice. He asked to be chosen, saying that he was a bachelor, alone, childless, without family, and that it was better that he should take a risk, rather than a family man. We especially appreciated this step, because we knew that by accepting this post, the man was forfeiting his life for the good of all.

Jaliszewicz, by himself, constituted the third *Judenrat*. Although he was helped by a staff of workers, he was the only one responsible *vis a vis* the Germans.

In Slonim, about half the Jewish population remained then, about twenty thousand people. The routine of a life full of sorrow and suffering continued. Now there were no longer delusions. The cruel truth had been revealed in all its nakedness. Meanwhile, every tailor was required to sew and mend the clothes and garments taken off by those killed at the Cieplowa Fields. The tailors sewed and wept for the dead. Sometimes, they knew the owners of the clothes: here was the coat of this one, and the dress of that one. From time to time, out of the pockets, they took pictures, mementos, etc. . . .

A week after the 14th of November, an S.S. detachment left Slonim, and exterminated all the Jews of the nearby town of Kozlowczyna. Only a few were saved, and reached the Jewish quarter in Slonim. Among them was Dr. Atlas, who later joined the partisans and died a hero's death. At the same time, news was received from western Poland, where there was no slaughter. And then refugees from the cities of western Poland began returning to their cities. In Bialystok, quiet prevailed; there were no *aktzias*. Nor did anything in particular happen in cities near Wolkowysk and Baranowicz. In his diligence, the contemptible Hick exceeded all his colleagues in the district. The Jews began to flee from Slonim, some to Wolkowysk, some to Bialystok. There were also refugees who returned to Warsaw.

When the Jews tried to enquire after the details of the massacre on the 14th of November, they concluded that those who hid had saved their lives. It was then decided to build special hiding places, which they called "bunkers". The tenants of each house built a bunker together. The entrance was hidden, so that in time of trouble it would be possible to hide there. A great deal of work began in the Jewish quarter, most of it done at night. Sand and bricks were brought in all kinds of

ways. They dug in the ground and put up bunkers.

Wild rumors spread. We called them, for short, "panic". Every day, when it was just getting dark and people prepared to go to bed, they asked and checked if there was any kind of "panic".

In the beginning of December, a rumor went around that the Germans were planning another *aktzia*, this time, to kill children. The reaction was spontaneous. All the women who had children began all at once to flee the city, without knowing where they were going. They did not pay heed to the prohibitions and the patrols. The same cry was heard from all of them: "They are going to slaughter the children." It was very cold and the women plodded in the snow, walking on without looking back, to escape, to flee wherever the wind blew them, just not to stay in the killing city. It was a terrible and shocking sight. In their arms, the women held their infants, bundled in all kinds of blankets and wrappings. Children who could walk were pulled after their mothers, while they held onto the hems of their dresses.

When the Germans heard of this, they immediately called on the *Judenrat*, that is, Jaliszewicz, and complained bitterly that they were being thus slandered. They would kill the man who spread this rumor. The Germans declared that what had happened on the 14th of November would not occur again, and demanded that he calm everyone down. And indeed, this time, in truth, nothing happened. After two days, the women returned to their homes. "Panics" like this came and went. There was never a day of peace and quiet. In the evening, we said if only it would be morning; and in the morning – if only it would be evening.

That same December, we had a bit of relief. Hick went to Berlin. He traveled at the head of a convoy of trucks full of the plunder of the murdered Jews of Slonim. He returned immediately after Christmas.

One winter day, all the Jews of Jeziernica came to Slonim. They had been ordered to leave the place, except for Dr. Walach, who was permitted to stay there temporarily, in his capacity as a doctor. Jews also came from other nearby towns to find work in the workshops in Slonim.

The Ghetto Under Lock and Key

One's most recent troubles cause one to forget previous ones. Again, they began distributing cards, this time in another color. This topic became all everyone talked about. Thinking that a card in this color conferred the right to exist, everyone made efforts to get the new card. The month of April 1942 came, but winter was still in force, the cold reigned and, lo, a new order: all those still outside the quarter must move. They allocated half an alley in the quarter for them. The number of those transferred was about two hundred people. These were all the doctors and their families, nurses and medical service personnel, expert tailors who worked for the Germans, watchmakers and gold and silver smiths.

Immediately thereafter, the establishment of the ghetto was declared, that is, they turned the Jewish quarter into a closed area, surrounded by barbed wire. The erection of the fence had begun in the winter. It was necessary to warm the soil, in order to insert the posts. The fence was made of double and triple iron wire, running vertically and horizontally. It surrounded the entire Jewish quarter and had two gates, for entry and exit.

The fence was built by the engineer Wolfsztajn, a refugee from Poland. They worked from morning to night, until they completed the job. These were the boundaries of the ghetto: a gate at Olenska Street between the secondary school and the Ajzensztat house; a secondary gate at the entrance to Operowa on the right; an additional secondary gate at the entrance to Operowa on the left; a gate near the maternity hospital on Operowa Street, and a barbed wire fence that stretched between these gates and included the hamlet of Zhabinka and nearby streets in Rzgowa. The end of the ghetto reached the community center (the theater) and the last bridges (in the direction of Zamosc).

Suddenly, we heard that Hick had been dismissed. The Jews were glad and drank a toast. Some saw this as a turning point and a good sign. It turned out later that this had no connection at all with the plan of annihilation hanging over our heads. The dismissal only caused a disruption of timing, as if Hick wanted to prove that without him, it was impossible to carry out the plan.

And a story within a story: a company came from Mogilyov and demanded that it be given eight hundred men for various kinds of work in that city. Kvint opposed this. He maintained that if it was certain that they were really required to work, he would agree, but that he had no faith in it. Kvint was imprisoned, but his stance was strong and brave, courageous: "I will not, by my hand, give you people. You will do to me what seems good in your eyes". The Ukrainians began a manhunt and, after three days, gathered three hundred

men from the ghetto. They were allowed to take clothing and food with them, and were taken to Mogilyov. It turned out that, this time, they really took them for forced labor, although in the end they were killed and destroyed, and only one or two of them remained alive.

The next afternoon, the ghetto was surrounded by the S.S. Hick announced that, while it was indeed necessary to punish the ghetto's inhabitants for their refusal to go to work, he was canceling the punishment this time. As proof, he was removing the patrols and demanding the return of the cards. It was an irony of fate, to see Hick as a "protector" of his Jews.

On May 1st, all the doctors were called in the middle of the night. They put them into cars without any explanation. I was also among them. We sat together without saying a word. We thought that this was our last journey. It turned out that we were called upon to treat those injured in a train accident. They did not give us details, but there were very many injured.

During the Shavuot holiday, the distribution of cards began again, this time in the color green. The cards were printed with a different text, indicating that the owner of the card was permitted to reside in the ghetto. A total of 2,500 cards was distributed. Terrible panic prevailed. The Jews immediately fortified the bunkers and camouflaged them even more. They also began to print forged cards.

Rumors spread about the partisans' activities. We learned of many vengeful acts of the partisans, and it seemed that they were harassing the Germans very tangibly. A German who left the city placed himself in danger. The partisans gained control of the entire area, and the Germans refrained from traveling at night. They traveled only during the day, in large convoys. The partisans sabotaged the railroad track and derailed trains. They killed garrison forces and members of the German regime in villages. They attacked food shipments intended for Germans, taking them for themselves. We saw that the Germans' pride was broken. Every evening, the Germans slept in the large shelter in the post office building, afraid of surprise attacks by the partisans at night.

Rumors also increased about a second front about to open in western Europe. The Germans wandered around despondently, and signs of indifference could be seen in them. The guards were removed, and the Jews left and entered the ghetto unsupervised.

All this instilled a spirit of hope. It seemed as if events were coming that would change our situation for the better.

Rittmaier

In the middle of January, a new S.S. commandant, named Rittmaier, appeared in Slonim. He walked around the city armed with an automatic pistol. He had the face of a sadist, and the Jews wondered about the nature of this beast. On the third day after he came, he entered one of the workshops and saw a bottle of milk sticking out of the pocket of one of the workers, Lejbel Cipin, the son of the shoemaker Cipin from Jurezyka, who worked in the carpentry shop on Rybacka Street. The villain's face darkened, "How is this, the Jews still have milk?" He raised his weapon and killed him on the spot. An encounter with this animal entailed mortal danger. Once, when he was walking in the street and saw a group of Jews, he shot them immediately. The Jews began to leave the ghetto less frequently. They tried to find a way of getting at this fellow, but in vain. In no way was it possible to get to him.

On the morning of 21 June, some Poles outside the ghetto were arrested. What did this mean? Had the Germans directed their activities toward the Poles? It was said that a Polish organization had been discovered in the city.

At the end of June, an order was given to the *Judenrat* to produce a few dozen gold rubles. A Polish clerk who worked in the work-office also told us that they were going to transfer six doctors to Minsk. Although the order had not been officially published yet, through her contacts with the German manager, she knew for certain that there was room for concern. We gathered immediately for a consultation, in which the head of the work-office, Gerszon Kvint, also participated. While we were talking, someone came in and told us that many cars were coming into the city. Kvint expressed his opinion that this was not worth our serious attention. The Polish clerk probably meant to extort money and, as to the cars, they were for the partisans. On that night, 28 June, we finished collecting the sum of gold imposed on us and brought it to the *Judenrat*. Commander Kvint was in a good mood and told a few jokes.

At nine that night, when we returned through the streets of the ghetto, we felt disquiet. Jews stood near the doors of the buildings, in a "panic", without knowing why. That night, at 3 A.M., I woke to the noise of cars. It was possible to peer out of the ghetto from the

windows of my room. I looked and saw that there was a great deal of traffic in the city; cars, cars without end. I hurried down to the ghetto and saw that all the inhabitants were awake and on their feet, feeling that something was about to happen.

29 June 1942 – The Massacre Begins in the Petrelowicz Fields

At four in the morning, the ghetto was surrounded by armed companies along the entire length of the fence. At five, a loud trumpet blast was heard. From the window, I saw whole convoys of tanks and trucks full of gendarmes approaching the main gate of the ghetto. We felt trapped. There was no hole or breach in the fence through which we could flee and escape. The iron wires were strong. One boy tried to get out through the wire network, took a bullet and died on the spot.

Kvint, head of the work-office – as was his official title – stood as usual at his post near the gate, on the ghetto side. He gave the order to get into the bunkers and hide. In a minute, the ghetto emptied and no one was seen in the street. Only Kvint and his helpers continued to stand near the gate, among them Maks Rabinowicz (the son of Joel), Misza Luz, commander of the ghetto police, and the engineer Wolfsztajn.

Suddenly, in came the first car and after it, the second, in which sat Rittmaier, the murderer. He got out of the car, took a few steps in Kvint's direction and asked in a loud voice, "How are things, Kvint?" He [Kvint] walked toward him, his hand raised toward his hat, in order to remove it. But he never did. Two or three bullets, fired at him by Rittmaier from his pistol at a distance of a few centimeters, put an end to his life. He fell, wallowing in his own blood. With my own eyes, I saw him immediately after, lying at the gate of the ghetto, his arms extended, his hat knocked off his head, as if to say, "You will enter the ghetto over my dead body . . ." Eye witnesses said that Rittmaier bent over the dead Kvint and asked, "And what do you have to say now, Kvint?", and fired another bullet at the lifeless body . . .

Hundreds of thugs streamed into the ghetto, among them Germans, Latvians, Lithuanians and Ukrainians, armed with axes, hatchets and other tools. There were also clerks from all the offices, called up for the last battle with the Jews of the Slonim Ghetto.

When they burst into the narrow streets of the ghetto, they did not see anyone. They went into the houses and brought out a few who had not hidden. They did not find the rest. Where are the Jews?, the murderers asked each other. The Germans began running around in the streets, shouting at the tops of their lungs, "Jews, come out of hiding!"

I was an eyewitness, and also heard all these things, because I did not hide. They brought me out of the house and stood me in the street, together with about three or four other people, who had also not hidden. They turned us over to a company of Latvians, who brought us through an alley to the main gate of the ghetto. There, near the gate, we saw the body of Kvint and understood that the fate of the ghetto was sealed. They made us run up to the bridge. Here, we were arranged in two rows, near the former boat-station, known as Abramka Mosze's. There, on the bank of the river, our group, numbering a few dozen people, was turned over to the murderer, Rittmaier. With me then were Sonja, my wife Zahawa's sister, my little girl and her nanny.

Not twenty minutes had gone by since we were standing there, when suddenly I saw Hans Zajfeld (a young German soldier, a medical student, polite and obliging, responsible for medical matters of the German garrison in Slonim, who was on a friendly and professional footing with the Jewish doctors there) coming at a run. He came over to me and asked, "What are you doing here?" "What am I doing here? They took me!", I said. He went over to Rittmaier and began to argue with him, "I cannot be without him," he said, "They help me. I need doctors. I need them." Finally, Rittmaier became reconciled; he stood us on the side and ordered that no one touch us. And so, most unexpectedly, we were saved from the heavy fire of that day, thanks to Hans Zajfeld, the German, who had passed by chance. All that day, he toiled to find additional doctors and take them from the fire.

Meanwhile, other Jews were brought to us. To this day, I can still see the noble figure of the Rebbetzin, the widow of Rabbi Fein, being rudely pushed toward the bridge. The shooting does not stop. We also hear explosions of grenades. The entire ghetto turned into a battlefield. From the other side of the River Szczara, Ukrainians and Lithuanians run like lunatics, looking for Jews, but not finding them.

The Ghetto Goes Up in Flames

And then began the burning of the ghetto in the section between the bridges, the well-known "island". The wild beasts went from house to house, poured

kerosene on the houses and set them on fire. The houses in the ghetto were, for the most part, built of wood. After a quarter of an hour, they had all caught fire, with heavy smoke bursting from them and billowing skyward. Blood and fire and pillars of smoke! Those who were hidden were forced to leave their hideouts under the burning houses. From the distance, I saw them coming out: tens, hundreds, men, women, old and young. The Germans grabbed the infants and threw them directly into the fire, and made the adults run on. Any description of an inferno pales in comparison to this fearful spectacle.

They kept our group at the bank of the river all day. We stood there, and before our eyes trod the death march of the community of Slonim by groups, according to the how they were taken out of their hideouts: all ages, all classes, the healthy, the sick – supported by their relatives, the elderly with verses of the Psalms on their lips. Here was the staff of the Jewish hospital, the last Jewish institution in the history of the Jews of Slonim. They walked together toward death: doctors, nurses and service personnel. Around them were many soldiers, armed from head to toe, soldiers of all colors of the rainbow of the enlightened European nations – Germans, Lithuanians, Latvians, Ukrainians, Poles, Belarusians – faithfully fulfilling the task of the destruction of the Jews. The hospital, with all the patients in it that day, was blown up and completely burned.

Here and there we see familiar faces, and they are all rigid, as if the spirit of their lives was taken from them even before they reached the place of the slaughter. All the time – gunfire, bombs, fire and smoke!

The ghetto went up in flames and the gunfire deafened our ears. The date: 29 June 1942, a clear and hot summer day, although from time to time, a lively, brief summer rain came down. It was a Catholic vacation day, and they stood in their holiday clothes on the other side of the barbed-wire fence and watched the "great event" of the destruction of the Jews, actually taking place right before their eyes. The companies led over the bridges, on both sides pillars of fire and smoke from the burning houses, and the direction – east to Petrelowicz, the village near Zamosc. The soil of Petrelowicz absorbed on that day – slaughtered the life's blood of thousands of the new victims.

In the afternoon, they made our group run over the bridge, too. We were forced to run continuously, while the Latvians rained blows down on us from all sides with the sticks in their hands. We ran over the bridges, the heat from the burning ghetto like molten iron on our flesh, until we reached the courtyard opposite the Catholic church in Zamosc. About fifty people were there, men only, who remained after a rigorous selection intended to keep only expert professionals and workmen alive. Many men waived the right to life, joined their wives and children and went toward Petrelowicz, never to return. Many, many chose death and did not desert their beloved families.

Another picture from this courtyard is etched in my memory. There was a young couple with a baby; one of the Germans said that they needed them. They added the man to our group, and told the woman to go out with her baby. The man refused to go without his wife and baby. When the Germans failed to persuade him to part from his wife, they pushed him roughly toward them, and they both fell on the ground. They sat there and, with rigid faces, waited for their transfer from there. They sat without exchanging a word between them. The baby nursed from its mother's breast, a sort of last supper. They had an otherworldly look. Soon enough, a convoy arrived at the place. The Germans pushed them out, and they were swallowed in the crowds taken out of the city, to a place no one knew about then.

Toward evening, we were taken to Goldenberg's factory. Sick and exhausted, we stretched out on the floor and stayed there all night, lying there mutely. No one spoke. Each was occupied with the deep burden in his heart. We did not feel hunger or thirst. We could not sleep. From the window, we saw the last survivors of the burning ghetto. Our hearts went out to all those still lying in the bunkers, not yet found, and to the thousands who were taken out in a few hours and had disappeared forever in the fields of Petrelowicz.

The next day, they arranged us in rows and distributed numbered cards, which meant that we had a permit to stay alive. They took us into the P.K.O. (the Polish Army recruitment office) building. We had to pass muster with those cards of life in hand many times, to prevent any infiltration. When they transferred us to the ghetto, we numbered 180 people.

The slaughter continued. One company of twenty people engaged in gathering corpses and transferring them, another company dealt with shipping possessions. There were still Jews in the bunkers. Poles and Belarusians walked around looking for them. They used all kinds of "tricks". The sound of a crying child or a

cough was an unmistakable sign. Around the ghetto, near the fence, stood many of the local Polish population, who came to see the spectacle. They looked on indifferently as Jews were taken from the bunkers, despoiled of their property and led to the slaughter.

Many came out of the bunkers on their own, for lack of water to slake their thirst. The police gathered those who remained and collected them in one place, the city jail.

I had a card. After many efforts, I was able to visit the prison where my family was, together with many hundreds of the inhabitants of Slonim. I had heard about my father-in-law's severe illness and succeeded in getting in, hoping that I might be able to give him medical assistance, as well as smuggle some sort of food in for the hungry and thirsty. I cannot describe what I saw. Sweating crowds of prisoners – Poles and Belarusians (not one German was among them) – ran about everywhere, in the cells and in the courtyard, shouting and screaming, abusing the Jews, pushing them and beating them for no reason. Jews – hungering for bread and thirsting for water – came out of their cells, thrusting watches, rings and other valuables at the guards, and pleading for a slice of bread or a little drinking water. The guards took their belongings and, in exchange, gave their victims murderous blows and chased them back into their cells.

In the cell I was led into were about a hundred people – shadows of people – with staring eyes and faces full of pain, sorrow and grief. This was the third day we had not eaten, and the two loaves of bread I managed to get were immediately divided among the children. I stood among them, broken and shattered, while they looked to me for a spark of final hope, and I – while tears spilled from my eyes at the sound of silent weeping that rose from every corner of the cell – I did not have even one word of encouragement!

The hunt continued for fifteen days. Every two or three days, they took the prisoners out to the prison courtyard; again, a selection of professions, and the rest they led to common graves. On the 15th of July, the *aktzia* ended.

This was the campaign of Rittmaier, who orchestrated the whole "action". The ghetto's boundaries shrank again. Only twenty houses remained, into which those who remained alive crammed themselves. We were 800 legal people, cardholders, and about another 1,000 illegal people, those who had stayed in the bunkers and were saved. For the fifteen days of the hunt and the slaughter, they succeeded in protecting their hideouts and withstood hunger, thirst and inhuman suffering. They were human skeletons, and the tiny portions of bread the cardholders received were distributed between everyone.

But the Angel of Death in the shape of Rittmaier had still not said "Enough". One night in the month of July 1942, at four in the morning, a roar from the courtyard where I lived reached my ears. This was an order from Rittmaier. All cardholders had to come out of the houses and present themselves in the courtyard.

We went out. Rittmaier announced that this was the last day and last chance to get cards. Whoever did not have a card was to come out and follow him. Not many took advantage of his offer, but a few dozen believed his promise and came out. Rittmaier led them into the first ghetto and in the middle of the street, shot and killed them all. This was his last action in Slonim. After this, he got into a car and left Slonim forever.

The *aktzia* that began on 29 June 1942 ended on 15 July. According to our calculations, ten thousand people were annihilated in this period.

No one thought of imposing order in the small ghetto that remained. All thoughts were given over to the possibility of escape. Attempts were made to contact the partisans. There was an alleyway on Podgorna Street through which we received news and letters. This was the way we received news from Dr. Blumowicz, who had left the ghetto earlier, including details and instructions. Everyone began planning to leave the valley of killing.

At that time, the following incident took place: a company of Jewish workers was sent to empty one of the houses in the ghetto. Somehow, two partisans managed to sneak into the company, equipped with work cards and yellow badges. They went into the houses, took a crate and prepared to take it out. There was a machine gun in the crate, and the partisans wanted to smuggle it out. At the last minute, the Germans found out about this. The partisans managed to escape, but the Jewish workers were taken to the jail and executed.

Besides escaping to the forests, to the partisans, some escaped to districts of the Reich. News was received that somehow the Jews survived there. Among the Christians were found those who could help one escape, who, in exchange for money, took people to different towns. When the refugees of Slonim got there and told about the extermination, no one believed them.

In conversations with eyewitnesses, too, the Jews of the Bialystok district did not believe their ears and claimed that there were probably special reasons for killing the Jews of Slonim . . .

The Burial Stone Seals our Community on Yom Kippur 1943

At the end of the month of July, I, too, left Slonim. Since then, my fate was severed from the fate of the hundreds of survivors of the large Slonim community who remained in the seventeen-house ghetto. We went our separate ways; both were covered with blood. The chapter of my wanderings to Wolkowysk, my days in the concentration camp near Wolkowysk, my escape from there, and the eighteen months of life hiding* in villages and forests, in attics and cellars, until my wonderful rescue when the region was liberated by the Soviet Army – these were my lot. Those who remained of the Slonim Ghetto, satiated with acts of spite and abuse, were shot and murdered in two additional *aktzias*. One was on the 7th of Elul 5702 (1942), when about 400 were killed. The second was on Yom Kippur 1943. On this holy day, the Slonim Ghetto was destroyed to the last Jew. On that day, the burial stone sealed the holy community of Slonim.

Until my emigration to Israel, I had to contend with two difficult questions. One was the disturbing question heard from many: "Why did you go like lambs to the slaughter?" The second was the label of betrayal and treachery that stuck to the *Judenrat*. Then I told of the three *Judenräte* that operated in my native city.

The Jewish population in my native city was about 30,000 people. In that city, a total of three *Judenräte* operated. The first was comprised of elected people, and the second of volunteers, although we already knew the fate of their predecessors. They did not reap advantages from their positions, except, perhaps, for the addition of a portion of the regular food that was allocated. These people did not abuse their office. Are they worthy now of disgrace? On the contrary. They are worthy of praise and we will exalt the memory of their work! During my wanderings, I came across another three or four *Judenräte*, and I did not find traitors or collaborators among them. Indeed, there were such people, without a doubt. King Solomon said, "Or can one walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be scorched?" It is possible that here and there, there were people who abused their positions. But from this, to labeling one a traitor, the distance is great!

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* Dr. Kaplinsky and his friend, Dr. Reznik, were saved thanks to the help of two Poles – Mrs. Czernik and Aczer Stanislaw Boslowicz – in the district of the village of Kremianica near the city of Wolkowysk.



August 5, 1991: A group of Ostrolenkan Jews from Israel and the United States visit the memorial of The Jews (among them many Ostrolenkans) murdered in the fields of Petrelovicz, near Slonim

Chaya Sojka-Jablonka, Tel Aviv

Our Bunker in the Bialystok Ghetto

Autumn 1943. For nearly two months, the city of Bialystok has been *Judenrein* (cleansed of Jews). The last thirty thousand Jews of the ghetto were sent to Treblinka and Auschwitz by the Germans. We, a group of forty-three men, women and children, are in an underground bunker at 28 Jurowicka Street. It is dark, crowded and stifling in this living grave. During the whole day, we sit in absolute silence, pressed against each other. Only our breathing is heard. Even the little children are frightened into silence, lest we be heard above . . . Only when darkness descends, and the heavy steps of the cruel patrols are no longer heard in the street above, do hunger and thirst stir in us. The brave and nimble (the first, my sister-in-law, Chaja, my brother Aron's wife, now named Kajman and living in America) jump out – and up – through the small opening. During the day, this small, secret door protects us from the enemy. At night, it opens the skies to us. How many hopes, dreams and prayers of thanks did forty-three souls hang upon that door that saved us . . .

With sharpened senses, we inspect the area. It is quiet outside, a starless night. The air is pure and refreshing. In twos and threes, we go out to search the empty apartments for food. We find a bag of barley, a few potatoes, some slices of dry bread, a little sugar. In the vegetable gardens, we look for the last tomatoes, onions, potatoes. There is less and less food every day. In the closets and drawers of the Jewish homes we find many things, but the most important is missing – food. We return sadly from our search, with empty bags. Disappointed, I meet the large blue-gray eyes of my daughter, Judyt, and the sparkling black eyes of my son, Luszek, which are half-dulled. The faces of my two children are gaunt and withered.

The late November frost has not left vegetation in the gardens. We are all gripped by fear, sadness and despair. Hunger knocks on our magic door. We dream of bread – fresh, real bread. My sister-in-law says that there is a sack full of flour somewhere in the attic of an empty apartment. This sack does not let us rest. We think about how much bread and strength it could give us. The quarrels in the bunker would stop, the quiet ones could speak up more, the children would smile, the strong would be satisfied, the weak kept alive. The anxious would be calmed and sleep a bit. It would bring patience and relief to forty-three souls.

My parents, of blessed memory, had a flour mill in Ostrolenka. From childhood, I have loved soft, delicate, fragrant white flour. It was always tied to happy fantasies for me. Now, the sack of flour in the deserted attic awoke completely different longings – that there would be bread to satisfy my daughter, Judyt, my son, Luszek, my sister, Lea (who lives in Australia today), and her husband, Miron Brejtbart, my brother, Mosze Aron, and his wife and children, Szlomit and Niuni, me and all those living in this dark, dirty, airless hole. And all those who were hungry and suffering.

There were five healthy men in the bunker with us: Jakow Lachowicz from Ostrolenka, 27 years old, broad-shouldered, with a full, golden head of hair; Michael from Sokol, who we nicknamed The Wood Man because he had lived in the forest for ten months and had come to Bialystok to take his mother back there with him. He "got lucky", and came in time for the last *aktzia*. The third was Mojerman, a big, tall young man from Grodno – a giant. We called him the The Tank, because of his size and because the ground shook under him as he walked, as always, barefoot. The fourth was Zalman Wajncymer from Szczuczyna – thin and quick. The fifth was my brother, Mosze Aron, considered one of the heroes of the forest before the war. (My husband, Motel, was already dead by then. He was one of the first victims, taken by the Germans on Sabbath, 12 July 1941, together with one thousand other Jewish men.)

My sister-in-law, Helen, tried to persuade them to bake bread in the little bakery near us, at 5 Ciepla Street. The house was low, so the tall buildings around it would hide the smoke. The German guards did not patrol at night. She was decisive, speaking with complete confidence and I tried to support her. Finally, everyone agreed to the adventure. We decided to go to the bakery at night, and check the conditions and the

possibility of the daring and dangerous campaign.

We hung sacks and sheets on the bakery's windows for camouflage and switched on the electric light. There were three sacks of flour, as well as firewood. My sister-in-law put on a large apron. I rolled up my sleeves, and scrubbed and washed the crates. She poured out the flour, mixed it with water and we left it to ferment until the next night.

The next day, we had a consultation: who would bake the bread, who would stoke the oven, who would stand guard, etc. We decided that each family would send representatives in proportion to its size. That evening, in total darkness, we went out to the bakery at 5 Ciepla Street, an organized group of ten people.

The baking was done quickly and nimbly. Five pairs of hands kneaded the beautiful dough. The flames lit the room and the wood crackled merrily, like in the good old days. Faces were flushed, the mood lightened, we even joked. Forty-four round loaves were laid on long, narrow boards, waiting to be placed in the oven. My sister-in-law, Chaja, and I went outside to relieve Sonja, who stood guard. Outside, it was dark and completely quiet all around. Suddenly, we thought we could discern two black shadows. Were they two trees? They moved and came closer. Our hearts beat faster. I quickly entered the bakery to warn about the approaching danger. We switched off the light and everyone dispersed. We two remained behind. We didn't run. We stood behind the door, pressed against the wall. Through a crack, I saw two figures slowly coming closer. They crossed the threshold and whispered something in Yiddish. We breathed a sigh of relief. I went out and asked them who they were. When they heard my voice, one of them grabbed my hand and began kissing it. He said in a trembling voice, "Jews, we've found Jews!" My sister-in-law came out and using our signal – three clicks of the tongue – called those who had hidden. We were overjoyed.

The two young men had come from their hiding place at 20 Neuwelt Street. They thought that no Jews were left in the ghetto besides themselves. They smelled the aroma of fresh bread, which brought them to us. Each told us about his experiences. We did not notice when the door opened and two more young men and a young woman came in from another hiding place. They marveled at our idea of baking bread and our daring, enjoying the fragrance coming from the oven.

The loaves were ready – beautiful and shining, although they were black, instead of reddish, and moist and sticky inside. But who cared? The two young men went off contented, with two loaves in their hands. The others asked us for the leftover fermented dough and the key to the bakery, so they could bake bread the next night. The idea spread among the bunkers and, every night, another bunker baked bread. Judyt and Luszek also joined the adventure and helped carry the baked bread to the bunker. We were the heroes of all the children. They were happy, they ate and their eyes shone.

Could the taste of the finest cakes have been better than the taste of that sticky bread with the black crusts?

Suddenly – disaster. No more water and electricity. The Germans cut off everything in the empty ghetto. Our struggle was for nothing, we were lost!

The next morning, in the neighboring yard at 26 Jurowicka Street, twenty-five people came out and waved white sheets in surrender. These were the Rudy, Pleban, Finkelsztejn and Zalmanowicz families and others. As we were in no rush to turn ourselves over to the Germans, we searched for ideas. We hoped that in the big vat at the bakery there was still water. Groping in the dark, we tried to open the tap. Not a drop. Maybe lower down? We wrapped a long stick with a towel and lowered it into the vat. It came up dry. Our silence was bitter.

Thirty meters from us was the garden of the *Judenrat*, where vegetables were planted. At the time of the last expulsion of Jews from the ghetto, a struggle took place there between a Jewish self-defense group and the Germans. The barbed wire fences were destroyed. I suggested that we look for vegetables in the garden. Maybe we would be lucky enough to find something. We groped in the darkness, walking on unfamiliar ground. Suddenly, we stepped into some water. Checking, we discovered that it was a spring, covered by thick groundcover. Nearby, we found a bucket and a jug. We pushed aside the cover and drew clear, refreshing water. We tasted it – the water was cold and good, although mixed with vegetation. We stopped looking for tomatoes and onions, and ran to the bunker with the water, happy as Robinson Crusoe.

At the hideout, we were ecstatic. Some even wept with joy. Everyone surrounded the bucket, as if it was a great treasure. Saved again! That very night, we told those living in other bunkers of our great discovery. We clicked our tongues three times and told of the miracle.

Unfortunately, the struggle for our lives ended badly. On the 5th of November, Miron Brejtbart left the

bunker to look for food at a nearby house. The German patrol saw him there, followed him and saw where he went. Thus, our hideout was discovered. After a few minutes, a group of Germans arrived. They led us to the Gestapo, and from there to the prison in Bialystok.

In prison, there were a few hundred Jews, who the Germans had found in bunkers, hideouts and the forest. My little boy, Luszek, was sick with typhus and pneumonia even before, in the bunker. He could barely drag himself along on his weak legs to the prison, where after three days (on the 8th of November), in the prison "hospital", he gave up his pure soul. My daughter, Judyt, Peszka Lewin-Frydman, Jakow Lachowicz and two other young men left the bunker before we were discovered, to escape from the ghetto to the forest, to the partisans. To my sorrow, fate decreed that they should be caught by the murderous Germans.

We were sent from the prison to concentration camps: Stutthof, Ravensbrück and others. Only ten of the forty-three in our bunker remained alive.

The fates of those in other bunkers in the Bialystok Ghetto were much worse.

Helen Kajman, New York

The Last Laugh of the Children of Ostrolenka

The Jews of Ostrolenka were given a period of twenty-four hours to leave the city. A heavy cloud of sorrow and desolation lowered on Ostrolenka's Jews. The skies, too, were cloudy and threatening on that autumn day of 1939. Men, women and children, loaded with bundles, sacks and implements, left their homes and all their property forever. No one imagined that this was the beginning of the road of their suffering and torture, the end of which was destruction. From 1939 to 1941, the Jews of Ostrolenka lived in Slonim, Brisk, Bialystok, Lomza, Szczuczyna and other cities in Soviet-occupied Poland. Their lives were hard and bitter. But the real suffering began after the Germans occupied Poland. The systematic destruction of the Jewish population did not skip the Jews of Ostrolenka.

A small group of Jews from Ostrolenka was in Bialystok, among them the families of Motel Zutkiewicz, Mosze Aron Sojka, Ben Cyjon Pianko, Mosze Litwer, Jakow Lachowicz, Lewin and others. Some of the men were among those caught on that infamous Sabbath (2,000 men were caught on the first Sabbath after the entry of the Germans), some of them in the first expulsion *aktzia*, others in the *Judenrein* (cleansed of Jews) campaign.

Eleven Ostrolenkans were in the group of forty-four Jews imprisoned in one cell in the prison in Bialystok. Among them were ten children, four from Ostrolenka. Earlier hardships, living in the underground bunker at 28 Jurowicka Street for three months – erased any sign of happiness from the children's faces.

The first day that we came to the prison, the 16th of November 1943, the children became refreshed. Here, things were a little different from our dark hideout. There, it was crowded and stifling, and we had to keep absolutely silent. Here was a big, light room, although it was in a cellar. It was possible to move around undisturbed, to talk aloud and to read to Mother and Grandmother. There were four closed windows now, and their small eyes soon got used to the light.

The children spent all day near the narrow windows. They saw snow, and were happy and wondered at it. White snow, airy and glittering. Their small eyes glowed, a faint blush appeared on their cheeks. "I want to play in the snow", said little Mirele. Szmuelik had an idea. With jumps like a squirrel's, he reached the corner of the cell, where an old broom stood. The children plucked the twigs one by one and using them, drew a bit of white snow through the bars. Whoever succeeded in holding a bit of snow in his thin hand, was a hero in the eyes of the others. They asked him, "Give me a lick, let me hold a drop of snow . . . "

The creaking of the door and the appearance of the

food pot made the children forget the snow. Each of them grabbed whatever came to hand as a vessel: a rusty bowl, a jar, a small pot. A tumult began. The food distributor, Antosiewicz, a blond, tall Gentile with a wide mustache, made sure that no one fooled him and that no one got two portions of soup. He distributed the food sparingly, skimming the thin soup off the top. The happy ones who gave him clothes, watches and money got the thick part, potatoes, cabbage and carrots, which Antosiewicz scraped from the bottom of the pot with the help of a can attached to a long stick.

My small son, Emanuel Sojka, four and a half years old, was a very smart child. He found a grosz in his pocket, and bravely gave it to Antosiewicz, asking for a bit more soup – but returned shamefaced to his place, with a sour face and an empty bowl . . .

In the prison cell, was a long row of beds, one right next to the other. Each bed was a hard metal frame, without a bit of straw or another covering. Every night, we thought that this might be our last night and that from here, we would be taken out to be executed. How was it possible to lie on bare boards? People lay close to each other, four in a bed, to preserve their body heat. The most miserable were the children. I had two: ten-year-old Szlomit and four-year-old Emanuel-"Niuni". I placed my son on top of me, so that his body would not touch the hard boards, while placing my arms, instead of a pillow, under Szlomit's head. Her face was palely translucent, there were dark circles under her eyes, her arms and legs as thin as sticks. Only a short time ago, she had begun to develop so nicely . . . My heart was torn in me and my tears washed her pale face. Suddenly, she opened her eyes and looked at me with deep sadness. "Szlomit, my child, do you blame me? I won't be able to help you, I won't be able to save you." She trembled like a fallen leaf, as she did in the bunker when danger hovered over our heads. My heart bursting with pain, helpless, I am afraid to move, so as not to disturb Niuni in his sleep. Yesterday, he asked me, "Will we never see Father again? Will I never sleep in my bed again?" He does not cry, he does not ask for anything. I talk to him, promise him, and tears choke my throat. My small son believes me and hopes. My unfortunate son, pure soul, innocent of any transgression. You have not tasted even one good day in your short life, my little Jew. For what reason do we deserve this? Answer me, God!

Niuni wakes up by himself. Young and old use a covered bucket that stands in a corner of the cell for a toilet. Although my two children can manage by themselves, I go with them each time they go to the pail. I do not want to leave them for a moment. I am afraid and know for certain that some day, some moment, death will separate us.

Two weeks pass this way. Luszek Zutkiewicz, a blond, twelve-year-old boy, a beautiful child, who dreamed of living through the war as a shepherd in a village, is taken to the prison hospital, suffering from high fever. In great pain, he gave up his young, pure soul in his last words to his mother, Chaja Zutkiewicz. All of us in prison received the sad news with great pain.

The cell opposite us is full of Jewish women and children from Bialystok, Grodno and Orodok and other towns. In cells opposite, there are Jewish men. For a gold coin, dollars or silver, the guard allows the women to meet with their husbands or their sons, and the daughters with fathers. These hurried meetings enable hugs, kisses and sometimes passing a portion of bread. For bread, the men sell everything; some of them were even left without trousers. The Polish prison guards do not a bad business with the 312 Jews rotting in the cellars. Sometimes, they chat with us and tell us that there are still many in the cellars who were sentenced to death.

One evening, the door opened and five people were thrown into our cell: three women and two children. These were Berta Fuks, Manja Tankus and the young doctor, Feta Fuks (presently in Israel – Mrs. Turek) – the daughters of the textile industrialist Fuks. The children were Salus Najman, five years old, and his cousin, Tankus, nine years old. In the ghetto, we lived next door to them, on Jurowicka Street. My children were happy to see little Salus. But these two children were unable to walk, they had to be carried. We learned that they were in an attic for three months. There was a bunker in that building which the Germans discovered during the first days after the *aktzia*. The Germans fired into the bunker and wounded a Jew from Grodno named Yosem. The others fled in panic and in their great haste, Awraham Najman forgot his little son, Salus. He remained in the bunker another day and night, clinging to the corpse.

The Jews in the attic heard their neighbors being chased. The next day, they decided to go down to the bunker and look for any food left there. Suddenly, they found the terrified child there and took him with them to the attic.

Their condition was much harder than in our bunker. They did not have food or water. They did not dare go out at night to look for vegetables in the *Judenrat*'s garden. They ate uncooked groats and, in an ingenious way, succeeded in baking thin, flat breads from dough made of cereal flour and rainwater. Berta Fuks, a young woman of rare beauty, told me that she had only one wish: to drink water to repletion before she died. Later, they were discovered and brought to our jail cell.

Over the three months, the boys lost strength in their legs. Salus looked on with envy at the other children running about the big cell. Only once did I see him with a smile on his face. This was during one of the children's games. They caught the biggest one among them and made believe that he was a German. They tied his hands, pushed him, hit him and ordered him to cry and kneel down. Salus burst out laughing and said, "Shoot him, the German!"

I participated in all the children's games, and in their conversations and quarrels. There was no time left to take care of my mother and my two sisters, who were with us in the cell. My mother prayed, and her pale lips whispered, "I am leading seven children to the wedding canopy. . ." (three daughters and four grandchildren). My sisters stroked and combed their children's hair, and talked to other women.

It was sad in the prison at dusk. People sat silent, each in his place. From time to time, the silence was ended by plaintive singing. Sara Numberg sang *Eli, Eli*, and this warm prayer touched all of us to the point of tears. In the cell, darkness prevailed. Here and there, a groan was heard. Someone asked, "Can someone else sing?" My daughter, who sat on my knees, in my arms, began to sing Pesach Kaplan's ghetto song, *Rivkaleh Die Shabesdike*. Everyone listened intently. From the depths of her little heart, her thin voice, expressing longing and love, shattered the darkness and the heavy atmosphere in our cell.

When she finished, she said to me, "I sang to my father. Every evening, we will hug each other like this and sing, just like I did today. Right, Mother?"

Sometimes we lay like this, my children's heads on my body and their hands in mine. I heard the beating of their hearts, and felt the warmth of their bodies. I breathed in their breaths. A mysterious voice whispered to me every day, every hour, "Enjoy them as long as they are yours, for death will separate you any day." Terrible thoughts, accompanied by pain that is hard to describe.

For a moment, I fell asleep and dreamed a dream. I saw a stormy sea, with black and red waves. Then, the sea calmed and became blue again. And here I was, in my new home, in a beautiful room. Around me were works of art, flowers, luxury, but I was there alone . . . Suddenly, I woke up and hugged my children tightly to my heart. I was so happy to be lying with them on the hard boards of the prison.

That was the last evening with my children. All the children crammed into one corner. Two new children arrived – two brothers, eleven and five years old. Little Mojszele told us that his father sewed shoes. During the *aktzia*, when the Germans found his parents, who had hidden, he, Mojszele, hid under the bed. For two days, he lay there. Then a new gang of Germans came and found him. They asked him to come out, but he did not move from his place. One German gave him bread and real chocolate, and Mojszele came out. The Germans brought him to the prison.

Then, his older brother told us what had happened to him. He was on a train, with his mother and father. People pushed and it was very crowded. The boy was pushed and reached the narrow window of the railroad car. His father helped him and he jumped out. The train traveled on, and he remained lying in a ditch, because he could not run. The Germans found him there and brought him to the prison. Here, he met his little brother, Mojszele. The two brothers trembled with the cold; their hands were blue, frozen. The little one, beautiful and sweet as a girl, could not yet pronounce the letter "K".

Later, our children told them their own experiences. My son, Niuni, spoke aloud, clearly and beautifully. Everyone listened to him. I lay not far from the gathering of the children. Niuni brought his new friend to me and introduced me to him proudly, "You see, this is my mother!"

It was already late and everyone waited impatiently for the evening soup. Because hunger pricked us, we wanted to taste hot food. For us, this black soup, made of coarse flour, had the taste of paradise. We thought that if we remained alive, we could never ask for anything better. But as if in spite, the door did not open and the food did not arrive. The children, who were already tired, gave up on the food and wanted to sleep. To encourage them, we began telling them stories. They listened, enchanted, to [tales of] the princess and the frog, the woodcutter and his seven children, and others.

Niuniele stood close to me, beaming with joy, because his mother knew such beautiful stories.

The pot of food still did not come. The children were awake, and no longer wanted to sleep. We asked each of them tell a story. Mojszele told the tale of the wolf and the dwarves which he had heard from his mother; he told it, each time exchanging a "K" for a "T". All the children laughed at him. The atmosphere in the room became lighthearted and merry. Each child told whatever he remembered. Finally, the boy, Szepsele, did magic and clown's tricks, screwed up his face – and all the children rolled with laughter. A real theater! This was our children's last laugh. They fell asleep hungry.

The next morning, a Thursday in December 1943, our children were cruelly taken away from us. Forty-four children, of 312 Jews.

A tumult began in the prison – S.S. men, Polish clerks with lists, armed Ukrainians in uniform. The pursuit and the uproar so affected us, that while it was happening, we did not even cry; instead, we protested. Silent and terrified, the children stood in a row not far from us, along the long hallway of the prison.

Only in the dark railroad cars did knowledge and understanding come. Then, too, I could not cry. To this day, I envy those who have enough tears. To this day, the last laugh of our dear, sweet children echoes in my ears . . .




Ghetto

They Drove Us from the City

From the series of poems, *Kaddish* and *My City*, devoted to the expulsion of the Jews of Ostrolenka. The city was cleansed of Jews upon the entry of the Germans, before the ghettos, the crematoria and the selections.

They drove us from the city –
Even before the enemy burned with his rage
And Majdanek appeared in the world.
Even before the enemy expelled us to the end of the road –
This was before the Nazi Satan invented
Satanic plans with impure rules.

They drove us from the city –
From a city of sun, interwoven with a tinge of gold,
Before the enemy slaughtered . . .
To be a Jew his eye "pierced" like a lance –
The place of a Jew burned his feet.

They drove us from the city –
Without a reason, without any sin,
Father, mother and child walked together then.
They drove us from the city –
From the town, they drove us –
Before they were buried alive, they did not resist –
The dear ones, the loved ones, and the earth was silent.
They drove us from the city –
Even before Icchak Katzenelson sang his song in anger, song –
The lamentation "The Jewish People is Destroyed" . . .
Even before Rabbi Zeitlin was sanctified in a prayer shawl and phylacteries
In the fire of martyrdom. And Yisroel Shtern, the poet,
Close to God – understood the cruelty of the heavens, the
Mockery . . .
(My townsman suffocated in the gas chambers, his assertions that in the heavens
There are voices of his holy anger! . . .)
They drove us from the city –
Even before the enemy celebrated the end of the Jews by force
Quiver –
They sank in the bunker, in the ditch . . .
From the city they drove us – before the world grasped – Well, alright –
That the God of Abraham is also indifferent to Jewish blood . . .
Even before the millions who were cut down –
In shame, each forced his grave to dig . . .
They drove us from the city –
My city, my town, your Jewishness flourished there with learning,
With trade, work, with the warmth of the simple Jew . . .

They persecuted and drove us, even before death appeared in the ghetto
In a shroud, masquerading as all sorts of deaths, and the silence of a world that was
Cruel!
They drove us from the city –
Even before they brought us to a despicable death and the end,
Then, when in the heart still shone faith and hope!
Even before they burned bearded grandfathers,
Even before God turned His face from the world.
Before they put to death holy grandmothers holding the book of supplications –
And "there", where unnatural deaths raged.

***

From the city they drove us –
They also went with the city to "some" distance together the loved ones
Of the . . .
The religious homes, the streets pure with prayer,
With work,
With mourning and with heartwarming jests!
From the city they drove us –
Their hatred, raging from their happiness, accompanies us on our way:
The last Jew has already gone and disappeared! . . .
With malicious joy and looks like stabbing knives –
The Gentile orchestra plays the Jewish tragedy.
From the city they drove us –
Even before they arrived in the land of God, the Eternal of Israel –
The escaped remainder, that does not believe in any world . . .
With their deaths, hearts remained with the ardor of revenge –
Here are murdered the Diaspora's shame – the shame of two thousand years!
– – – – – – –
They drove us from the city.
They drove us from the city.

Yitzhak Ivri, Tel Aviv



Loading a "Transport of the Old" from the Ghetto to Auschwitz (sketch)

Yisroel Shtern



Ostrolenka – Warsaw – Treblinka

Yisroel Shtern

Menachem Flakser, New York

Yisroel Shtern was born in the town of Ostrolenka, Lomza district, which is on the border of Congressional Poland and Lithuania. The wide River Narew surrounds the town. Monuments to wars of bygone days stood in the fields near it. The town's workmen toiled all week, making clothes, shoes and hats for the farmers of the area, who came to town for the Tuesday and Friday market days. The storekeepers also expected good business on those days.

As Yisroel Shtern himself replied in Zalman Reizen's questionnaire for the *Lexicon of Yiddish Literature and Journalism*, he was born during the Shavuot period in 1894. This meant that he himself did not know the exact date of his birth. The home he was born into was a very poor one. His father, the *melamed* [teacher], passed away at an early age, leaving a widow who had to support and educate three small children. In addition, the mother's father lived in the house. He was an elderly man with a long white beard, a scribe by profession. He checked the *kashrut* [fitness in accordance with Jewish law] of phylacteries and *mezuzot* [parchments inscribed with verses, affixed to doorposts in Jewish homes] and, once in a great while, he wrote a Torah scroll for a Mishna study group, or for the butchers' prayer house. He did not make a good living from this, and his widowed daughter had to take care of her elderly father as well.

She was young and blooming and did not lose her head. She began to bake sweet baked goods and every day, toward evening, she sold them at the homes of the city's well-to-do Jews. The children studied in a *heder* and, later on, she even sent them to learn in yeshivas. Yisroel, the eldest and most accomplished of the children, studied in yeshivas in Lomza and Slobodka. When he came home for the holidays, he prayed in the *shtebl* of the Gur Chassidim. During prayers, he always stood in front of the bookcase, his face stuck between the long binding pages of *Yoreh De'ah*. Only very infrequently did I see him pray together with the congregation.

For a certain period, as a yeshiva graduate, Yisroel studied in a class of other young men, "accomplished heads", with my father, Chanoch Flakser. My father had rabbinic ordination. For many years, he was supported by his father-in-law, Reb Efraim Goldbruch, that wonderful Jew, to whom, in due course, Shtern dedicated one of his few poems.

More than once, as a small boy, I woke before morning on a winter day, when the bright lamps were suddenly lit, and the entire house was filled with the singsong voices of those studying Torah in a group.

When World War I broke out, Shtern was in Vilna, the capital of Austria-Hungary, imprisoned there as a Russian citizen. During the war years, he absorbed the philosophical-literary currents prevailing in Austria then.

Shtern came to Warsaw, but he was not seen in literary circles. He was connected to some kibbutz of students of the *musar* [ethics] school. At that time, his poems began to appear in various journals, such as *Ringen* and *Kaliastra*, but without any special impact. When a poem of his appeared in the Sabbath Eve *Moment* newspaper – only then did the writer Hersz Dawid Nomberg come running to the Writers Union at 13 Tlomacka Street, calling out, "Who is this Shtern? Where is he?"

But Shtern did not get involved in literary circles. This was a period of increasing unrest in literary Warsaw. Markisz came from Russia with his poem *Zylinder oif de Fees un de Shtivel oifn Kup* (*Top Hat on the Feet and Boots on the Head*); Uri Zvi Greenberg came from his father's [Jewish] law court in Lemberg and Mejlech Rawicz from Vienna, with the cold shadow of Spinoza in his poems. The journal *Literarischer Bletter* and many books appeared. Youths from Chassidic homes filled the house at 13 Tlomacka Street; stormy literary evenings and enthusiastic discussions

were held there. Although Shtern did not get involved in all this, he stood on the side. He could be seen at the "Lithuanian Shas Society" at 39 Nalewki Street, or at the prayer house of the "Dead Chassidim" (Breslover) on Dzielna Street.

Shtern became more and more withdrawn, as if in his own separate world, even when he began to appear among his writer colleagues. No one knew what Shtern was doing, and how he supported himself. I will never forget how, one winter evening, I finally reached the room or, more correctly, the hovel where Shtern lived. Shtern lay on a rickety iron bed, in a pile of rags, sunk in a deep sleep. He would distance himself from the world for many weeks and then, suddenly, a brilliant essay of his, and sometimes a poem as well, appeared in the newspaper.

He expressed a protest against everything around him, and was not ready to compromise with life. I remember just one incident. The Writers Union succeeded in getting Shtern to join its editorial staff for the summer months, to proofread and thereby earn enough to cover his sustenance. He rebelled against all the limitations life imposes on us.

With special delight, he wandered around the streets of the city. He liked to look at the faces of troubled and depressed people, to stop near a beggar on the street corner, and to finish by sitting with a holy book at the "Lithuanian Shas Society".

Because of the shameful conditions of his life, Shtern became ill with a grave disease and spent months in the hospital. His beautiful *Hospital Poems* were born there, among the most important of his works.

Shtern did not consider his writing an actual profession. This is attested to by the fact that, for the ten years he lived in Warsaw, amid lively literary activity, it did not occur to him to collect his works in one book. Among the writers, he especially liked Hillel Zeitlin, and was among those who came to the latter's house on Szliska Street, a place where perturbed souls sought to correct the problems of the Jewish people. Among the writers in Warsaw, it was said that something had happened in Yisroel's private life, some tragic event that affected the development of his life. The event remained embedded deep in his soul; its influence was felt in that he always sought a place among people of the ethics school of thought.

World War II brought Shtern, together with millions of Poland's Jews, under the brutal regime of the Nazis. He suffered from want and from hunger, and was often bloated, according to the testimony of Emanuel Ringelblum. Work was arranged for Shtern in the ghetto workshop. He felt good there and succeeded in doing all the hard work. One day, they assembled all the workshop workers and brought them all to the *Umschlagplatz* [the collection point], and from there – to the gas chambers at Treblinka.

According to Ringelblum's testimony and that of other eyewitnesses, although Shtern wrote a great deal in the ghetto, the works of this unique person and talented poet were lost together with him.

H. Leyvik, New York

I do not intend to write an evaluation or professional critique, but rather things of a personal nature. They are influenced by the fate of the poet I met during visits to Warsaw in 1925 and especially when news reached us of his tragic death in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Yes, Yisroel Shtern apparently felt the infernal fire approaching, even before it ignited in all its cruelty. Loneliness, bitterness and poverty were his lot. Here he lies in the hospital, broken, depressed. Only here, however, in the hospital, he peels off fettering chains of despair. Here, spring blooms for him: he looks into the patients' faces, sees the smile of God in them, and writes the poem *Springtime in the Hospital* (the poem was printed in the *Warszawa Almanach*, 1924).

Was he religious in the Jewish-Traditionalist sense? I doubt it, but I think that he was certainly a believer. His way of life was mystic, but God's smile did not always shine on him.

He published his poems in the *Literarischer Bletter* newspaper, in the *Folkszeitung* Bund newspaper and others. Was he a Bundist? No. But he always had a weakness for poor and suffering people, the simple folk, laborers, the wonderful unseen ones.

He himself dressed in pauper's clothing; he was neglected. His pockets, however, were always full of literary works – his own and those of other writers, Jewish and non-Jewish.

At the Writers Union in Warsaw, they liked him, felt his unique power. I myself was a witness to this, when I visited Warsaw in 1924. When he came to the Writers Union, he would sit alone, preoccupied. Suddenly, he would get up and leave. Where did he go?

He did not have a family. He used to wander the streets of Warsaw. He loved the streets and was capable of walking around for an entire day. What did he seek there? Only he himself knew.

Yisroel Shtern was broad-shouldered and sturdy, his steps heavy and strong, even though he had not eaten his fill.

He would enter the house of prayer of the Breslover Chassidim, called the "Dead Chassidim". The atmosphere there was to his liking. He stayed there entire days, as if he were one of them. He sat there and learned. Why did he do this? Was it because he wanted to distance himself from people, or because he found his God there? Sometimes for both reasons – because he ran away and because he found God – and sometimes for neither reason.

Here he is, wandering the streets again, under the skies of Warsaw, with the fears, with the loneliness, with the shout: God, be with me! And during all this, he thought of Y. L. Peretz . . .

For him, Peretz was the epitome of a Jewish poet and artist. He was happy, knowing that he lived in Peretz's city and was his contemporary, but wretched, because Peretz no longer lived. We sense this in his excellent essay, *Kroinen tzu der Yiddisher Kritik* (Crowns for Criticism).

* * *

Mejlech Rawicz, in his book *Mein Lexicon* (published in Montreal, 1945) recounts, among other things, that "Yisroel Shtern – so they said – went through an especially personal, intimate experience, which left a wound in his soul that did not form a scar, and thus – his strange way of life".

Are we to accept that this one-time experience of Shtern's, the secret of which the poet never revealed, was the main reason for the catastrophic nature of his poetry? – I believe that this is mistaken. The roots of his poems are hidden in his personality, formed during the years of his childhood and youth, when he absorbed things of great sadness, national and religious as one.

According to Zalman Reizen's *Lexicon*, Yisroel Shtern published his poems in the weekly, *Das Folk*, in 1919. Later, he published a series of poems in Hillel Zeitlin's newspaper, *Der Sne*. Still later came his longer poems, *Springtime in the Hospital* and *Ostrolenka* (*Literarisze Bletter*, 1927).

In his first poems, his characteristic lines are already prominent, his way of identifying with the inanimate, with mute things in nature and the city, in a street and a house, such as a sidewalk, a post, a tree, stones, a wall, clouds, a dog. He saw his lot as inferior to the lot of them all, and it was as if he envied them. He said in his poems:

I do not envy anyone,
Except for the song of a scythe,
In a village towards evening.

Or:

My sadness
Hangs on all the trees
And does not fall to the ground . . .

In one of his earliest poems, *Besha'asan Schwartzen Reigen* (*At the Time of the Black Rain*), his sadness is especially obvious, when he describes "his dead brothers coming to him and pulling him towards them by his toes . . ." and he asserts:

--- You knew our places –
The wild paths in the wild forest,
And You swore
With all Your holy compassion
That You would not let our little world
Sink;
See, the storm felled the ancient trees,
We, the young
Fell asleep, desperate, like grass without earth.

This was about two decades before Majdanek and before the Warsaw Ghetto.

He walked the streets of Warsaw, which were still free, and asked questions that were characteristic of him:

Why is every post and every roof
The master of itself and its image,
And why do I lower my eyes? –
Am I inferior to all the stones of the sidewalks,
Lying on the street, and they are not ashamed
To look heaven in the eye?

(*Prayer of a Man in the Middle of the Day*)

Could someone have told him then, that there might

come a day when all the Jews would feel inferior to the stones of the sidewalk? This did indeed happen, twenty years later. The sidewalk was happier. And he, Shtern, looked for a way to fall and stay close to it . . .

* * *

Moshe Grossman, in his book, *Heimishe Geshtalten* (Homey Images) (Tel Aviv, 1953), describes the enthusiasm with which Numberg received Yisroel Shtern's *Hospital Poems*, that strange, weird man, and how he, Grossman himself, followed him once in amazement, as he walked the streets of the city:

---"I followed him," wrote Grossman, "and observed him. He wore old, worn, faded clothes and so, too, were his shoes and his face: tired, wrinkled, dusty. Only the eyes – clear, bright eyes, the eyes of a child, and a spark of light and faith in them. He walked with an uncertain gait, like a messenger, a strange guest, unfamiliar . . ."

Grossman's description exactly matches the impression Shtern made on me when I met him. I say "met", but it was not that easy to get to know him. At the Writers Union at 13 Tlomacka Street, he was a rare guest. His colleagues in Warsaw spoke of him with a smile on their lips, but not without respect. I met him once at the Writers Union, and his appearance matched Grossman's description. He sat on the side, alone, withdraw; he sat and was silent. I went over to him and introduced myself, "I would like to know you, Colleague Shtern." He stood up and the soft look of his gentle eyes penetrated me. "So would I, with pleasure," he replied. He took my hand in his broad, solid and heavy hand. To this day, I remember that handshake. "I recently read," he said in his soft voice, "your poem, *The Wolf*, and was very impressed by it." "Why particularly *The Wolf*?," I asked him. He mumbled something and then said, "Because that's the way it is."

I told him about the deep impression his poems made on me when I read them. He thanked me politely, and remained sitting in his place. Finally, I asked him if he would like to travel to America. He replied heavily, "What would I do there?"

In the Hitler years, when news reached us of the horrors of the Warsaw Ghetto, we also heard how Hillel Zeitlin, of blessed memory, went on his final way, and how Yisroel Shtern, of blessed memory, was killed. It was painfully clear to me why Shtern was influenced by my poem, *The Wolf*, twenty years earlier. He, indeed, fulfilled everything in the poem about the rabbi at the time of destruction – and I only told about it . . .

What is a legend? Clear and refined reality, containing figures who were dreams, and became real in the light of reality. The style of legend suits the way of life of Hillel Zeitlin, who went to his death wrapped in a prayer shawl, as well as the figure of Yisroel Shtern, who lived and died as part of legend.

M. Waldman (Paris) in an article titled, *The Legend – Yisroel Shtern*, recounts: "In the first days of the war, he disappeared. For a long time, he was not seen; only when the thunder of the bombing abated, he appeared. He met friends with a soft whisper, as if he was blessing each of them. The last time I saw him was on 15 October 1939. I looked for him, to say goodbye to him, the revered poet, and to hear what he intended to do. Warsaw trod on ruins then. The streets became cemeteries, where stunned people wandered around. Suddenly, Yisroel Shtern appeared before me – like a miracle. He walked, his glance directed forward, sad, unshaven. The pockets of his tattered coat, which had become yellowed and grayed, swayed like sacks in the air.

He had filled his pockets with his sole possession – the writings of poets and philosophers he admired. He did not want to leave Warsaw. "Where would I go?," he asked, "I cannot reach the place that I want to go to. So many Jews have remained here – and this is my fate, too."

The same thing about Yisroel Shtern is recounted by the poet Avraham Zak, in his book, *In Umru fun Yuren* (Unrest of Years) (Argentina, 1954, Jidbuch). "Yisroel Shtern," tells Zak, "did not sit in the kitchen (the kitchen of the writers in Warsaw, on Karmelicka Street, at the beginning of the war) a long time. It was as if something pursued him, distanced him from people. Where he was, and how he lived – no one knew, nor did he tell anyone. "What do you think, Colleague Shtern," I asked him, "Are you staying here or leaving?" "Is it impossible to run from fate," was his brief reply.

That same answer: *fate* – as Waldman related. And Waldman finishes his story with these words:

"They say, perhaps this is a legend? If it is, more can be told of Yisroel Shtern. He laid on scorched earth, his eyes turned toward Heaven, and softly prayed for the redemption. He did not speak to people and returned his soul to his Creator like a saint, protesting against the world and its God."

What Shtern felt, lying on the burning ground, we

can only imagine, each in his own way. In 1943, I wrote a poem in memory of Yisroel Shtern, called *My Brother, Yisroel Shtern*, which was included in my book, *I Wasn't in Treblinka*. The poem was written under the influence of the legend of his death in the Warsaw Ghetto.

My Brother, Yisroel Shtern

My brother, Yisroel Shtern,
my brother of abundant poems,
we belong to one father,
one father – the eternal Jew.

My brother, Yisroel Shtern,
our father went to the slaughter,
to hear the ram's horn of the Messiah.
It happened yesterday, yesterday,

And you did the same thing,
but in a slightly different way.
You lie amid ruins,
in the middle of a Warsaw courtyard.

You lie on stones of the sacrifice
as Isaac lay –
in you, all your bones yearn
to sing without asking.

You do not ask: like the ram.
And who will sharpen the knife?
And who will blow on the fire,
to throw the sacrifice into the flames?

You do not ask – you begin to sing.
Completely free of yourself,
The wonder of your voice begins to ring
higher, higher and with vigor.

I lie – as usual – covered in dust,
no limb moves.
How wonderful it is for me, wonderful to be eternal,
how wonderful it is for me without a cradle, without a grave.

I will hear your voice from afar,
my brother, Yisroel Shtern!
It has been given to me to make heard
words of ancient strains.

And suddenly your voice becomes silent,
and from your silence come out with a new melody,
with a new melody
tones under your palate.

The gates of Heaven opened,
and remain so, eternally open.
The blood that should demand and shout,
wants to sleep, wants to sleep, wants to sleep.

Someone, Heaven, will tear at you,
and I will restore it to completion again,
and give you redress
with my bullet-ridden limbs.

Here is my prayer of a midnight company,
accompanying the sound of my father's ram's horn –
my limbs rise in stoning,
in murder, in strangulation, in burning.

How good and how pleasant,
sweeter than the delight of a holiday,
to fulfill four deaths –
one martyrdom is not enough for me –

I will hear your voice from afar,
what will happen – remains secret.
A wonder of our times
which cannot be told.

H. Leyvik

Rachel Auerbach, Tel Aviv

A Tree in the Ghetto (Yisroel Shtern)

It may have been in the spring or the beginning of the summer of 1941, at the height of the season of hunger and typhus among the many beggars, peddlers and street musicians. It was after Herszele's death. I could not forgive myself for not trying to feed him an extra portion from my kitchen. When I met Yisroel Shtern by chance, at one of our institutions, I took him aside and invited him to come to 40 Leszno Street every day to have a bowl of soup. His first question was, "Is the kitchen kosher?"

"What could be unkosher here?" I replied. "There is no milk or meat here. We add a little oil, which is *parve* [not dairy, not meat].

Shtern did not respond with even a hit of a smile to my witticism, and also did not say whether or not he would come. Nevertheless, after a few days, he appeared, and from then on, came regularly. As soon as our cook saw him, she immediately served him a bowl of soup, according to my instructions, without a chit. Both she and the "patron" of our kitchen, the former owner of an estate in the area of Ripin, were used to such "violations". They included this customer among my "free types". To one thing only they did not become reconciled: why did I not let him take the portion home, and specifically invited him to sit at the table in the big hall?

And really, what is there to deny? Even among the wretched refugees from provincial towns who comprised most of the kitchen's customers, Shtern was conspicuous because of his terrible slovenliness.

The edges of his coat were tattered all around, and the sleeves and the elbows were ragged. He did not remove his greasy hat, black from great use, from his head. He shaved infrequently, and the stubble on his cheeks stuck out wildly, like porcupine quills. While it seemed as if there was no longer a jacket under his coat, nevertheless, his belly was unusually bloated. I asked Kirman about this, and he explained that because the pockets of his coat and its hems were torn, Shtern folded his important belongings inside, under the edges of his coat: a book to read – the poems of Rilke, Kasprowicz and some of his own, and a cup for ritual hand-washing, which he kept intact, according to the precepts of the *Shulchan Aruch* . . .

As the old saying goes about the wise man, who carries everything he needs on him.

Even before the war, we knew that Shtern was one of the "dead Chassidim" – the Chassidim of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov – nevertheless, we did not imagine how far his piety would go . . .

*

Toward the end of December 1941, the kitchen – to offer assistance in the winter – was turned into a kitchen for convalescents. We began to cook nourishing, rich soups especially for those recuperating from typhus. From now on, only those who received special permission could enjoy the services of the kitchen, and only for one month. Although the kitchen was subject to continuous supervision, even in this situation, I could still "smuggle in an exception". Many writers, artists and musicians took a great interest in our kitchen and its calories. For Shtern, the important thing was *kashrut* [fitness in accordance with Jewish law]. I was obliged to let him know that the food would be cooked with pork fat and horse bones. From that day, Shtern disappeared from the kitchen.

I did not see him for a few months, until Passover Eve 1942, when Kirman came to 40 Leszno Street, and told me that Shtern had declined terribly, actually to the point of death, and that he must be saved.

I dropped everything and we went to see him. In a cellar apartment on the corner of Pawia and Smocza Streets, lived a respectable Chassidic family. They had allocated a corner to Shtern to sleep in. Thin sunbeams shone through windows under the ceiling, which were closed with iron wires. Two beds stood along the walls, laden with pillows and covered with red velvet coverlets. An old book cabinet stood opposite the door.

At the table in the center of the room sat Yisroel Shtern, who was hard to recognize. His body was bloated; the edema on his face was covered by a very thick beard. The family tried to justify the fact that they

had not made up Shtern's bed. "He refused to lie down," they said. "What could we do?"

Shtern listened to the conversation. It seemed that he himself was irritated by his condition. He allowed us to decide what to do as we saw fit. He took exception to only one thing: he would not ride in a rickshaw to which a man was harnessed.

I cannot remember where we found a wagon and a horse. There were almost no carriages in the ghetto then. We took Shtern to the TOZ (the Jewish health organization) on Gesia Street, where we had a "strong advocate in the family" – the writer, Jehuda Feld, who was headed the administration.

They gave Shtern a haircut, shaved his beard, washed him and dressed him in new clothes from the TOZ storeroom. Only then was he checked by an internist, who did not wait for the results of the tests, and injected him with a good-sized dose of glucose. Then, Shtern was taken to the refugee center at 14 Leszno Street.

We quickly called the Jewish self-help administration, where "our" people sat – Icchak Giterman and Emanuel Ringelblum. According to a recommendation "from on high", the manager of the place put a bed into his office, so that Shtern would have a room of his own. Shtern was given dry goods from the YISA storeroom, and a woman was hired to cook and serve him meals. They also gave us medications and the money necessary for additional foods rich in vitamins. The money was placed in the hands of Josef Kirman, as Shtern was known for his parsimony and his refusal to "waste" a penny.

Kirman knew Shtern inside-out, and was as devoted to him as a brother. He pampered him lovingly and fulfilled all his whims. From time to time, Kirman gave me a little money, and I would run to the market at 42 Leszno Street, near our kitchen, and buy for Shtern a piece of cheese, a bit of butter, vegetables and fruits smuggled from the Aryan side. Our care of Shtern bore fruit. The swelling slowly receded. He got up and at the end of June began to go out.

Keeping the bloating of hunger at a distance cost a few thousand zlotys. I remember this because there were tens of thousands of swollen victims of hunger in the ghetto then. The fate of those thus stricken was sealed. The soups of the people's kitchen could not help them by then; they could only harm them. Treatment costing thousands of zlotys was far beyond the ability of the Jewish self-help [organization].

*

This was at the beginning of the summer of 1942, during the time of the Gestapo's nightly murders, of the night of terror that preceded the first expulsion *aktzia*. Signs of what was to come came faster and worsened; the atmosphere became more and more tense.

Shtern lay alone in his room; he read poetry and was sunk in thought. We refrained from telling him about the horrors of the street. We also did not supply him with newspapers, with their news of German victories. In those days, I think Shtern lived a quiet idyllic life on the brink of destruction.

I remember one of my visits to him, when he was at the refugee center. I brought him a bag of strawberries and a jar of blueberry compote. The center's office was on the second floor of the building's left wing, near the Evangelical church, which was closed up. Through the open window, it was possible to discern a network of towers and turrets, stone facades, a sector of Christian architecture. Closer – a tall, broadly branching tree. This chestnut tree was completely covered with white flowers, like a Christian fir tree adorned with white candles and fluttering flames. Among the cornices of the church birds nested, and in their nests – chicks that had hatched out of their eggs. The birds flew back and forth with crumbs of food in their beaks. They chirped and fluttered around the nests, as if they did not know that this was the ghetto, in which Jews were doomed to extermination.

Silence and solitude, as if two steps from here, the street did not rage in the throes of being at death's door, as if those of us inside did not know anything.

. . ."In the Shadow of the Old Cathedral". . . we talked about Emile Zola the romanticist, who was somewhat well-known, as he was revealed in his novel, *The Dream*, in which he describes young love between the illegitimate son of a bishop and the daughter of an organist . . .

– "There is no great writer who is not a lyricist, at least for a short period of his creativity" – remarked Yisroel Shtern. He asked me to read a poem of Stephan George to him, because it was hard for him to read in the dusky light.

– "It would be better if you read one of your poems to me," I requested. "Write a poem about the tree that blooms in the very heart of the ghetto . . ."

Before I left, Shtern asked about the news. I tried to avoid telling him about the terrible events that were

happening in the city and about the even worse things everyone spoke of, but I came to understand that it was impossible to fool him.

– "The German is strong, the German is strong" – he mumbled when we talked about the situation on the fronts. In the ghetto, there was no lack of optimists, for whom every bit of news from the east or from the west was for them a sign of the downfall of the Germans. Yisroel Shtern was not among the optimists. He also did not delude himself about the future of the ghetto and Warsaw.

He did not want to pleasure himself with books of short stories. He did not believe in them.

But did he perhaps believe just a bit?

*

I had not seen Shtern since the expulsion began. They told me that in the satanic whirlwind, in the futile struggle with annihilation, Shtern maintained a certain measure of a sense of survival. Someone from the ghetto's employment agency (the journalist Ptakowski, I believe) sent Shtern to a German place of work on the Aryan side. For some time, he was seen every morning, marching in the work lines that went out of the ghetto. Shtern had already passed the age of fifty, but he tried to look healthy and invigorated. They told me that he got a blue work smock from somewhere. He put on a checked cap, hung a cloth bread satchel on his shoulder and marched with a group of others.

However, "the masked ball" did not last long. Shtern was caught in one of the "wild" blockades during the second half of August. These took place on any day when a few hundred "heads" to complete the transport were lacking at the *Umschlagplatz* (the place where those who were expelled were assembled, before sending them to the concentration camps).

The S.S. men were tired of shouting and shooting, and wanted to finish their "work" day quickly. They sent a few Ukrainians to one of the ghetto's gates at five o'clock, when the groups began coming back to the ghetto from work, and directed some of them straight to the *Umschlagplatz*. Sometimes, they held a selection there, but most of the time, they sent everyone straight to the railroad cars, with the bundles of onions and carrots they intended to bring home. Among the "heads", the invisibly laurel-wreathed head of Yisroel Shtern fell into their hands . . .

*

Yisroel Shtern was one of the most important poets who grew out of our literature after World War I. As early as the 20s, his *Hospital Poems* series placed him in the first rank of Jewish poetic art in the entire world.

A deep religious flame lit his perception of the world. A seething inner climate breathed from his every line – an original mixture of Jewish scholarship and modern thought, of the small town and the big world.

The origin and abnormal conditions of development of the poet among the Jews, and the usual anomalies of every poet struggling with his milieu and himself made Shtern what he was: a combination of spiritual greatness and, in daily life, genuine idleness. His idleness went so far, that pleas to collect and publish at least one volume of his poetry came to nothing.

Thus was Yisroel Shtern until World War II broke out. What happened to him during the days of destruction? To everything I have recounted about his fate, I must add something about his spiritual metamorphosis in the ghetto. Whoever observed his behavior in those days said that the recluse, after years of seclusion, reached a degree of revelation. He became more humane and socially active. In the smothering atmosphere of the fate of the Jews and human suffering, it was as if Shtern felt at home – where he had drawn extraordinary inspiration.

*

Piles of the dead covered the roads taken by the deported, from one end of Occupied Poland to the other. In a green uniform and the helmet of a German gendarme, Death walked about in broad daylight, in streets crowded with the hunger-stricken and noisy with the cries of beggars and the shouts of peddlers. It hovered around the walls, stood on guard at the gates of houses and fired a rifle at little children.

The dead wallowed at the sides of the pavements, covered with sheets of paper; the epidemic ran wild. The gravedigger and city madman did their job. Was it possible for a poet to be absent here?

Peretz Markisz's "Days of Blood and Honey" were stricken with darkness – the Jewish days that tugged at the heart and gave voice to the Jewish poet.

And so, in his last days, Yisroel Shtern became one of the anonymous comforters seen in the courtyards and at street corners after the nights of killing – standing and

preaching a sermon of encouragement, or singing a song of solace.

The tragic and the grotesque, the fantastic and the exceptional, shocked and demanded, burrowed into the soul to its utmost depths.

All activity in the ghetto wore a veil of philanthropy. Under the mask of social assistance, literature also flowered. To our great surprise, there had never been such a demand for poetry from our public, as in the ghetto years.

At 14 Leszno Street, in the same building where Shtern lay in the refugee center, the intelligentsia's public kitchen – formerly, the journalists' kitchen – was opened after the ghetto was established. It was organized by A.M. Apfelbaum, formerly a member of the *Moment*'s editorial staff. About two months after the ghetto closed, Apfelbaum organized *Motzei Shabbat* [Saturday night] parties here, called "Literary *Seudah Shlishit* [third Sabbath meal]". For a small payment, one could get a cup of *ersatz* coffee with real sugar and a slice of cake baked with wheat flour mixed with potatoes. Writers and artists received these refreshments free of charge. The main attraction was the literary program. A table, covered with a white tablecloth, was placed on a platform. A pair of brass candlesticks was put on it. The walls were decorated with stylized Chassidic images, cut from colored paper. This was a sort of nod at or hint of the accepted tradition of Peretz. Yisroel Shtern sat at the table, quiet, somewhat pensive, silent before beginning to speak. It was as if letters of fire darted in the hall. Everything he said awoke intense attention. His theory of poetry, the philosophical idea taking wing – were ignited by one flame.

Yisroel Shtern's front teeth had fallen out, and his speech was hard to follow. His words carried in the hall like a faint growl, yet despite this, their content reached his audience. The number of his followers at the Saturday night meetings grew.

Sometimes he read one of his new poems to the audience, a poem about what was taking place around us. I remember a hint and fragment of such a poem. He read the poem at one of the Mendele Mocher Seforim [Mendele the Bookseller] evenings observed in the ghetto days. It was called *A Letter to America*, a paraphrase of a well-known folksong. It was a lament, sending greetings from those doomed to death to those far-off Jews, who, in due course, would weep for our destruction.

It may be that we did not appreciate, that even Shtern did not understand, that the poet had a sense of the future, a revelation of lyrical prophesy. Even today, the heart aches for the loss, for the voice that growled poetry, silenced before its time.

Shtern was killed in August 1942. With him were lost forever all the poems he wrote in those years, deeper and more mature than the earlier ones. How lovely is the light of sunset.

If, someday, they dig under the ghetto's ruins and the third part of the Ringelblum archive is found, my papers will be discovered there. I turned them over for safekeeping right after the *aktzia* broke out. Among them, on the back of an advertisement for the ghetto laundry, is Shtern's poem about the tree in the ghetto, the poem I "ordered" from him. He gave it to me to read and I never got to return it.



Poems and essays in Yiddish by Yisroel Shtern – collected by H. Leyvik – published by CKA, New York, U.S.A.



Yisroel Shtern

My Book "Ostrolenka"

Efraim Goldbruch

I

Exactly like one who lies at the feet
Of the night and ties darkness around
His head, like bandages
Because severe pain cuts inside
With long knives, like a long year,
Because dozens of lanterns spit
With light on the sidewalk,
And every stain of light is a year,
All his years lie,
Spit into the streets,
And he flees (like heaven
Flees at dusk when it sees
That all its property has been burned,
And its last gold coin
Is also false and worn-out . . .),
And he flees, like a mother
At the funeral of her child,
When her vision and hearing sink,
And at every step the wind whispers
In her ear: Go back!

If you see your light buried,
You will go mad,
And your remaining children
Still need a mother . . . !
And he flees and plunges himself into
The darkness as in a river: -
Perhaps he has grave sins
Perhaps he should come out rich,
Immersed and purified,

So long as the wool is not shorn
One cannot begin to spin,
And if he has lost everything,
Perhaps he will find God.

Who knows then, the meaning of his mourning?
He lies somewhere near a fence,
An abandoned, strange fence,
And as if in a wide robe
He holds, folded in the dark
All the parts into which the world
Has crumbled, and he cries.
Someone is approaching from afar
With a lantern in his hand.
The shadows begin to tremble
And flee to the sides,
Begin to plod along near the wall,
To find a savior here
And they come across him, lying down,
The lonely one, lying down,
And they ask him for pleas.

Exactly like one who lies at the feet
Of the night and ties darkness around
His head, like bandages
Only shadows, that fear,
Know not of it and expect
Help from the strong man, –
So you come to me, images
From Ostrolenka, hugging yourselves
With bent heads,
But all of you have become
One who comes near me: Efraim Goldbruch.

II

A beautiful Jewish soul – everyone said,
As they say in mid-month: What a beautiful night!
You were like the moon
And you did not have a home.

Roofs kiss gently, barely touching.
The sky flutters like a blue fowl.
Windows flee the street, searching for a sweet dream . . .
The city has already sunken into slumber up to its neck.

The night washes your flesh with wind
And sees itself reflected in the quiet streets.

Only two open shutters still sway,
Like children who refuse to bathe,
Although they stand in the water.

"There's a women, a bed and a wealthy home,
A handsome landlord who creeps like a mouse" –
Zaborowski the Policeman and the dogcatcher chatted:
"It is still open, Sir, look, the rod has not yet been placed on the shutter!"
But you do not hear, and the stars followed you
And helped find a bed.

III

You sleep somewhere like a beggar and lie – you yourself are a sack – on a sack,
Your old age is broken to rise with the rooster's first call,
And your house is perfumed: on the carpets
Are live flowers . . . and a bed of fine mahogany.

Standing tall-full-clean-single, he does not wait for the landlord
And dozes off in the cold bed cover, as in a fresh deep snow,
Do not forgive, Efraim Goldbruch, that they threw you out
Of your wealthy home,
Like a fly from a sparkling glass of tea.

It is a danger to he who knows not, that only the wealthy must eat
Challah [Sabbath and festival bread] made with oil, and he runs around and shouts:
How is it that children in the sands chew pieces of glass out of hunger,
With all the plenty and the good and God alone belongs to the poor . . .

As your *kapote* [frock coat], Mr. Goldbruch, is it not a river,
Then how suddenly does it become wet under the lining?
Then how is it that from under its lap, a live fish
Comes into being? You dragged this
From your Frejda and you bring it to a weak woman in confinement.

Is this a humane act? If you let such a one near the drawer
Where the store's income burns, he will bury everything!
Then do not thunder, Efraim, that you were thrown out.
You were in a wealthy house: a terrible letter in an envelope . . .

IV

Oh, well, on Friday, they know:
At the end of the road, they are lighting the horizon;
Look Efraim: in Heaven they are baking *challot* [bread loaves]
For the Sabbath.
At Josel the Patcher's they are dying for a bite,

So you must begin to collect: Jews, braid
A kopeck into the *challah*!

And when the evening places
Red tongues in white clouds,
It is understood that there, above,
Candles are lit in silver candlesticks.

Will the widow Lejke sit in the darkness?

Oh, well, on Friday we see
A man does everything he can.
But a whole week? Heaven help us:
From the first spots of day
Until the beginning of night – he only says,
The prayer shawl on his head, and he says - - -

V

The clouds mix and leaf themselves soundlessly.
In silence and holiness the day opens,
As an old book opens, pleasantly and carefully,
The sun comes out like a wonderful idea.

The streets listen and become clean . . .

The town shakes sleep from its eyes
As dust is wiped from things before Passover.
Even Horki the Tailor, already bent over the sewing machine
Will sew more chapters of Psalms than hunched backs.

And what does Efraim Goldbruch do?
He prays.

He lies for half a day in the world and burns with anger and shame
They pour, they throw kerosene, salt, soap and flour on his flesh,
He loves people and beams with love, but they are strangers to him,
He lies for half a day, they strip his skin and sell his flesh . . .

Trade goes on in the market – and in the heavens, the sun goes and pours on its way
Mountains of gold barley and wheat;
Clouds catch rays in their mouths like yeshiva students
Looking for acquisitions of grain, with straws between their teeth.

And what does Efraim Goldbruch do?
He prays.

Only the day will end more beautifully than it began.

The streets lie quietly and blue like a river
And the gentle moments of dusk fly over them like doves,
And to a heavy golden door, closed on a kingdom,
The sun matches a key of blood . . . and contemplates, bowed in piety
Now stand the white houses, which were so proud
An hour ago, like wise men, who saw much
And finally saw only one thing: that they must believe . . .

And Chackel Kupferminc does not grasp what has suddenly happened to him, –
Under a heart burning so strongly, and like a child, leans his head on the windowpane
And looks at the market: shadows fall to the ground and hug the stones:
He stands in the store – and forgets – and remembers –
And he feels like crying.

And what does Efraim Goldbruch do?
He prays.

VI

Reb Efraim, Reb Efraim!
How can a man all day
Do nothing but pray?
On a fine front tooth
The world holds a great weight.

People look into the mouth of the world,
They toss bits of stars and a little earth,
Immediately there must be the earthen bowl:
There would be disgust – a horror.

And if the tooth on the other side
Begins to fall, to bend (like a bad conscience),
Then the front tooth would be torn out
And a black hole made eternity.

They slowly throw a heart, like tongues of honey,
And pieces of earth, like sponge cake, on the scale, –
So how can a man all day
Do nothing, except pray?

VII

And Efraim Goldbruch answers:)*
.....
.....

* He never completed this poem, which was published in *Literarischer Bletter* (Warsaw, No. 41-42, 10/14/1927).

From the Poems and Writings of Yisroel Shtern

Collected by Yitzhak Ivri

Everyone goes to God alone.

*

(In the hospital) sleep; forbidden to walk, one strolls – inside oneself.

*

"39 . . . 40 . . . 41 degrees, another degree closer to you, God!"

*

Evil is a hero who slays himself.

*

Lumps of earth like cake.

*

The child is less a child when its mother is a poor laundress.

*

He who believes himself wise, thinks only of his wisdom. He who is wise, knows that there is no end to wisdom.

*

There is an intelligence that sees only what is caught at first glance, and hears only what is immediately heard. It may be energetic and innovative, but its energy is, to a great measure, like an animal's, and in its war there is a sort of passion of inflamed bulls. Those having this understanding see themselves as very wise. When they achieve something, they succeed in organizing their world with ease and satisfaction. They enjoy their lives. They grasp everything that comes to hand, not considering where and why. Everything becomes a goal in and of itself. Therefore, for example, money has a double value for them. First, because it is money and, second, because the money is "theirs". And so it is with everything.

*

When everything will be purified, improved and refined – until every person will be a High Priest, every day Yom Kippur and every lump of earth – the holy of holies.

*

The evil in the world has short intelligence and long arms.

*

He who does not believe is afraid he will not lose. He who gambles already wins: a moment of belief that he will win.

*

Everyone is an artist in his own home.

*

Minor writers always pray in a quorum.
Original poets pray alone.
A classicist whispers a prayer that no one before him has ever said.

*

People, even the noisiest ones, do not like noise. They prefer serenity, quiet. To be silent as trees and to grow like trees. But what can they do – winds pass over them

and they must be noisy. Sometimes people curse because unrest hovers over them, because they hide their curse.

*

It is said that "a man is the tree in the field". It may be that in a field, a man is a tree, but in the city, he is less than a man. The smells we smell and breathe into ourselves – they are the smells of cement, the smells of lime, the taste of burning tar.

*

Real humor does not laugh gratuitously.

*

Theater is an escape from threat to danger, in order to get free of the threat.

*

The daybreak and daytime: Daybreak has its accessories, which make its dress special, interwoven with red, green and gold cloth. Daybreak has its followers that imitate it and are exactly like it – warmhearted, with a refreshing cleanliness. They are like it – better than holy and holier than good.

Daybreak has its early risers. They are veteran prayers, who think so gently, before the world begins to think coarsely. They bless and praise the Creator, His world, before one among them enters the market and sins, cheats, sighs falsely, laughs falsely, lives pettily and dies pettily. Daybreak has its stories.

Daytime does not acknowledge distinguished lineages or chosen ones. The streets are full. Everyone is outside and everyone lives according to an ordained measure, as if they take care, Heaven forbid, not to be greater than the other. Everyone tries not to be perceived as reckless, and speaks so that everyone will understand him. And he seeks out jokes, so that even the most foolish will "get the joke".

*

I have nothing against genuine cynics. They are not cynical. They are unaware of it, they do not celebrate it, they live it. It is not a special sort of conduct; it is part of hundreds of their daily actions. But I cannot tolerate those young people who keep cynicism in a glass cabinet, so that if they have guests, they will have something to serve them . . . It is hard to tolerate those who, when they spend time with good friends, arrange cynicism, like a pure Jew, *lehavdil* [but different!], arranges *tikun chatzot* [midnight prayers of mourning]. Afterwards, they return home to their wives and children and hang curtains so that no one will peek in, and withdraw into themselves. They purr quietly like a cat, respectable *balabatim* [heads of households]. When they die, God willing, and become young girls in their next incarnation – then they will sit late into the night among a company of young people, smoking cigarettes, displaying silk stockings above the knee, using profanities and speaking coarsely. Later, on the way home, they will agree to be escorted only to the door. No further.

*

Every beautiful thing awaits those who are amazed by it.

*

If sleep is a sixtieth part of death, then dreams are a sixtieth of life.

*

When a mother teaches a baby to walk, she uses only a small part of the area of the floor. It would be very sad if the baby continues walking only in the small area in that room. A mother must remember that the baby's feet will take him to endless spaces.

*

Do not turn your glance to the heavens, and do not count the stars, for everything happens before your eyes – in courtyards and in the streets, because our planet itself is a star.

*

Trees are ancient and have already seen a great deal. They know enough to pity victors.

*

Disillusionment is wisdom of a breast pocket on a man. Poetry is man's wisdom. Wealth is external splendor. Poverty is inner splendor.

*

There is nothing more unaesthetic than skepticism, because beauty is in surprise. Sanity, clarity . . . knows a great deal, knows everything, does not stop knowing. It does not countenance being trapped, controlled by anyone. It has many means of watchfulness. Its imagination is wrapped in a frock coat and, over it, another frock coat and, over it – fur. Over the fur is just a fox skin, and on the skin is armor. It becomes stronger, richer, protects itself, and in the end, it starves to death in its citadel, like Rothschild in the iron chest . . .

*

Great writers, remembering that they are normal, settled artists, drag their model over the sand in the house and the mud. Only after a long time and great effort, do they get fresh air, ripeness of the fruit and fragrance.

*

The reader, even the best one, should not delve deeply in order to find psychic explanations for a work's literary value. What is written is enough for him. Inquiry is not within the purview of the reader.

*

I believe that love is a natural thing. It does not give an opinion about what is an existential war. If it is not a war, we should allow ourselves to be embraced and touched. Our eyes are drawn to, and kiss every picture of the world. Our ears become intimately familiar with every half-sound, sound and complex sound combination. There is no fortune of which we should deem ourselves unworthy. And there is no space that we would not dare to tolerate in our personal space . . .

*

Only the poor comprehend the depths of poetry.

Our time is wise and serious testimony of the weak man.

Wisdom of life is not yet high intelligence, which tries to plumb the depths, but it is a step.

There are words that do not ease, and one remains as wise as he was before.

The good in us is like a telescope that shortens the distance between us and the other.

When we are hungry, we only want to eat.

Silence is eternal. It outlives noise.

We always feel dangers in life. We are wrapped in insecurity. Millions of minutes look at us like millions of eyes of the Angel of Death.

The soul is not always in the body. Sometimes the situation is the opposite. It happens that the body knows itself; its spirit greatly falls, hunches over and, from its inferiority, stretches out its hands. It wraps it, as, with durable parchment, a Torah scroll wraps the Chosen People, Israel.

When the body crumbles, expires and disappears, the sadness is not so very great. The greatest pain is when the soul must be exposed.

Before man sinned, the snake walked on four legs and did not cause ill to anyone.

There is no opposition that can deter us. However, we, too, cannot escape from anything, no matter how much we enclose ourselves.

Why should we reveal ourselves? Why should we open up? Are we other than the night, which is closed with locks? Have you ever opened a door of a person's tears? Have you ever cut a smile in two and seen how it looks inside? And the clock, standing near us on the table and showing the hours – is it more alive or dead than our hours? It strikes and strikes noisily – is it more foolish or smarter than our blood? We want to be quite wretched, in order to stroll about in the world happily, like a secret among secrets.

The butt of a smoked cigarette is no bigger than we are, and the sunset is no smaller than we are.

Nature, in and of itself, is beautiful. It waits for the beautiful person. From all its cells, every day the voice goes out: Woe onto human beings, who rot in their ugliness, do not want to enjoy my glory, are unable to rise up and must fall. Together with them, I fall, too, because they do not sustain me. My sustenance is the glance of their eyes.

Our sin is a millstone, which does not stand idle, but grinds much flour and feeds our punishments.

Every event depends on the other, like the lock of a door. But the key is in our hearts.

A poet, be he ever so great, is not weak, but also not stronger than a poet. He sees, but not more than a detail, something torn from the whole of nature.

When we love everyone, we do not hate ourselves. We light up and come closer to the holy spirit in our bodies. We pity those who think that they can hate us.

In a moment of surprise, we are never angry, never poisonous. We find ourselves surrounded with suddenness. And all suddenness is a wonder. And every wonder elevates, refines humanity and is more secret. We are a link among all the links of fate. Who should we envy? Who should we blame? If we are everyone, if everyone bows before us, and asks mercy of us, no less than we ask of them? We are not angry and no longer alone. On our way, we hear footsteps. Where everyone is, we are there, too. We are thankful, because we are the measure of everything.

From the book in Yiddish, *Songs and Essays*, Yisroel Shtern

Collected: H. Leyvik
Published by CKA National Library by the World Jewish Cultural Congress
A. Stein, New York

Writers: On Yisroel Shtern

Itzik Manger (From a letter to Yitzhak Ivri)

I was very close to him – that is, I spoke and he growled. Only once did I hear him get angry. One day, he came to the Writers' Union. I was very happy and asked him why we had not seen him for a few days. He answered angrily, "Are you too sick to wish me a Good Sabbath?!" I had completely forgotten that it was the Sabbath. I was not insulted. On the contrary, I was sorry. I knew that because of him, I remembered that it was the Sabbath; he was genuinely religious, one of "God's fools" – the foolish and the sympathetic, in comparison to "God's devious ones". I tried to convince him to publish a volume of his poetry. He would not hear of it. "To write poems," he said, "is a personal achievement. To print poems, is business. So the publisher, the businessman, should pay me well."

The heart shrinks from so much pain. The clouds go their way and the days pass. What is poetry? The chirping of a bird, the buzzing of a bee, a gust of wind. But what is shadow? Something mute, without content, and yet painful to the point of madness.

Yisroel Shtern was my shadow, and very painful . .

Yechiel Hofer

The saying "Poverty suits the Jews", can be said of Yisroel Shtern. He, in his poverty, felt freer, better and elevated. He did not wish this, however, for others. He saw his poetry as "hungry people" . . .

Shtern's poems are like pessimistic prophesy. I would say that his senses were pessimistic, but his soul was optimistic. He was entirely night, but his prayer was "the prayer of a man in the light of day" (this is the title of one of his poems).

*

The poet, Yisroel Shtern, who wrote so little, had the reputation as a fine and great poet for good reason. Nor did his death as a martyr create a legend about him. He was a legend in his lifetime.

*

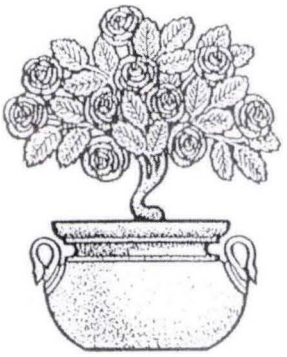
Just as Shtern was never embittered, so he was never bad (in times of trouble, Chassidim always said "It is bitter for us", and were careful not to say the word "bad"). Bitterness can be sweetened, but bad can only be eradicated. In eradication lies great danger, both for bad and for good.

He was full of contradictions, as a pomegranate is full of seeds. But his contradictions were complete.

*

Yisroel Shtern belonged to the high category of poets of the generation that ripened between the two world wars.

(Excerpt from his essay, *Stela Poetica, Yisroel Shtern and His Works*, *Di Goldene Keyt*, No. 26, 1956)



Binem Heller

When Yisroel Shtern Expired . . . *

When Yisroel Shtern expired
The spring of tears was closed.
With the last convulsion of his body –
The earth had again earned a flood.

Only in the blood flowing in every vein –
Is he endlessly demanded by the world!

His body on the altar of hunger –
Will curse he who once sang!

The language, once suited to rhymes –
Sunken in its own pain, as in flames.

And in my dream, I see someone:
The poet Shtern in a sack of bones.

He still lies in the ghetto, weakened,
And of God – to anger, he thinks at the last,

If this is true, because without law and without a judge,
Each must fight with his weapons.

And he has only his heavy flatfoot,
Like the bundle of writings of the poet Shtern.

His final poem should be written in blood,
And if it is not – then he will remain here.

And lets abandoned winds take him
And with him – all the earth will disappear.

Oh – look! He departs with the last convulsion
The earth deserves now, the flood again.

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* *Yiddish Writings*, a collection of literary writings, Lodz, 5707 (1947). Union of Yiddish Literature and Journalism in Poland

Yitzhak Kachan, Melbourne

A Reading by Yisroel Shtern in Ostrolenka

It was on the morning of a Jewish holiday. I went to Reb Jakow Bajuk's to meet Yisroel Shtern, who had been invited by the Peretz Library to give a reading here. Knowing that Yisroel Shtern had become deeply religious, I was not surprised when I saw him praying with devotion and intensity. With a gesture of his hand, he bade me to sit down. While doing so, I observed his broad face and sad eyes.

It was a sunny summer morning. As I looked at his face, it seemed to express a twilight longing, a kind of mystic shadow, which accompanies the secret of death. I was reminded of his poem, *Toward Evening*:

Toward evening, old people tend not to die,
Toward evening, children are found by fences,
Toward evening, lamp wicks are lit . . .

I tried to remember the rest of the lines of the poem. Shtern, noticing my lips move, asked, "Do you want to tell me something?" "No," I replied, "I am only trying to remember your poem, *Toward Evening*."

"You've read my poem?" he asked in surprise.

"Yes, several times. I even knew it by heart." To show him that I meant that literally, I began to recite:

Toward evening, quiet madmen send letters,
Toward evening, letters are written and torn up:
Something is made easier and something is lost . . .
Toward evening – rings on severed fingers,
Blood on gold – gold on blood.

When I finished, the expression in Shtern's eyes changed from sadness to a smile.

"It is good that I came to visit Ostrolenka," he said quietly, "It is a pleasant surprise to me, that people in my hometown read my work, and that youths learn my poems by heart . . . I thought that nothing had changed here since I left . . . "

He became quiet and fixed his stare on the distance. I felt that he did not see me, that he had forgotten that I was sitting there. After a minute, he said, "Will you come to me after dinner? We can talk a bit before the reading."

* * *

"Have you read my *Hospital Poems*? What did you think of them? And, in general, what do you feel when you read my poems?"

I began, "You combine man and nature wonderfully. Your relationship with nature is mystical . . ."

I stopped, and searched for words to express my feelings. I did not have the courage to express my opinion to a great poet, whom I so admired, but Shtern encouraged me and I continued: "Your poems are masterpieces, but somehow, they are sad, they breathe disquiet, they are full of longing, the shadows of death, they breathe artistic candor and tragic truth. One becomes sad of heart:

Towards evening, they fiddle,
While devils snatch the bride from the house,

or

Towards evening, there are flags of lost wars.

This is a strong picture, but it casts fear on our beautiful dreams on summer evenings."

"Why do you think my poems are so tragic?" . . .

Shtern looked at me with a somewhat embarrassed smile, said something about the *yichus* [distinguished lineage] of our ancestors, and then his expression became deeply serious again.

"Listen, my young fellow townsman. Do you know what poetry means in its deepest sense? Poetry is meant to bear the heavy burden of humanity, with all its misfortunes, with all its tears." He quickly rose from his chair, walked the length of the room, stopped before me and continued. "You read and I want you to chew on it well. Every poet aspires to reach the depths of a person's soul. While they rest, with their eyes closed, the poet is awake and intent on catching the faintest noises coming from somewhere in the night."

He became quiet again, and asked pensively: "Do you know what Peter Altenberg said about poetry? 'From our tears, poems are born.'

You asked me before about my poem, *Toward Evening*. I feel the dusk differently. The daytime affects me differently than the evening and the nighttime, than it affects you.

During the daytime, words spill like sand, spill and disappear. But in the black nights, when the world is immersed in gloom and does not move, like a black slate, every word is engraved with a knife on the slate, and remains before the eyes for a long time. In fact, I will speak about it during my lecture."

We went to the Peretz Library.

* * *

The hall was packed. The audience had arrived early and waited for the lecturer, who was received with applause when he entered. He was a bit embarrassed, as he had not expected to be thus received.

Near the head table, he whispered to me:

"You know what they say – It's hard to be a prophet in your own city. I did not expect such a big crowd and such warmth." (This had a double meaning, because the hall was also very warm . . .)

As Chairman of the meeting, I greeted our esteemed guest cordially and emphasized his place in Yiddish literature. I presented him to those assembled. Among them were many readers who were proud of their highly talented townsman. I expressed joy, too, on this occasion.

The hall fell silent. Shtern began his lecture about art and poetry.

"Every great artist creates a new world, an imaginary world, alongside the real one. The essence is not life, but what is around, above and after it . . .

In Peretz's *At Night in the Old Market*, the dead walk and look at everything happening around them. They absorb the beauty and the ugliness of life. In the tumult of daily life, people do not see everything that is real. At night, the same people lie, tired and depressed. Only in their dreams do they see sublime things, which they did not perceive during the day. The artist, while he is also far from noise and tumult during the day – it is only at night that he hears the divine voice: Woe to my children who have been exiled and sent away from me – and there is no comfort. How long, how much longer?"

We took a short intermission, and Shtern quietly asked me whether the audience had understood him. I explained that his appearance had given us great pleasure, and that even those who had not understood everything had enjoyed a great experience. After the intermission, Shtern spoke about Y. L. Peretz, one of those poets who always long for God . . . He sought the way to God, wanted to be closer to Him and, thus, closer to people. "Poetry is the bridge between one person and another. Its final goal is holiness and spirituality. It aspires to penetrate the human 'I', in which the struggles waged bring relief and serenity. Genuine poetic works are also unfeigned and imbued with inner religiosity; their purpose is to enquire, and not necessarily to reveal . . . Every artist erects for himself his own building in the space of the world, and everything happening there is colored with his blood. How difficult are the creator's labor pains! Even an artist like Heinrich Heine devoted his strength to reworking and rewriting many times his short poem, *In the Wonderful Month of May*, until he achieved the desired style, color and sound."

Although the lecturer had spoken for a long time, and it was very hot in the hall, the audience was fascinated; those assembled did not remove their gaze from the podium. Not even a whisper was heard. Everyone instinctively felt that this was not just an ordinary lecture, but an artistic-lyric improvisation. Later, Shtern expanded on the analysis of poetry and literary criticism, casting rays of light on writers and works.

When he finished, the audience burst into applause, thus thanking him for the spiritual pleasure that had lasted for about two hours. However, the story did not end there. People surrounded the head table, to shake hands, to extend personal thanks and to ask questions. We decided to continue the event and allow questions and answers. The questions were of a varied nature; the lecturer, with his short but to-the-point answers, illuminated literature and artistic problems. In his answers, there was not only expertise, but also descriptions from the best of the field.

In particular, Shtern dealt with the question of inferior literature. He answered humorously, blending satire into his words, until we felt that a new lecturer stood before us, a brilliant feuilletonist and satirist.

"In every literary class, you will find an inferior aspect. This is the proud person, who strolls in the streets with his nose in the air, and knows how to curry favor with everyone. He speaks to each in a different

tongue. His idealism is pure gold. Of what can you accuse him? Of material pleasure? Nonsense! Even if you give him money, he has nowhere to put it . . . One of his pockets is full of good qualities; in the second, he has good deeds and, on his back, may it not happen to us!, is a heavy bundle of honesty . . . He takes all injustice on himself. And who should, if not him? He has all the tools for it. This is the nature of the inferior man – he has in his storehouse all good, and lacks for nothing . . . If he needs something, he goes to what is ready and takes it."

Shtern said all of this with a smile on his lips. At the end, however, he became serious and finished in a loud voice. ". . . We often get the feeling that we are facing a new flood, but God has sworn that there will never be another. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov explained it thus: there will never be another flood of water, but a flood of sullied thoughts, of bad ideas, of inferior conduct – will certainly come! Genuine, pure art and poetry, however, will wash this from our lives. I believe this! In a man's heart is a treasure. We need only know how to reach it . . . "

* * *

Many years have passed since that holiday, when Yisroel Shtern was with us in Ostrolenka. Most of his audience has turned to ashes; a few came out unburned. And the great poet, who so believed in poetry and art, in the treasure of the human heart, wandered the streets of Warsaw, bloated with hunger. He, the prince of poetry, in his final hours, as well, believed in the treasure of the human heart. One need only know how to reach it. Who knows? He has taken his secret with him for eternity.

Yitzhak Ivri, Tel Aviv

The Poet Who Remains a Deep Secret

a. The Poem *Ostrolenka*

He was at war with this world all his life. It was as if he maintained that everything in the world was soul only, without body . . . and the proof was that he lived in seclusion, cut off from all substance. Despite his heavy, broad-shouldered body and appearance, he went about the world as though lost, a soul without a body. His glance always wandered off into the distance, above everything . . . He lived as if "in heaven". Supposedly, all his walking about on this earth was only because of "a secret something there" . . .

He arrived from his native city of Ostrolenka and settled in the big city of Warsaw, where his strange behavior, both as a person and a poet, caused everyone to wonder.

He dedicated the poem *Ostrolenka*, one of his most beautiful works (see *Literarischer Bletter*, No. 41-42, Warsaw, 1927), to Reb Efraim Goldbruch (the father-in-law of the *lamdan* [teacher] from Ostrolenka and the community worker, Reb Henach Flakser, may God avenge his blood). Exactly like Shtern, he scorned this sinful world with all its lusts and pleasures, its businesses and shops. This sterling Jew – "the stars of the sky followed him at night and helped him search for a place to rest" – was near to the heart of Shtern the poet.

Although his poems and essays opened a wellspring of poetic, creative and personal revelations, he remained incomprehensible. On the one hand, he cast off this world with all its pleasure. He was hungry and solitary, and devotedly went to the "dead Chassidim". He stubbornly refused to allow book publishers and newspaper editors to publish something of his wonderful works. On the other hand, he stuck to the Bundists, who exalted maintaining Jewish existence in the Diaspora (by the way, this idea went so horribly bankrupt . . .!). How was such a combination possible? It was beyond the grasp of common sense. People tried to understand the riddle named Yisroel Shtern, but without success.

Who was Yisroel Shtern? A poet – this is known – even a rare poet. To what did he aspire and advise others to aspire to? What line did he take? Can we label him a barometer of a miserable period of the Jews? A prophet of that time of perdition? No more? Yes, he was a poet with a soul, but without a body. A poet who remains a deep secret.

b. All Alone . . .

He was, I would say, more devoted to God than to people. He sought his God day and night, roaming the streets of Warsaw, where he met hungry and wretched people whose fate was sealed, and who awaited destruction . . . These searches purified his soul. There, he found his truth and breathed in the inspiration of his works, in which he threw sparks into our sinful vale of tears.

* * *

Was he a man who genuinely believed, and rejoiced in every seed of life? Or was he a pessimist, as others claim? He was dismissive of life, both its "coarse" pleasures and his personal development as a poet. If he already published something of his brilliant works, a poem or an essay, it was "as if the devil forced him", as if an invisible, higher power forced him to do it . . . He was a poet and a visionary "for its own sake". It was more important to him to see for himself, than to tell others what he had seen . . . He cast off life with its iron rules. I would say that he also dismissed death. Even death "lived" for him. Everything for him was – the soul. The body was nothing but an external vessel in which the soul lived. Or – it was also a soul, and the soul lives forever and does not age or ever change. This was, in fact, the idea of his Breslow Chassidim, the "dead Chassidim", which Shtern clung to with all his mystical fervor. The Breslow Chassidim do not need a new Rebbe. Their "dead" Rebbe lives forever and they are his "dead" Chassidim. Death can also replace the concept of life. To live, according to Shtern, meant to be with God, to draw near Him, to become integrated into Him. "He has no body and no bodily form." This was Shtern's approach to "The One in Heaven", He whom he sought and found. His approach to Him was other than that of his great colleague, Reb Hillel Zeitlin, of blessed memory. Innumerable ways lead to Divine Guidance. Each according to his way, to his own nature; each in his own way. Each one feels it differently. Shtern's way to the Master of the Universe was characteristically "Shternish". Concealed, secretly encrypted, it remains an unsolved riddle . . . Shtern preferred to befriend the nights, rather than the days. The day was too little for him. Shtern's secret was tied to dark nights. It was precisely the nights that lit his way. Only the nights knew how to decipher the riddle whose name is **Yisroel Shtern**. Therefore, he said in his poem *For the Curious*:

When someone asks me who I am,
I send him to my nights.

The first says:
A grave.
A stone has yet been erected on it.
He flew about as quietly
as a dove,
and fell asleep somewhere
like a dove.
No one cried for him,
and there is not yet a stone.
But sometimes while the world
laments somehow so white
and soft
as a white dove, –
the moon
stands still in the middle of the sky
and points with a long finger
at the window of a little house:
he died here!

The second replies:
Always in love
always in love,
he could stand for hours
in the midst of the sleeping town
and burn and burn
between two suns.

The third night looks down
and the clouds at her side
drift, drift and sway . . . .

Yes, the nights knew Shtern better than the days.

*

"One goes to God alone", Shtern said in a poem. Quietly, without vulgar bustle, without the noise of drums . . . The Lord of the Universe, who is also Master of crude lusts and "coarse" pleasures, "listened to" these wonderful poems, to the poetic cooing of the doves and the mystic prayers of the lone individual, a complex enigma in and of himself all his days.

In his personal life, as in his poems, he was always alone; no one resembled him and no one could compare to him.

Shtern also went "alone" to his God, through the gas chambers of Treblinka, even though there were millions who went with him. Each of them walked in his own martyrdom, alone . . .

c. The Poem that Heralded the Jewish Holocaust

On that night
a thousand Jews will lie, silent – dull clods of earth,
and in one of the thousand, a thought will sprout:
If God has lost us, then God will find us…
and quietly, as a flower in the wind, his lips will move:
Sh'ma! – ["Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One"]
And another, who this very night has lost his senses
will rend the night with his Ha-ha-ha-ha —
Not my home... not my word... not my child... not my wealth...
On that night
the sound of weeping will fill the world.

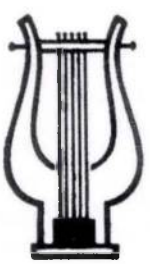
(From Shtern's poem *It Will Come to Pass*)

Yisroel Shtern was one of those who foresaw the destruction of the Jewish people. The lines of the poem above, *It Will Come to Pass*, were written in 1933 – precisely the year when Hitler and his gang, may their names be eradicated, gained power. The German Nazi nation, with a few exceptions, bears witness to the intuitive feeling harbored in the heart of this unusual, spiritual man, who was also deeply involved in a union with the Lord of the Universe.

When World War II broke out, Shtern lived in Warsaw, and suffered the hardships of the ghetto with all the Jews: poverty, hunger, degradation to dust, the expectation of death. He protested to Heaven, did not want to taste anything of the vile world in which his Master of the Universe, to Whom he was close, so cruelly turned His back on the Jewish people . . . Bloated from hunger, he was sent to the gas chambers of Treblinka. According to one version, he breathed his last in the streets of Warsaw . . .

As said, he foresaw the Jewish destruction. Everything that was supposed to come to pass "on that night" – came to pass!

The dark night, the night of blood, descended on the world, destroyed it and obliterated from the face of the earth the Jewish city of his birth: Ostrolenka.



OSTROLENKANS

Who Fought and Fell for Our Nation and Our Homeland



Dawid Lew, of blessed memory

Member of the Histadrut Committee, HeChalutz, in Ostrolenka
Born in Ostrolenka in the year 5664 (18.XI-1904)
He died the death of a hero, giving his life for the sake of the Homeland,
as a First Lieutenant in the Self-Defense Organization in Jerusalem,
on 19 Av 5689 (25.VIII-1929).
His memory is blessed!

Dawid Lew was an exemplary Zionist-pioneer figure.

He was the son of an outstanding Zionist father, one of the first Zionists and Hebrew teachers in Ostrolenka.

Anszel Lew, his father, was known in the city. His reputation preceded him. The behavior and honesty of his son, Dawid, both in the party (a leader of HaShomer HaTzair and HeChalutz) and in society, were exemplary. Like his father, he was a fervent Zionist; his dedication, heart and soul, to the Zionist ideal knew no bounds. The desire to emigrate to the Land of Our Fathers and build it did not weaken in Anszel Lew's home. The Zionist spirit prevailed in his home and hovered over all the members of his family. Dawid, his son, was fortunate enough to emigrate. As a member of the *Haganah*, devoted to the depths of his soul, and as a First Lieutenant in the company, he fell on that bitter day, a "burnt offering" for his nation and homeland.

His good friend, the actor Meir Margalit, mentions, among other things, in *My Memories* (see *Homes and*

People): "Every meeting with Dawid became a source of great enjoyment for me. It would not be banal to say that he was the most ideal and the best among us."

Dawid, the son of Reb Anszel Lew, was born in Ostrolenka in 1904, emigrated to Israel in 1925, was killed in 1929 and buried on Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

May his memory be kept in our hearts!

Y. I.

Awigdor Kupferminc



He was born in Ostrolenka in 1896. In 1923, he emigrated to Israel. Even before World War I, in 1914, he aspired and planned to emigrate to Israel as his family's pioneer.

In his youth, he studied a great deal, and devoted himself in particular to the study of Hebrew and Judaism. At the end of the war, he worked as a Hebrew school teacher in a town near Rowne. In 1923, he realized his dream and emigrated to Israel. For a few years, he worked in Tel Aviv as a construction worker, and learned the plastering trade. The work did not satisfy him, because he aspired to settle the Land. He joined the Ein Vered organization and, with all its members, went there and became one of its founders.

Life was difficult at *Hityashvut HaElef* [Settlement of the Thousands, a plan to create farm holdings for 1,000 families] locations. The Jewish Agency budget was very small and there was no chance of developing a farm. To support his family, every member had to work outside the farm. At the end of a day's work outside, everyone tried to build their farms and prepare a source of support for the future. Awigdor was also forced to find himself a source of support for his family, as well as accumulate savings to develop his farm at Ein Vered. To this end, he left Ein Vered temporarily and moved to Tel Aviv. There, he found work as a plasterer and succeeded in saving money to build the family's house in Ein Vered. Cruel fate decreed that, at the outbreak of the events of 1936, he happened to be working on an Arab building in Jaffa. On 19 April, he was murdered by Arabs who attacked him with knives. He was survived by a daughter, Drora, and a grandson, Avigdor, named for him.

May his memory be blessed!

A. D.

Elchanan Wylozny

Anyone who knew Nir was stunned to hear the news of his death in the Negev campaigns. Nir's name became well-known in his last months. His reputation preceded him. In the Arava [Negev], his name was mentioned with reverence. Nir was the Hero of the Negev. To his family and friends, Nir was known as Elchanan. From a cub in the Beitar Youth and a soccer player on its team, Elchanan rose to the rank of "nest"



commander. When World War II broke out, he was among the first recruits. After the war, he took part in the administration of the Soccer Department of Beitar Tel Aviv. He was active in Ma'amad and excelled in instruction. He was loved by his trainees and succeeded in instilling iron discipline in them. With the breakup of Etzel, he was recruited into a combat company and, at the end, headed a *Gachal* [*Recruitment in the Diaspora*] battalion. Despite difficult conditions, Elchanan knew how to elevate the soldiers' spirits; their admiration of their commander was limitless. Highly intelligent, he knew how to lead them from battle to battle and from victory to victory. In the end, Nir became famous as the conqueror of Hulayqat. This military outpost was captured by his battalion in a bayonet battle, face to face, in a strong assault, with the battle song *Alei Barikadot* [*On the Barricades*] on their lips. In this battle, as in others, he excelled in level-headedness and intelligence, and won the esteem of the Staff.

The story of his life and his war will be included in our generation's legends of bravery.

(From *Niv HaLochem*, 24 Heshvan 5709
[26 November 1948])

*

Elchanan joined Beitar at a young age. He excelled primarily in organizational talents and in his warm relations with friends and trainees. He established the "nests" in Ramat Gan and the Montefiore neighborhood.

Elchanan was married and the father of a daughter named Nira.

*

"I am beginning to be a soldier" . . .With these words, he began his diary – the diary of a Hebrew soldier.

*

Elchanan was drafted into Etzel. He rose in the ranks of command due to the great military experience he had gained in the British Army. Elchanan was a man of many deeds. In the short time he was in Etzel's ranks, he was an instructor, an organizer and the driving force of the Third Battalion. He was among those who took Jaffa, and his heroic deeds at that time were many. Everywhere, the name of Commander Nir was mentioned.

*

When Etzel's battalions broke up, Elchanan transferred to the Israel Defense Forces. He joined the glorious Givati Brigade, the brigade, which, with its heroic acts repulsed the Egyptian invader and paved the way to the Negev. Not a few of these heroic deeds are credited Elchanan. At the head of his company, he captured Hulayqat, the Egyptian stronghold.

He participated in many battles. Although he was injured more than once, he refused to stop his war. He did not heed the many requests of his friends to transfer to a service battalion. He listened to his conscience and returned to the battlefield even before his wounds scarred over. In one of the famous battles of Iraq-Su'widan, while preparing his soldiers for offensive warfare against the enemy, assaulting the Egyptian stronghold at the head of his soldiers, an enemy bullet struck him and the song of his heroism was cut off.

*

Elchanan Wylozny, the son of Mosze and Frida, was born in Ostrolenka on 10 August 1920. In 1927, he emigrated to Israel with his parents. He fell on 2

November 1948, at Iraq al Manshiya. He was buried in Kfar Warburg.
May his memory be blessed.

(From "Pages in memory of Commander Nir, Captain Elchanan Wylozny, of blessed memory, who fell in Negev battles on 2 November 1948")

Mosze Wylozny



I remember Mosze Wylozny during his childhood, when he studied at the Hebrew school (the Improved *Heder* – Yavneh) in Ostrolenka. We were classmates. His teachers liked him because he was a diligent student and excelled in his acumen. His friends liked him because of his constant cheerfulness, a quality he inherited from his grandfather, Reb Tuwja, one of the city's prominent citizens. He infected his teachers and classmates with his mischievousness, his smile and his laugh during lessons and playtime.

I remember Moshe as a youth, when his family moved to Lomza. We saw him as a faithful friend, because he was always ready to help, even though the possibility of doing so was limited. His loyalty and devotion were unblemished and, therefore, he was always esteemed in society. In all his actions and studies, he saw a kind of preparation and training for emigration to Israel. He was one of the fortunate ones, because his father's family was in Israel. He was the first, and one of the few in our society, in general, who succeeded in reaching Israel before the Holocaust. In this, too, he was an example for us.

I met him in Israel in 1938. In his conversation and personal plans, he was the same Mosze that he had been, but externally, there had been a change: he had grown, matured, his black eyes were deeper and his face was a bit more serious. It seemed as if he had ceased to enjoy the perfumed air of Israel. He was a member of the Haganah and, during the events of 1936-1939, he did not sit idly by. Sometimes he told us about his guarding adventures, without any hint of bragging. He remained lively and cheerful as he always was, with the addition of a large measure of enthusiasm and energy, and to all this – a strong love for the Homeland. Mosze was an active member of Bnei Akiva in Israel, and one of its main leaders. His work gained him a good reputation. He was the driving force of his circle of friends, active and activating, doing and encouraging. For a time, he worked at the *HaTzofe* newspaper, and then began to help his father at his factory for furniture and implements made of tin and iron.

In the strength of his spirit and the courage of his heart, Mosze was an example. More than once, he risked his life, carrying out daring Haganah actions. During the bloody days of 1947, when the Arabs in Jaffa attacked Tel Aviv and harassed its neighborhoods' inhabitants, Mosze went out – he was already married and the father of two children – to protect life and property and to repel the Arabs – and he was killed.

May his memory be holy and blessed!

Chaim Chamiel

Szaczar Finkelsztejn



He was born in Tel Aviv on 5 Kislev 5693 (6 December 1932) to his parents, Awraham and Rosa Finkelsztejn, who educated him in the pioneering, working Zionist spirit.

In the beginning, he studied at the *Beit HaChinuch LeYaldei HaOvdim* [The House of Education for Workers' Children] and then transferred to the Carmel School in Tel Aviv.

From 1946, and until the beginning of the War of Independence, he was educated at the educational institution at Kibbutz Mizra. There, he became involved in society and joined the HaShomer HaTzair movement.

After the establishment of the State, and at the height of the War of Independence, the kibbutz sent those children who came from outside the kibbutz back to their homes. Immediately upon his return to the city, he contacted the movement (the HaShomer HaTzair "nest" on Bograshov Street) and was active and activating there. From then on, Shachar continued his studies at the Herzliya Gymnasium [secondary school]; however, after his stay at the kibbutz, it was difficult for him to adjust to the regimen at the Herzliya school.

He went to work as a draftsman for a famous architect, until he was recruited into the I.D.F. in the Nachal.

He received his agricultural training at Kibbutz Evron, where he took a course in tree planting at the agricultural college in the region; from there, he joined his friends at Kibbutz Sasa and became a member. He put down deep roots during his residence at Sasa. His activity was varied and rich.

At the end of his military service, he wanted to remain at the kibbutz, but after difficult deliberations, he decided to return to Tel Aviv, to continue his studies and to help his father with his work. After returning to the city, however, he did not cease his activity among his friends who left his kibbutz or other kibbutzim. With his friends, he founded the cultural circle *Lehavot* (known now as *Lehavot Shachar*).

A lively, keen youth, energetic and strong, he knew how to inspire his good and cheerful spirits in all his friends. He was a gentle soul, blessed with talents, who loved music, song and art.

In December 1955, he took external matriculation examinations, intending to enter the medical school at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In August 1956, he went into the army reserves, took a difficult course, and was posted as a soldier in the armored forces. In a short time, he was called to serve again – in the Sinai Campaign.

He fell in battle at Abu Agila on 27 MarCheshvan 5717 (1 November 1956). He was buried in the emergency military cemetery in "Shlach", on the way to Nitzana.

On 17 MarCheshvan 5718 (6 November 1957), he was laid to rest in the Kiryat Shaul military cemetery.

May his memory be blessed.

The Family

Parchments of Fire*

In memory of my son, Szachar, who fell in the Sinai Campaign

Parchments of fire. Whispering parchments.
Whispering – of the mystery of man's soul.
Man – the image of God, a mixture of feelings.
Feelings – not yet dead and silenced.

And silenced! – in his place – parchments of fire.
Fire blazing in the heart of the bereaved.
The bereaved – who has lost what was dearer than being,
Than being – what he had yesterday.

From yesterday – when he had continuity and a future.
And the future is – suddenly cut short.
Cut short – and ended. And a perpetual candle is lit,
A perpetual candle – parchments of fire from now on.

Rosa Finkelsztejn

Tel Aviv
Four years after the Sinai Campaign
27 Cheshvan 5717 – 5721

(*Al HaMishmar*, 17/11/60)

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* [*Parchments of Fire*, a project perpetuating the memory of soldiers who have fallen in Israel's wars, collects writings about them.]

PESIA SZERESZEWSKA



Ostrolenka – Auschwitz – Israel

Brajna Iglewicz-Majrowicz, Tel Aviv

Pesia Szereszewska-Nasielski, of blessed memory

Born in Ostrolenka, she came to Israel in 1946 (5706). She passed away on 18 Tevet 5715 (January 1956).

She was the daughter of Josef Nasielski, of blessed memory. They lived in the cellar at Thylim's, in the Old Market, near the bridge. Reb Josef Nasielski was a Torah scholar. He had four daughters and one son. They operated a bakery Ostrolenka-style: the chief baker was his wife, and he engaged in the study of Torah day and night. As father-educator, he devoted himself to the education of his daughters and introduced them to the world of Torah. One of the daughters was Pesia, of blessed memory. I knew her from Bejt Jakow and Bnot Agudat Israel, where we studied together. Even as a Bejt Jakow student, she excelled in her sharp perception and amazing memory. We said of her that she was a "lime pit that does not lose a drop". Even as a child, she had a desire to learn and know. She always aspired to be among the first. If she happened to fail, and another student did better than she did, she was capable of bursting into tears in the middle of the lesson. Then she prepared for the next day, so that no one bested her. Of course, her father helped her a great deal. She also had a drive to read books or, more correctly, to "swallow" books. When she sat down to read a book, she did not get up until she had read it to the end.

As said, they had a bakery, where they also sold bread. When Pesia was alone in the house and someone came in, she was so immersed in her reading that she did not notice that someone was talking to her. Sometimes, a customer there stood for a long time, until she detached herself from her book. She remembered every book she read by heart. Pesia loved to talk about everything she had read and, when she did, she was like an overflowing fountain. She did not allow anyone to stop the flow of her words until she had finished.

Of course, for such a reader, the Bejt Jakow library was too small and sparse. She paid no heed to the censorship of the time (not all books were approved for reading by Bejt Jakow students), and acquired books from every available source.

In 1930, after completing her studies at Bejt Jakow and at the government primary school, Pesia went to Krakow and was accepted at the Bejt Jakow Seminary. Not everyone was accepted there. A few girls from Ostrolenka were candidates for study at the Seminary, but not all of them had the means. Pesia had not grown up in a wealthy home either, but her older sister, already a Bejt Jakow teacher, helped her. Although the level of studies at the Seminary was very high, Pesia was among its best students. She understood everything and knew how to express herself. Besides Torah literature, she was acquainted with the works of various writers, and knew how to utilize this.

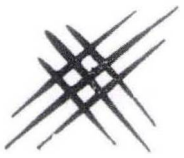
Proof of her scholastic excellence is the fact that, immediately upon completion of her studies at the Seminary, without prior experience, she was sent to the city of Sosnowiec, to be a teacher in one of the largest Bejt Jakow schools. Later, she taught in Warsaw, and married a rabbi named Szereszewska. There, she fell into the clutches of the Nazi beast. Fate brought her to Auschwitz, where she drank deeply of the poisonous cup. Her husband and son were murdered, and she alone was fortunate enough to be liberated. Who is capable of describing what Auschwitz was for the Jews, and for her? It is doubtful whether history will ever be able to relate all the facts of that terrible Hell! The majority did not leave that place, and the few who survived are like dead bodies with live souls. The souls aspire to survive and see revenge exacted on the murderers. Pesia was among those who survived Auschwitz.

After her "dead" body recovered a bit, a creative spirit awoke in her. While still in Italy, she began recounting her experiences in public appearances, while establishing a warm home for all the orphans, to help them forget the horrors they had seen with their own eyes in Auschwitz. As soon as she arrived in Israel, she opened an *Ohel Sara* House in Bnei Brak, named after Sarah Schenirer, the founder of Bejt Jakow. This was a home for Bejt Jakow refugees. She devoted herself to this institution, attending to its material and spiritual existence. She had a strong will and extraordinary

powers of persuasion. Nothing stood in her way, as she went about reaching her goal. Overseas, she told of frightful death camp episodes and roused people to join her fundraising projects. Anyone who heard her wonderful lecture at *HaBima* in Tel Aviv appreciated her rhetorical powers. She spoke to a large audience, including ministers and representatives of foreign governments, telling the truth about Auschwitz. She was the youngest speaker, and brought them all to tears.

Unfortunately, there was no remedy for the poison she absorbed in Auschwitz. After a short time in Israel, the bacteria hidden in her body began their deadly mission. She was hospitalized in nearly every hospital in Israel – Beilinson, Tel HaShomer and others. The greatest doctors invested enormous efforts to keep her alive, but did not succeed in destroying the germs that had penetrated her bone marrow. Even on her deathbed, her will to live and create was strong. At the height of her flowering, in her 30's, Pesia was taken from us.

May her memory be holy and blessed!



Yehuda Nachshoni

I had the privilege of meeting her personally in the light of the burning crematoria, and was shocked to the depths of my soul. All around, the crematoria burned and the gas chambers worked full out. The abyss swallowed the last of the holy sparks in men, and she bridged the abyss with a bridge of loftiness and holiness that amazed all who saw it. With dedication, she organized a cell of friends that preserved the image of God in the inferno's depths. She comforted, encouraged, supported and helped. She reproved young girls who stumbled, and spurred them to overcome obstacles. She injected life wherever she turned and was a mother, sister, teacher and guide, a queen, whose every word was a command. Even the angels of destruction accepted her authority. They felt the influence of her personality and stood amazed before the charm abundant in her radiant character. It may be impossible to believe, but anyone who knew her can confirm the fact that she was a princess, even on a devil's island.

I once saw her praying in the attic of the S.S.'s laundry in Auschwitz. If someone else had done this, they would have killed her immediately. They did not harm her. They did not disturb her. We all believed that her prayers protected everyone, without distinction, devils and men alike.

She was wonderfully talented, thought deeply, knew the Pentateuch by heart, was familiar with all the literary currents and spoke a marvelous, idiomatic Hebrew. I think that that was the first and the last chime of Hebrew in that cursed corner. She spoke about everything, but primarily liked to talk about matters of faith and belief. Original books of ethics were commonplace on her lips. She was dreamy, with an emotional soul. She was excited by every revelation of a glimmer of light in camp life. She once heard a Jewish daughter call out the *Shema* [Hear, Oh, Israel, the Lord Our God, the Lord is One], burst into bitter tears and did not restrain herself. She cried many times, not from sorrow, but from emotion. She also kept a diary and, in that book, collected every morsel of light she came upon in her way.

(*Dvar HaPoelet*, 23, February-March 1956)

A. B.

"The Princess in the Devils' Den"

Pesia Szereszewska was a noble and pure character who sanctified Heaven in the hell of the Auschwitz concentration camp.

When Pesia emigrated to Israel, she became well-known to many, due to her shocking testimony about the extermination. An audience of thousands burst into tears when Pesia stood on the stage at a special conference of the Fund for Recruitment and Rescue, organized in Tel Aviv in 1946. She did not shock her listeners with descriptions of the horrors, but with her stories of the supreme heroism of the Jewish martyrs, who preserved the embers of faith in that terrible death camp. I was not at the conference where Pesia spoke, but was fortunate enough to hear her tell stories of

holiness and bravery at another opportunity. After a time, she became ill. The sufferings of Auschwitz came out in her body, and she came to the convalescent home in our village to rest and recuperate. She told of a modest Hebrew woman, as beautiful as a queen, who maintained a Jewish life in the women's camp in Auschwitz. The woman came from Greece, with the rest of the women from the Greek Diaspora, banished by the Nazis to Auschwitz.

While she worked at the camp's laundry, she met the woman, followed her, and discovered that she maintained a sort of secret royal court, into which she admitted the Hebrew women from Greece on Sabbath nights. She lit and made the blessing over the Sabbath candles, and said prayers with them.

Pesia knew how to tell a story and describe things. The story about the Hebrew princess, who lit candles in Auschwitz and said prayers with the tortured and holy ones, stunned her listeners. The eyes of many were kindled with the light of this holy transcendence; tears flowed after ten years of petrification and stupor.

After she become famous, we did not hear much about Pesia. From time to time, stories from her tales about the lives of the Jews in the concentration camp were published, all of them testifying to the spiritual bravery of the tortured and of transcendency in that terrible furnace of pain.

For a few years, Pesia conducted educational ethics [lessons] for ultra-Orthodox girls in Bnei Brak, until she passed away after a protracted illness.

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In general, few returned from the valley of death. Of those who did, only a few returned whole in their souls and bodies. Many failed and lost their humanity. Pesia was one of those few who preserved the Divine Spirit in the furnace of destruction. Her image shines out at us with a transcendent light. May her memory be blessed and her character be a symbol for future generations.

Pesia Szereszewska-Nasielski

Wisdom of the Survivors



Pesia Szereszewska-Nasielski

If a man's will is his honor, and if I feel unable to fulfill your desire, then it is probably worth asking your pardon from the beginning. What does the audience wish to hear, if the speaker is someone who came from there, from the Nazi hell? The request is "modest". If you were really in all the camps, tell what you saw there. That is the trouble. I cannot do that. I would like to stress from the outset that I will not relate lamentations and moaning and woe; I will not speak of pain. We do not want the pain to become a course on a menu served to guests at a party, Heaven forbid! The pains are holy to us and we do not have the right to use them. Before the parting of the Red Sea, Moses Our Teacher said: "The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace". The Early Commentators explain the verse. ". . . and you shall hold your peace" is, in fact, the fundamental stipulation, in order to

understand important events in the life of the individual and in the lives of humankind. The sign of ascribing importance to this is receiving it silently, with internal comprehension, not with vociferation. Words can only cheapen the matter. And another thing. What you know until now is enough to bring about internal contemplation. Therefore, I will not touch on my gloomy past. I want to tell you about two acts that I saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears, after our "liberation".

We were liberated by the Americans, with the help of God, on the 5th of May 1945. On the first Sabbath, we gathered in our camp to pray and recite the benediction of deliverance. What we felt then is impossible to convey to you. In general, freedom can be appreciated only by someone who was once oppressed, who was once a slave. To breath freely, to drink water – are these small things? The crux is dependence on our own will, and not the will of others.

We lived, about a thousand girls, in thirteen barracks. In all the windows, Sabbath candles shone. Once again, the Sabbath walked regally to the temporary homes of the Daughters of Israel. And lo, pure prayer was heard, immaculate prayer from the heart, coming to cleanse the filth that accumulated because of the cursed defiled ones. The praying ended, and *kiddush* [sanctifying the Sabbath or a holiday by reciting a blessing over wine] was heard. The Jewish slave became a prince.

I heard that the gate had opened. But this could not be. The American administrator promised that they would not disturb our Sabbath. If there would be something to announce, it would be postponed until Sunday. And now, a taxi entered. A man of about forty-five quickly jumped out of it, dressed in a uniform I did not recognize. I saw this from my room, which bordered on the room of the Secretariat. I noticed that a change suddenly took place in the guest, when he heard the *Shabbat Shalom* sounds cleave the space of the camp. He slowed his steps and his face actually went black. I approached him with the camp secretary. In German, I asked him who he was. He rebuked me: How dare I use that language?! He would not speak in the language of his enemies.

"You are absolutely right," I admitted, "but I do not know Russian." He showed the secretary all his documents. He was a liaison officer of the Red Army Command. Since there were 36 young Russian women in the camp, he wanted to talk to them, and prepare them for repatriation. He also showed letters of recommendation from the American administrator, requesting that he be assisted. He added that he would not permit the inclusion in the conversation of anyone except the Russian women. Even the presence of the camp administrator was not acceptable. I said to the secretary in Yiddish, "Luckily for me, I will not have to listen to a sermon like this on the Sabbath." He did not reply, but his face reddened.

I went over to the Russian women to tell them the news. "I have good news," I began.

"What?" They started to guess. "Probably tomorrow and today there will be potatoes and cabbage, or maybe we will get a pair of American leather shoes."

"Not news of this kind," I said to them. "Someone from your government has come, and he is interested in your repatriation."

"What's this?" asked their representative, Katya. "What was that word? It sounds like some kind of disease."

"He wants to take you home," I explained. What terrible disappointment showed on their faces. They received the news with cold indifference. I thought: How different the impression would be if they sent to call us home – to Israel . . .

In accordance with the women's request, I went with them, although this was unpleasant for me. He began to make a speech. He was, apparently, a professional speaker. He spoke enthusiastically about liberation, about freedom, about the liberating Red Army, returning its sons and daughters home. He ended with exclamations in Stalin's honor. Indifference prevailed again. "We will not go without shoes!" they shouted. "We are still free. If the Americans increase our food ration, it is worth waiting."

He promised them the earth, but they remained unconvinced. Finally, he began to threaten to send cars and take them, and that would be that! Once again, the thought came to my mind: When will they send cars to take us to our Land?

The officer went over to his taxi. I escorted him out of courtesy. As he was leaving, he spat out, "I hate you."

When I heard this, I strongly urged him to come to the Secretariat, because I had something to tell him. He acceded to my request. I said to him, "You see, these are Sabbath candles. Although they are already partly extinguished, I still want to say to you in their presence: You are a Jew!" His face turned red and then paled by turns. "Yes," I continued mercilessly, "You are a Jew. I

have proofs that confirm my conjectures. When you heard us praying, your steps slowed. You spoke of freedom with the enthusiasm typical of a Jew, for whom freedom has always been lacking. When you said that you hate me, I thought – how is it possible to hate someone you do not know? It can only be that as a Daughter of Israel, I was recognized by your conscience. I wanted to say that you hate your people, but this is not true. This only hides the inner connection existing between you and your people, from whom you are now estranged. Now, you must leave."

But he did not move, and burst into tears. This was not just crying, this was sobbing. In it, I heard the sobbing of all of Russian Jewry, which was suffocated, which longed to return to the Jewish People and to its Land.

After a few minutes, I heard a shocking confession.

"Yes," he began, "I am a Jew. To this day, my old mother prays. Her wish is that her son should be a steadfast Jew. I was raised on the purity of Russianism. I have sacrificed the best years of my life for Russia. Until the Holocaust, I was happy. My good friend from the Ukraine showed the Germans the locations of my wife and my son. They were all burned, and my friends shouted '*Jude, Jude*, raze it, raze it to its foundations . . .' I wanted to die.

During a battle, I met a soldier with a Star of David on his shoulder. I asked him which country he came from. He replied, 'From our country.'

Which 'our country'?

'The Land of Israel,' he said proudly.

'Why do you sacrifice your life?' I asked.

'To strike at our enemies and help establish a life of freedom and liberty in our land,' he answered. The Hebrew soldier asked me, 'Why do you sacrifice your life?' I, the orator, who always knew how to reply to the point, did not know what to answer this time. Why was I sacrificing my life? This question pecks at my brain like Titus's mosquito. I find myself between a rock and a hard place. If I do not return this morning, they will kill my old mother, who is even more dear to me now, after I have come to a full realization of my Judaism. On the other hand, my soul is with you. This idea is not only in our camp. It has taken wing. I feel that the subject of the vision of Israel, soldiers of the Land of Israel, has breathed life into these dry bones of Russian Judaism, and I say to you: he who we awaken, will continue to be wakeful."

The next day, I received a note: I am leaving. I am sending 1,000 liters of fuel. I would be happy if you would use it to travel to our land, Israel.

Any comment is superfluous. Here is the second deed:

The Shavuot holiday was drawing near. Our national holiday. "This day, thou art become a people." We wanted to celebrate it properly. We wanted to have a party, to show that we were the daughters of a nation that learned, that man does not live by bread alone. Among us were fifteen girls, most of them from Hungary. They were brought to the camp about half a year before the liberation. We consulted with them about the program. Everyone said that we must show how we were burned, how we were suffocated in the gas chambers. I would not hear of this suggestion. How could we show these things? It would be a real desecration.

A girl of about thirteen years of age, the actress among them, sat at a distance. I asked her opinion, and she answered simply: My opinion is completely different. We should only show a picture of the built-up Land of Israel and sing songs of Zion. If they are our friends, the Americans and the English, they will be happy. If they are our enemies, they will burst. She justified the expression she had used, saying, "Before my stay in the camp, I would not have used that word" – and bent her head. Her suggestion was adopted.

The party was held at the conclusion of the Shavuot holiday. The hall was decorated. Although we were dressed in prisoners' uniforms, a sort of festiveness anointed us all. Members of the American Army command came, about thirty officers. The curtain rose. After the camp administrator's words of explanation, Chanale came on stage, went over to a pile of broken stones and bricks, and put up a piece of paper, on which was written "The end of ghettos, the destruction of the Diaspora!". Fervently and emotionally, she said, "In the name of the youth that has survived, I declare, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, 'I give thanks to You, O Lord, for You were angry with me', for only then did I understand, that there is no place for us in the Diaspora." This was a sublime moment. We rose from our places. Quiet weeping was heard in the hall. The Americans were bewildered. They did not understand what had happened. When we translated her words, they also stood, and then, as though ashamed, sat down. We sang songs of Zion and presented scenes of life in Israel expressing the joy of creativity and work. With the song *HaTikva*, the party ended. In the name of the American

Command, a high-ranking officer conveyed an American flag to the camp administrator, and said, "Things like this are conferred only to governments. As a symbol of recognition, we are giving it to you. We are highly impressed. We want to select young women from here to go to New York as Magen David Adom nurses."

"Where is this? In which country? From the United States?," we asked.

"Sir," I said, "cosmopolitanism is wonderful, but it is not right if only Jews are its supporters. We, too, want to go home. We have a country, and its name is Israel. You will be doing us a favor if you help us and hasten our departure." I saw an officer standing before me, tears flowing from his eyes.

The next day, he came over to me and said, "All of you are absolutely right to want only to go to Israel. In free America, there is a law in colleges of *numerus clausus* regarding Jews. In addition, if a Jew wants to [use his influence and do] someone a favor, he must masquerade as . . . an American."

I understood his words. It is not worth mentioning names. As the Gemara says: "Your friend has a friend, and your friend's friend has a friend . . ."

These are the two deeds.

An invitation was sent to us, the survivors, to return to Europe, which was soaked in our blood, to rebuild it. The style of the invitation was thus: You Jews are like the dust of the earth – you are always trampled underfoot like dust. But this dust of the earth is excellent building material. The Jews should contribute their share to the rebuilding of Europe.

Our vehement, unflinching answer is: No, we will not return to build. We did not destroy and we will not build. Let those who destroyed build. We want to go to Israel. Do not think that our strong love of Zion is the consequence of anti-Semitism, and that because there is no place for us in the Diaspora, we want to go to Israel. No, it is not a negative reason. And negation comes only from the positive. We want to go to Israel because our home is here. Even if your invitations were whole-hearted, even if anti-Semitism disappeared completely, even if the earth did not burn under our feet in the Diaspora – even then we would not return to the Diaspora, because without the Land of Israel, we cannot exist. It is impossible for an independent Jewish soul to live among the Gentiles. Our desire is to come here, to live as Jews among Jews in our land, according to our holy Torah, because the Torah has taught us the love of Zion. Through it, love for the Land of Israel grew in us. We could smell the scent of the Cedars of Lebanon in the words of the Torah. In the words of the Torah, we heard the deepest secrets of the waves of the Jordan. In the words of the Torah, we felt the dew of the Hermon, and the vigor of the Land of our Fathers, who bought it with their hearts' blood.

In the words of the prophets, where they are serene and quiet, as well as sublime, the beautiful skies of our land were reflected back at us in all their splendor. Now, we want this to be not merely longing. We want to come to this reality. It has been made clear to us that we must not rely only on Our Father in Heaven. It is clear to us that we must turn to you, the Jews. Do you know that after the Liberation, approximately 3,500 Jews died in the camps? If there had been a warm hand to take care of them, they could have lived. When we talk about the annihilation of six million, it is impossible to comprehend the number 3,500. All these numbers are beyond human comprehension. There is only one way to understand these losses, even a little. According to the Gaon, Rabbi Yechezkel Sarna, Head of the Hebron Yeshiva, we must consider the words of Amos, ". . . and I will make it as the mourning for an only child". There is no one in Israel who will not have a share in the destruction. His part in the mourning is that of a man for his father and his mother. A man for his brother and his kin. A man for his teacher or his student, a man for his friend and lover. Let each make for himself mourning for an only child. Then perhaps he will grasp a small part of this sorrow. How is it possible not to do anything? We explain to ourselves that our kinsmen remain in the camps and, after all the troubles they went through, now, after the "liberation", the danger of illness, of atrophy, of death await them. We were educated and raised according to "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand lose its cunning". We must understand that the time requires us to think: "If I forget the Diaspora, let my right hand lose its cunning". Our fellow Jews await our help. Will we not answer them, Heaven forbid?

The Diaspora demands that every Jew lend a hand in the rescue, because this way, every Jew will be saved. The love of God, the love of Israel – this is the decisive obligation. When they asked the Agudat Yisrael delegates at the investigatory committee if they, as Torah observers, preferred the entry into Israel of Torah-observant Jews, their answer was, "Every Jew, as a Jew, has a right to enter". This is the correct and proud reply. We feel the love of Israel for every Jew. Soon the

stony heart will be removed from the free [non-observant] Jew, and he will return to the Source. Is it impossible to demand the love of Israel for a Jew who is true to God? The time has come to destroy all false polemics. What is essential is – rescue.

The survivors' opinion is: if the Hebrew heart will open fully, the gates will open. They have empowered me to say to you, in the words of Micah: "The breaker is gone up before them; they have broken forth and passed on by the gate, and are gone out thereat". We are the children of kings and have the right to break all fences and gates. We have been disappointed by every promise of the Gentiles. For us, the steadfast words of God live and exist, received from his prophets, and we will soon see their fulfillment! "On that day, I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up its breaches, and I will raise up its ruins, and build it as in days of old . . . And I will plant them on their land, and never again will they be uprooted from their land which I have given them, says the Lord, your God."

(From the speech made in Haifa in the Amphitheater.
Printed in *Sha'arim*, Passover Eve 5706 [1946])

Yosef Barc

Pesia Szereszewska-Jazyn

It was during the time of the war. I chanced on one of the refugee camps in the forest near Bari, Italy, a place of concentration of refugees moored in illegal ships . . . A dark night, drizzling rain. I applied to the Secretariat, and inquired about relatives, in accordance with requests from people in Israel. Pesia was also on my list.

"Pesia? She is here. She is our mother," they told me. She immediately appeared. She did not look at all like a mother, nor could it be seen that this young woman had gone through so many hardships, as I discovered later. I gave her greetings from her relatives and her eyes shone with tears of joy.

Highly educated, a religious woman, gifted, possessed of a wonderful oratorical talent – she was a mother to all the refugees in the concentration camp.

I tried to have her transferred to the first boat due to sail. After three months, I returned to Israel from Italy. I rushed to meet her. The meeting was very emotional. I became even more agitated when she told me how she got to Israel – with what hardships and pains, how she withstood them and how she strengthened the spirits of her fellow passengers on the boat. I invited her to spend the Sabbath at Degania. I gave her directions to get there, but she already knew them. When we passed Mount Tabor, she read out verses from the Pentateuch, and everything that had been said about Mount Tabor. She abounded in Torah and knowledge. At the Sabbath gathering, she told us about everything that had happened to her and what she had seen in the concentration camps. We were both horrified and charmed. The next day, I asked her to speak to our children. I was concerned about our Sabras, who do not like speeches. She spoke for a long time, and they were rooted to their places. When she finished, I asked my young son, "Nu, so, did she speak for a long time?" "What do you mean – long?," he replied, "I wish she had kept on talking."

For some time, she was seen at gatherings on behalf of the Recruitment Fund. She founded a religious institution for children. She belonged to Agudat Yisrael, but she was far from identifying with them politically.

From time to time, I met her. Every meeting was an experience for me. She was holy, in the most exalted meaning of the word.

She married and went to the United States for a short time. She did not enjoy many good days. Everything she went through in the camps left a mark in her body, and she suffered a great deal from her illness.

I was told that in the last days of her life, she bore in her heart an idea that she wanted to discuss with Yosef Shprinzak and me. I regret that I was too late, and never saw her again.

But I number among the thousands for whom she was a mother.

Yosef Shprinzak

We here did not know her and her origins. Only those of the Brigade who met Holocaust refugees in Europe were the first to know that such a pearl existed.

To us in Israel, she was revealed in her speech at the public meeting that took place at *HaBima*, a gathering on behalf of the Recruitment and Rescue Fund in December 1945.

This revelation surprised and stirred hearts. It was not a speech, nor was it an outcry by one who bore on her arm the number that was both cursed and holy. It was a wild declaration, a celebration of the testament of the six million who were annihilated . . .

And in the testament was a command to life, to a renewed Zion. The testament was "to the survivors, who should become rescuers" – that they should sanctify the lives of the nation and the building of the Holy Land, so beloved by Pesia.

And in her speech – a supreme expression, fine words, the like of which we had almost never heard.

Her revelation to us surprised and agitated hearts. Later, when we came to know her personally, she enchanted us with the charm and grace of her soul, with her character and her flurries of emotion.

Whoever knew her felt that this woman was born to an exalted mission for her nation and her land. "Wisdom, understanding and knowledge" nestled in Pesia's soul. She was all vitality and lively initiative.

Her great culture, both Hebrew and general, her idiomatic speech, her literary talent – ensured her special place among the important women of our day, in the age of Zionism and national revival.

She was extremely religious, however, this religiosity was independently hers. Instead of "religious", it is more correct to define her as "believing". Belief radiated from her being. Perhaps she was the comely symbol of the notion of "the welfare of Jewish beliefs". This religiosity, both universal and national, captured the hearts of the non-religious as well.

She was a Zionist from the strength of her belief and fervent hope for the future of her people. Every time I encounter the concepts of "daughter of my people" or "daughter of Zion" – the figure of Pesia arises before me.

Y. I.

Pesia Szereszewska, of Blessed Memory

I saw her altogether once or twice in my life. But that was enough for her image to remain always before my eyes.

It was about 16-17 years ago, at the time of a meeting of the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel Committee, when we tried to "lay" the "cornerstone" of the first idea of publishing a *Yizkor* book. As soon as I saw her, I was charmed by the splendor of her radiant, noble face. I heard her talk and talk, and all of her words were brilliant, to the point and weighty – with her drive, her deep wisdom and her sharp erudition . . . After that, I did not see her again. Due to certain difficulties, and because "all beginnings are difficult", years passed and the book still did not come out. Serious efforts were made only in the last two years, and we achieved what we did. The book was published, but Pesia did not get to see it.

Her death shocked us. It landed on us like an unexpected blow, because we were unaware of the entire progress of her illness, which drew the life out of her tortured body. A refugee from the Nazis' death camps, Pesia Szereszewska (Nasielski) was unable to bear the final cries of her sisters and brothers in Hitler's valley of murder. The echoes reverberated for a long time in her gentle, Jewish heart . . . She called for the love of the Jewish people, and turned to all the Jews of the Diaspora to help transfer the Jews in European refugee camps to Israel as quickly as possible. She lived long enough to witness the establishment of the State, to

which she was bound with every fiber of her religious-Zionist soul.

Pesia did not win her personal life-and-death struggle against the destructive bacteria of the Nazis, planted in her body at the time [of the war] and revived after a brief interim, bringing about her death. She fell, like a hen that managed to fly, mortally wounded, from the hands of the slaughterer, and dripping blood, fluttered her wings, took a few steps – and collapsed! . . .

Pesia Szereszewska's radiant soul cast light into the hearts of every Ostrolenkan who knew her. She was destined to be a distinguished religious leader. We must study her words, so full of content, as pure, true Torah.

May her soul be bound up in the bond of everlasting life.



Rebbetzin Basia Lea Herzkowicz, May She Rest in Peace



With the passing of Rebbetzin Herzkowicz, may she rest in peace, not only her children and her family were orphaned of their mother, but hundreds and thousands of her students as well, spread all over Israel and the Diaspora. For she was not only an educator, but a loving mother. Besides Bejt Jakow students, whom she took under the wings of Torah education, many women mourned her, for Rebbetzin Herzkowicz, may she rest in peace, roused them to Judaism.

Indeed, she was a lofty and noble figure, an exemplary personality.

The Bejt Jakow movement knew very few women of her caliber. For Sara Schenirer, may she rest in peace, it was hard to find another student to help so many others realize the Bejt Jakow ideal, as did Rebbetzin Herzkowicz, may she rest in peace. For more than thirty-five years, this woman was one of the pillars of the Bejt Jakow movement and ultra-orthodox education in Israel.

She came from Polish Ostrolenka, from the home of her father, the Chassid and teacher, Reb Awraham Josef Nasielski, of blessed memory, head of the Rabbinical Seminary of the yeshiva of the Admor, Rabbi Aharele Hofstzejn of Kurzeniec, may God avenge his blood, a prominent Gur Chassid. Reb Awraham Josef was a very God-fearing man, a fervent Chassid, who studied Torah day and night. He raised a fine family. He had only one son and several daughters. This Chassid invested great efforts in his daughters' education. His daughter, Basia Lea, left her father's home equipped and permeated with knowledge of Judaism and enormous erudition in the Sayings of Our Sages, with fervor, enthusiasm and an inexhaustible treasure of *Yirat Shamaim* [fear of Heaven].

From this splendid home also came her sister, Pesia Szereszewska, may she rest in peace, the well-known ultra-orthodox community worker and author.

Rebbetzin Herzkowicz, may she rest in peace, saw her life's mission, her exalted and highly refined ideal, in her work for Bejt Jakow. Even in her youth, she began to be prominent for her rare talents, her captivating rhetorical ability, her ardor and influence. When she was only sixteen years old, she spoke before an audience of ten thousand people in the Warsaw city hall square, and made an enormous impression.

She was a devoted student of Sara Schenirer, and a partner in her great life's work. When Mrs. Schenirer went on a campaign to capture [hearts and minds] all over Poland, with the intention of opening Bejt Jakow schools in every city and town, she took Basia Herzkowicz with her to help promote the idea. In her, she saw huge educational and persuasive power, despite her very young age. Once, during one of their trips, when she spoke many times during the course of three days, she was invited to speak again on Wednesday. She maintained that this was beyond her strength. Mrs. Schenirer, however, did not give up: You begin – and God will help you to continue . . .

She completely devoted her days and nights and her talents to the exalted Bejt Jakow mission. She traveled from city to city, established an ultra-orthodox school in Ostrolenka, the city of her birth, and in Poltusk, and worked with Mrs. Chawa Landsberg, may she rest in peace. She took upon herself the task of administering the Bejt Jakow in Chelm. She married her husband, the Gaon and Chassid, Rabbi Szymon Aron Herzkowicz, may he live a good, long life (now Rabbi of the Agudat Chachmei Slavita in Bnei Brak), and they established a splendid Jewish home. Despite the pressures of home and their children's education, she did not desert her position at the educational front for a moment.

In 1932, she and her husband emigrated to Israel. He was appointed Rabbi of Tel Amal near Haifa, and she found a broad field for charitable work in the children's institutions of the area, and at the *Tipat Chalav* clinic ["drop of milk" – well-baby clinics in Israel]. After a time, her husband became the administrator of the Torat Emet Talmud Torah in Haifa.

She worked very hard and invested all the fervor of her soul in the students' development, and as an extremely devoted mother, loving, affectionate and dedicated.

After a number of years, they moved to Tel Aviv. There, she taught in a Beit Yakov Seminary and left her impression of hundreds of students, instilling in them the spirit of Torah and *Yirat Shamaim*. At the same time, she served as Chairwoman of the Women and Girls of Agudat Yisrael in Tel Aviv. Her limitless dynamic power found an outlet in educating the generations. She organized women's circles and parties, and gave speeches and lectures. She especially excelled in Torah commentaries and Tales of the Sages. Whenever they heard her speak, her listeners were amazed.

She took care that her children received a good education and, for this reason, the family moved to Jerusalem. The War of Independence came and Jerusalem was besieged. During this period, the figure of Rebbetzin Herzkowicz, may she rest in peace, shines with additional radiance. She excelled in marvelous acts of charity. Her devotion and care for others knew no bounds. Every day, she cooked tasty meals for those who could not leave their homes to get food. She was not deterred by the shells exploding around her, but refused to allow anyone else to accompany her and endanger himself as well. She was stringent only as it concerned herself, and was lenient concerning others. She had a strong, flinty sense of confidence and absolute faith in God and His help. She also knew how to instill this feeling in others.

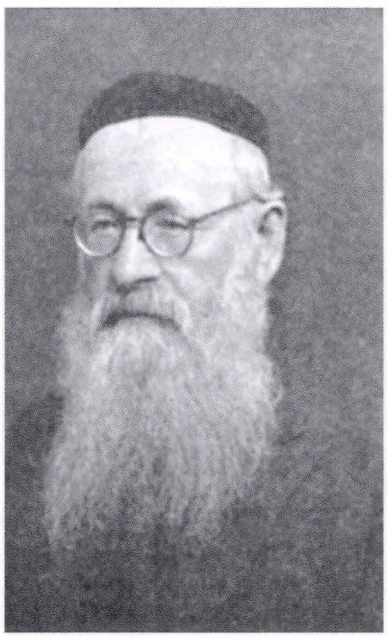
With the end of the battles and the liberation of Jerusalem, she took an educational system upon herself again. Rebbetzin Herzkowicz ran about, exerting herself, utilizing every way and opportunity to acquire for the Beit Yakov Seminary the big house on Givat [Hill] Shahin, in the Katamon neighborhood, from the military government. Her mission was successful. The house was transferred to the seminary and thousands of future mothers were educated there. For a number of years, she filled the role of educator at the seminary, inspiring her students with her grand spirit and creating an environment in the spirit of Sara Schenirer. She was also prominent in community work, as a speaker who captured hearts in election campaigns for the First and Second Knesset assemblies, and as a superb lecturer on subjects of Judaism in women's circles and religious organizations.

More years passed. The family moved to Bnei Brak. Her husband, the rabbi, was one of the city's prominent Torah personalities. He established Torah lessons, spoke and sermonized in public and published important books about Jewish law. She dedicated herself to the establishment of an ultra-orthodox school for girls, which she administered, making a supreme effort even during the year of her illness, until the last months of her life. Her illness became more severe and she was taken to Jerusalem. On Sunday, November 5, 1961, she returned her pure soul to her Creator, at the age of 51.

Alas for those who were lost, and will not be forgotten!

B. Y.

Rabbi Chaim Mordechaj Braunrot, of Blessed Memory



He was born in Ostrolenka (Poland) in 5641 (1881).

When he was very young, his father, Reb Natan Cwi, a book seller, sent him to learn with the Gaon Rabbi Awraham of Soczaczow, and then with Rabbi Eliahu Singer, the Rabbi of Kalisz.

Still a very young man, he was certified for instruction by Rabbi Milchael Tenenbojm, author of *Divrei Milchael*; the Rabbi of Lomza, Rabbi Mosze Nachum Jeruzalimski; the Rabbi of Kielc and Rabbi Szymon Dow of Siedlce.

His first rabbinate was in Czerwin, in the Lomza region, Ostrolenka district (1908-1914). Then he was retained as Rabbi of the city of Chorzel. After a short time, however, World War I broke out and all the Jews of the city, which was near the German border, were expelled. He arrived in Warsaw as a refugee, and remained there for two years. He devoted himself temporarily to community work and was one of the heads of the refugee assistance committee. In 1918, he was appointed Rabbi in Ciechanow, and served in that rabbinate for twenty-five years, with the exception of two years (1922-1923), when he was in America on a mission for the community, together with Rabbi Trojb of Kutna.

When he was in America, he also served as the rabbi of the synagogue of the Lubavitcher Chassidim in Chicago.

In 1939, about two months before World War II broke out, he went to England, again on a mission for the community. Because of the war, he decided to remain there for a few years, until he could emigrate to Israel.

In Poland, he was considered among the great rabbis. He was a Torah scholar and very active in community work. For many years, he was a member of the executive committee of the Polish rabbinical organization. He was liked and accepted in rabbinic circles, and was an intimate of the courts of the Admorim. Although he was an Alexander Chassid, and was even related to the family of the Admor of Alexander – he was a loyal Zionist, and one of the first Polish rabbis who united around the Mizrachi organization. He was very active in the movement, in writing and speech. He also filled roles in the movement's administration. For a time, he was a member of the executive committee of the Mizrachi organization in Poland. The Assembly of Mizrachi Rabbis in Poland was established at his initiative and he headed it. During his stay in England, he served as Vice President of the Mizrachi there and participated in conferences of World Mizrachi and in the 12th, 13th and 14th Zionist Congresses.

He visited Israel in 1926 and 1936. He settled there in 1943, and was appointed Rabbi-Av Beit Din of Tel Aviv-Jaffa. He served in this position until his last days. He was also appointed Chairman of Religious Education in Tel Aviv-Jaffa. After the passing of the Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel, of blessed memory, he was active in the Mizrachi movement in Israel and spread Torah. He published many articles in periodicals in Israel and abroad: *HaMizrachi*, *Die Yiddisher Schtimmer*, *HaTzofe* and others. He wrote many books about Jewish law and homiletic literature, many of which remain in manuscript form.

The following appeared in print:

Otzar HeChaim, Piotrkow 1930, new interpretations of Jewish law and *Aggadah*; *Omar u'Devarim* (1935), sermons on the Torah portions of the week from Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus (the rest in manuscript form); *Stirat Z'kenim* (1948), about the Sayings of the Sages regarding Jewish law and *Aggadah* (an additional portion still in manuscript form).

He also published Jewish law articles to clarify the

question of milking on the Sabbath (1946) and *Traveling on an Airplane on the Sabbath*, *Sinai*, Volume 14, pages 129-135, with particular attention to problems of the time and the need to build a renewed Jewish settlement.

In the bibliography:

Netiva, booklet, January 1936;
Tel Aviv Municipal News, Nissan-Iyar [Hebrew months] (19th year, Edition 9-10), page 144;
Bamisila, April-May 1950, page 16;
HaHed, Booklet 6, February 1950;
HaTzofe, 30 August 1943, 26 February and 5 March 1950, March 1951;
Encyclopedia of Religious Zionism, published by Musar HaRav Kook, Volume A, pages 385/87.

S. D. Yerushalmi

*

He had a reputation in the rabbinic world as one of the most important rabbis (writes Y. Beharav in *HaBoker*, 10 Adar II 5703, 17.3.43), and one of the rarest figures of the scholarly world.

A fervent Lover of Zion, he did much for the good of building the Land. He was among the heads of Mizrachi in Poland. It should be mentioned that he wrote the declaration of the Mizrachi organization in Poland.

He also excelled as a sermonizer and speaker who knew how to blend homilies with the modern style of preaching. His books on matters of Jewish law and *Aggadah* made an enormous impression on the world of the rabbis and exegesists.

His ability in rulings is seen in the pamphlet, *Mayim Chaim*, appended to his great book, *Otzar HeChaim*, where one discovers his marvelous expertise in the Early and Late Commentaries, his precise perception of every detail, and delving into every aspect of the *heter v'issur* [permitting and forbidding].

When World War II broke out, the rabbi was in England on a mission for the community, and was retained as Rabbi of the city of Leeds. He was also appointed Vice President of the Mizrachi organization in England and Ireland, and was a member of the Jewish Council for the Jews of Poland.

He did great work in all areas there, too, in particular, for the emigration to Israel of yeshiva students who had fled to Vilna and other neutral places.

To this end, he established a special committee and was in constant contact with the Gaon Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky, the righteous of blessed memory. Many articles were published in Jewish English newspapers regarding Rabbi Braunrot's activities to save Jewish survivors in Europe.

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He stood resolutely for the honor of Torah and the rabbinate.

In his article, *On the Question of the Communities and the Rabbinate* (*Yerushalayim*, a monthly rabbinic anthology, Warsaw, September 1936, published by *Knesset HaRabanim HaMizrachiim* in Poland), he wrote:

> And this ugly negotiation on the rabbi and rabbinate is not always done in the same way and in the same coin, but sometimes for money, sometimes by bartering, sometimes by verbal agreement . . . But sometimes it happens that it is done without any possession of Torah. Sometimes, it has other kinds of benefits: sometimes because the candidate for the rabbinic seat whispers the prayer said after receiving a blow, sometimes because he professes the unity of God's Kingdom in secret . . . and so on.
>
> This trading for the rabbi and rabbinate has emptied communities of their sanctity and they continue to backslide, continue to be destroyed. Who will make a fence? The new community elders? And who will stand in the breach? The new "member of the community"?

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When he served as Rabbi-Av Beit Din of one of the important courts of the Chief Rabbinate of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, he delved into the problem of rabbinic judgment concerning the Israeli legal structure since the establishment of the State (written by Rabbi Y. P. Tchorsz, *HaTzofe*, 15 Adar 5710, 5.3.1950). He published articles concerning matters of Torah law and, in his thinking, formed a perfect plan to organize the rabbinical law courts in general, and to arrange a system of statutes and laws according to the Torah in particular. By nature, he was good-tempered and loved the Jewish people. Love of peace was part and parcel of his soul; fairness, sensitivity and nobility were characteristic of him.

In the Mizrachi movement, he mediated between youths and the elderly. He pursued peace and loved harmony and perfect work. He was agreeable and accepted by all his colleagues and the entire public. Although still young in spirit and fresh in his actions, his continual work in the law court irked him greatly. It resulted in severe heart disease, which shortened his end; his life was stopped in the middle of its song. He passed away in Tel Aviv on 7 Adar [February 24] 5710 (1950).

Alas for those who were lost, and will not be forgotten!

May his soul be bound up in the bond of everlasting life.

Reb Israel Mordechaj Lewinski

Writer, teacher and educator.

Reb Israel, of blessed memory, lived for many years in Lomza, the city where I spent my youth. He was a close neighbor. He lived on Rzondowa Street, where my family also lived.

Great interest drew me to the Lewinski family home. I was like a member of the family there while still very young. I saw in him a person of solid character, a man of deep ethics, who clung to truth and justice. The founding of the Improved *Heder* and other things attest to this. It is interesting – the writing ability he had, he bequeathed to his family. He waited patiently for his time to come. Although he was a reserved person, his candor was sometimes limitless. He was a fervent Zionist. It may be said that he was a "die rather than transgress" Zionist, who lived both the good and bad aspects of Zionism.

When he arrived in Israel, he was prepared to begin everything anew. A Jew of the old generation, youthful desire always pulsed in him. He was always vigorous. When I visited him during the last months before his passing, I was surprised at his assertiveness and alertness. Again, he proved the idea that the soul is as eternal as the sun; it never ages in man, not even for a day or an hour. The soul leaves the old, broken body while it is still young. When I asked him why he had begun to write and publish so late, he answered, "Late? It is never too late . . ." He was alert until he reached advanced old age. He remembered the reckoning of every little thing. He bore his Jewishness and his humanity with pride to his last days.

He was born in Kadzidła (Ostrolenka district) in 1871 (5631), the son of Efraim Jehuda and Rachel Lewinsky (Lewita), and descended from the author of *Tosfot Yom Tov* (therefore, many of his family members bear the name Yom Tov). Until the age of ten, he studied in Kadzidła or Myszyniec. By the age of eleven, he studied with his eldest brother in Myszyniec and, later, in the Lomza Yeshiva. After four years, he went to Vilna and studied general studies. When he reached army age, he was sent to the Grenadierów Division, located near Moscow. He was quickly released because of near-sightedness, and married a woman from the city of Zambrow. His father-in-law promised to support him permanently, but a fire broke out in Zambrow and destroyed all his father-in-law's property. Then he went to the city of Wachock and became a teacher. From then on, he was fated to be a teacher and educator. He was examined in the gymnasium [secondary school] in the city of Poltusk and, there, received his license to teach. In Zambrow, he taught Russian in *heders*. His reputation preceded him. He came to Lidowna (Jedwabne) and established a Hebrew school there. Later, he was called on to teach in Lomza. There, he established the Improved *Heder* (the *Torah Vedaat* School), wrote in the newspaper of the time, the *Lomzer Schtimmer*, and gave Hebrew classes in the evenings to adult women. His lessons excelled because they were unique and unusual for *heders* at the time. Besides Hebrew, he taught Pentateuch and history. Thanks to him, the Improved *Heder* developed. After only a short time, it employed four teachers. Acceding to the demands of his children, he emigrated to Israel in 1935, and lived in Tel Aviv. Here, the writer in him suddenly awoke, and he wrote serialized children's stories, as well as scientific articles in children's newspapers, such as *Davar LeYiladim*, *HaBoker LeYiladim* and *HaTzofe*. Like an overflowing fountain, writing ability sprung up, which had been hidden inside him all his life. While still in Vilna, he took an active part in youth publications in

The Red Book by Avraham Litwak, called *Yisrael Ostrolenka*. He was also active on the editorial staff of the *Yizkor* book of the Lomzans. He wrote, translated and helped publish it. In the *Yizkor* book of Ostrolenka, as well, he wrote an article called *Kadzidła*, where he was born. Although he reached a ripe old age (93), his desire to write, to learn and to live was like a young man's, worthy of admiration.

Apparently, there is an end to everything and every person. Suddenly, he fell on hard ground, was seriously hurt and taken immediately to the hospital, where he passed away. He left three sons (one of whom is the folklorist, Dr. Yom-Tov Lewinsky) and a daughter. They all reside in Tel Aviv.

Y. Ivri, Tel Aviv

Note Grabie

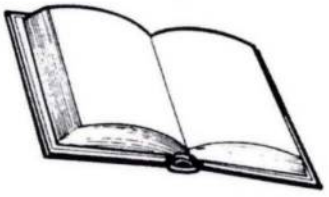
(Known by the name of M. Graf)

He was born in 1908 in Ostrolenka, the son of the Rabbi of Sziadowa, Rabbi Menachem Meir Grabie. He studied in *heders* and yeshivas, and in *Tachkimoni* for general studies. In 1928, he began to publish stories in the Orthodox newspaper in Warsaw, *Der Yod*. Later, he was one of the editors of the daily newspaper, *Heintike Neies*, in which he published his light feuilletons. From 1935-1937, he also worked at the Warsaw *Heint*, and traveled on behalf of the newspaper to Jewish settlements all over Poland, publishing interesting articles about them.

I do not know of his later fate. At the beginning of World War II, Note Grabie disappeared, and no one heard of him anymore.

(*Heint* Jubilee Book 1908-1938; Dr. Reuwen Feldshuh, *Yiddisher Gezelshaftlicher Lexicon*, Warsaw 1939, Lexicon of the New Yiddish Literature, Volume B, New York, 1958)

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Ostrolenka Without Jews

Mark Rakowski, Warsaw

The City of My Youth

Everything flowed and passed in our lives. Everything turned into shadow. But there is a kind of magical power in the memories of the past.

Everyone, especially in adulthood, bears a small cemetery in the depths of his heart, not just for relatives, friends and others who were dear to him – but also for events and occasions to which he is strongly tied.

Recollections become more distant in the course of time, and are even erased from our memories. Then a day comes, and forgotten incidents suddenly appear, coming to mind. The dead leave their graves, speaking and smiling with their colorless lips. Great sadness encompasses our hearts then. We feel lonely, and the thought that everything has passed, never to return, does not let us be. It seems to us that we would give anything for one day of that beautiful life, the life of youth and happiness, which will never return.

An enormous impetus to visit the places where we were once happy and carefree awakens in us. I have a few cities like these: Malkin, where I was born and which I left as a child of ten; Ostrolenka, the city of my flowering youth, from which my whole family moved to Bialystok at the time of World War I; and finally, Warsaw-Otwock of the period of my literary activity.

After World War II, during my various travels and wanderings, I do not know why these two cities, Ostrolenka and Bialystok, tempted and winked at me, like distant lights in the dark night.

On the banks of the enchanting Black Sea, in the shadow of the intoxicating scents of the tropical trees on the Crimean Peninsula, on the deck of the ship on which I sailed on the waves of the Volga River, and also when I struggled with death – at all these places, there rose before my eyes, as if from a fog, the Rivers Narew, Visla, Swider and Bialy – the murky stream of Bialystok. As if on a screen, shadows of the cities of my childhood and youth pass.

These experiences are not just sadness and longing. They are sick, pathological experiences – this is nostalgia. Sadness and longing are passing phenomena, caused by chance failure in life or disappointed hope, or even by stormy weather continuing for many days. These feelings are there one night and lost the next. But nostalgia is a disease that gnaws at you day and night, weakens the body and brings about despair.

In a bitter movement of the soul, I travel to Ostrolenka. The train cars are spacious, there is no crowding. No Jewish faces can be seen in them. And what would Jews seek here, when in the entire region between Warsaw and Ostrolenka, not even one Jew is to be found?

The monotonous rumble of the wheels is heard. Beyond the window, the landscape flashes by. In them, I seek some reminder of years gone by, something familiar to grab on to – but in vain. My thoughts run with the speed of the rising and falling telegraph wires, toward the distant past, when train cars were full of many Jews, jammed and crowded in. I see before me Ostrolenka of old, as it is frozen in my memories.

Megalomania takes control of me. Here I am, the only Jewish wanderer to tread on his tortured brothers' ground, and I can find no rest. I am the modern enemy, bewailing the bitter fate of his annihilated nation, his family, his relatives and friends. I am the unconsumed burning bush.

Ostrolenka! I feel like a man who wakes from a terrible nightmare in the night, in a dark room. He has lost direction and lies with wide-open eyes, thinking that he did not lie there the night before. He looks for the door, the window, the closet, groping in the dark, exerting himself until he arrives at the conclusion that he is indeed lying in the very same place.

I leave the railway car and pass familiar places. I look into people's eyes, searching for familiar faces. I am ready to approach the first person I encounter and ask to shake his hand. But I feel strangeness in a place where once everyone knew me. A wave of cold passes

through all my limbs. No one knows me and I do not know anyone.

It seems to me that I am not myself, but someone else, because someone took the "me" of old far from here, and now only my shadow hovers in the emptiness all around. My city, where every door and window was always open to me, where at every step of the way I met acquaintances, is unfamiliar to me now.

Where have they disappeared to, the soft, wide carriages, harnessed to a pair of horses, which took passengers to the railway station? Where are the mighty, tall wagoners, the giant Seka, who from the heights of their seats, like a figures of authority, waved their whips with a whistle and sang to the tempo of the galloping horses' gait and the clatter of the wheels in iron hoops?

The image of Meir Hersz appears before me, the typical Jewish wagoner from Mendele Mocher Seforim's [Mendele the Bookseller] town of Kapcansk, with his gaunt horse and its decrepit cart, bouncing and creaking as it went, a beggar who took care of half a dozen children. His customers, for the most part, had heavy loads. Crowds of children shouted "Special delivery!" and ran after his wagon, which was like a large wheelbarrow. Every few months, he appeared dressed in his Sabbath *kapote* on a weekday. Then, everyone understood that his horse had died, and they collected about fifteen-twenty rubles for him to buy a new horse.

In front of the railway station, once teeming with life, full of wagons and carriages, now stands one forlorn bus. People get on slowly, without haste, indifferently – as if traveling without a purpose.

The bus passes quietly near a row of houses close to the road, where the little synagogue built of wood, for a few prayer quorums of Jews, once stood, built thanks to my father's great efforts.

My head spins. The old places revive forgotten people, precisely in this synagogue. On Sabbaths, those wagoners sat near its eastern wall, dressed in festive *kapotas*, washed, the smell of soap and kerosene wafting from them – and among them, my father, Jakow Meir, dressed in a short coat, with a collar and tie. My father liked them, with their folksiness, and befriended them, as though he were one of them.

I must admit that this simple environment was so close to me and, thanks to these laborers, tenderness and love for the simple man was rooted in my heart.

I cannot recognize the place where our house stood. The marsh that stretched behind it has disappeared as if it never was, the storks stepping proudly are no longer seen, the croaking of frogs is no longer heard. Only a few neglected structures stand as though enchanted in the silence all around, and people are sunk in a deep slumber.

There is no longer the movement of old along the five kilometers between Kaczyny and the city. The long wagons, full of heavy sacks, barrels and all kinds of merchandise are gone forever. I remember Meir Josel, the strong porter. Even a crate weighing over a hundred kilos did not bend his back, which was as straight as a ruler. Here, alongside the road, stood the windmill of Szaje the Grinder (Milner), who used to tell wonderful tales of ghosts and reincarnations. Opposite was the smithy of Awraham the Blacksmith, who was adorned with a long beard, and who my father nicknamed "Strong-Hammer", because he understood the Torah commentaries. He was not a drunk by nature, but on Simchat Torah, he drank well and properly, until he almost lost his senses. When he sang in a sobbing voice, those around him began to shout "Kieliszek wodki podawaj!" (Give him a shot of vodka!).

Like shadows, images pass before my eyes and disappear. Cars go by quickly and, from time to time, a farmer's cart. The entire area has changed until it is unrecognizable. Swamps have been drained, trees cut down, and numerous new houses built in their stead.

At the entrance to the city of Ostrolenka, I had the impression that nothing had changed. Tall modern buildings had not sprung up. The same low huts remained on both sides of the road. Only here and there an empty lot stuck out, a remembrance of the last destruction.

Where were the people and the farmers with their wagons, the empty lot leading to Benedon's barracks, which shrank because of the newly built buildings? Where were the dozens of Jews – men and women – crowding around farmers' wagons loaded with grains and vegetables? The rurals are no longer seen with huge baskets full of chickens, ducks and geese, and the Jewish housewives prodding them, weighing and blowing on their rumps to reveal the flesh and check their quality.

No one cares that their townsman of old, who the whole town once knew, has arrived after forty years, brokenhearted, to have a look at the place of his childhood and youth, where his young life passed happily and in great hope.

Ostrowa Street has also remained as it was. It has not been made wider, and its houses are no taller. But it is more beautiful and cleaner, and looks festive. Only the steps leading to the doors of the stores of the Jews are missing.

A beautiful public park with flowerbeds and new benches placed in the central square. Three of its sides have been renovated or rebuilt. The city hall and post office are unchanged. Only the house in which Hacek's store was has been completely erased. From there, an empty area continues on to the River Narew. The houses on the street leading to the bridge have also disappeared. Nothing remains of the houses on Synagogue Street, where the Hotel Polski was, or Thylim's house, in which the Markiewicz couple lived, and where we enjoyed ourselves and laughed over a cup of tea. The place is now surrounded by a wooden fence; behind it, makeshift shacks have been built. And another empty area in the direction of Bialy's sawmill.

But where is the bridge? Often, when I was in a foreign country, through the eyes of my spirit, I saw the banks of our River Narew and, spanning it, the wooden bridge leading to the Rozan road, surrounded by many trees and bushes. At those moments, it was as if I had broken through the dense wall of the past, and stood face to face with the years of my youth. Now I feel as if something has shattered. The thread of my life's path has snapped, the bridge has disappeared, and there gapes the deep abyss of those years in which I was as free as a bird, when the days flowed without worry.

Sunk in respective thoughts, I ramble slowly through the streets of present-day Ostrolenka, which has expanded, primarily in the direction of Wojciechowice. Clearly, a great deal of effort has been invested to restore the ruins and build new, modern houses. A huge bridge has been built over the River Narew, at the continuation of Lomza Street. In Wojciechowice, a big paper factory has been erected, said to produce hundreds of thousands of tons of paper a year.

But not a scintilla of joy has awakened in my heart, because not even one Jew remains in the city. I feel that I am losing my balance, my head is spinning; the order and look of the houses has changed. With each additional step, the spark of my life is extinguished.

Here, on the corner, not far from the post office, was the iron goods store of the father of my friend, Awigdor Melin. There, near the city hall, still stands Flakser the father's stone house, with the steps. He was an important community worker in our city. The attorney, Mosze Rubinsztejn, lived on Ostrowa Street. Here was the wooden shack in which Herszel Moszkes produced oil, there on Synagogue Street – Herszel Szperling's foodstuffs business. I remember the place where Dr. Koen and his three sons, who went to Russia, lived.

On Lomza Street, near the confectionary, hung the three copper dishes of the medical assistant and barber, Gutman, whose speech was a mixture of German, Yiddish and Polish. People placed great trust in him, as in a doctor and even more so. He attended to the city's inhabitants, and farmers in the area came to him, as well. He was very sure of himself, claiming that he attached cupping glasses so tightly to his patients, that they would stick even during the jolts of the road to Petersburg. In 1940, I met his son, the doctor, and his wife in Bialystok. I do not know what became of them.

I also thought about Yisroel Shtern, but my memories about him are tied to Warsaw, where I found out from him that we were from the same town. In the *Yizkor* book of Jonas Turkow, I read of his road of pain in the ghetto and in Warsaw. Together with him disappeared our shared work of translation from the English – *The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare. I never succeeded in including it in the book I wanted to publish. One printed copy disappeared with Shtern and another copy with my wife, who was murdered by the Germans in Otwock.

Here and there I see a few stores, with outmoded, unfashionable merchandise in the shop windows. On the main street, are a few large and beautiful stores for the sale of food and a few large restaurants that will not be empty, so long as one can get some liquid refreshment there. Most of the buildings that contained stores have become apartment houses, their windows adorned with plants and curtains. What I liked in the restored Ostrolenka was the new bridge, built according to the *dernier cri* of construction, the new stone houses on the way to the municipal park, the public gardens with an abundance of flowers and greenery. But Ostrolenka should be ashamed of its movie house. It is located in a filthy shed, in a side alley full of mud off Ostrowa Street, opposite the courtyard of the synagogue – of which not a vestige has remained. It is all muddy and ruined. A barren spot. All around are scattered scrap iron wrecks and piles of garbage. When I passed the place, I was startled by some cats burrowing in the trash and a pair of dogs fighting over a bone.

Evening draws near. I feel lonely and helpless. So, a king who has lost his crown and his possessions must feel; so, a singer who has lost his voice in his old age must feel.

Again, I stand in the market square. In the past, at this hour, it was full of wagons and carriages. The air echoed with tumult and noise, shouts of wagoners, porters and crowds of Jews loaded with packages – and along the sidewalk strolled the youths. Now, only the hasty steps of passersby hurrying home can be heard.

Without realizing it, I have arrived at the new bridge. The sun's last rays have disappeared. A pale moon has appeared, drifting between translucent clouds; its pale light cuts the River Narew. I stand alone, with my long shadow, and look into the endlessly flowing waters of the river, that took with them forever my youth, my happiness, my dreams. I look at the shallows, lit, gilded and quivering in the moonlight, changing colors, as though pouring from thousands of eyes that were extinguished too soon. I hear the murmur of the flowing water . . . and it seems to me that someone is whispering in my ears the fatal, merciless utterance: Never again! Never!

Ostrolenka Today

One of our townsmen, in present-day Poland, writes about Ostrolenka:

"Ostrolenka today is without Jews. At the time I visited there, everyone was talking about the big paper production factory, where thousands of people will be employed, and which will produce thousands of tons of paper a year.

Present-day Ostrolenka is a clean, polished, adorned city, but it has lost its soul and no longer speaks to the Jewish heart . . .

A friend of mine traveled to Ostrolenka with me. He told me that he had received a letter from an Ostrolenkan Jew named Golubowski, who is the manager of a wine production factory in Grodno. He asked me to get documents for him to enable him to return to the city of his birth in Poland. We sent him the requested papers, but he did not make further contact with us. Apparently, he decided not to come . . . "

The Jews are to blame for everything

This was a well-known expression, even before the mass destruction of the Jewish community in Poland by the Nazis. Although there is a negligible Jewish minority in Poland now, once again they claim that the Jews are to blame for everything. Even the Jews who were annihilated can serve some purpose . . . Why shouldn't a Jew be blamed?! . . .

There is no trace of Jews in Ostrolenka, but if any kind of recurring problem is discussed – then the Jews are to blame . . .

This is a report published in *Zycie Warszawy* (Warsaw Life), a popular newspaper appearing in Warsaw, on 6 February 1958, called *Tongues of Fire and Slander*, signed by A. W. The conscience of the non-Jews in Ostrolenka is not clean concerning the Jews, and the nightmare of the Jewish martyrs does not let them rest. They believe that the Jews came down from heaven and set fire to their homes (recently, many fires broke out in the city), in order to revenge themselves on them.

In the paper it is written – "In fact, it is hard to know what is sadder, that a young man set fire to houses in Ostrolenka, or the wild slander and rumors that spread and were inflated by a large part of the inhabitants.

"Let us recall the events: between the 15th of October last year, and the 24th of January this year, nine fires broke out in Ostrolenka. The fire destroyed many farm buildings, in which was a large inventory, both animate and inanimate. The person guilty of the arson could not be caught, despite the vigor of the police and a civil guard organized by the inhabitants. A great panic arose in the city. Fear of fires and rumors of all kinds spread. Finally, after the ninth fire, an Ostrolenkan inhabitant, Witold Szoplinski, was arrested and confessed to setting the fires. When questioned, he gave as a reason for his actions the opposition of his mother to his marriage to his beloved and, after that, his hasty marriage to another woman, which ended in divorce."

I had the opportunity to discuss this subject with many Ostrolenkans, especially when the crime was recreated at the location of the arson. Nearly half of the inhabitants of the city gathered to have a look at Szoplinski, the arson suspect. We heard not a few completely unfounded things there.

The rumors maintained, and until today repeat, that the Jews of Ostrolenka, in fact, were guilty of the arson. Why the Jews and not the Christians? Obviously – was the answer – because they want to revenge themselves on the city's Christians. At the time of the German occupation, when the Jews of the city fled, the wagoners who helped them flee stole their property.

The rumors spread far beyond Ostrolenka, because similar arsons occurred in other places as well.

If the rumors had spread among simple, naïve, uneducated people, one could regret that someone was spreading them intentionally, to confuse those who had been harmed by the disaster.

The article continued with matter-of-fact details of the investigation, opinions of experts, psychologists, etc.

The article ends thus:

"It is impossible to stand idly by, and look on indifferently at the tumult in the city. One should and must discount the dangerous slander. A party committee and a city council exist; there are institutions with workers capable of thinking logically and of explaining the matter to the satisfaction of naïve people. He who is in power – he must impose authority."



"For the Stone Shall Cry Out of the Wall"



Mark Rakowski, near the monument of the Jewish heroes who were killed

Our honored townsman, Mark Rakowski, took upon himself a mission both holy and difficult, imposed on him by the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw – to photograph destroyed Jewish sites in Poland, such as public buildings, synagogues, homes of rabbis, etc. He sent us pictures from present-day Ostrolenka and wrote to us:

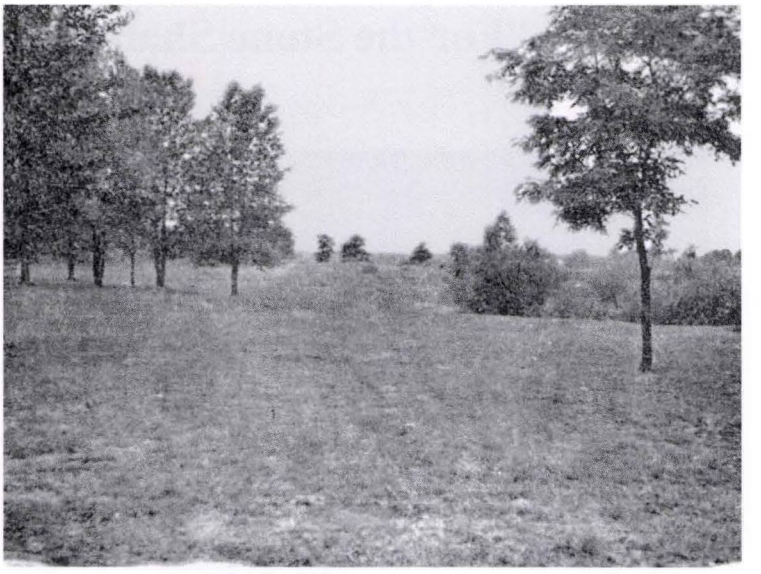
"I took upon myself the Jewish Historical Institute mission – to travel all over Poland, to cities and towns, accompanied by a photographer, in order to perpetuate in photographs the remains of religious and cultural Jewish life. At dusk, in this role, I sometimes feel like the Eternal Jew, who wanders tirelessly all over the world, treading on destroyed cemeteries, their graves crumbling, on the ashes of the six million, spread all over this country.

I suffer, my heart drips blood when I look at this great Vale of Tears. I am tormented more spiritually than physically. My head is full of painful impressions, endlessly passing. When I come to familiar places, "the now" and real life disappear for me, and I remain face to face with the past, which has become tangible.

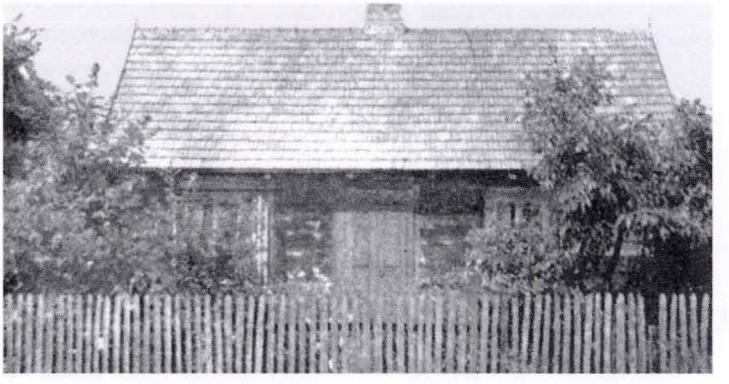
I was photographed at the railroad station of Ostrolenka (Kaczyny). In the place where our home was, a large stone house now stands and, next to it, a kiosk. When they pointed out the old houses that had been restored, I did not recognize them. Once, they were about 200 meters from the main road; now, they are a short leap away. The road has come closer to the houses, and near them, a wide sidewalk has been paved. I was photographed with two local inhabitants who knew my family, but did not know me, nor I them . . . In addition, I was photographed in Ostrolenka proper. I photographed the house in which my aunt, Czila Rakowski-Pawlowska, a dentist, lived. (She was murdered in the Bialystok Ghetto.) I photographed a number of places where public buildings stood – not a trace of them remains. Where the synagogue was, there is an empty lot; an apartment house stands on one part. Around it – ruined houses. In praise of the city of Ostrolenka, it must be said that it is hard to recognize it. Most of the wooden buildings have disappeared and, in their places, stone houses have grown. In the market square – a beautiful park with trees, benches and colorful flowerbeds. All this would be well and good, if the Jews had remained in Ostrolenka to enjoy the restored city.

I also visited the cemetery and photographed it. It has been completely taken over by weeds and green trees, and not even one gravestone remains. The Germans removed them, to use them as foundations for buildings and to pave roads. There remain only a few crumbling graves, and every piece of stone shouts – 'For the stone shall cry out of the wall' – and awakens anger and rage against the Fascists, the modern cannibals, who did not allow even the dead to rest.

I took special care to photograph the square and some of the streets around it. Besides this, I photographed the 'Pomnik' (monument) in the grove, on the other side of the River Narew. It was erected in memory of Poles who were murdered, but it should read: J e w s!"



The place above is called Gorki. In this place, several hundred Jews were shot and murdered.



A house standing where the synagogue stood in Kaczyny



At the railway station (Kaczyny). A kiosk on the lot where Jakow Meir Rakowski's house stood. In the picture: Rakowski (on the right) and two neighbors from the past.



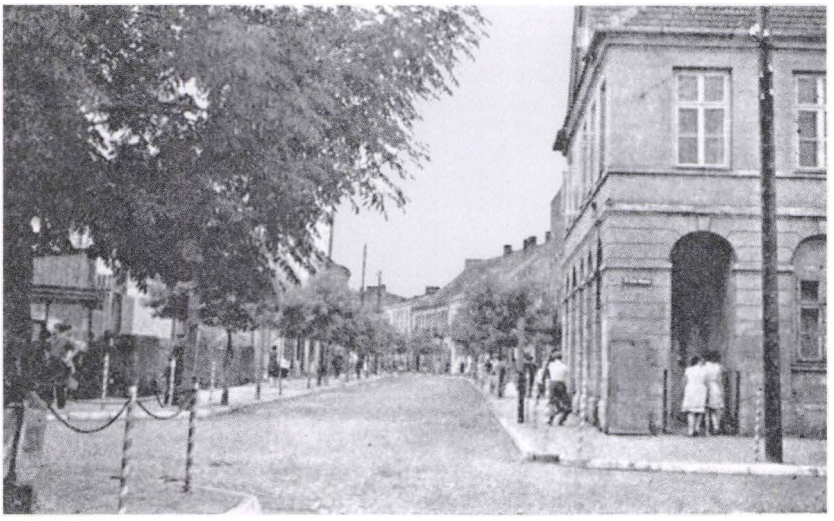
The building on Lomza Street, which housed the Powszechna Szkoła Jewish Primary School



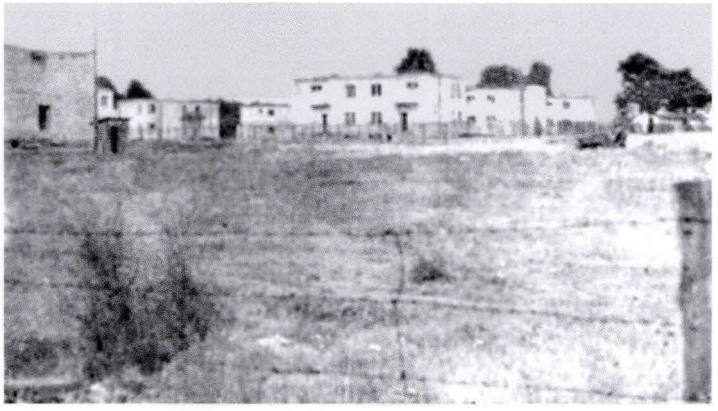
A corner house at General Bem Square



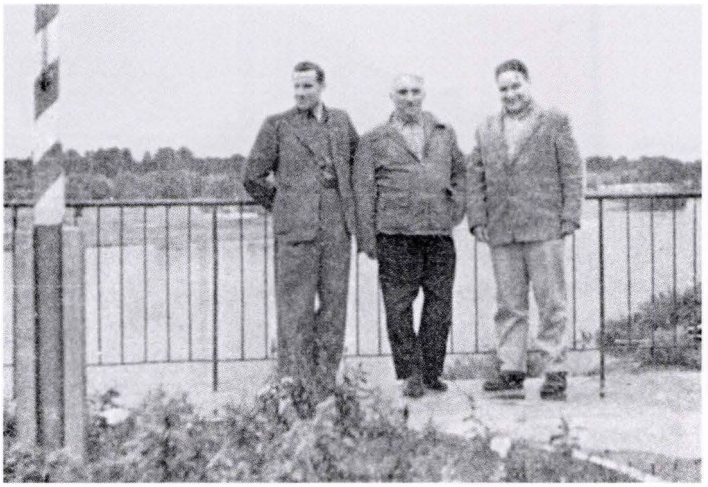
Lomza Street, today Kostuszko Street



Ostrow Street, today Glowackiego Street



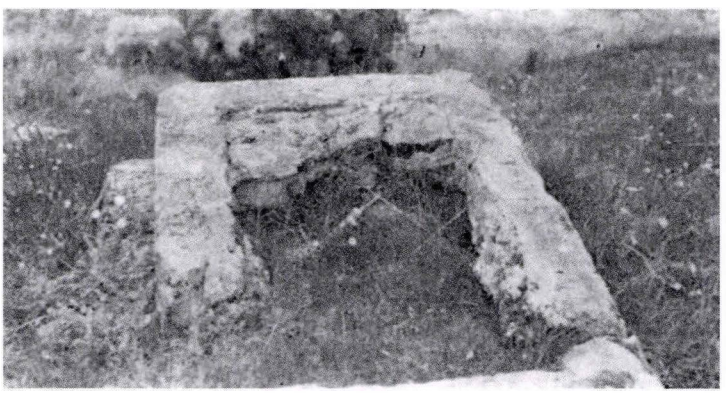
New houses in Wojciechowice



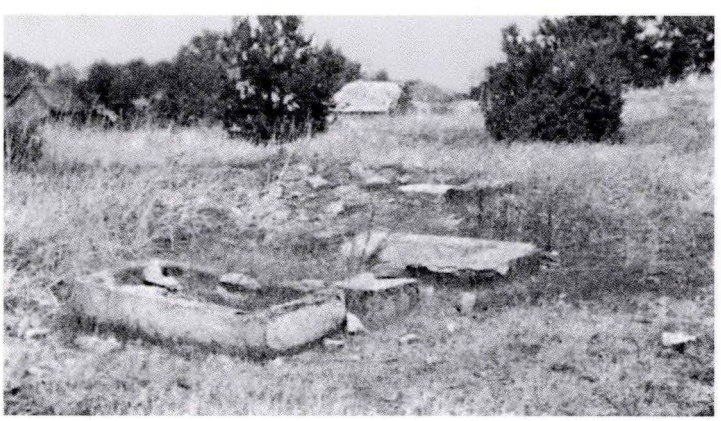
View of the River Narew on the way to Wojciechowice, where the sports club was established. In the middle of the picture: Rakowski



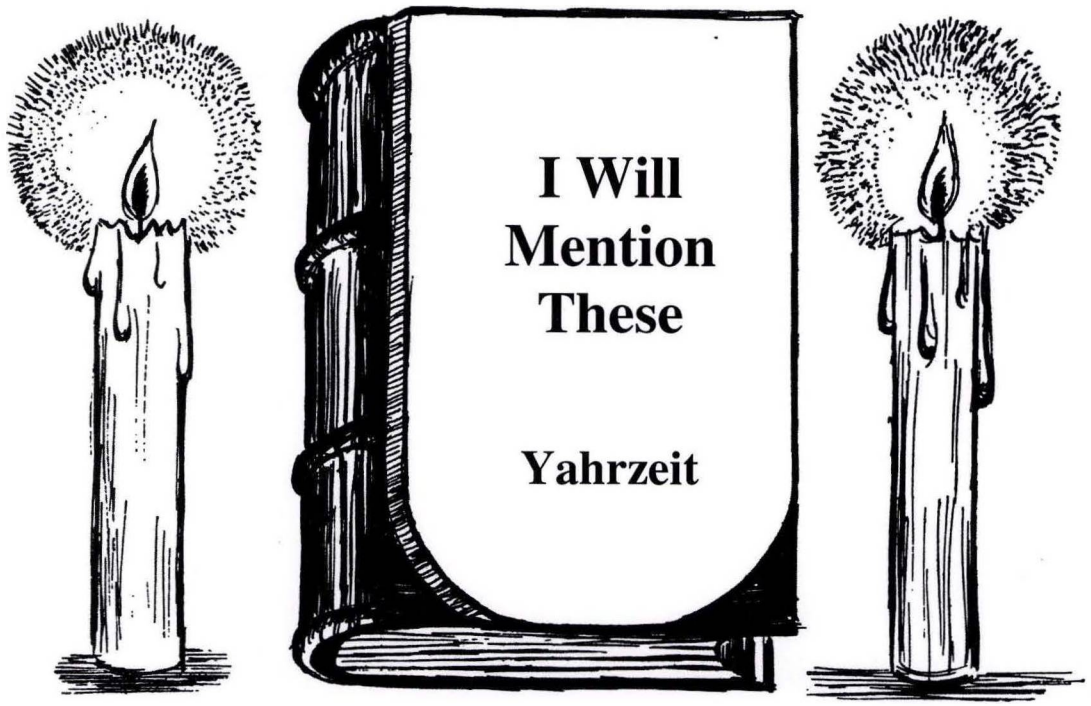
The part of the synagogue courtyard in Ostrolenka not built on



Fragments of the cemetery in Ostrolenka



Fragments of the cemetery in Ostrolenka



I Will Mention These

Yahrzeit

Chaim Chamiel

Magnified . . .!

[The first word of *Kaddish*, the mourner's prayer]

A

I will sing to you, this song is for you, replete with sadness, for what was and is not,
The sorrow immersed in my heart, from this enchantment, an altar, a fountain of tears,
There is a song in me, grief clings to the song, like a shadow accompanied by loneliness,
I will sing to you, Ostrolenka, the final funereal song of the holy community that was lost.
The city of Ostrolenka was not destroyed – no,
Ostrolenka was not destroyed, here it is, still
Alive, standing, here, it is marked on a map, in a book,
Here, even the refugee has returned from it,
He says: I was! – And what? – All its houses stand,
Courtyard and street, everything there, everything there was saved,
He says: Synagogue Street is there,
The old market, the new, and the stream Narew, the bridge over it,
Houses that were there, of wood and of stones, houses of brick walls,
Bent, straight, crooked, low and high,
He saw people there, walking in lanes and in streets,
The refugee saw many people there, people walking,
Sitting and eating, laughing, reviling in houses there,
Dissipating and drinking, becoming drunk – and all of them are new . . .
Not the Jews of Ostrolenka, not one remains there
Of the inhabitants of that city, its elders who were born there, lived there, built their homes there.
In the city lived – the poor, the rich, Chassidim and Misnagdim,
Workers, merchants, idlers and simply, Torah scholars.
A city among the cities of Israel – Ostrolenka, with five thousand Jews there,
Babes, children, young men and women, young and old,
And a shamed study hall, empty of the voice of Torah and prayer,
He saw pigs walking about in the courtyard and rummaging there
And in the home of the exalted lord – the refugee says – drunks clash,
Smashing the windows with cursing and laughter uncircumcised.
And the refugee says: He traversed its length and width and asked:
Where is the bath attendant, where is the beadle, teacher or *gabbai* or just one of the God-fearing there,
Where once there were outstanding teachers, a rabbi and two judges,
There were arbitrators, cantors, beadles, bath attendants, there were water carriers:
(Zeligel, a madman; his rival, Zyszte, a mute, and 'Nyamin, just a water carrier),
They supplied water to every householder in the city;
There were also decisive ones in the city, leaders, *gabbaim* of study groups,
Synagogues and *shteblich*; first and second and third [called, in turn, to read from the weekly Torah portion],
and to the distinguished the *maftir* [the last part].

And there were unions of small merchants, tradesmen, artisans, grocers,
Cobblers, leather workers, carpenters, fishermen, butchers and pig-bristle sellers,
And there were orchard-owners in the city, who grew apples and plums,
Pears, cherries, and greengrocers were there, grain merchants and domestic animals.
Because there were in the city of Ostrolenka, there were many who toiled there,
They toiled, and there were workers there, they lived for the Gentile there,
The money was his, the fields were his and, at the end of the harvest,
Heavy rain poured down outside, then the Gentile came to the city.
Many tailors were there, who sewed their cloth jackets,
The farmer came, a Gentile from the village, sold grain from the granary,
He smelled liquor, and immediately "a quarter" and "a hundredth" [of a cup] burst in his mouth,
And he went to the market, among the stalls, to choose, to buy from the Jews, to check the quality,
If the coat was tailored from fabric that would last for many years,
He spread his arms with a shout, to be measured for breeches,
And from a Jew, his soul desired that he bring a gift to Maryszka,
A sweater, felt slippers, a fine silk turban,
A brooch, a clasp, or a belt and a buckle, aquamarine, lip rouge, earrings –
Thus they lived in Ostrolenka, and Jews traded with Gentiles.

B

And there were those who went out to the villages of the country to buy calves or produce,
The rain did not deter them, nor the chill wind – among them slept Reb Srul.
Srul, his wife, Cyrl, called him,
Srul, the members of the *shtebl* called him,
Srul was his old, familiar name,
Only Wasyl called him Srulik.
Srul – and who did not know Reb Srul, who had horses. A deprived Jew,
He added a beard, a moustache like a Cossack's, to a bald head.
He was pleasant, he was Reb Srul in that
On every holiday (and they were not lacking) and at every feast
Held for a *mitzvah*, or after the Sabbath or a *kiddush*,
Reb Srul sang a new melody.
Srul, Reb Srul, was also a Chassid and teacher,
Very erudite, a Torah scholar of the Torah of his Rabbi, Nachman,
And when he sat with his friends to eat, he would, at the outset,
Before they took the first sip – tell a joke
Of his Rabbi, thus:
The drinker will sing,
As they sang at the well,
The food came out, which does not gladden –
For they did not sing about the manna.
And so, Chassid, he was a Chassid, a teacher, Reb Srul,
And his mate was a woman of valor, modest, God-fearing,
He wandered around the border cities,
And his wife, Cyrl, was barren.

And when they were sixty, sixty is usually old age,
Reb Srul gave his horses to his Gentile servant, Wasyl:
– "Hey, Wasyl, good Wasyl,
See, your Srulik is old;
Another year and another spring,
And he will settle in his grave.
Probably, Wasyl, you have probably heard,
That the Messiah, our righteous one,
Will roll those who dwell below
To the Land of Our Fathers.

Tell me, then, tell my worthy Wasyl,
Can someone feeble and old like me carry his sack of bones to the city of Jerusalem?"
"May God save you from that,"
Wasyl quivered like a shadow –
"I will bundle you up, Srulik, I will place you upon me,
I will bear, carry, and from my shoulder, no one will drop you."
"Stop, stop, Wasyl, why should you speak like a simpleton,
No Gentile can take me, not even Radziwiłł . . ."
(Wasyl crossed himself twice and went weak in the knees,
From the words of his Srulik, like a decree from Heaven)
"For another year or two, I will stay here with you – and then
With my Cyrl, I will go to Jerusalem while I still live!"
Wasyl, a Gentile and hot-tempered, became angry at God, and greatly reviled
That he should rot in Ostrolenka and Srul should go to meet the Messiah.
And if the Messiah of the Jews would take only Jews –
Where would he light ovens, and for whom and why would he work?
Then Helena, daughter of fornication, his wife, the shrew, the reincarnated cat,
"Revenge, Wasyl," she directed him, "against both God and Srul!"
Once, Wasyl took Srul to a village to buy cattle,
In the eastern corner of the dome of the sky, the morning glow had not yet come.
Three crosses stood on the road between the village and the city.
Wasyl would kneel and remove his hat from his head.
And here, Reb Srul looks, they travel, and have already passed,
And Wasyl does not move, does not shift himself – one cross, the second they reached,
A grove darkened before them, a foot stepped off the path,
Then suddenly, Srul ordered, "Go back, go back, go back, Wasyl!"
As though the order struck Wasyl's head like thunder from heaven,
In wonder, he rubbed his eyes – What if Srulik would start to kill him here?
"Tell, Wasyl, what foolishness – what did you plan to do?"
From his breeches, he pulled a large knife and began to confess . . .
Day and night for two years, Wasyl atoned for his crimes,
And Srul to Jerusalem did not come and hope to roll into caves there . . .

C

And there was also in the city a land owner, who plowed with a plow,
Reb Mordechaj Zew – and he harvested into his granary;
In the summer, we jumped on straw,
We toasted kernels and roasted potatoes on the fire,
And pulled the udders of milk cows, and rode horses.
And there were brave Jewish porters, weary during the day,
Their beards floured, and their clothes tattered,
And in the evening, they returned from their labors,
And studied holy books, and reflected on Torah or Mishna or *Ein Yakov*,
Or learned Gemara with a study group to the light of a candle and electric light.
There was one, with hands like steel,
His voice was the voice of a lion, and his heart Jewish,
And he cast fear on the Gentiles – the porter was nicknamed "Ola-Boga".
And Reb Szlomo, the Tarrer and the Chassid, sold tar during the day to the wagoner,
And at night, sat in his room and studied until midnight and beyond,
With a melody that caused my heart to tremble,
And I would wake and hear the song of his pleading through the wooden divider
That divided the room of the Tarrer from my father's bedchamber.
And Reb Manes Chassid, who prayed fervently, and would hop and jump,
And the strange distortions of his face and eyes frightened me.
There were party leaders and committee heads in the city,
Collectors for Zionist funds, and those who arranged assemblies,
There was Pesach Hochberg who administered all the work.
There are those who say that he came back after the Holocaust
And fell into the hands of murderers.
There were those who held fetes for daring youths who emigrated to Israel;
Whether a son who "rebelled" against his parents and escaped, or simply one of vigor,
A HeChalutz youth who had been at a kibbutz.
There were community workers in the city, the *gabbai*'s wife and a righteous woman,
Who supported charitable institutions or simply the donations of a philanthropist
For *Kimcha d'Pascha*, *Maot Chitin* [contributions to the poor for Passover],
help for the Sabbath and in times of distress.
Group by group they gathered to study Torah and Mishna or a deep issue,
And they began and ended with a sermon, with in-depth study,
With words of the *Aggadah* and a sip of liquor,
With a Yiddish song that brought them to tears,
And a Chassidic melody, just now brought to town.
There was a Torah study group, *Chevra Torah*, dear, simple Jews,
Plain Jews, they built the study hall for Torah and glory,
And every day, after their labors, they gathered to study the holy Alsheich,
And recited in a popular tune, and ended in prayer.
The Sabbath of [the Torah portion of] "Jethro" is the *Chevra*'s Sabbath,
when they go up to the Torah and read,
And vow, and end with a *kiddush* [sanctifying the Sabbath by reciting a blessing over wine]
of liquor and cake and herring,

And on the seventh of Adar, they arrange a *seudat mitzvah* [meal at religious ceremonies] and study,
And tell the praises of Moses Our Teacher, and bless us, that we should be worthy of the Messiah.
And on Simchat Torah, they completed reading the Torah together,
And studied the holy Alsheich, and then sang.
The *gabbaim*, especially the chief *gabbai*, brought red, choice apples,
And opened a small cask of beer and drank a toast.
And there was a society of great charity, of assistance to the sick,
Of support of orphans, of the solitary,
Of the pauper in his home and the disadvantaged,
Linat HaTzedek – the patient was kept in bed,
They brought him a doctor and medication,
And the blessing of friendship, and genuine help for the needy.
And they sometimes needed contributions and organized fundraising campaigns,
And presented plays in the women's section [of the synagogue],
On Chanukah, they presented the *Sale of Joseph*,
Or the story of Judith, publicly and splendidly,
A sketch from Shalom Aleichem; on Purim they staged the Book of Esther.
There were in the city some ritual slaughterers,
And of course, there were disagreements in the city about the virtues of a particular slaughterer,
The Chassidim split up on the side of the Rabbi, who declared the meat unkosher,
Or on the side of the Rebbe, who declared the meat kosher,
And they boycotted each other on the Sabbath . . .
There in the city, a fund was established, a sort of folk bank,
To help laborers or down-trodden Jews and for charity, and everyone was a member,
Deposited his money and went to the cities or villages, to buy a calf or lamb or cow,
Or a sack of potatoes to buy and sell.
In the city there was a Mizrachi Hebrew school – Yavneh,
And a Cultural School, and a Talmud Torah, there was a yeshiva,
And there were many *heders*, which educated for Torah and religious commandments,
And a Hebrew kindergarten was there, and a Bejt Jakow for girls –
In short, life, like Jewish life and its ways in cities, towns
Large and small, which were once in that country.
They lived their own lives in it, their customs in their homes, their laws, their language,
Their prayers, their songs, surrounded by an ocean of hatred and jealousy.
The sons were educated in Torah, and went to the great yeshivas
In Lomza, Radon, Klotz, Baranowicz, Bialystok, Mir,
And returned, great Torah scholars, worthy of honor and reputation,
And, if they were deserving, even the daughter of a wealthy man.
And mothers blessed in their hearts and said on those days:
"May it be His will, that my son will be a Torah scholar,
and be fortunate enough to become a rabbi in our nation".
Yes, there were those who studied work or a profession, who went to a workshop,
And those who engaged in merchandise,
And those, yes, in the last years, who acquired wisdom in a secondary school.

D

And life was like the life of all the people in the country, lively, vigorous,
Their significance and all their reverberations were discussed,
Wrung out in public places:
At first in the *shtebl*, in the community house, the community *shtebl*;
A large synagogue of the people, which, during afternoon and evening prayers,
was noisy with conversations and talking.
Discussions about matters of kings and ministers, disputes of states, and skirmishes of nations,
And everything from the Jewish viewpoint: Is it good or bad for the Jews?
If the enemy got stronger, they found comfort in "All who distress Israel, become leaders",
That the Holy One raises him, to increase his downfall in the eyes of the nations,
And the loss of independence – this was a clear declaration, hinted at in holy books,
Books of the God-fearing, the Chassidim, and the Rebbe, long may he live, said thus and such . . .
They sit in a corner at the *Chevra Mishnayot*, and study a chapter of the Mishna every day,
With the [commentary of] Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura and *Tiferet*; someone reads aloud in soft voice,
And near them a long table, where those who study the weekly Torah portion with Rashi sit,
The reader explains, with a rising and falling melody, and explains,
Looks in his book and says, "Korach and Nepheg and Zichri" [in Hebrew: *kor* = cold;
pag = pass, *l'zchor* = recall),
An allusion to the cold which passes during the weekly Torah portion of Va'era, and everyone will recall.
Reb Berysz stands near the oven, takes his pipe out of his pocket, reams it out,
Opens the polished, shining cover over a respectable tobacco pipe bowl,
Tobacco of leaves he got in villages, on the roads, in Chassidic congregations, in Rebbes' courts, at an inn.
Reb Berysz is a guest, a guest in the city, a Chassid and a bachelor,
He loves to court Jews, out of love for his people
He comes to every city, to every village, entertains with a story, with something that happened,
he tells about it and answers questioners.
We said he is a Chassid, he is joyful, he capers, he dances and leads others in dance, amuses,
He is a Chassid – not necessarily of Rebbe Such-and-such, he is a Chassid and, in his way, he is happy,
Such is Reb Berysz – lean and tall, his goatee jumps as he speaks,
Wrinkles on his forehead, his cheeks, his blue eyes smile out of a deep gaze,
A large hat on his head – over the skullcap that covers his bald spot,
As do the hats of the Chassidim in this country, its half-visor looks like a moon,
A cloth *kapote* and to separate between upper and lower, he is girded in silk;
Reb Berysz likes to act like a rich *balabayit*, to open his *kapote* and display a buttoned waistcoat
A silver chain, from the right pocket, passes over the button
To the left pocket, holding an ornate watch in a prestigious box
The privilege of generations is his heritage.
It is said that Reb Berysz was caught in the forest
And they did an odious, dangerous thing to him,
They did not take his chain, his watch, his box;
They found Reb Berysz lying as though slaughtered,
A doctor was brought, he shook his head sadly:
"Jews, do you have a Rebbe? Take him to the Rebbe, before his soul swells!"
And he recovered. He came to the Rebbe healthy; the Rebbe peered into his eyes:
"Berysz, it is a great *mitzvah* to be perfectly happy, because happiness purifies,

Happiness draw the soul of a person closer to his God, this cannot be imagined,
Go to my children and say: The Rebbe has decreed that you be happy.
You heard Berysz – speak!"
Reb Berysz was stunned by the voice of the speaker like thunder and lightning,
He closed his eyes and saw the fire and the cloud, and trembled, and said:
"Rebbe, how, how to make people happy, teach me Rebbe, how to make them happy,
How to make Jews happy these days? Holy, dear Rebbe, teach me!"
"Berysz," his Rebbe rubbed the tip of his nose, "What are you asking, Berysz,
How to gladden the hearts of Jews, have you forgotten the Torah of the righteous? The love of Israel!"
Reb Berysz left his Rebbe's house, took his satchel and his stick – and he went.
From city to city, to the village; he wandered to a settlement of a handful of Jews,
And told wonderful stories of the courts of the righteous,
And miracles that the Holy One, Blessed Be He,
Does for his People every day, all the time, as He promised,
For the sake of the Torah, which has stood for generations; and hints of wonders
That Israel will do in its land in the future,
May it be speedily in our days, with the coming of the Messiah.
And so, when Reb Berysz took his pipe out of his pocket and cleaned it of dust,
And opened the polished, shining net cover, covering the respectable tobacco pipe bowl,
He put his other hand behind him, into the pocket under his *kapote*,
And he tapped and pulled out something that looked like a sock,
And opened it, and caught between his fingers a bit of crushed leaves,
And poked them into the pipe's bowl, poked and sang softly,
And the Jews in the community house, at the time of afternoon-evening prayers paced and conversed,
And hearing his song, immediately pushed themselves in –
Ha?! *Shalom Aleichem*, welcome. How are you all? Thank God!
Reb Berysz then ceased his work,
And began distributing two fingers' worth left and right,
And jested with each one, big and small.
Some came from the side, bringing him an ember,
He took it in his hand and tossed it into the pipe's bowl,
And closed its lid on it, and held its long mouthpiece at its end,
And sucked in one draught, and a second, the tobacco smoke began to curl
Circles, circles, up, down and to every side.

E

They finished the afternoon prayer, they began the evening prayer,
Every prayer quorum, as the custom of mourners who hold a lottery as to who will lead prayers;
Who will be first, and second, and third; meanwhile, Jews linger to say *Baruchu* and Amen,
Pace, converse, debate, smoke, order the arrangements of individuals and society.
And Reb Berysz stands and tells – animates the souls of you there in Ostrolenka, is it not so?
Where Torah and prayer and greatness are bound together in one place,
Even a heavenly angel cannot carry out more than one mission at a time,
But the Torah was not given to angels, but only to men.
Therefore, men are undoubtedly greater than angels.

Except that the Evil Inclination, that seduces to transgression, dwells in his heart,
And tempts, and goes into the kidneys and suggests,
And goes into the eyes and says: See pleasant things
Which you desire – just as I am a Jew, that I do not lie,
And descends and sits in his feet, and hurries them to transgress,
And brings him to sin, until he is trapped, and throws a drop of bile at him.
But the Jewish people, holy offspring, what do they do?
Overcome and repel the Evil Inclination,
With pretext, with wise opinion, with explanation,
And draw him to the study hall.
Because he has come to the study hall, he hears *Amen Yehe Shme Raba* [from the *Kaddish* prayer],
Again, he has no existence in him, and asks to leave.
The man takes this Evil Inclination,
Grasps it by the throat and slaughters it, and merits Life in the World to Come.
They say to Reb Berysz: Please tell, Reb Berysz, tell
The wonder tale of the greatness of man in this world –
He puts a pinch of tobacco in his nose, to rouse himself,
Blows his nose, and says, by way of a question: "A tale?
A tale, gentlemen? So be it! A wonder tale and a parable.
I heard a story that animates souls, that happened once upon a time."
Reb Berysz taps his forehead, grasps it and wrinkles it like a floor cloth,
Lowers his eyes toward his nose, pauses briefly,
And immediately rouses smilingly:
A tale I heard, told by Szaje Meir of Radom, a wonder tale and a parable - - -
Thus he used to tell, because so his Rebbe ordered him
To gladden the members of his congregation, to cheer them and to love.
These were the stories of Reb Berysz, wonder tales,
Things that happened or were merely parables,
Warming hearts by talking and returning many to the good.

There were also in Ostrolenka many Jews,
They were, and are no longer,
And no one eulogized them, knew of their deaths, their graves, to this day.
With thousands they went, with the whole nation; in the city, in the village, in the town,
They became dust. There was no one who would laugh, who would cry, who would avenge.
A city among the cities of Israel in Poland,
Five thousand Jews in it were lost; the individual was lost, the community was lost,
Babes, children, young lads and maidens, women and men,
Young and old, the poor, the rich, Chassidim, Misnagdim - - - *Magnified* . . . !

Jerusalem, January 1950

The Terrible Memory

Electric lights already illuminated the houses when I entered the immigrants' village. Some of its inhabitants were among the last to leave the German concentration camps. A few weeks before the Allied Armies entered, when they were close to life and rescue – their relatives were destroyed. And while all the world joyfully celebrated, they were still stunned by the catastrophic loss of their dear ones, after such great hopes of being saved from the hand of the murderous beast. Nor did they heed the call to emigrate to Israel. They were overwhelmed by emotional paralysis.

When they revived, a strong desire to "renew" their families immediately beset them. Men married women and women married men after chance meetings. With the establishment of families came the desire to acquire possessions, to fill up their apartments as much as possible with anything that came to hand; to adorn themselves as much as possible, in order to make themselves worthy of the image of a normal, regular person . . .

Babies were born quickly enough to the renewed families. The fate of women who did not accomplish this was bitter. Doctors invested devotion and much work to encourage and cure these women so that they, too, would have a child. Among the women were those who crossed borders and searched monasteries, children's institutions and homes of Gentiles in villages, to see if somewhere a refugee child remained. And indeed, later, four girls came to the village who had been extracted from the claws of a stubborn monastery, which had saved their bodies, but wanted to steal their souls.

*

Since my last visit, some years ago, the village's appearance has greatly changed. With the help of the Jewish Agency, the houses have been enlarged. There is a big agricultural settlement, the barn full of well-tended heads of cattle. Despite the current grave crisis in the settlement movement, which has not skipped them, the inhabitants here try diligently to strengthen their position.

One of the members, an old friend, invited me to see her enlarged home and the new shower with the miracle of shining tiles. I entered the room and was blinded by a strong ray of light from a chandelier decorated in cheap common taste. In a corner of the room, on a bookcase, the weak flame of a small kerosene lamp flickered.

"*Yahrzeit**, of course," I said aloud.

"Not my *yahrzeit* alone," the woman replied, "but that of all of us. Go from house to house and you will see a *yahrzeit* candle lit in every one."

This is surely a date of annihilation shared by many families who were in the same camp, I told myself.

As if she understood my thought, the woman shook her head excitedly.

"From the day we were told of Eichmann's capture," she explained, "the village was in an uproar. Many left off their regular work routine. Everything they went through broke out anew. From the obscurity of forgetfulness rose the terrible memory, as if the disaster had occurred yesterday. And lo, out of an internal urge, one of the members lit a small *Yizkor* lamp, and suggested to her neighbor that she do the same. This passed by word of mouth, and all the women hurried to the grocery to get a candle or kerosene lamp. This was done without a meeting, without explanation, without a general assembly. A woman and her neighbor, then the latter and her friend – decided to light a *yahrzeit* candle in memory of their loved ones – until the day of the hanging of the cursed one."

For a long time, I could not move from the spot. Later, on the pretext of an unavoidable meeting, I went out to the street and into a few other houses. In each of them, a faint *yahrzeit* light flickered, the same tongue of flame that burns in hearts with an endless blaze.

I could not sleep that entire night. How was it that I had not thought of doing what they had done? For the soul of my mother, too, may she rest in peace, went up in flames when the Nazi minions passed through Russia and burned her home over her head . . . I felt myself a partner of the people of the village and its women in this terrible experience. The focus of all the generations was suddenly part of my body and soul.

As I left, early in the morning, all through the village the lights of that terrible *Yizkor* accompanied me, reflected from the windows of the houses.

Chasia Drori, Kfar Yechezkel

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* In Yiddish: the anniversary of a death.

River, If Only You Could Speak!

Like a silvery arm, shining in all shades of blue and green, mightily flowing and splendid, the River Narew encompasses my town.

On Sabbath morning, a holiday-like quiet prevails in the city. Anyone who has not yet gotten up for prayers enjoys final minutes of peaceful sleep. The streets are swept, the shops are locked. Here and there, children have already come out of their homes with blueberry cake in their hands, dressed in Sabbath clothes, to show them off to their playmates. Soon they call the old Gentile, Jurkowski, to take the Sabbath candlesticks off the table. For a slice of *challah* [Sabbath bread], the good Gentile stokes our ovens in the winter and prevents us from desecrating the Sabbath.

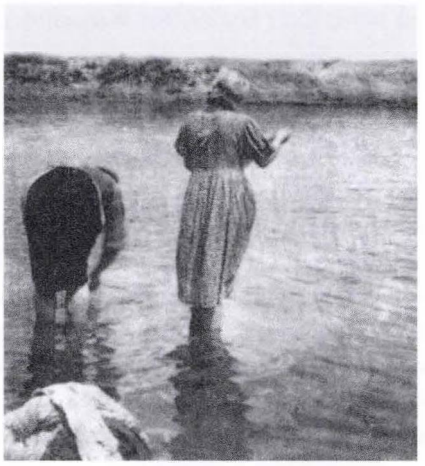
. . . Between the stalks of the reeds on the riverbank, to the whisper of the current of the waves which awakens longing for the eternal and the unknowable, there, hidden from the eyes of law-abiding Gentiles, something unusual occurs. The first group of youths standing at assembly. The little children of the area, who deduced the secret from their brothers, and I among them, stare covetously. Eaten up by jealousy, we watch them with amazement and awe. Who are they? The figures before our eyes are like messengers of the Maccabis, of whose heroism we were taught.

This was the city's first group of Hebrew scouts, which later became the city's HaShomer HaTzair organization. The assembly is received by Awigdor, the founder, my late brother. Everything was carried out in Hebrew. We listen, enchanted. This was the first breeze bringing news of the revival of the Hebrew youth.

The HaShomer HaTzair movement was a decisive turning point among the youth, which had slumbered until then in the bosom of the typical tradition of a Jewish Diaspora town.

The *heder* and the Talmud Torah, the encumbering Chassidic dress, blindness toward the condition of the people and yielding to its existence in the shadow of the Gentiles' good graces, lack of national recognition – all this paved the way for a new image of Jewish youth, who suddenly stood erect and looked proudly in the face of the Polish inhabitants' contempt and humiliation. In the eyes of the latter, this seemed like a discovery bordering on the miraculous. They began to feel respect for us. Wonderfully organized trips; parades of crowds of youths, wearing internationally recognized scout uniforms, held on Lag BaOmer or another Jewish holiday, when they passed through the city's main arteries on the way to the bridge. The flag with the Magen David carried high, the sound of drums and Hebrew song echoing in the air like a voice announcing the coming of the Messiah. With respect and wonder in their eyes, the observers moved aside, both bearded, devout Jews and Gentiles, who did not raise their hands to throw stones at us this time. Who among us does not remember the impressive national demonstration protesting the bloody events in Israel? The zealous fervor and the feeling of scathing insult Ostrolenka's youth demonstrated swept the entire town. As one, old and young, opponent and supporter expressed their rage with clenched fists and listened to the speakers' words with tears streaming from their eyes. It was as if the air was saturated with holiness. That demonstration day showed to us that something that had been planted deep in the hearts of the townspeople had germinated when the need arose.

The movement absorbed the best youths, thinking youths, youths hungry for knowledge, youths ready to sacrifice themselves. Following this movement, other youth movements began to organize, part of the pioneer movement, as well as movements of the opposing camp. I will not dwell on the latter, not, Heaven forbid, because of negative feeling, but because their own members will surely do so.



The women of Ostrolenka washing laundry on the riverbank

There, over the bridge, on the banks of the River Narew, most of the activities of the HaShomer HaTzair movement took place. We searched for space, and nature did not spare its abundance. In its touch, the youth felt its freedom of soul. There we held our scouting games, sports competitions that toughened our physical strength for what was to come. There, in long conversations, sometimes until the morning light, we wove the dream of pioneer fulfillment. These conversations were nothing less than chapters of study and consideration of social problems, histories and economics of our nation. They gave us a deep world perspective, which led us toward a final solution in our longed-for land, ready to contend with its wildernesses and with human forces hostile to us.

I cannot list the names of the members of the movement, as the list is too long. I will mention here a memory dear to me, of my brother, teacher and rabbi, Chaim Awigdor Eisenstein, the father of the movement. Nearly a youth when he completed his studies at the Lomza Yeshiva, he was already expert in all Zionist youth movement questions. He began with Tzerei Zion and HeChalutz. When the HaShomer HaTzair movement was still in its inception and in the underground, he was the first in the city to receive the first exemplars, in Polish, of the HaShomer pamphlet. I remember my great fear – I was still a little girl then – during a visit of the Polish police at our home, searching for illegal literature . . .

River Narew, you were our most wonderful friend, you freely gave us the wonders of nature, you kept our secrets, you absorbed our laughter, our tears, our oaths . . .

On the day we left you, when our town was swept of every Jewish soul by a fatal, murderous hand, you remained a witness in your eternal image. The mute witness of teeming life on your banks, of the Jewish word, of the Hebrew song, of *Tashlich* [a prayer said on Rosh HaShana near flowing water] . . . Of Jewish fisherman, of laundry washtubs that Jewish laundresses enfolded in your waters, of the joy of ice skaters, of Shomer HaTzair songs which split the darkness, and which no longer blend with your waves. River Narew, if only you could tell . . .

Esther Eisenstein-Eisenman, Tel Aviv

The Jewish City

In my memory, picture after picture of Jewish life in Ostrolenka arise – religious, social and general, as it was conducted after I left 25 years ago (on 12 October 1937). It is hard to believe that it no longer exists, but reality is the strongest and most convincing explanation. What did the Nazis do to our beautiful city of Ostrolenka? A Jewish city with all its nuances and divergences. What evil did the Nazi murderers do? Where did the Jews disappear to, who filled the synagogues, the study halls, the libraries, the parties and the organizations of all kinds; good, honest Jews, who followed their fathers' ways. And the Jews who drew away from traditional ways and dared to dream and fight for new lives, built on modern foundations, to bring new content to an outdated order of life. There were also Jews who went even farther: they dreamed of global and pandemic ideals. To achieve their goal, they stood for renewed building of the world order, to place it on better and more just foundations.

When the Jews of Ostrolenka sang, how wonderfully they harmonized. Melodies and tunes from Gur, Radzymin, Amszinow, Kotzk, Belz and Worka filled the air. The songs told of exiles to Siberia, hangings and prisons, and called for protest and rebellion. There were the songs of longing of Yehuda HaLevi (translated into Yiddish by Bialik). Here, on the main street, stands a modern Jewish educational institution, and from it come sweet voices in song. Their favorite song was *Oifn Bergel Shtait ah Shtebl mit a Greenim Dach* (On the Hill Stands a House with a Green Roof). Like an answer to this song, another song is heard from the window of the yeshiva – the sweet, heartfelt melody of a yeshiva boy delving into the debate between the House of Shamai and the House of Hillel. And there are also voices of young boys and girls in song, telling of hopes and promises unfulfilled.

And the songs at every Jewish table on Sabbath Eves? On Simchat Torah or any other joyous Jewish holiday, the Jews sang and danced, each according to his own style and essence. Hand in hand and shoulder to shoulder, heads to the side, eyes slightly slanted, turned toward and dreaming of heaven. Long *kapotas* hems are

tucked into belts – they dance in ecstasy, free of daily worries. The ecstasy grows from minute to minute . . . Who can compare to them in moments like these?

There were also Jews who even in dance did not extend themselves, very bound to life's problems. Their dance had another purpose and meaning. It gave them the courage and patience to believe and aspire to the redemption of the Land of Israel and our nation.

There were Jews who went to the study hall to hear a sermon, to capture a bit of spiritual food for the soul, and others who went to their party branch to hear lectures and classes on the subjects of literature, philosophy and politics. There were Jews whose hearts' desire was to lead prayers in the synagogue, and those who sought other honors, such as election to the municipal council, membership on the community board, or standing at the head of some local party branch. There were Jews of a dignified appearance and the reverse. There were Jews who were philanthropists and those who begged for donations; Jews who were gifted speakers and those who had difficulty speaking; exploiters and exploited Jews; Jews who were religious workers and unobservant, secular Jews; Jews who groaned beneath the heavy yoke of life and Jews who enjoyed pleasurable lives; Jews with professions, such as doctors, dentists, dental technicians, Jews who loved the theater arts, writers. And to complete the picture, there were also among us Jews, albeit a few, who left the Jewish way . . .

*

The song has become muted, all debates have ceased; there are no more quarrels, no ideological struggles; a cruel fate befell them all, and united them forever. They are all holy and pure.
May their memories be blessed and may God avenge their blood!

Frumke Segal-Bogdanowicz, Montevideo, Uruguay

On the Anniversary of the Destruction

Many years have passed since the Nazi beast's machine began its merciless destruction of the Jewish people. Hundreds of cities and towns in Poland were destroyed in the mass murder of Hitler, cursed be his name. Every city and its individual history, its genealogical records.

We, the Ostrolenkans, gather at the great symbolical mass grave of our nation, on the anniversary of our destruction. Each of us carries out his own self-examination, remembers and eulogizes his own martyrs. The eternal light in our hearts will remain forever.

When we commune with the holy souls of the community of Ostrolenka and its environs, we gather at an unknown, symbolic grave on the Holocaust *Yizkor* day, each with his own accounting, commemorating and eulogizing our holy townspeople, the community that closed its pages of history so tragically. In our memories, pictures rise anew from the magnificent past, from the vigorous life that was and is no longer. It will always remain in our hearts, glowing like a pillar of fire. I see folksy types, workmen, grocers, Chassidim, students, yeshivas, schools, study halls. I see our organized community lives, the prosperous bank, the many charitable institutions, libraries, sports clubs, drama circles. I see well-organized parties – Zionists, Bundists, revolutionaries, various youth movements. All these colorful forces were the cement that unified our public lives.

I open my eyes – and reality and depression are revealed before me, the endless mass grave. The beautiful dream rises to the heavens in the smoke of the crematoria of Majdanek, Treblinka and Auschwitz. Millions of Jewish bodies burned there, crying out to us, "Remember what Amalek did to you!" Remember and do not forget for generations. Do not forget that in our century, when science and technology made a giant leap forward, the Nazi beast pushed human culture thousands of years backward, to the age of cannibalism. The huge mass grave reflects our people's great tragedy. The small brass plaque reminds us of Ostrolenka's destruction. We cry out and swear: If we forget, if we forget you, our mothers and fathers, our brothers and sisters, if we forget you, Ostrolenka, where we passed the most beautiful years of our lives – may our right hands lose their strength!

And to us, who miraculously survived the great vale of tears, I say: do not forget the days of blood and the piles of ashes. Internalize the lines of Z. Segalowicz in

We, the Buriers of the Ashes:

And I have nothing else, Master of the Universe,
In the ashes of the Jews of Poland and Lithuania,
In these ashes is endless suffering.
The words of my poem sink in the ashes . . .
The ashes rise and penetrate my eyes . . .
The ashes of the old and of day-old babes . . .
Who trades in the heart and conscience,
The *aktzia* ended – and now one is allowed to live . . .
A desert of ashes will endlessly cover
The dancers, gluttons and celebrants . . .
The hot ashes of life – whispering embers.
The wind will bring the sparks; they will come
From Poland, from Wolyn, from the Ukraine, from Lithuania,
The slaughter continued there for five years.
The burning eyes of millions of people,
The feelings and desires of millions of hearts.

When we come to demand justice of the nations of the world, we must perform an accounting of ourselves. Have we paid the great debt that history has imposed on us? We could have died exactly as our family members did, sacrificed on the Nazi pyre and suffocated in the gas chambers! Yes, our townsman, Yitzhak Ivri, a Hebrew and Yiddish poet, laments the destruction in his book, *Before the Day*:

They intended me, too,
When the ax with a dull blow
Put you to death from this world,
When they led you to the unnatural death of millions,
Like a devoted brother, I went after you,
But miraculously, fate intervened between us,
And like a protecting mountain, concealed me from the murderer's cunning glance . . .

If fate wanted to spare us from the dull ax, so that in our generation the prophesy of the prophet, Jeremiah, would take place: "And thy children shall return to their own border", we must not forget that the cost was very high – six million victims! History has imposed on our generation the responsible duty of extending material and moral assistance to the State of Israel and the Diaspora, compensation for the destruction of our nation.

Arcie Nowinski
(From the Argentinean press)

I Will Never Forget!

I took my first steps on your ground, Ostrolenka! In kindergarten, I sang songs in Yiddish. On the holidays, my mother used to dress me in a white velvet dress with a blue ribbon, and my brother, Chaim, took me to the synagogue to hear the blowing of the ram's horn. On Simchat Torah, I walked proudly, flag in hand, to take an apple and the sweet things they treated us to in the synagogue. With what happiness and joy beamed the eyes of both children and adults!

Later, when I grew up, I went to school. I had many friends: Bela, Fela, Leila, Mordechaj, Jankele, Berele and others. My first teacher, Blumowicz, taught us to read and write. During recess, he used to jest with us. For example, he told the red-headed Chaja Fejga, that the stork that brought her carried her over yellow sand, to pleasant Fela – over marshes, and to pale-skinned Bella – over white sand. And we, the children, laughed and laughed . . .

One of my friends did not come to school, because her shoes were torn. We gave a play and bought her shoes with the revenues. I also went to Bejt Jakow, where I learned Yiddish and *Modeh Ani* [*I Thank You*, the prayer said on waking]. On Rosh HaShana, we went to the River Narew for *Tashlich* [a prayer said on Rosh HaShana near flowing water] with all the Jews. I loved the candle lighting on Chanukah – the first, the second, the third – the eighth. Father told about the miracle of Chanukah, and I got Chanukah money from Father, Grandfather, my uncle and the neighbor. It was warm in our house. We played with our spinning tops and ate delicious potato pancakes.

Purim was a special holiday for me, because it fell on my birthday. I received presents and we sent *mishloach manot* [Purim gift baskets] to friends and acquaintances. We ate many *hamentaschen* [Purim pastries]. All the children wore costumes and walked around the courtyards and streets.

Spring came. The snow melted and Passover

approached. We baked matzos, prepared goose fat and wine. We cleaned our houses, burned the *chametz* [leftover leavened foods], bought new clothes and shoes, and sold the *chametz* [dishes, etc. used with leavened food]. It was warm in our house, and the smell of cooked fish filled the air. Guests came, everyone took a rest from daily cares, from the obligation to pay taxes . . . The holiday came, and with it came rest from work.

Summer vacation arrived, and everyone went to the marvelous, fragrant nearby forest. The children played, listened to the sound of the cuckoo, and asked it: How many years will we live? She replied coo-coo-coo – endlessly! We were all happy – we will live for many years . . .

We bathe in the river and sail in boats. My brother, Chaim, and his friends sail the boat, and my brother holds the oars. He is big already, has reached Bar Mitzvah age and finished the Yavneh School. Toward evening, we return home, happy and tanned. We eat the dinner that Mother has prepared. We fall asleep and, in our dreams, experience the joy of the day that has passed again.

How good everything was there!

But the beast in human form cut us off from the dream, and hard days began.

We must leave Ostrolenka! The city must be "clean of Jews"!

With tears in our eyes and pain deep in our hearts, we leave the city, hoping to return as soon as possible. "For the world is not *hefker* [abandoned] . . ."

*

1947.

After years of suffering and hardship in the ghettos, the camps, the forests and the fields, after we went through indescribable hell – we met in Germany, a small group of Ostrolenkans, for a memorial service. We talked about our city and our lives in it, we said *Kaddish* and lit six candles. Each candle symbolized one million of the murdered Jews . . . six million martyrs. Six million victims of the Nazi beast!

We stand and cry, mourning the victims. Tears flow.

I will never forget my dear parents, my grandfather and grandmother, my brother and sister, my friends and acquaintances, and all the townspeople of Ostrolenka! I see them every minute of my life! You are always with us and within us!

Honor to your memories!

Sara Holcman, Argentina

Sparks of Holiness! . . .

Written by Yosef Kalina, Tel Aviv Adapted by Yitzhak Ivri

Sparks of holiness, shards of holy memories
Rise from the eradicated city.
In the light of memory, I leaf through, as in a *Yizkor* book,
Page after page . . .

It is told by word of mouth
That "Jewish" happiness was once the lot of this town . . .
This was years ago, many years ago;
When Reb Noskele lived there, a great saint, very rare,
He loved the townspeople, he was kindly to all,
He was a great believer, with his heart and soul he served his God,
Reb Noskele Czerwiner – everyone called him.
This happened when there was not yet a ritual bath in Czerwin,
And Reb Noskele immersed himself every morning in a pure spring,

Even in the winter, on cold days, he immersed himself and like a fallen leaf, trembled with the cold . . .
Once the *poretz* who ruled the town passed by,
And in the bitter cold, he saw Reb Noskele immerse himself in the spring.
Greatly amazed, thus he said (eye to eye, in a simple tongue):
"Why are you doing this, Rabbi Noskele, precisely when it is cold enough to burn your skin?"
"For us, the Jews, Your Grace, it is a *mitzvah*, truly a commandment
To immerse oneself every morning, before prayers . . . "
And the *poretz*, when he heard these words,
Immediately ordered the allocation of a parcel of land,
To build a ritual bath for the Jews on it.
And he swore that the ritual bath would be erected exactly on the spot
Where the pure spring flowed . . .
And so it was! – thanks to the great saint
No more would any Jew immerse himself outside in the bitter cold.

It is told that after many years, a great saint passed through the town,
And suddenly he stopped his horse, and asked excitedly:
"Where is the ritual bath of Reb Noskele?
To immerse oneself here in Czerwin is said to have great merit."
Everyone knew that the great saint
Was also very expert at commerce.
He traded with farmers at fairs, bought fabrics of their manufacture,
Knew all the prices by heart, and also did calculations in this way,
And later took them to sell in towns all around, including Ostrolenka . . .
Once something strange happened to Noskele:
He bargained with a farmer woman about the price of some fabric
He was insistent and did not want to add.
She pleaded with him: Improve a little, Jew, improve!
Noskele stood dumbstruck in his place,
As if a "black cat" passed between him and the town, Heaven forbid . . .
As if his body was struck with heavy whips,
And he interpreted the matter as if it was a hint from Heaven:
"According to the farmer woman, I have to mend my ways . . .
And the sign is clear: I must uproot myself from here!"
It is told that, indeed, he moved to live in Makow,
But all his life he was called "Reb Noskele the Saint of Czerwin"!

*

And a wonder tale: many years ago, it is told that a rabbi, a Torah scholar,
Came to Czerwin with his whole family in a splendid carriage.
The entire town gathered to watch, and this is what they saw:
First out came the rabbi, in person, and in person, cast his glance all around . . .
As if there was purpose and logic in his coming here:
Rabbinical holiness to spread over Czerwin . . .

"Is there an apartment here for the residence of an entire Jewish family?"
In one voice, all the townspeople answered him, "Yes!"
And in their hearts they thought: This is luck, a great blessing.
As is known, in Czerwin, apartments never stood empty without reason,
So that ghosts might dance in them late at night;
If one succeeded in "uprooting" – another was immediately planted in his place . . .
And thus the *poretz*, both the owner and ruler of the town,
On the spot filled the "blank page" again . . .
And here – what greatness! What joy in the entire region;
Czerwin now has a rabbi, in our little town!
And Jews came to him from everywhere and every direction;
On Sabbath and on a weekday, at all times,
Loaded with troubles and worries, to talk to him about what was hidden in their hearts,
They believed in the saint, every word of his was touched with purpose by Heaven . . .
Then it was decreed on Czerwin that its joy would be short-lived
And holiness would not reside in it for long!
After only two years, the rabbi left,
And no one knew to where, to which place . . .
He went, but, for a long time, the impression of his power remained in the town;
In the memorial book of Czerwin is written thus:
"And it was on that day – it fell exactly on a holiday (perhaps Simchat Torah),
All Czerwin's Jews broke into a stormy Chassidic dance, and said words of Torah . . .
'And you shall rejoice on your festivals' echoed without end in the rabbi's house,
Indescribable great joy!
But if the matter was decreed,
Also the greatest joy is broken . . .
And it was said as if the rabbi was placed on trial,
And a saboteur suddenly sent from somewhere . . .
By chance, a common policeman lived next door to the rabbi,
With his coarse boots, he invaded at the height of the great happiness,
And ordered a stop to the celebration . . . the rabbi was well-built and of a dignified appearance.
He has little children, late at night they woke from their slumbers and burst into tears.
The rabbi felt insulted by the desecration of the joyfulness, and his anger reached the heavens . . .
Like an angry lion, he grabbed the policeman by his collar and threw him out into the street.
Everyone wondered at the rabbi's heroism; with joy and fear they spoke of it;
The day came – and the policeman sued the rabbi in court!
The rabbi refused to take an advocate for himself – even at no charge.
The prosecutor turned a pair of furious eyes on the rabbi . . .
At the end: the rabbi began his arguments like a fountain before the judges on the bench;
The rabbi was released; in court, his face shone and the Divine Presence rested on him . . ."

*

And who does not recall that fearful Sabbath?
We thought that, Heaven forefend, the end had come for the Jews of Czerwin . . .

This was, probably, in the fifth or sixth year
When the throne of the Russian Tsar was undermined and became unstable,
When the revolutionaries called for "freedom" and were ready to light a fire,
And the fire of the oppressed masses' anger spread afar,
And, of course, all this "pour out your wrath" spilled onto the Jews, and around it
Hatred of the Jews and calls for pogroms were borne in the air . . .
In Czerwin, a stubborn rumor spread
That the Gentiles of Malynowa, four kilometers away,
Were already ready with scythes in their hands,
And on Sunday, after prayers in church and abandoned drinking,
They would come, full of rage, ready to slaughter and burn all the Jews;
Even "our Jewish friends", as it were.
And the proof: the Gentile, Adamowski, a tall, strong plasterer, hinted clearly of the matter:
Before every Jew he encountered, he passed his hand across his throat – indeed, it was thus . . .
One could believe, it was logical.
There were pogroms in Kisziniew, Bialystok and Siedlce,
So why not here in Czerwin?! . . .

Immediately after *Havdala* [the prayer separating the holy Sabbath and the secular week],
the rabbi went to the priest with some of the *balabatim* and teachers.
The priest heard them out, as one listens to a familiar request,
Although his face flushed with great shame.
Yes, he knew. He knew of the slaughters, the pogroms against the Jews.
Great saints of the faith of Moses were killed this way,
True, many Christians were so inclined for generations.
He promised that he would stand guard, and speak to the hearts of the Christians,
Encourage the love of Jesus for others in them . . .
Tell them not to think of such things,
And to erase the desire to murder from their hearts . . .
Also Baldakow, a new policeman, something of a friend of the Jews,
Turned to Ostrolenka, "a city and mother . . . ", for urgent help
Speedy messengers were immediately sent there.
On Sunday – until midday, all the Jews of Czerwin, scared to death
Hid in their houses; none of them dared go out.
And lo – a miracle from Heaven: on the road came at a gallop
Cavalry on their gallant horses,
And in Czerwin, the ground trembled . . . !
And the Gentiles from Malynowa, four kilometers from Czerwin,
Came crowding out of the churches – but without scythes in their hands,
And not even one Jew was slaughtered or burned . . .
On the contrary, with indifference, the Gentiles went with the flow,
And the Jews earned well in the stores,
As though nothing had happened there . . .

*

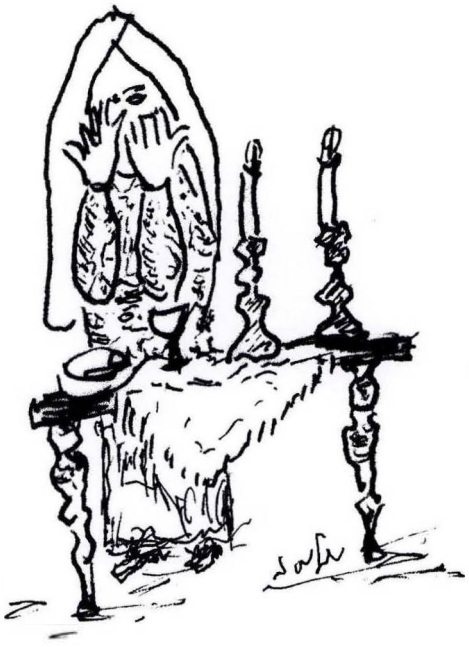
It is good to see a Jew of Czerwin, how much innocence and pride is in him!
How pleasant are daily conversations in the town, and good to hear,
How Czerwin looked before there was a train in Ostrolenka . . .
If they traveled to Warsaw by way of Malkin –
They had to pass through Czerwin! . . .
Every day a shipment left there,
And sometimes two or more, that is, during the day and also at night,
The road was not quiet for a moment –
In short, Czerwin became an important point!
It must also be added that anyone who came through the place
Could restore his spirits in Czerwin: in the winter – with steaming soup,
In the summer – with a cold drink . . .
There were also coffee houses, where one could sit,
And restaurants – in which to dine on a good meal . . .
And sustenance there was in abundance,
Even a few wealthy men, of the first rank,
As, for example, Reb Izrael Kalman, of blessed memory – the baker,
Chaim Welwel, of blessed memory – the innkeeper,
Icze Meir, of blessed memory – land lesser,
All this was before the destruction, when life flowed along serenely . . .
What was lacking in Czerwin, before Hitler came to slaughter and kill?
It had everything: a synagogue, a ritual bath, a community – a "State", in fact!
And there was even a prison – to sit in for petty punishments,
And a very hot bathhouse, in order to sweat.
There was also a court and a judge (which they did not have even in Goworowo),
And management of synagogue affairs and disputes – as customary in every city . . .
Terrible arguments broke out in town about Judaism,
About Jewish law, for example, the style of prayer, or because of the new rabbi who had just arrived,
About a Torah adjudication with a public complication, about a public prayer leader's right of possession,
Even if it was a weekday, the Sabbath, a holiday or a new moon,
And the intermediary was not in Mother Ostrolenka,
In fact, the religious vessel came from Ostrowa, to extinguish the fires! . . .
To this day, it is difficult to solve this riddle:
Is it because the way to Ostrolenka was long and hard,
Or because Ostrowa was better liked because of its *Yiddishkeit.*
Czerwin, however, was never isolated –
In all daily affairs, it was always tied by its navel to Ostrolenka, in fact . . .)

There were also respectable, cultured Jews,
Famous and well-known in all of Czerwin!
Such as Rabbi Jehuda Sznajder, of blessed memory, a very honest Jew and so fanatic a Misnagid,
as to make one's hair stand on end.
Such as Rabbi Kalman Frydman, of blessed memory, the warmhearted and lenient,
the father of Reb Berel the admired, worthy of respect,
A warm and fervent Zionist; nearly all his family emigrated to the Land of Israel . . .

There were other Jews, whose names are missing here,
Who, like stars, lit Czerwin,
Also Jews with fists,
Who tended toward quarrels, both personal and in God's name.
Rabbis and Jewish law adjudicators – they, too, merit pages in the genealogy;
Crowned teachers – their rabbinical chair stood first in the town;
Such as the world-class Gaon of Ostrolenka, Rabbi Braunrot, of blessed memory;
Such as Rabbi Segal, of blessed memory – the great saint of Wonsowo;
And Chassidim of all sorts with fervor of the Sephardic style,
And Misnagdim, with a heavy Ashkenazi style and stiff *Shulchan Aruch* laws . . .

But the town's most beautiful hour was
When before the completion of a Torah scroll, everyone thronged to the ritual bath;
Everyone in Czerwin immersed himself, everyone added a letter to the new Torah scroll . . .

Year after year it existed, and tiny Czerwin lived thus in majesty and ascendancy
Until . . . alas, the day of judgment came,
Anyone who was a Jew was sentenced to extinction,
The hour of the six million came . . . !
The Nazi Satan spread his wings over the whole world,
He uprooted the lives of the Jews by the roots!
May these lines, each and every word in them,
Be a candle of eternal memory, wherever a Jew was annihilated,
Of the holy and the pure led to death (not to be described)
And of all the cities and towns that were eradicated, and among them, our Czerwin . . .





At a memorial gathering in Tel Aviv in memory of the martyrs of Ostrolenka and its environs, 1961





Above:
The Presidency
In the center and below:
The audience at the gathering in the hall

I Am Entirely . . .

In Memory of My Holy and Pure Mother,
Mrs. Rachel Lea Iwri, Daughter of Reb Josef Mejrann, of Blessed Memory,
May God Avenge Her Blood

Every *Yizkor* book
is a ladder of the ascent
of the souls that lack graves . . .

At every established *Yizkor* grave –
The survivors will always be vigilant and will not forget . . .

I am entirely stormy autumn
Winds of rage and storms gallop in me.
I am borne to the heights of iron skies
Smoky from the fire of destruction, dusty with the ashes of bodies . . .

I am entirely tears of blood
Shed in sobbing
For my mother who was slain, deprived of a Jewish burial,
Who protests with millions of the slain all around –
On paths of the ascent of souls . . .

I am entirely a question of fire,
A cry that remained alive;
Tossing my head at smoky iron skies
(Stronger than flint is my complaint! . . .),
I fall backward, broken-necked,
Ha! When will my slain mother
Rise to the heights with those annihilated?! . . .

I am entirely the continuation of those decapitated and destroyed,
The choked *Shema* of my mother in the gas chambers cries within me;
I go, and in every morning's sunrise
I will see the sunset of her final moments.

I am entirely a cry of *Yizkor*,
A memorial candle, flickering with the sorrow of remaining, –
I say *Kaddish* from a prayer book burned to ashes
With terrible prayers and blood-soaked memories:
For those endlessly loved,
For those slain by indescribably horrible deaths,
Who wait for their graves, for their ascent
To the gate of their rest in eternity - - -

Yitzhak Ivri

Folk Halperin

The Souls of Our Fathers

The town is desolate. The houses have been emptied, but their shutters are not closed, nor are their doors locked. Only cats wander around the neglect, and the stars shine for them only.

The town has been emptied of its sons. Some were shot, their bones strewn about in the fields. Some were dragged in train cars to forced labor on the front, and the rest fled to the forests' thickets.

Only two of the townspeople survived. Their hiding place was so well hidden, that they could scarcely find themselves. With the descent of the night's shadows, they creep out, frightened, and hurry behind fences and along walls. The cats look after them, and even cats cannot be trusted nowadays.

Behind the old synagogue lies the town cemetery. Rows of gravestones stretch until they are swallowed by the darkness. Under the stones, dear fathers and mothers rest. The two survivors are about to part from the dear graves, their last link with this land, before fleeing as their brothers did.

Out of the deathly silence, is heard the whisper of prayer. A shining tear falls on the top of the stone – the last tear of the last visit to a family grave.

And the town's last surviving sons leave it.

The fathers, in the graves, were totally left behind and completely bereft. There was no one else to visit their hill of earth in times of family joy and sorrow. There is no one else to lay down on their stones during days of penitence and national mourning. Who would seal the cracks in the cemetery fence? Who would chase away the pig burrowing in their holy soil?

At midnight, the dead rose from their graves to pray in the old synagogue and to speak to their dear children in dreams. They found an extinguished eternal lamp and unlit memorial candles there. They went to the homes of their offspring and – desolation. An unclosed shutter, an unlocked door. No son or daughter in a bed, no grandson or granddaughter in a cradle. Not a breath of life or visionary dream . . . They stand in a row, in their shrouds, a touch of the soil of the Land of Israel on their eyelashes, and go to find their sons, to accompany them and join them in eternity.

And rows and rows of the souls of our fathers go astray, without direction, searching for their surviving children. Their call is heard in the stillness of the night. Only their faces are unseen . .

IN ETERNAL MEMORY

OBITUARIES AND EXPRESSIONS OF REMEMBRANCE

In Memory of Martyrs and Departed Ones

(Reflections near the gravestone of our townswoman, Chaja Chrempacz)

On December 23, 1961, the unveiling of the gravestone of our townswoman, Chaja Chrempacz, was held, fourteen years after her death. We met on the appointed day, several representatives of our city, among them Mr. Chaim Drezner and Rachel Weiss, *née* Chamiel, at the Nachlat Yitzchak cemetery. The initiators of the erection of the gravestone were a group of friends who emigrated to Israel after the Holocaust from Germany, and who were active in Bnei Akiva there. Mr. Yonah Green should be especially mentioned; he devoted himself to the matter.

This is the history of the Chrempacz Family after it emigrated, during the time of the War of Independence. Chaja's husband was drafted into the army; he fell while fulfilling his duty. Chaja became ill due to her afflictions in the camps; her heart could not withstand the great suffering she lived through. She was eulogized and her heartfelt devotion to the youth movement after the war was mentioned. All this praise and these eulogies reached my ears as though from a distance, because before me Chaja stood, erect and happy. On her face hovered her constant smile, while she gathered us, as girls, on Sabbaths and holidays for public prayers at the "nest" of our youth movement. The boys prayed at the Mizrachi synagogue at the same time. Chaja, who always fought for emigration to Israel, also began to fulfill her own dream. She went to *hachshara* right before the war broke out. Now, the lives of all the youths in our city before the Holocaust pass before my eyes, when we gathered at the Shomer HaDati nest, the Dancyger brothers among us. I remember how their father, with his four sons, prayed with the Mizrachi synagogue congregation, and the song and joy they created in our nest. The members Chaim Wajnsztok (the Treasurer), Sokolow, Lubelczyk, Fajwel Tejtelbojm (he demanded that we call him only by the Hebrew name, Szraga), Shalom Garber, Cukerman, and so on and so on – as well as the girls, my dear friends, Golda Mosaz, Szejna Szkol, Sara Szodlowicz, Goldwaser, Cukerman, Sara Chmiel, as well as my sister, Sara Sapir and our leader, Jabek. My closest friend was Chaja Fisz; we almost never parted from each other. In our town, it was considered a good arrangement to match a young girl to a man from abroad. Chaja Fisz had this luck: she married a young man from Australia and on their wedding day, he returned to Australia and she remained until the Holocaust. Like everyone else, she was murdered.

I would like to mention here the adult patrons, who took care of the youth: Zalman Gorzelczany, Eliezer Eliahu Zusman and Herszel Skrobacz, who was head of the nest after Chaim Chmiel, may he live a good, long life, emigrated to Israel. How good and pleasant it was to hear Reb Herszel Skrobacz's lesson for the boys. To this day, that pleasant tune plays in my ears.

I wake from my reflections and see before me the gravestone, and on it engraved the words "Here lies Chaja Chrempacz, a HaShomer HaDati activist in Ostrolenka . . .

May her soul be bound in the bond of life.

Although you were plucked so young, you had the great merit, Chaja, to be interred in our homeland. How the heart pines, because all those I mentioned above were not even buried in Israel.

May these few words be a gravestone in their memories.

Chaya Sapir-Szpigelman, Netanya

In the Memory of a Party in Ostrolenka

I refer to the Al HaMishmar party, which, in the life of our city, stood guard and took an active part in all community matters. It participated in all the Jewish institutions in general, and in general Zionist ones in particular. The latter were devoted to the revival of the Jewish People and its culture in our homeland. With special attention, its activities were devoted to the benefit of the national funds: Keren HaKayemet and Keren HaYesod.

The leaders of activity in the party, as well as in the committee, then, were the members Icchak Rapaport (who emigrated a few years before the war to Israel);

Israel Kachan, of blessed memory; Josef Kalina (now in Israel); Becalel Bursztejn (now in Colombia); Chaim Grynwald, of blessed memory (the son-in-law of Reb Naftali Shuw, of blessed memory) and Karwat, of blessed memory (the son-in-law of Reb Mendel Richter, of blessed memory).

The party had its own residence. Sessions and meetings took place nearly every week at Izrael Kachan's, of blessed memory.



Fejga (Chmiel), the daughter of Bluma Gedanken (Uruguay)

She fell as a partisan in
Kaczyny near Smolensk.
May God avenge
her blood.

At these sessions, members dealt with ongoing matters and resolved all current problems. In many matters, Al HaMishmar cooperated with Ait Livnot [A Time to Build] (few ideological differences existed between them), headed by Mendel Bialy and Mendel Gedanken, of blessed memory. Their common sessions were held at the home of Mendel Bialy, of blessed memory. Many common matters were organized at the Zionist synagogue. On behalf of these organizations (Al HaMishmar and Ait Livnot), Mendel Gedanken, head of the Jewish community at the time, and Szmuel Klejnman, of blessed memory, acted as general Zionist representatives in the Jewish community.

For many years, the Zionist synagogue was in Mendel Gedanken's building on Synagogue Street. During the last years, it moved to the home of Symcha Pianko, of blessed memory, on Ostrowy Street.

I can still remember our experiences during the holidays, especially on Simchat Torah and the last day of Passover, when we sat in the Zionist synagogue, and drank and rejoiced. All of us were imbued with the spirit of love and comradeship. Our good feeling was limitless. We really felt the verse in Psalms: "Behold how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity." Everyone was agreeable and charming . . . It is hard to forget those hours! But that that place, where we sat and drank and rejoiced, that place, in which Ostrolenka's Jews lived for generations and to which they were attached, heart and soul – that place became a place of expulsion, extinction and destruction for them . . . This we did not imagine. Although there were pogroms and all sorts of calamities in every generation, despite this, we remained alive. Jewish existence was not completely uprooted by its foundations. Of crematoria, of unnatural deaths in forests, fields, homes, on streets and in synagogues . . . we did not think! Of the destruction of six million Jews, among them over two million children and old people – this we did not dare consider. We did not believe that this was possible. Here, too, we ask our ancient question, the Jewish question of generations which pierces the depths: Why?! But there is no reply; the cruel world has no answer. Although we are among those who survived, life is hard for us. Having no alternative, we continue to exist, the remnants of families that were destroyed.

May it be His will, that these lines rise like an eternal light and an everlasting memorial over the unknown graves of our holy and pure families, among them loyal members of the party mentioned above. They stood devotedly "Al HaMishmar" [On Guard] of this Zionist organization, and were eradicated from the face of the earth, together with their Zionist dream.

Yosef Kalina, Tel Aviv

Awraham Mendel Grynberg,
of Blessed Memory

He was born in Prosnitz and lived in Ostrolenka all his life. A Torah Jew, an Amszinow Chassid, the brother of the Ostrolenkan Jewish law adjudicator, Reb Mosze Irmijahu Grynberg, of blessed memory, well-known in the world of educators and rabbis. He was an observant Jew, and stood for truth. He studied Midrash with a study group every Sabbath. On High Holy Days, he prayed in the *shtebl* of the Amszinow Chassidim. He was a member of Agudat Yisrael. Deep in his soul, he believed otherwise: he supported the society of "They will all make a bond together, to do your will with a complete heart".

He was a merchant. He had grain storehouses, as well as a store on the side, which added a bit more income for him. (He lived in a house on the Ostrow Road.)

His wife, **Hinda Dwora**, of blessed memory, was born in Ostrolenka. She was a modest woman and a helpmeet for him.

Awraham Mendel passed away in 1939. The rest of the family and his wife – their fate was that of all the martyrs destroyed by the Nazis. May their memory be blessed.

G.

Chaim Szyman, May God Avenge His Blood



He was born in Ostrolenka, the son of Berel Lejbke, a salt merchant for many years. He married a woman from the city of Broku, the daughter of Reb Motel Lewinsztejn, of blessed memory, a respectable family. He had six children – four sons and two daughters! All his life, he sold iron; he was an honest merchant. He continued thus until World War II broke out. With the expulsion of the Jews from Ostrolenka, the entire family went to Slonim, where it was destroyed by the Nazis, may their names be erased. Three sons survived. Two are in Uruguay: the eldest, Alter Szyman, and the youngest, Zindel Shuman. The middle one, Mosze Shuman, lives in North America.

S.

Lea Kosowski,
of Blessed Memory
(In memory of a sister)



"Jewish woman,
who knows your life!"

How I felt the pain of my sister, Lea Kosowski (*née* Kupferminc) on that bitter and hurried day when we saw her family off, on their way back to Poland. Her resolute decision not to join them made her suffering even greater. Her will was strong not to break the bond with the land she loved. She was tied to it with every fiber of her being, and remained with us.

I was amazed by her strength and energy, which stood her in good stead in those difficult moments! For many years before she came to Israel, she wandered all over Russia as a refugee, from 1915 to 1920.

The Poles' persecutions strengthened her bond to Israel even more.

Our late father chose a husband for her from among the yeshiva students. Her husband was sharply intelligent and talented in many areas, but not prepared for practical life. Our father allocated part of his store to them. Here, my sister demonstrated her ability to draw customers by decorating hats and doing fine handwork for Gentile rural women.

From early childhood, I remember her misgivings about maintaining her family. When she arrived in Israel, she demonstrated her ability to adapt again. Her

sons, who emigrated before her, were unemployed, which irritated her greatly. This economic distress agitated her husband and he decided to leave Israel. He also influenced their daughter, Chawa, the mother of a little girl, and her husband joined her. My sister, however, refused. She remained in Israel without any means of support, but received encouragement from us. She tried her hand at all kinds of work, and struggled with the hope of returning her family to Israel, despite her husband's insistent pleading that she return to Poland.

I remember how on May 1st she marched with us in the streets of Tel Aviv, singing songs of workers and pioneers. After a year of suffering, she broke, and returned to Poland. Her efforts to return to Israel were in vain. The Holocaust swept her away, together with the members of her family who remained there. I am certain that her final thoughts turned on her beloved homeland. It is very sad that her family did not obey her instinctive common sense, which whispered to her: adapt to Israel. May God avenge her blood.

Chana Kupferminc-Zarfati

Alter Bonciak



The son of Dawid and Fejga Bonciak. Among the craftsmen, his father was a respected community worker. He administered the *shtebl* and the craftsmen's charitable fund.

Their son, Alter, was among the first Ostrolenkan soldiers in the Polish Army. He established the Bund organization, together with Herszel and Icchak Rozenblum, Chaim Zalman Nadborny the Carpenter, Rozenbojm the Paramedic and Aron Zusman. Later, he was a community worker in the tradesmen's organization, together with Aron Jakow Zlocisty and Shalom Michel the Tailor. He was murdered in Slonim, together with his wife and children. May God avenge his blood.

L.

Ben Cyjon Pianko

He was born in Ostrolenka, the son of Symcha Pianko (a partner in the beer and soda factory of Naftali Sztern and Zyskind Zusman). He had a wine store and lived on Ostrow Street. He was a man with a warm heart, who did good for others. Tirelessly and devotedly, he invested his time without discrimination in philanthropic works for the needy, with advice or tangible help. More than once, he saved people who had encountered trouble.

Many were his good deeds for friends, friends of friends or simply the people of Ostrolenka.

One incident is worthy of mention and will surely serve him as an eternal memorial. When the Germans expelled the Jews from Ostrolenka, he succeeded in using the influence of those close to the Germans so that the Jews were not robbed and assaulted as they left the city. And so it was!

To my regret, this merit did not stand him in good stead. He, his wife and two children were murdered in the Bialystok Ghetto, with many Ostrolenkans.

May God avenge their blood.

Z.



Berel Kopytko (Kuper),
of Blessed Memory

He always worked as a butcher for Pesach Hochberg. I saw him often when he came to our house to ask if a piece of meat he brought with him was kosher. He came to us quietly, sat and waited piously for my father's reply: Kosher or unkosher? When the decision was "kosher", he opened up, his tongue was

loosened and he began to talk of the news in the press. He was a man who worked hard. The sun did not shine on his private life. He did not live only with himself, but with the whole world. The wide world, its complex ways and politics – these constituted his spirituality. He did not just read newspapers, he delved into them and studied them in order to understand what was manifest and what was latent in world events.

When he discussed and inquired into world matters, his face shone; the ray of light of an enhanced soul shone in his forlorn life. I met him after a time in Australia, where he worked hard as a porter at the port. After work, he would sit down with a pile of Yiddish newspapers that he received from the United States. With what joy and longing did he ask me about Ostrolenkans; I had to tell him about each one individually. Who remembered a person who sailed the seas or disappeared without a trace? Was it possible for a man to forget the place he came from? When I spoke with Berel Kopytko in Australia, I had the feeling that he had left Ostrolenka only yesterday, and that the "heavenly" Ostrolenka lived in him until his last breath.

Yitzhak Kachan

Israel and Cwija Wonszak,

of Blessed Memory

Israel Wonszak was born in Goworowo, the son of Icchak Mosze and Chana Rywka Wonszak, of blessed memory. He was a modest Jew, a professional wagon maker (*stelmach*). He lived at Benedon's. He prayed at Chovat HaLevavot, and sometimes led the prayers. He studied Torah with a study group.

A warmhearted person, he was aware of the troubles of others. Together with Reb Szmuel Baruch Landau, he often volunteered to go through the city, to help the needy.

His wife, Cwija, was modest and pious. Their only son studied throughout the years in *heders* and yeshivas. Reb Israel took care that his son learned Torah and paid for his tuition at good schools. When he grew up, Josef joined his father's business, in order to help him ("All Torah without work . . .").

Reb Israel passed away in Ostrolenka in 1939, at the age of 82. His wife, Cwija, died in 1933, at the age of 68. Their only son, Josef Wonszak, may he live a long life, has been in Israel with his family for many years. (By the way, he was one of the active members of the Poalei Zion D.C. organization in Ostrolenka and a member of the Jewish community council.)

May their memories be blessed.

W.

Chana Rywka Keller (Pel)



She was born in Myszyniec, a town near the German border, in the region of the city of Ostrolenka in Poland. During World War I, when the townspeople were expelled from it because it was near the front, she came to Lomza while still a small girl, with her parents and her entire family. After she grew up and acquired an education at local schools, she began working at an orphan's home (*kinder heim*) as a supervisor and educator. The children were attached to her and loved her deeply. She often gave her own food to poor children during hard times at the institution.

While she was still young, she aspired to emigrate to Israel. She joined a religious Zionist youth company and went to a pioneering *hachshara*. In 1932, she emigrated to Israel. She experienced a difficult period of unemployment, but she overcame it and, with extraordinary tenacity, worked at hard jobs, even those suitable only for men. In the course of time, she found permanent work and established a family, but the dregs of bitterness remained in her. An honest and naïve woman, who had faith in humanity in her nature, she reacted with great spiritual pain to everything that did not seem honest or proper to her. Because of her naïveté, her demands of others or her family were often exaggerated. She passed away from cancer on

Thursday, 2 Adar II 5722 (8.3.62), in the midst of life. She is survived by her only daughter, who is in Israel.

May her memory be blessed.

I.

Rabbi Josef Ostrolenker,

May God Avenge His Blood

I met Rabbi Josef Ostrolenker, of blessed memory, when we two studied at the Lomzer Yeshiva. He accompanied me to the city of Nur, when I went there to receive the rabbinate with my family, may they live good, long lives. He came with the Admor, the Righteous Gaon, Rabbi Jehoszua Zelig, may God avenge his blood, of blessed memory. He was then Rabbi of Sokola. He created a tumult and upheaval in Nur during my stay there. Previously, the Chassidim were my opponents. After some months, however, they became strong and devoted friends and worked for my benefit.

Soon after I arrived, he influenced the *balabatim* strongly with his splendor and brilliance. Reb Josef was a dear person of pleasant qualities. He was an outstanding educator. His reputation as a great Torah scholar and educator glorified Israel.

Alas for those who were lost, and will not be forgotten!

Rabbi Yakov Markiewicz,
Bnei Brak, Israel

Reb Mosze Brysk

He was a coal merchant. He lived in Benedon's houses, and was an Amszinow Chassid. He learned day and night. He would get up at 2 A.M. He was a pious Jew, but he understood the desires of the young generation. He is survived by a son and daughter in Israel. May God avenge his blood.

Reb Mosze Natan Tejtelbojm

He was a Chassidic Jew of dignified appearance, with a long white beard. He gave Torah lessons at Chevra Torah. He learned in a study group. He had a leather skins business. He was the burial society's *gabbai*. He was murdered, with his wife Chana, in a little town near Ostrolenka. May God avenge his blood.

Reb Josef Mosze Tejtelbojm

He was a carter, the son of Awraham Tejtelbojm. He was killed in the synagogue in Goworowo. The Germans entered during prayers, took out ten Jews wrapped in prayer shawls and cut them to pieces. Then, they summoned their wives to identify those who were killed and have them buried.

T.

Jakow Nasielski

He was the brother of Josef Nasielski, of blessed memory. Like his brother, he also had a bakery. He lived in the Old Market near the city hall. His wife was also the sister of Josef's wife. He was a Gur Chassid and an Agudah and Bejt Jakow community worker.

Lejbel Sredni, His Son and His Family

He was a great food and culinary products merchant. He lived on Lomza Street.

We met him as children, because the Jewish-Polish Powszechna School was in his building.

Szapira the Baker from Lomza Street, his wife and his daughters.

The teacher, Krymkiewicz, taught in the Powszechna School. Her husband was a clerk in the municipality.

Blumsztejn and his family; the son-in-law of Sarniewicz. He had a shoe store.

Szlomo Sapir or, as he was called, Szlomo the Smarewidlyk. He always sat bent over the Gemara and, in his pleasant, ringing voice, studied day and night. Those sounds are with me to this day.

May God avenge his blood.

A.

Mosze Sarniewicz,

May God Avenge His Blood

He was an elegant and cultured type of man. He owned a paint store in the Old Market. He was inclined toward the Bund organization.

Israel Frum, May God Avenge His Blood

He was an honest man, of the worker type, a carpenter by profession. He was devoted heart and soul to his family, and to those closely or even distantly related. He was a brother in time of need, both to individuals and the community. He was a member of the Bund, and was dedicated to the organization all his life. He began to be active in 1915. He was prepared to sacrifice himself for the truth. He suffered from every injustice and inequality. He was killed by the Nazis, may their names be obliterated.

Mosze Litwer

He was one of the city's Hebrew speakers. He taught evening courses in Hebrew. He was active in HeChalutz. He was killed, together with his wife and family, by the German Nazis.

L.



Fejga Sojka



Gita Sojka



Rachel Sojka



Reb Icel Sojka

In Eternal Remembrance of Our Dearest and Most Beloved

Father	**Reb Icel Sojka** Well-known community worker
Mother	**Rachel Sojka** *Née* Lachower, the sister of the well-known writer, Fiszel Lachower, of blessed memory Both murdered in Slonim 1941
Grandmother	**Gita Sojka**, died in Ostrolenka
Sister	**Fejga Sojka, husband and child** Murdered in Treblinka
	Motel Zutkiewicz Well-known party activist in Ostrolenka Shot to death in Bialystok 1941 on "Black Sabbath"
And children	**Judyt and Arjeh (Luszek)** Judyt – murdered; Arjeh – died in Bialystok Prison, 1943
Brother	**Mosze Aron Sojka** Murdered
Brother	**Hercke Sojka** Died in Israel, 1959
Mourners	**Chaja Sojka-Jablonka** **Cwija Sojka-Klinger** In Israel **Lea Sojka-Szmukler** In Australia With their families



Hercke Sojka



Mosze Aron Sojka



Judyt Zutkiewicz



Motel Zutkiewicz



Arjeh (Luszek) Zutkiewicz

In Memory of Our Loved Ones

Our father

Josef Cuker

A Chassid and loved in the city

Our mother

Chaja Sara Cuker

Of blessed memory



Our brother and sisters

Malka Cuker
May God avenge
her blood

Hersz Motel Cuker
Passed away in
Africa

Golda Cuker
May God avenge
her blood

Chana Cuker
Passed away in
Ostrolenka

The mourners
Rivka Tzuker-Levi, Israel
Shmuel Ber Tzuker, United States



Above, from the right: Chaja (Tobjar),
Note, Zysel, Lejbel Barycz, Alter Ben Cyjon
Below, from the right: Ester, Mother Sara,
Father Mosze, Dwora (wife of Alter Ben Cyjon)

In Memory of the Blachowicz Family

Our father, **Mosze Blachowicz**, of blessed memory, was a modest man; he devoted every moment of his free time to the study of Torah and its issues.

Our mother, **Sara**, of blessed memory, his faithful helpmeet, was an exemplary woman and mother. Despite her weak state of health, she worked tirelessly, was always lively and had a smile on her face. Her main concern was to educate her children in the traditional-nationalist spirit and to acquire a multi-faceted education for them, although they encountered hardships on all sides. Indeed, many years were sown with her tears; their harvest was denied them. Suddenly, they were swallowed alive by the Nazi monster, they and two brothers, their wives and baby girl, two sisters and a brother-in-law, all buried alive in Molczat in Russia.

Our oldest brother, **Chaim Note**, of blessed memory, excelled in exemplary honesty and good heartedness, as did his dear wife, **Chaja**, *née* Tobjar, of blessed memory. Our brother, **Alter Ben Cyjon**, of blessed memory, was handsome. Throughout his youth, he suffered from illness and finally recovered completely and married his beloved, **Dwora**. A daughter was born to them, **Chana Michal**, of blessed memory, and then the impure and criminal hand caught up with them. Our oldest sister, **Zysel** [sweet], of blessed memory, was aptly named. She was a courteous woman and, although she experienced great suffering, she overflowed with energy and the joy of life under the influence of her beloved husband, **Lejbel Barycz**, of blessed memory, the young community worker, who was loved by all levels of the public for whose benefit he worked – and not for the sake of reward.

Our above-mentioned sister was shot by the impure Nazis at the border of Makow, the city where her husband was born. He was buried alive at Molczat, together with my dear parents, my brother and their families, our youngest sister, **Ester**, of blessed memory, the daughter of their old-age, beloved by all of us – plucked in her youth and cast into a common grave with all the Jews of Molczat by the barbaric Nazis, may their names and memories be erased!

This testimony was taken from a native of Molczat, who managed to flee to Vilna, and from there, to come to Israel with a group of pioneers.

When our brother, Jehoszua, may he live a long life!, returned after the war from a Siberian prison, he, too, met refugees and, from them, discovered details of the horrible catastrophe of 1 Av [2 August] 1943.

Therefore, the New Moon of Av is the memorial day (*yahrzeit*) of our dear family, of blessed memory.

May their souls be bound in the bond of life and may God revenge their blood!

The mourners
Shoshana Perlman-Blachowicz,
(the author of these lines) and her family, Israel
Rachel Gingold-Blachowicz and her family, Australia
Yehoshua Blachowicz and his family, Australia



May God Remember

The souls of my dear parents, **Israel and Sara Fejga Rubinsztejn**, my brother and sister, **Gedalja and Rachel**, of blessed memory, who were annihilated and felled by the impure Nazis, the oppressors, may their name be eradicated.

My father, of blessed memory, was born to his father, Reb Mosze Rubinsztejn, an honorable man, well-liked by the community in Ostrolenka. He was an expert in legal matters, and sometimes served as an advisor to the city's magistrates. He was also well-liked by the Polish intelligentsia and this, more than once, benefited the city's inhabitants. My father, of blessed memory, was an educated Jew and a fervent Zionist, who believed entirely that Zionism would bring redemption to the Jewish people. At his print shop, the first in our city, the Ostrolenkan pamphlet called *Ostrolenker Schtimmer* [The Voice of Ostrolenka] was first printed. In 1929, after the death of my father, of blessed memory, my mother was forced to take on the yoke of support on the one hand (an educated, energetic woman, she managed the print shop with excellence) and to continue with the affairs of the house and the education of her children on the other. In addition, she was active in a women's organization that worked for the benefit of Zionist funds. As my father, of blessed memory, was a good Zionist, she educated her children in this spirit, and rooted in their hearts the love of the Jewish people and its land.

The mourners
Their daughter, **Rivka Lachower** (*née* Rubinsztejn)
and her husband, **Zyskind**, Israel

"For he who exacts retribution for spilled blood remembers them . . ."



From the right, bottom row: Our father, Chaim Mordechaj, our grandmother, Fejga, our mother, Lea
From the right, top row: Dawid, Zelda, Meir, Zew, Jakow Szlomo – the children

With deep sorrow and broken hearts, we mention here the dear memory of our beloved and dear parents, brothers and sisters, as well as all our relatives who were killed by the murderous Nazis, may their names be eradicated.

Our father, **Reb Chaim Mordechaj Lachowicz**, of blessed memory, the son of Reb Nechemia, of blessed memory, an observant Jew of good character.

Our mother, **Lea**, of blessed memory, the daughter of Reb Dawid Bonciak, of blessed memory, a teacher, highly respected by all who knew him.

Our grandmother, **Fejga**, of blessed memory, a dear and amiable woman.

Our brother, **Jakow Szlomo**, may God avenge his blood, who fought bravely for his life and the lives of others. He was killed on his way to save Judyt Zutkiewicz and Peszka Lewine, when he was in the forest as a partisan.

Our sister, **Zelda**, and our brothers, **Meir, Dawid and Zew**, who died heroes' deaths and did not surrender to the enemy.

Our relatives, **Motel Bonciak**, his wife and their children; **Alter Bonciak**, his wife and their children; **Szejna Bonciak** (Burak), her husband and their children; **Zlata Bonciak** and her little daughter; **Alter Lachowicz**, his wife and their children; the **Balfan-Sokol** family.

May they rest in peace and may God avenge their blood.

The mourners
Eliezer Lachowicz
Zyskind Lachowicz
Yafa Lachowicz
And their families, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance



Nachman Mosze Malka Josef

The parents

Josef and Malka Litwer

The brothers

Nachman and Mosze Litwer

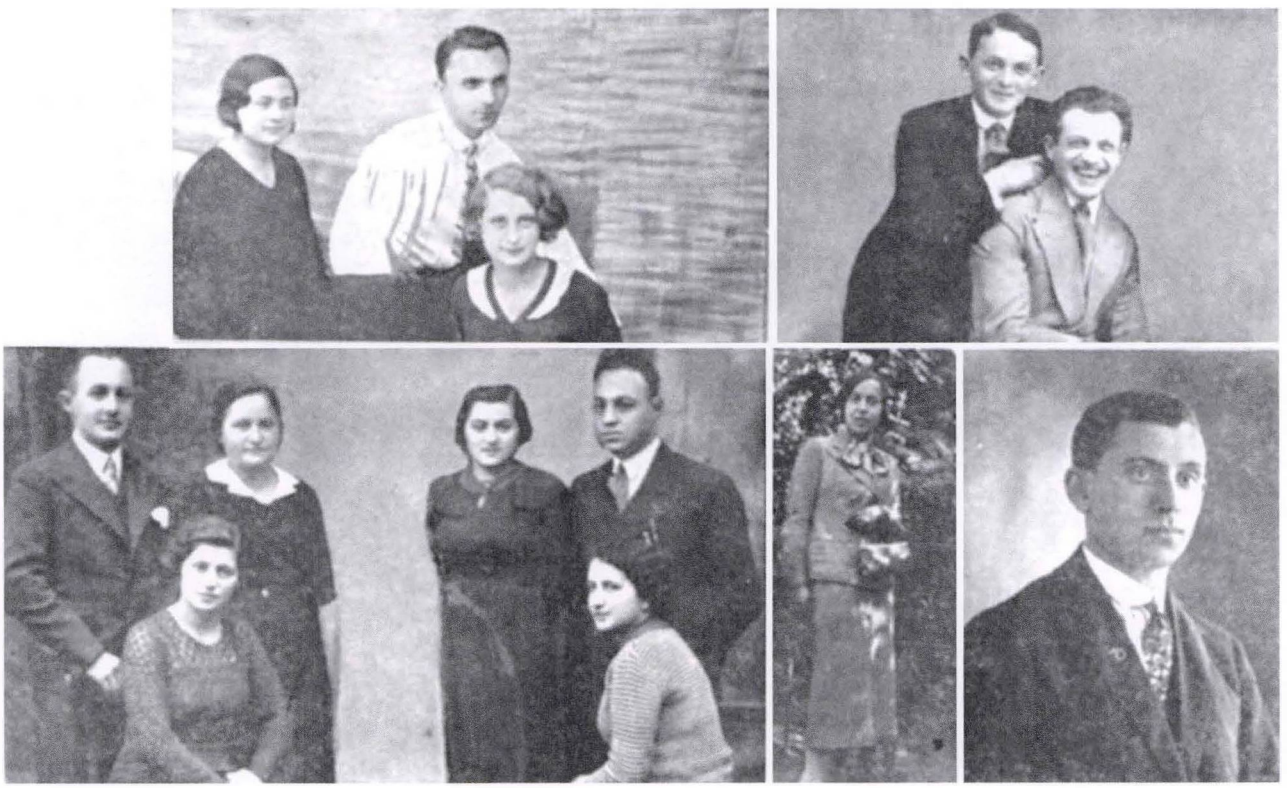
The mourners

Daughter and sister
Tzvia Biezuner (Litwer)

And her husband
Dr. Yakov Biezuner

And their family, Canada

In Memory of Dear Friends



Above, from the right: **Hercke Sojka**, of blessed memory, passed away in Israel, **Jechiel Szafran**, may God avenge his blood, **Fejga Sojka**, may God avenge her blood, **Syma**, the daughter of Rabbi Burnsztejn, of blessed memory, may God avenge her blood.

Below, from the right: **Lejbel Leszcz**, may God avenge his blood, Gitel Benedon, may God avenge her blood, **Sara Thylim**, may God avenge her blood, and **Peszka Lewin**, may God avenge her blood – seated

Arjeh Bajuk, may God avenge his blood, **Ester Izrael**, may God avenge her blood, **Lejbe Rachel Zylbersztejn**, may God avenge her blood, and **Awrejmele Frydman**, may God avenge his blood – standing

May their souls rest in peace and may God avenge their blood.

The mourner
Shalom Margalit, Israel



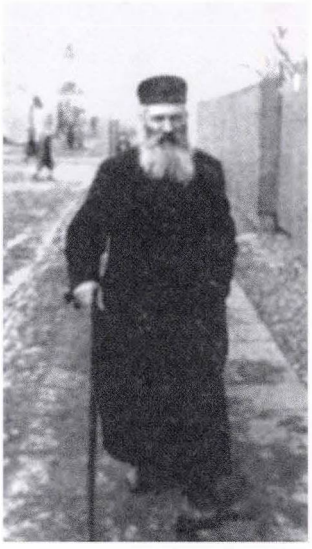
In Eternal Remembrance

Father
Szlomo Dawid Zylbersztejn

Mother
Fejga Frejda Zylbersztejn

In mourning
F. Zylbersztejn
and his family, Argentina

The **Zylbersztejn Family**,
Mexico



In Eternal Remembrance

Father **Naftali Sztern**
Mother **Bejla Sztern**

The mourners
Sara Zylbersztejn-Sztern, Uruguay
Liba Frenkel-Sztern, Australia





In Eternal Remembrance

Eli Mosze Wajnkranc, of Blessed Memory

Passed away in Uruguay

He was born in Ostrolenka in 1908. He studied in the *heder* and in the yeshiva established by his father, Reb Jakow Arjeh, of blessed memory, among others. His father was a Gur Chassid.

In 1928, he came to Montevideo (Uruguay) and worked there as a printer and typesetter. He was one of the foremost typesetters there at the time. An energetic man, he later opened his own print shop.

He achieved a strong economic status and a good reputation for himself as a man with an aptitude for culture. He was interested in Yiddish culture in this country and was known as a proud, patriotic Jew.

His death had a heavy impact on the family and the region, the people of Ostrolenka, friends and acquaintances.

His wife **Szejtel**
His son **Josef and his children**
His daughter **Batia and her family**, Uruguay
The Wajnkranc Family, Uruguay and Israel
The Kaspi and Zusman Families, Israel

In Memory of the Szperling Family



From the right: Ita (the daughter), Sara (the mother), Cwi (the father),
Jechiel (the son, standing), Szejna (the daughter),
among them three grandchildren: Berel, Jankel and Rachele (the children of Miriam and Natan Lew)

My father, Cwi (Herszel) Szperling, of blessed memory, was born in Ostrow-Mazowieck, the son of Beniamin and Rachel Szperling. His father was an Alexander Chassid. He was a courteous man of good character. In Ostrolenka, he engaged all his life in trade. He was a merchant of wholesale imports. He was involved in the community and very respected by his fellow townspeople. He was devoted and active in matters of charitable funds and charity. He, himself, also gave and contributed generously. A member of the community board (*dozor* [elder]), he did much to ease the difficult condition of the needy in the city. When the first charitable fund was established in Ostrolenka from the money of the philanthropist Blum, a Wojciechowicean from America, my father received the money ($5,000) in his name and the name of Chaim Pinczas Gingold (who later served as Chairman of the community). They were solely responsible for the money and the administration of the charitable fund.

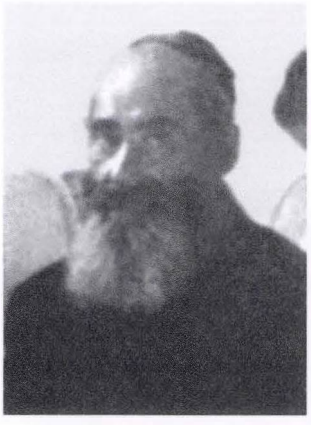
My father, of blessed memory, also knew how to approach the needy when giving charity in secret. He was a brother to the needy. Anyone who had something that troubled his heart, he came to my father, Herszel Szperling, to bare his soul. He devoted his limited time to the community.

My mother, Sara, of blessed memory, was born in Ostrolenka, the daughter of Reb Berel and Falka Szymon. She was a refined woman and his helpmeet in every sense of the word.

My brother, Jechiel, and my sisters, Ita and Szejna; my sister, Miriam, her husband, Natan Lew and their children, Berel, Jankel and Rachele – during the Nazi Holocaust, they were all murdered in the forests near the city of Syniowka, around Baranowicz.

Those who cry bitterly: **Aron Szperling**, his wife, **Chava**, and their family, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance





The beloved parents

Szmuel Baruch and Lea Landau, of Blessed Memory





Father and mother

Szmuel and Chana Sara Frydman, of Blessed Memory

In sorrow

Rachel Lachowicz (Landau)

and her family, Israel



May God Remember our dear parents and our dear sister

Our father: Reb **Mordechaj Gimpel**, of blessed memory, the son of Reb **Dawid Jehuda Blachowicz**
He was a righteous man of good deeds

Our mother: Mrs. **Chawa**, of blessed memory, The daughter of Reb **Mosze Chaim Krystal**
A righteous, intelligent, goodhearted woman

Our sister: **Sara**, of blessed memory, the daughter of Reb **Mordechaj Gimpel**
A refined soul

Who died martyrs' deaths at the hands of impure and base murderers
Their pure blood will not be forgotten in our hearts; the purity of their souls and the clarity of their spirits will remain in our hearts forever.

The mourners

The sons
Eliezer and his family, South Africa
Moshe, Uruguay

The daughters
Malka Katz-Blachowicz and her family, South Africa
Masza Benc-Blachowicz and her family, Uruguay
Rachel Abel-Blachowicz and her family, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Israel Szron, of Blessed Memory



Szepsel Szron, the son of Israel Szron,
his wife, Czarny, and son, Josek



Szejna Szron,
wife of Israel Szron



Moszke Szron,
son of Israel and Szejna



Czila Szron,
daughter of Israel and Szejna



Icchak Zaborowski



Chaja Bajleke Zaborowski-Szron,
wife of Icchak Zaborowski

All were murdered in Slonim, except for Chaja Bajleke and her small son, who died in Lomza, 1939. May God avenge their blood.

The mourners
The **Leibel Szron** Family, Canada
The **Drezner-Szron** Families, Israel



Henach Gielczynski, his wife, Sara Rywka
Sons: Mosze, Jakow Hersz, Mordechaj



Zalman Gielczynski, his wife,
Chana (Szafran),
murdered in Slonim



Littman and Jospa Gruszko
(Rodeski-Gielczynski),
murdered in Stolin



Chaim Zonenberg, his wife Czipa (Rodeski-Gielczynski) and their children: Pesia, Rejzele, Mordechaj Lejbele, murdered in Stolin



Jenta Rodeski-Gielczynski, murdered in



Rodeski Szmuelke, he fled from Slonim and was murdered near Stalingrad

The mourners
The daughters — **Pnina Lakiec-Gielczynski**, Israel
Szejna Zabranecki, Argentina
The son — **Chaim Gielczynski**, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

The holy and the pure

Reb Chackel Zylbersztejn and his wife,
Sara Dwora (*née* Makowski)
Zundel Zylbersztejn and his wife, Fruma
Cwija Zylbersztejn
Lejbe Rachel Zylbersztejn
May God avenge their blood.



Reb Chackel Zylbersztejn

Bejla Gitel Rapaport (*née* Zylbersztejn)
Passed away in Israel

The mourners
Yitzhak Rapaport and his family, Israel



Zundel and his wife, Fruma



Bejla Gitel Rapaport



Lejbe Rachel



Cwija



Below, from the right: The mother, Etka; the grandfather,
Reb Joel (Joelke Israel); the father, Reb Eliezer
Above, from the right: Beniamin, Meir, Chana, Lejbel – their children

In Eternal Remembrance

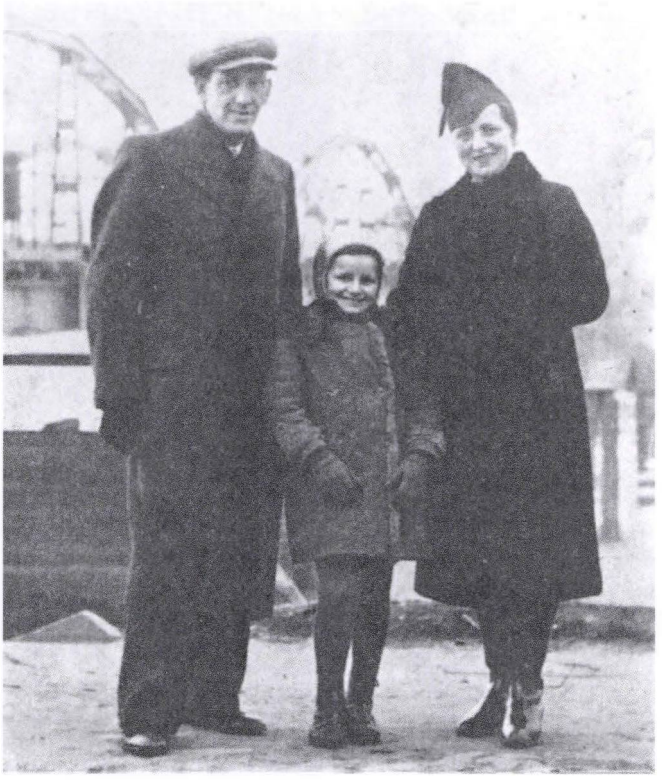
Father, of blessed memory, was a Torah-loving Jew, who set times for Torah study. He was among those who worked for the study of Torah. He was one of the founders of the *Chevra Bachurim* [study group], which later became the *Chevra Mishnayot*. Its lessons were, at first, given by Reb Mordechaj Iglewicz (*Der Farber*) and, later on, by Reb Josef Nasielski. When the Yavneh School was established, Father, of blessed memory, was among its supporters and sent his eldest son to study there. He was a Zionist. All his life, he aspired to see the building of the Land of Israel, but he did not live to realize his aspiration. He gave an ultra-Orthodox education to his four sons and daughters. All continued to follow the path in which they had been raised.

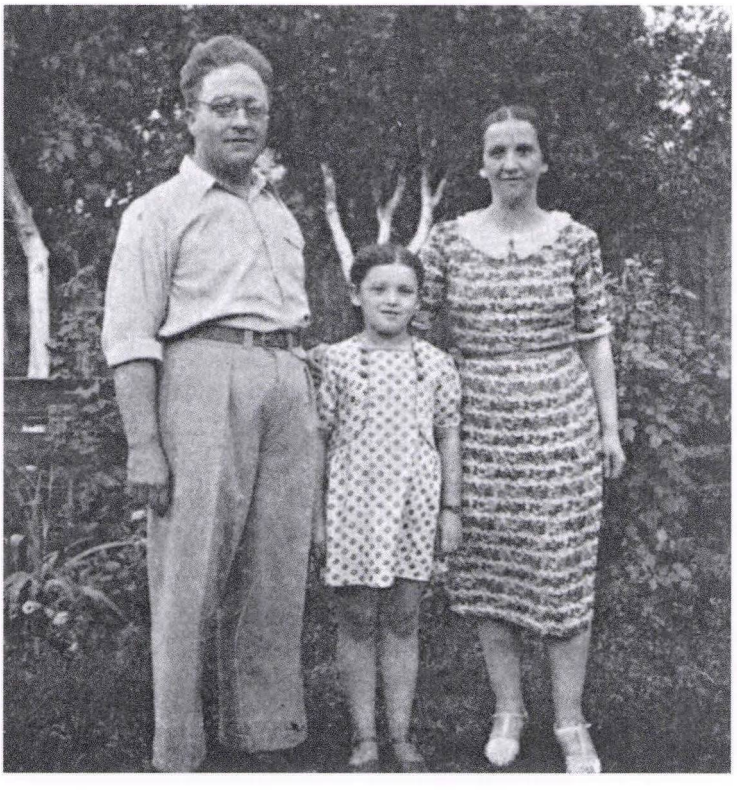
At the time of the expulsion from the city, the family stayed in Slonim for a time. After the Nazis, may their names be eradicated, returned and occupied Slonim, the family was annihilated. Even during their stay in Slonim, they succeeded in maintaining contact with their son in Israel – but, suddenly, this ceased.

The mourning son
Yosef Miron (Mejrann) and his family, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Dawid Jehuda Finkelsztejn
His wife, **Rachel** (*née* Benc)
Their daughter, **Chaja**
May God avenge their blood.





Przystanczyk Joachim
His wife, **Ester**
(*née* Finkelsztejn)
Their daughter, **Jochewed**
May God avenge their blood.

The mourners
Avraham, Yosef, Dov and Rivka
(*née* Pintel) **Finkelstein**, Israel
Yitzhak Finkelstein, Argentina

In Memory of My Dear Family

My father **Reb Mosze Chaim Cywiak, Shochet u'Bodek,**
of blessed memory

My mother **Chaja Sara** (*née* Tobjar)

My brothers **Nachum Eliezer**
Gerszon
Awraham
Icchak Meir

My sisters **Ester Rywka**
Szejna
Homy
Jochewed
Josefa

My aunt **Jochewed Brum** (*née* Tobjar)
Her husband, Chaim, and their children

My uncle **Josef Cywiak** (the brother of my father, Mosze Chaim)
His wife, Rywka, and their children

Who were murdered in the Nazi Holocaust in Nieswiez, Poland
(near Baranowicz)
May God avenge their blood.

The mourner

Faiga Micnmacher-Cywiak
Ramat Gan, Israel

The Story of the Tejtelbojm Family



Aron Hersz Tejtelbojm married Rachel, *née* Kanarek, in 1918.

His father, Awraham Tejtelbojm, may God avenge his blood, was killed in the Holocaust, and his mother, Chaja Sara, of blessed memory, passed way in Ostrolenka.

Awraham Hersz had a brother named Mosze Natan (Noske), of blessed memory, who was the *gabbai* of the small synagogue in Ostrolenka, and had a leather store. He had two daughters, who married and had children. All of them were killed in the Holocaust.

Aron Hersz had two sisters, Zysza Bracha Tejtelbojm-Frajman, of blessed memory, and Ester Tejtelbojm, and four brothers: Eliezer Tejtelbojm, of blessed memory, Szmuel Tejtelbojm, of blessed memory, Mosze Josef, of blessed memory, who was murdered in the synagogue that the Germans burned down, together with the rest of the congregation, and another brother, who passed away before the war.

Each of the brothers and sisters started families and had children, and all of them, and their families, were killed in the Holocaust.

Rachel's father, Aszer Kanarek, of blessed memory, passed away in Ostrolenka in 1934, and her mother, Rywka Kanarek-Zelanski, from Poltusk, passed away in 1939, at the Lomza Yeshiva at the beginning of World War II. Rywka, *née* Zelanski, had a brother called Abram Zielinski, who raised a family in Israel and passed away in 1956.

Rachel, *née* Kanarek, had two sisters and two brothers: Czila Kanarek-Jakobowski and her family of blessed memory; Fejga Kanarek-Szablowski and her husband, Lipa, of blessed memory, their daughter, Cyrl, and their little son, of blessed memory, were killed in the Holocaust.

Her brothers, Pesach Kanarek, who married Jachad, of blessed memory, and Mordechaj Kanarek, of blessed memory, left Poland before the war and moved to America, where they raised families and passed away.

Aron Hersz Tejtelbojm, a tailor, and Rachel, a housewife, had five children:

- Their eldest son, Symcha Tejtelbojm, of blessed memory, was born in 1919. He was an active member of the Bund, was drafted into the Red Army which fought the Germans, and, as an officer, was killed on 1 September 1943, about 18 kilometers from the city of Stalingrad.
- Czila Tejtelbojm-Turner was born in 1921. In Russia, during the war, she married Zew Turner, of blessed memory, from the city of Lodz. When the war broke out, Czila lived with her Aunt Fejga in the city of Warsaw, where she was sent to work as a seamstress, a profession that she had learned in Ostrolenka. When entry to the city was forbidden, she began searching for her family, which she found in the city of Lomza.
- Bela Tejtelbojm-Sztajer was born in 1923. After the war, she married Awraham Sztajer, of blessed memory, from the city of Lodz.
- Fejga Tejtelbojm-Bernard was born in 1925, and married Michael Bernard after the war, in a camp in Austria. She now lives in Argentina.
- Mordechaj Tejtelbojm was born in 1927. In Israel, he married Shoshana, *née* Hammerman.

In 1930, Aron Hersz passed away, and Rachel remained, a young widow with five children, the oldest of which was 11 and the youngest three years old. To support her family, she used to get up early in the morning to bring milk from the nearby villages to Ostrolenka, where she sold it. She did all this by herself.

In 1939, during the Succot holiday, it was announced in the city that the population had to be evacuated within 24 hours. Rachel, who was already a widow, loaded bedding and a bed for her mother, Rywka Kanarek, on a wagon, and with the three youngest children, traveled toward the city of Lomza. For about two weeks, they lived in cowshed some distance from the city, until Rachel found lodgings – the yeshiva in the city, where she moved her mother and her children, Bela, Fejga and Mordechaj. The two others were taken to an orphanage in the city. Rachel and her daughter, Bela, worked removing wreckage in the city. After searching, the oldest son, Symcha, and the daughter, Czila, found their family in the city of Lomza. All together, they moved to the city of Bialystok, and from there they continued into Russia. They reached Siberia, where they remained until the end of the war.

Rachel emigrated to Israel with her daughter Czila and her family, and her son, Mordechaj. Fejga moved to Argentina. Bela emigrated to Israel from Poland in 1956.

Our grandmother, Rachel (Bobe), of blessed memory, passed away on 11 February 1966. She had nine grandchildren, whom she raised and nurtured. Each grandchild raised a new generation.

In Eternal Remembrance

Awremcze Tejtelbojm, may God avenge his blood
was murdered in the Lomza Synagogue in 1939.
His wife, **Chaja Sara Tejtelbojm**, of blessed memory,
passed away in Ostrolenka.

Aron Hersz Tejtelbojm, of blessed memory,
the son of Awremcze and Chaja Sara,
passed away in Ostrolenka in 1930.

Symcha Tejtelbojm, of blessed memory,
the son of Aron Hersz,
was killed in Stalingrad in 1943
as an Air Force battalion commander;
he was an active member of the Bund.

Aszer Kanarek
passed away in Ostrolenka.
His wife, **Rywka Kanarek**,
died in 1939 in the Lomza Yeshiva,
immediately after the outbreak of World War II.

Pesach Kanarek
and his wife, **Jachad Kanarek**,
passed away in America.



Aron Hersz Tejtelbojm



Symcha Tejtelbojm

The mourners
Rachel Teitelbaum
Cyrl Teitelbaum-Turner
Bejla Teitelbaum-Sztajer
Israel
Fejga Teitelbaum-Berenhojt
Argentina
Feivel Kanarek
Mordechai David Kanarek
America



Rachel Tejtelbojm

About the Menachem Frydman Family, May God Avenge Their Blood

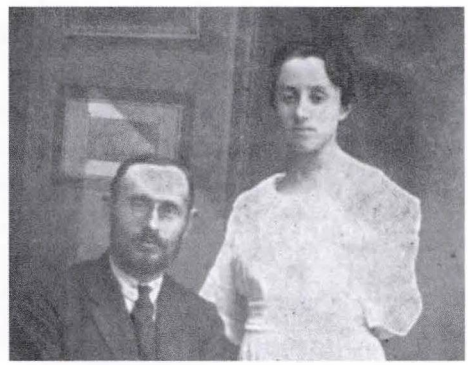
A candle for the souls of the ten members of the Menachem and Pesia Frydman Family who were killed: their eldest son, Szmuel, his wife, Basia (*née* Perkal), their daughter, Rywka; their second son, Awraham and his wife, Peszka (*née* Lewin); their third son, Zundel, his wife, Gitel (*née* Lachower) and their son, Jechezkel, may God avenge their blood.

Menachem Frydman, a native of the town of Bruk, established his home in Ostrolenka after his marriage to Pesia, *née* Lachower, the younger sister of the writer, F. Lachower, of blessed memory. Their traditional religious education, with the "intellectualism" they absorbed in their youths, left its stamp on their traditional way of life, which included understanding the spirit of the time. Their home was an exemplary home of tradition, love and mutual assistance between fathers and sons, of living together in harmony. He purchased his merchandise from distant sources and did business all his life with faith, honesty and great diligence. He merited a wife who was, all her days, a helpmeet in business in their store and in running the house. All her actions were thought out with the understanding, knowledge and devotion of an exemplary Jewish wife and mother. Their house was open to those from near and far and they helped the needy generously. Menachem was a learned person, and although he was occupied with his business, he set times for Torah, and studied a page of Gemara every morning before leaving his house on business.

The ax man struck down this beautiful Jewish home, too. The hands of our bitter enemies caught them during the destruction of the Jews of Slonim, where they thought to find refuge. Their son, Szmuel, and the members of his family were burned alive when a bomb was thrown into their home. That same day, their daughter-in-law, Gitel, with her baby, Jechezkel, in her arms, was taken from their home, and shot on the edge of the pit dug for the Jews of Slonim. Their son, Awraham, was shot and killed in front of his mother, at the doorway of their home, and his wife, Peszka, disappeared when she fled to the partisans in the forests, with her cousin, Judyt Zutkiewicz. Menachem, Pesia and their son, Zundel, tried to find a hiding place in one of the wells in their courtyard, hoping that each would save the other, but the enemy found them and they were shot and fell on the spot.

No one of their family survived, because they always stayed together. Loving in life, they were not separated in death.

Menachem Lachower



Menachem and Pesia Frydman



Peszka Lewin, Awrejmele Frydman



Szlomo Frydman



Basia Frydman



Rywka, the daughter of Szmuel and Basia



Zundel and his wife, Gitel Frydman



Jechezkel, the son of Zundel and Gitel

In Memory of the Eisenstein Family

Father was born in Drohiczyn (near Pinsk) in 1876. He was a student at the Wolozin Yeshiva and studied with Nachum Sokolow. When he was of draft age, he was transferred to serve in Ostrolenka, because the greatest concentration of His Majesty the Tsar's standing army was in Ostrolenka.

My grandfather from Ostrolenka (on Mother's side), Lejbke Lejzor, was a big supplier for the army. It happened that Grandfather once invited the young soldier, Lejzer Eisenstein, to come to him for a holiday (later, he became our father), with the commander's permission. It was also considered a great *mitzvah* to invite a Jewish soldier to one's holiday table. During the meal, between courses, my father displayed his talent in holiday songs with his pleasant voice and his knowledge of Talmud and the commentaries. From then on, Grandfather continued to invite Father to come for Sabbaths and holidays, and he endeared himself to all the members of the family. Mother was the eldest of Grandfather's daughters. She was already seventeen years old. After Father became like a real member of Grandfather's family, it was decided that Sara Lejzor and Eliezer Eisenstein would marry. With Grandfather's help, Father was released from the army and began working in Grandfather's business. After a short time, Father became self-employed as a supplier for the Russian Army, and he gained a reputation for skill and honesty.



Chana Eisenstein



Awigdor Eisenstein

When World War I broke out (in 1914), Father was drafted into the army. For four years, we did not know what his fate was, and we were little children then. The hardships of the war did not pass us by, and our longing for Father was very strong. In 1918, we received a letter from the Red Cross, to the effect that Lejzer Eisenstein was alive and well. Our happiness was boundless. After a short time, Father returned to Ostrolenka. Our home was filled with light and happiness. Fate, however, disappointed us later on. After three years, on Passover, on the second Seder night, in 1921 (5681), Father passed away. Our crowning glory was taken from us. We were all orphaned. May his memory be blessed.

When Mother was widowed, she was thirty-five years old, and remained alone with seven children. Only when we grew up did we learn to appreciate her limitless devotion to her children. She placed the future of her children as the goal of her life. She literally sacrificed her life for her children. She passed away on 19 July 1939. Her memory will live in her children's hearts forever.

Fate also played dice with Chana, our sister. We all left home, and she remained with our sick mother. Chana also planned to leave Ostrolenka. She delayed her plans only because of the death of our mother. A month after Mother's death, however, World War II broke out, and she wound up in the Vilna Ghetto. In 1943, she was executed by Hitler's minions, may their names be eradicated, in Ponary in Vilna. May God avenge her blood.

Our brother, Awigdor, was a student at the Lomza Yeshiva and excelled as a prodigy in his studies. Father, of blessed memory, was proud of his talented son, and that he followed in his footsteps. The spirit of the Third *Aliyah* [wave of emigration to Israel, from 1919], however, brought on its wings the pioneering idea to youthful circles, in which our brother began to be active. He was among the founders of HeChalutz in our city, as well as HaShomer HaTzair. Together with David Lew, he planned his emigration to Israel.

For family reasons, he postponed his emigration, and meanwhile, immersed himself entirely in his productive public work. He was the head of the HaShomer HaTzair "nest". His personal influence was invaluable, and to us, in particular. He was a brother, as well as a good friend. He had a bent for writing poems and used to read them to us and await our opinions. It was he who spurred us on to read. His death struck us grievously. He died in Warsaw in the Czista Hospital in December 1928. May his memory be preserved in our hearts.

Our brother, Szmuel, went to America a year after Father's death. In 1922, he was glad that he could send a few dollars home from time to time. He dreamed of bringing all the family to him, but to our great regret, his dream was not realized. He became ill in far-away America and died alone. May his memory be blessed.

In deep mourning
Hone Eisenstein (author of the above lines) **and his family**, Israel
Esther Eisenstein-Eisenman and her family, Israel
Batya Eisenstein-Bjoza, Los Angeles
Liza Eisenstein-Greenberg, Australia



Sara Eisenstein



Eliezer Eisenstein



Szmuel Eisenstein

In Memory of the Holy and Pure

Chaim Szaje Rozental

His wife	**Necha**
Their son	**Jehuda**
Their daughters	**Fejga and Syma**

Who were murdered in the city of Mogilew in Belorussia.
May God avenge their blood.

The mourners
The **Rozental** Family,
Israel and abroad

In Eternal Remembrance

Father	**Cwi Szraga Malach**
Mother	**Ester**
Sisters	**Brajnczi, Szyfra, Keilczi and Cyrl**

Of blessed memory. May God avenge their blood.

In deep sorrow
Benyamin Malach and his family,
Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Our dear parents

Mosze and Cwija Brysk

Our sisters

Bazke and Sara

Our brothers

Israel Meir and Icchak

Murdered in the Nazi Holocaust. May God avenge their blood.

The mourners

Rachel and Aviezer Brysk, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Mother

Ester Michal Byszko

Passed away in Israel

Meir Byszko

His wife

Szyfra and their two children

The mourners

The Byszko Family, Israel

In Memoriam

Szejna Dorfman

and her husband, Hersz Jarmus

(from Lomza)

and their daughter, Necha



Murdered in the Nazi Holocaust

May God avenge their blood.



The mourners

Shlomo and Pia Dorfman

(Szejna's parents)

Zvi Dorfman and his family

Shmuel Dorfman and his family

Yakov Dorfman and his family

(Szejna's brother)

Israel

Father **Szymon Landau,** the Torah scribe
Mother **Chana**
Brother **Symcha**
Sisters **Nechama**
Matel Pesia
and her husband, **Awraham Wajnsztok**
and their children, **Chawa,**
Mosze and **Herszel**

All murdered

The mourner
Chava Landau-Neumark, Canada



Father **Nachman Wajnsztok**
Mother **Hadas**
Sister **Dwora Rejzel**
Brothers **Chaim Icchak and Mosze Mates**

All murdered

The mourner
Nechama Wajnsztok-Yanai, Israel



Father **Chaim Note Cukierkorn**
Mother **Chaja Rywka**
Brother **Symcha Bunim**
Sisters **Lea** and **Brajna**

All murdered

The mourners
Nechama Cukierkorn-Zygelman, Israel
Lejbe Cukierkorn-Lan
Pese Cukierkorn-Azik, Brazil



In Memory of

My dear father, **Lejbel (Lipes) Goldsztejn, of blessed memory**
My mother, **Chaja Lea**, a dear person
My eldest, gifted, adored brother,
Icchak and his family

My noble-souled sister, **Fejga Rachel** and her family
My dear, pure-souled younger sister, **Nechama**
My dear sister, **Perel**, and her family



Icchak



Fejga Rachel



Nechama

I lost all of them, and was orphaned from them all. I remained alone. You have imposed on me a great burden, my dear ones, a very heavy one. All of your past, the light and the shadow, the sadness and the joy, the happiness and the sorrow. On me alone, to carry in my heart, to refresh my memory and my thought and not to forget a single detail. Only me, myself.

May it be His will that I have the physical and spiritual strength to preserve the sole, dear possession that remains of you: the memories.

Shlomo Goldsztein, Israel



Perel

In Eternal Remembrance

Israel Mojzesz Lewin,
of Blessed Memory
Passed away in Warsaw in March, 1938
His wife, **Leja Lewin**





Hersz Jakow Lewin
His wife, **Rut Lewin** (*née* Rosenthal)
Their daughter, **Bianka Lewin**

Avraham Frydman
His wife, **Peszka Frydman**
(*née* Lewin)



May they rest in peace.
May God avenge their blood.

The mourners

The **Levy-Lewin and Jagoda** Families, Israel
Batya Sojka, Abroad

Israel Mojzesz and Leja Lewin

In the city, Israel Mojzesz was known to have a sharp mind and an excellent profession. He was intelligent from birth, and he knew how to represent his business. Later on, he became a contractor of military works and also worked for municipal industries, such as the electric company, saw mills and flour mills. He was invited to advise them technically and mechanically.

In 1920, when travel to Israel became possible and some Zionist youths began to emigrate seriously – then youths began to study professions, to become welders, carpenters and electricians. These youths, mostly, were "Mother's boys", that is, they were not used to being independent. They began to think about a purpose, to help build the new Land of Israel. Reb Israel Mojzesz Lewine made a great contribution here. David Lew, of blessed memory, one of Ostrolenka's first pioneers and my brother, long may he live!, went to Israel Mojzesz to study the profession of mechanical welding, as did many others. Thus, Reb Israel Mojzesz was part of the building of Israel.

Israel Mojzesz's home was a Zionist home, as well as a home where Zionist youths gathered to pass the time pleasantly. I remember, I was too young then to participate in Flower Day, when they collected money for Zionist funds. With wonder, I saw Reb Israel Mojzesz Lewin give advice to his daughters, who participated in Flower Day, about how to collect more. He also reinforced the collection boxes, so that they would hold up. When I related what I saw to those who had sent me, they talked among themselves, and said that Reb Israel Mojzesz was a general Zionist and very active. Among those who came to Reb Israel Mojzesz's house were Chilke Szafran, Mosze Litwer, Hercke Sojka, the Jagoda brothers, Meir Krymkiewicz and, later, Awraham Frydman and I. Most of us were Zionists, except for Krymkiewicz, who had Bundist leanings. We used to argue about Zionism and Bundism and, sometimes, we shouted. Then, Mrs. Lewin would intervene and state, "At any rate, everyone will have to go to Israel. Those who want to remain in Poland, however, will come later on . . ." She asked her daughters to set the table, and treated us to a cup of tea, in an attempt to extinguish the fires of the debate . . . Regretfully, those who were supposed to arrive "later on", never came.

The Lewin family, too, had a share in the tragic Holocaust of six million Jews. They left two sons and two daughters in Israel, and one daughter in the United States.

May their memory be blessed.

Shalom Margalit

This page is dedicated by **Eitan Levin** to the memory of his parents, **Reuven and Czarna Levy**

The family tree of Levy and Zielinski families:

LEVY (LEWIN) family, from Ostrolenka, Poland

Ze'ew HAJBLUM

Dina HAJBLUM
b: 1850(?), *d:* 1940

Israel Mojzesz LEWIN
b: 1873
d: March 1938 in Warsaw

Leja LEWIN
b: 1884, *d:* March 1943
Murdered in Warsaw Ghetto

Isidore LEWIN *b: 1900,* **and Wife**
d: Murdered in 1926 by Stalin in Russia.

Frida (LEWIN)
b: 4.1.1904, *d:* 3.20.1979
and Fabian JAGODA
b: 6.12.1905, *d:* 1987, made aliyah in 1949

Batya *"Bashka"* (LEWIN)
b: 1907, *d:* 1978
and Hercke SOJKA
b: 1902, *d:* 1959
Made *aliyah* in 1933

Zvi LEWIN
Since 1925 lived with his family in Lucerne, Switzerland

Hersz Jakob LEWIN *b:* 1910
Was caught and murdered as a partisan in 1944, together with his wife **Ruth (ROZENTAL)** and their daughter, **Bianka *"Beile"*** (age 4).

Malka LEWIN
b: 1910, *d:* 1986 in Haifa, Israel
Made *aliyah* in 1935

Peszka (LEWIN)
and Abraham FRYDMAN
Joined the partisans and disappeared, after Abraham was murdered in front of his mother

Arie *"Lowkea"* LEVY
b: 1911, *d:* 1992
and Hanna *"Chanka"*
b: 1924, survived Auschwitz; made *aliyah* in 1948

Three (?) more brothers were killed in Russia

Reuven *"Ruwek"* LEVY
b: 7.5.1921 or 1919 as the youngest child, in Ostrolenka, Poland
d: 9.21.1995, in Ra'anana, Israel

ZIELINSKI family, from Pultusk, Poland

Shraga Yeuda ZIELINSKI
b: 1850(?)

Chaja ZIELINSKI
b: 1850(?), *d:* 1937

Abraham ZIELINSKI
b: 1874, *d:* 12.12.1956
Made *aliyah* in 1952.

Estera Golda (BORENSZTEJN)
b: 1881, *d:* 1940
Disappeared in Russia while escaping the Nazis



Fibel ZIELINSKI
b: 1903 in Poland, Lived in Cuba.
d: 3.10.1985, in Detroit, Michigan, USA

Pinchas *"Pinyo"*
b: 1905, *d:* 1.24.1986 in Israel
and Fania ZIELINSKI (ROSEN)
Made *aliyah* in 1949.

Frimat (ZIELINSKI)
b: 1908 (?), *d:* 10.2.1988 in Detroit
and Yacov David LIT (LIPOWITZ)

Mendel *"Mjetek"*
b: 2.21.1909, *d:* 11.8.2002
and Sabina *"Saba"* ZIELINSKI
b: 12.18.1920, *d:* 9.26.1995, in Stockholm, Sweden

Shraga ZIELINSKI
b: 1912/1914 (?), *d:* 1920 (?)

Harry *"Hatzkel"* Yehezkel
b: 1915, *d:* 10.29.2001 in Chicago, Illinois, USA
and Emily (KARP) ZIELINSKI

Czarna (ZIELINSKI) LEVY
b: 10.30.1919 as the youngest child, in Pultusk, Poland,
Made *aliyah* in 1949.
d: 2.5.1994 in Tel-Aviv, Israel

Reuven *"Ruwek"* LEVY + **Czarna (ZIELINSKI) LEVY**

Moshe *"Mjetek"* LEVY
b: 7.6.1944 in Russia, while his parents were escaping the Nazis.
Made *aliyah* in 1949.

Eitan LEVIN (LEVY)
b: 3.12.1949 in Tel-Aviv, Israel
and Liora (BEN-EZER)
b: 5.6.1950 in Tel-Aviv, Israel

Avraham *"Muki"* LEVY
b: 3.10.1958 in Tel-Aviv
and Esther (KLEINER)
b: 1.29.1959 in Tel-Aviv

Sharon (LEVY)
b: 2.14.1973 in Beer-Sheva, Israel
and Natti EDER
b: 1.27.1972 in Netanya, Israel

Boaz LEVY
b: 6.1.1975 in Ramat-Gan, Israel
and Hagit (SHTEINER)
b: 1.15.1976 in Ramat-Gan, Israel

Nimrod LEVY
b: 12.3.1985 in Kfar-Saba, Israel

Aviv EDER
b: 4.8.2003
in Netanya, Israel

Shahar EDER
b: 11.30.2006
in Netanya, Israel

Ziv LEVY
b: 12.24.2006
in Tel-Aviv, Israel

Adi LEVY
b: 2.5.2009
in Kfar-Saba, Israel

Eran LEVY
b: 10.18.1985
in Tel-Aviv, Israel

Idan LEVY
b: 2.3.2089
in Kfar-Saba, Israel

Researched and collected by Eitan Levin; graphics by Natti Eder.

In Eternal Remembrance

Our dear mother and sister

Sara Lejbe Lachowicz,

(*née* Stawiski from Kolno), **of blessed memory**



Born in 1907 and passed away in 1937 in Ostrolenka.

A refined and goodhearted woman.
Her devotion to her home and anyone who came
in contact with her will never be forgotten.

May she be bound in the bonds of life.

The mourners

The sons in Israel

Reuven Lachowicz and his family
Dov Lachowicz and his family
Nechmia Lachowicz and his family

The sisters in Israel

Brajna Liblich (*née* Stawiski)
Chaya Dvora Kam (*née* Stawiski)

In memory of our father, **Josef Szpielman**
Our mother, **Bejla**, of blessed memory
A noble and considerate woman,
who passed away in
Ostrolenka at an early age
And her daughter,
the toddler, **Sara**
Our brother,
Mosze Szpielman,
may God avenge
their blood



Mosze Szpielman



Bejla (wife of Josef Szpielman)
and her daughter, Sara



Josef Szpielman

Our brother,
Chaim Szpielman
His wife, **Rywka**
Their son, **Aron**
Their daughter, **Sara**,
may God avenge
their blood



Chaim Szpielman



Sara Szpielman
(daughter of Chaim and
Rywka Szpielman)



Rywka, wife of Chaim Szpielman,
and their son, Aron



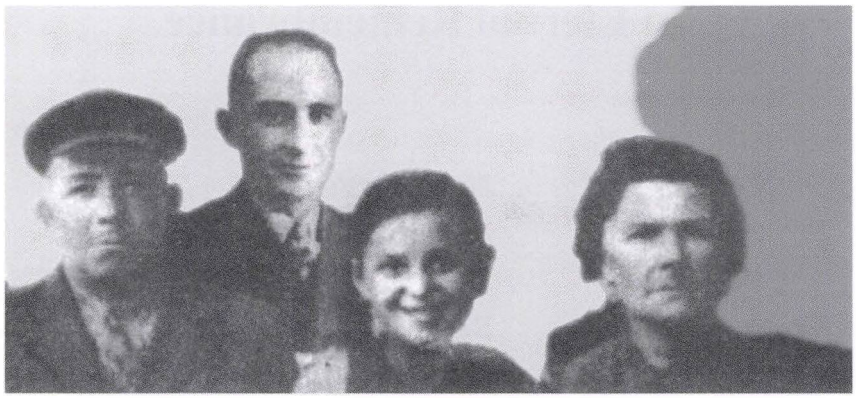
Israel and his son,
Awraham Szpielman



Ida (wife of Izrael Szpielman,
née Gumowicz)

Our brother, **Israel Szpielman**
His wife, **Ida** (*née* Gumowicz)
Their son, **Awraham**,
may God avenge their blood

The mourners
The daughters and sisters
Fela Kaplan (*née* Szpielman)
Dora Prowizor (*née* Szpielman)
and their families, Israel

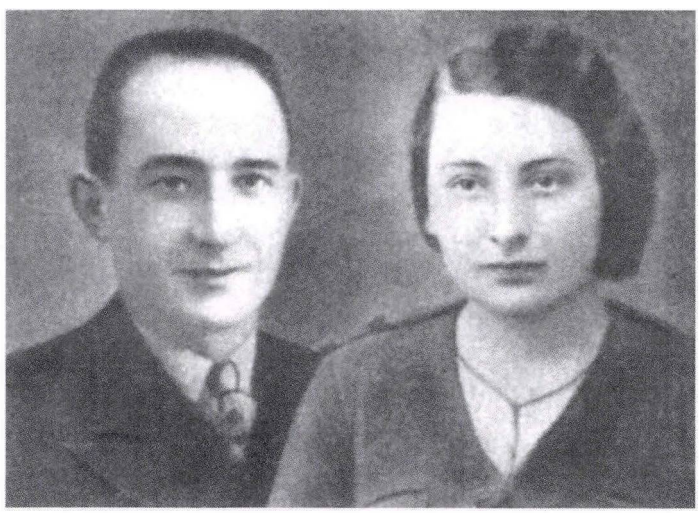


In Eternal Remembrance

Our dear parents, **Aron and Rejzel Wylozny**
Our brother, **Mosze Beniamin**
Our cousin, **Bluma Karsz**

Mosze Beniamin Wylozny
and his wife, **Itki** (*née* Czapnikiewicz)

In deep sorrow,
The sons **Zalman Wylozny and his family**
Icchak Wylozny and his family
Israel
Chaim Wylozny and his family,
United States



Mosze Beniamin Wylozny and his wife, Necha Itki (*née* Czapnikiewicz)

In Eternal Remembrance

Our father	**Noah Karlinski**
Our mother	**Malka Karlinski**
Our brother	**Reuwen Karlinski**
Our sister	**Basia Karlinski**

Joel and Fruma Sukna

The mourners
Baruch and Benyamin Karlinski, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Reb Lejbel Karlinski

His wife	**Dwora (Dworci) Karlinski**

The mourner
Benyamin Karlinski, Israel





In Eternal Remembrance

Our dear father

Awraham Piaseczny

Our dear mother

Fejga

Our dear sister

Chaja

Who were murdered in the Nazi Holocaust. May God avenge their blood.



The mourners

Chaim and Moshe-Hersz Piaseczny,

Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Father:	**Mendel Gielczynski**
Mother:	**Sara (Malinowicz)**
Brother:	**Eli**, his wife, **Szejna**, and children
Brother:	**Motel**, his wife, **Neszke**, and children
Sister:	**Rejzel**, her husband, **Josel Baranowicz**, and child
Aunt:	**Naomi Kam**, her husband, **Pinczas**, and children, **Chanci** and **Moszke**
Aunt:	**Peszka Kukman**, her husband, **Jakow Hersz**, and five little children
Uncle:	**Mosze Lejb Malinowicz**, his wife and two children
Cousin:	**Lea Geluda**, her husband, **Josef**, and four children
Cousin:	**Herszel Gielczynski**, his wife and seven little children
Cousin:	**Eli Gielczynski**, his wife and three children
Cousin:	**Rywka Berliner**, her husband, **Alter**, and seven children
Cousin:	**Icchak Gerber** and his wife, **Sara Rachel**
Cousin:	**Aron Gerber**, his wife and child
Cousin:	**Jechiel Peciner**, his wife and two children
Cousin:	**Sara Orlowicz**, her husband and two children
Aunt:	**Fejga Podasek**, her husband, **Icchak**, and four children
Aunt:	**Lea Budnik**
Cousin:	**Dawid Budnik**
Cousin:	**Mosze Budnik**, his wife and two children
Aunt:	**Rachel Lea Gielczynski**
Cousin:	**Chackel**
Cousin:	**Sara** and two children
Cousin:	**Frejda** and a child
Uncle:	**Matel Gielczynski**, his wife, **Chajci,** and children, **Dworke, Azriel** and **Chaim**
Uncle:	**Awraham Rozenblum**, his wife, **Ita Lea (Wajsenfeld)**
Cousin:	**Herszel**, his wife, **Dincze** and two children
Cousin:	**Icchak Rozenblum** and his wife
Cousin:	**Chawa**
Cousin:	**Pese Fejga Szwarcbord**
Uncle:	**Jakow Gerczak**
Aunt:	**Ita**
Cousin:	**Szloimke**, his wife and two children
Cousin:	**Sorcia Peciner**, her husband, **Icze Dawid**, and two children
Cousin:	**Peszka**, her husband, **Reuwen Nachum Gerczak**, and two children
Cousin:	**Rejzel Sapir**, her husband and two children

With sorrow
Rachel Kornblum
Esther Gruszko, Israel





In memory of our father
Reb Fajwel Finkelsztejn, of blessed memory,
who passed away in Ostrolenka and

our mother
Raszka Finkelsztejn, of blessed memory,
who passed away in Israel.

The mourners
Awraham Finkelsztein and his family
Yosef Finkelsztein and his family
Dov Finkelsztein and his family
Rivka Pintel-Finkelsztein and her family
Israel
Yitzhak Finkelsztein, Argentina





Our beloved parents

Nissan Lachowicz, of blessed memory
Neszke Lachowicz, of blessed memory
(The daughter of Reb Josef Mejrann, of blessed memory)

Both passed away in Israel

Our beloved sister

Basia
Her husband, Welwel Miller,
And their children

Murdered by the Nazis. May God avenge their blood.

The mourners
Chaim Lachowicz
Shmuel Lachowicz
Matel Lachowicz
Yosef Lachowicz
Pesia Lachowicz-Takson
and their families, Israel

Belha Lachowicz-Friszer, Australia



Reb Awraham Jehuda Elterman



Bejla Ester, Nissan, Meir Herszel

In Eternal Remembrance

Our father

Reb Awraham Jehuda Elterman, the son of
Reb Jakow Szlomo, of blessed memory
Burned alive in a granary in Jedwabne by the Germans.
May God avenge his blood.

Our mother

Chaja Malka, the daughter of Reb Meir Gibel,
of blessed memory
Passed away in Myszyniec

Our brothers

Meir Herszel and Nissan

Our sister

Bejla Ester
Murdered by the Nazis, may their names be eradicated

Jechiel Ben Cyjon and Dwora Elterman
Passed away in Mexico



Jechiel Ben Cyjon and Dwora Elterman

The mourners
Bracha Tikolsker-Elterman, Israel
In Mexico:
Zlata Garbarzewicz-Elterman
Mordechaj Elterman
Szejna Zysel Elterman-Hofman
Mina and Halenke Elterman
(The children of Jechiel Ben Cyjon and Dwora)



From the right, above: Reuwen Rozenblum, Elke Rozenblum (Mlynarzewicz), Pinczas Lubin
From the right, below: Mendel Segal, Szejna Rywka Lubin, Eliahu Lubin



The Rozenblum brothers (sons of Reuwen and Elke Rozenblum), all murdered. May God avenge their blood
From the right, above: Icchak, Jechiel and Symcha Rozenblum
From the right, below: Matel, Josef (Rabbi in Sokola) and Awraham Rozenblum

Our dear father
Icchak Cwi Chomont
Wojciechowice-Cegelna

Our dear mother
Brajna Rachel

Our dear brothers
Reuwen, Mordechaj and Mendel

Who were murdered in the Nazi Holocaust

With sorrow
Yehuda Yitzhaki (Chomont)
and his family
Chaim Chomont and his family
Israel

In memory of the holy and pure ones

My parents
Mosze Solomon
Baba Solomon
My sisters
Miriam, Sara and Chaja
My brother
Icchak
My grandfather and grandmother
Symcha and Lea Pianko
My uncle
Ben Cyjon Pianko
and his family
My uncle
Gutman Pianko
and his family

With sorrow
A. Solomon and his family
Petach Tikva, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Parents
Israel Icchak and Szejna Syma Kalina,
of blessed memory
(Passed away)
Brothers and sisters
Ben Cyjon, his wife and children
Malka, her husband, Beniamin Ellenberg,
and children
Arcie and his wife
Rywka and Szlomo Kalina (Murdered)

The mourners
Yosef and Rachel Kalina
Golda (Rajcik)
Peszka and her husband, Malach, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Grandfather and grandmother
Mosze Dawid Margalit and his wife,
Malka, of blessed memory
Parents
Zcharja Dawid and his wife,
Tojby Bergazyn
Aron Bergazyn
Israel Icchak Bergazyn and his wife
Gedalja Bergazyn
Etka Bergazyn (Murdered)

The mourners
Rachel and her husband,
Yosef Kalina, Israel
Shimon Bergazyn, America
Chaim Margalit and
Avraham Yitzhak Margalit
(Sons of Mosze Dawid Margalit), America

In Eternal Remembrance

My father **Reb Chaim Dawid Zamelson**
My mother **Miriam**
My brother **Mosze Welwel (Zew)**
My sister **Golda**

The mourner
Menucha Farbsztein-Zamelson, Haifa, Israel

My parents **Awraham** and **Gisze Mlynarczyk**
My sister **Chaja Basia**
My sister **Rachel** and her husband, **Meir Sikora**, and their **three children**
My sister **Miriam** and her husband, **Bunim Chmiel**, and **their child**
My sister **Sara Mlynarczyk**

With sorrow
Golda Wonszak (Mlynarczyk) and her husband, **Yosef**, Israel

My parents, **Lejbel** and **Bluma Mlynarczyk**
My three **sisters** and two **brothers**

With sorrow
Basia Szafran (Mlynarczyk), Brooklyn

My parents, **Israel** and **Cwija Wonszak**
My sister, **Chana Rywka** and her husband, **Awraham Szraga Rozenblum**
and their **three children**

With sorrow
Yosef Wonszak and his wife, **Golda**, Israel

Our parents
Baruch Brysk and Esther Brysk

The mourners
Sons **Chaim Reuven, Markel, Meir**
Daughters **Bashe, Bracha**, Uruguay

On the passing away of
Reb Szmuel, the son of Reb Icchak Gruszkiewicz
on Rosh HaShana 1962 in Cuba



The mourners
His wife,
Bejla Cyrl Gruszkiewicz, *née* Wonszak, Cuba
His son,
Yitzhak Gruszkiewicz, Costa Rica
His daughter,
Esther and her husband, Honduras





In Eternal Remembrance

Szmuel Jastrzembowicz, of blessed memory
Passed away in Ostrolenka in 1932
His wife, **Zlata**
And his children, **Alter, Bracha and Rywka**

In deep sorrow
The Jastrzembowicz Family, Israel

In memory of

Our dear parents
Icze Rezyka and Itki (*née* Szafran)

Our sisters
Fejga, Syma, Rachel and Sara

Our brother
Szlomo and his wife, Gita (*née* Gercek), and their two children

who were murdered in the Nazi Holocaust. May God avenge their blood.

The mourners
Zvi, Israel
Moshe and Esther, U.S.S.R.

Father	**Henach Bachrach**
Mother	**Sara Bachrach**
Brother	**Nachum**
Brother	**Matel**
Brother	**Mendel**
Brother	**Noach**

With sorrow
Efraim Bachrach,
Mexico City

In memory of the Gorzelczany Family

The father **Chanoch Zalman**
The mother **Golda** (*née* Rozensztejn)
The son **Dawid**
The daughter **Gitla**

All were murdered in the Nazi Holocaust.
May God avenge their blood.

The son **Gedalja**,
who passed away in Israel



The mourners
Yakov Gorzelczany
and Yehudit Gorzelczany, Israel

In memory of **Rywka Rozensztejn** (Wojciechowice-Cegelna)
The sons **Emanuel, Icchak and Akiwa**
The daughters **Frejdel, Rachel, Malci, Zysel and Dwora**

The mourner
Yakov Gorzelczany, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

The father **Szlomo Jabek, of blessed memory**
The mother **Fejga Gitel Jabek, of blessed memory**
The brothers **Aron and Mosze**
The sisters **Chinka Rachel, Lea, Dwora and Frejdel**
All murdered

The daughter, with sorrow
Chaya Frydman (*née* Jabek), Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Jakow Icchak Kozlowicz
His wife **Sorcia Kozlowicz**
(*née* Chamiel)
Their son **Lowke Kozlowicz**
Their daughter **Chana Kozlowicz**





Lowke Kozlowicz

The mourners
Sarake's parents **Pesach and Esther Chamiel**
Sarake's brother **Israel Symcha Chamiel** and his family, Uruguay

Shalom Chamiel and his family
Avraham Chamiel and his family, Israel
Moshe Chamiel, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

My unforgettable brother

Awraham Icchak Skalka

(Son of Menachem and Pia, of blessed memory)

He was honest in his dealings with people and friends.
He knew no way other than living from labor.

And his wife, **Ester**
Murdered by the Nazis, may their names be erased



The mourner
His brother, **David Skalka**, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Our beloved father,
Lejbel Klucznik (son of Reb Jakow Klucznik, of blessed memory)
Murdered in Slonim. May God avenge his blood.

Our beloved mother,
Chome Klucznik (*née* Chanachowicz)
Passed away in Ostrolenka

Uncle and aunt
Berel and Szejna Goldafer
Uncle and aunt
Zelig and Malka Klucznik
Murdered in the Slonim Ghetto. May God avenge their blood.



Lejbel and Chome Klucznik

The mourners

Chava Klucznik-Sciemchowicz
Chaya Klucznik-Framnicki
and their families, Israel

Judel and Malka Klucznik
Risze Klucznik and her family
Miriam Klucznik and her family, Mexico
Risze Klucznik and her family, America

In Eternal Remembrance

Father **Szlomo Gruszko**
Mother **Cypora** (*née* Paszkiewicz)

Brothers **Alter and his wife, Bajleke, and their three children**
Nisan and his wife, Chajci, and their three children
Litman and his wife, Josefa, and their child

Sisters **Sara and her husband, Noske Jakielczik**
Judyt

The mourner, the son and brother
Avraham Gruszko, Israel

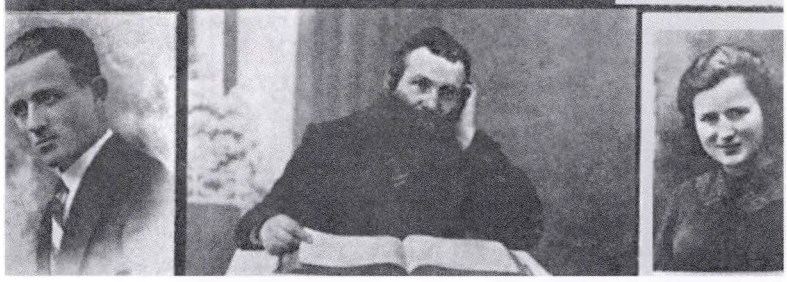
In memory of our dear parents

Szlomo and Jochewed Zabludowicz
Our brother
Nisan and his family
Our sister
Rywka and her family
Our brothers
Mosze and Nachman
Our sister
Chana

The mourners
Esther and Chava, Israel
Klyla, Australia

Nachman | Our mother, Jochewed | Nisan | Rywka





Mosze | Our father, Reb Szlomo | Chana

In memory of my parents, **Chaim Alter and Rywka Rachel Kamin**
My sister, **Ester, her husband, Jehuda, and their children**
My sister, **Sorcia, her husband and their children**
My sister, **Dwora**
May God avenge their blood.

When I describe my father, of blessed memory, I would not exaggerate my praises if I were to say that he was a God-fearing Jew, both in public and in private, and a sincere man of integrity, whose soul abhorred flattery and falsehood. I will mention just one trait, in the category of "Turn the Torah over and over again, for everything is contained in it". My father, of blessed memory, loved the Jewish people as did the Admor, Rabbi Mosze Lejb of Sassov, the righteous, of blessed memory. The Admor used to say, "The man who cannot suck the blood of the blows and scabs of the Children of Israel has still not achieved half the Love of Israel . . ." He was always ready to help others generously, without considering the difficulties involved. He supported the needy generously, he visited solitary and lonely sick people and helped them in their distress; his melancholy eyes bore witness that their trouble was his trouble.

My dear mother! Your bitter and cruel end did not separate us. You always stand before my eyes. I always look into your beautiful, intelligent eyes, at your perfect features. Your charming smile, which anointed your face, remains as in the good days that have gone and are no more. Dear mother, I have met many devoted and fine mothers, but in my eyes, you rise above them all. Your hands did not scrimp, but your words did! "A coin for a word, two for silence . . ." You were an exemplary mother and woman!

Their only son, who mourns deeply,
Moshe Kamin, Netanya

In Eternal Remembrance

Jakow Dawid Leszcz

His wife,

Rachel

And his son,
Lejbel

Murdered by the Germans.
May God avenge
their blood.



The mourners
The Family
Israel and abroad

In Eternal Remembrance

Husband and father,
Jakow Segalowicz, the son of Reb Jedydja,
of blessed memory
Passed away in Russia
Son and brother, **Szmuel Segalowicz, of blessed memory**
Passed away in Israel
Mosze Segalowicz and his wife, Bejla
Murdered in Slonim. May God avenge their blood



Szmuel Segalowicz,
of blessed memory

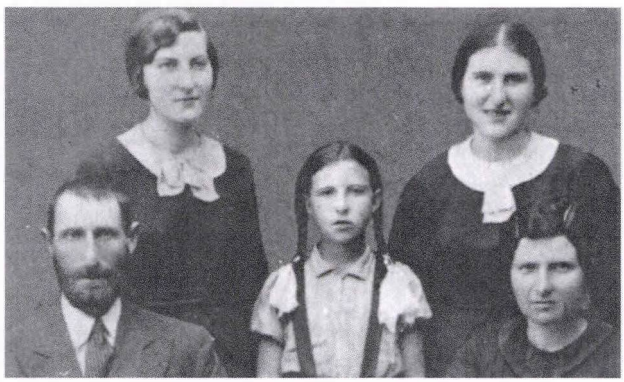


Jakow Segalowicz, of blessed memory



Mosze Segalowicz and his wife, Bejla,
may God avenge their blood

The mourners
Wife and mother
Chaya Lea Segalowicz-Lewita
Daughter and sister
Rachel Ginsburg-Segalowicz
and their families, Israel



In Eternal Remembrance

My father **Chaim Icchak Wylozny**
My mother **Chana Wylozny**
My sisters **Rachele, Miriam and Sara**

All murdered in Slonim. May God avenge their blood.

With sorrow,
Son and brother, **Szraga**, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance



Icze Biezuner and his wife, Lejbe

The mourners
Dr. Yakov Biezuner and his wife,
Zvia Biezuner (*née* Litwer)
Canada

My father
Jechezkel Gilda

My mother
Sara Lea Gilda

My sisters
Fejga Gilda-Perla
Towa, Frejdel and Etka Gilda

My brothers
Akiwa and Henach Gilda

In sorrow
Zlatke Gilda-Perkal,
Netanya, Israel

In memory of my dear parents

Fiszel and Menucha Goldwaser
My sisters,
Szejna, Sara Rachel,
Ester Gitel and Bejla
My brothers,
Jakow Szlomo and Awraham

The mourner
Reuven Goldwaser, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance



My dear parents
Chaim Josef and
Sorcia Markiewicz
My brothers
Mosze and Awraham
My sisters
Szejna, Cyrl and Fejga

Murdered in the Nazi Holocaust. May God avenge their blood.

The mourners
Bezalel Markiewicz and his family, Israel

In memory of my husband and our father, **Eliezer Dawid Serok**
and in memory of my son and our brother, **Jakow Mosze Serok**

May they be bound in the bond of life.

The mourners
The mother, **Chaya Serok, the brothers and sisters**
The **Czafman and Rotman** Families, America
Duciminer and the Serok Brothers
and their families, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

My father **Jakow Finkelsztejn**
Passed away in Ostrolenka
My mother **Chaja Hene**
My sister **Sara Rywka**
My uncle **Szaulke Finkelsztejn**
His wife **Fejga**
His sons **Jakow and Szepsel**
His daughter **Elke**
My uncle **Awrejmele Finkelsztejn**
His wife **Ester**
His sons **Jakow and Hillel**
His daughter **Chaja Sorcia**

All murdered



Szepsel and Jakow
(The sons of Szaulke Finkelsztejn)

The mourner
Szejna Masza Finkelsztein, Israel

In memory of the holy and pure ones

My father **Aron Lejb Serok**
My mother **Hadasa (Hadas)**
My sister **Frejda Rywka**

My grandfather **Jonas Serok**
(Jonatan the Beadle of the
big synagogue)
My grandmother **Szejndel**

My uncle **Baruch Serok**
and his wife **Fejga**

and all their relatives and families who were
murdered in the Nazi Holocaust.
May God avenge their blood.

The mourners
The **Serok** Family, Israel and abroad

Mother **Gitel Jarmus (Nadborny)**

Daughter **Ester**
Son **Julke**

Murdered.

With sorrow
Father
Chaim Jakow Jarmus
Basia Rozfeld
Son and brother
Mosze Jarmus
Daughter and sister
Sheva Wenglinski
(Jarmus) Israel



Mosze Mendel

Father
Mosze Mendel Grynberg

Mother
Jochewed

Sons
Shalom
Judel, his wife, **Leali,** and their family

In sorrow
Ben (Dov) Grynberg,
Sydney, Australia



Shalom

In memory of our dear family members

Reuwen Icchak and Chaja Reba Dorfman, of blessed memory
(Who passed away in Ostrolenka)

Isrolci Dorfman and his wife, Rachel
And their children
Mosze Chaim, Symcha Herszel, Dawid, Szejna,
Sara Malka and Chana
(Who were murdered in the Holocaust. May God avenge their blood.)

Chaim Dorfman, his wife, Chana, and their son, Fajwel
(Who were murdered in the Holocaust. May God avenge their blood.)

Perel Brum (*née* Dorfman), **her husband,**
and their children, **Dawid, Sara and Szejna**
(Who were murdered in the Holocaust. May God avenge their blood.)

The mourners
Shlomo Dorfman and his wife, Pia, Israel
Zvi, Shmuel and Yakov Dorfman
and their families, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Our father
Welwel Jagoda

Mother
Sara Dwora (Brodacz)

Son
Maks

Daughter
Chana

Murdered in Slonim.
May God avenge their blood.



Chana Sara Dwora Maks

The mourners
Sons **Feivel Jagoda** and his family, Israel
Moshe Jagoda and his family, America
Anshel Jagoda and his family, Uruguay

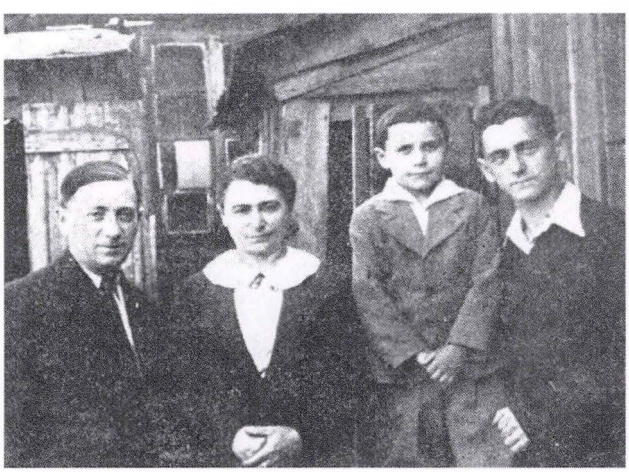
Daughters
Frejda Schlesinger-Jagoda
Krajne Gumowicz-Jagoda
and their families, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

The family of **Anszel Jagoda** (a musician)
Lived in Lomza

In sorrow
The **Jagoda** Family, Israel and abroad
Rachel Blum and her family, Australia

In the photograph:
Anszel Jagoda, his wife and their two sons
All murdered





In Eternal Remembrance

Reb Awraham Mordechaj Goldszlak
May God avenge his blood
(The grandson of Reb Michel Goldszlak,
the righteous, of blessed memory,
one of the first rabbis of Ostrolenka)

His wife, **Cyrl Goldszlak-Scznitzer**
May God avenge her blood

The mourners
Chava Szperling-Goldszlak
and her husband, Aron
Yafa Lieberman-Goldszlak
and her husband, Brachyahu
Israel



In Eternal Remembrance

My dear parents
Reb Mosze Alter and Sara Rachel Iglewicz
My sister **Chawa**
My brother **Ben Cyjon Jakow**
My brother-in-law **Szlomo Zloczewski**

Who were murdered in the Nazi Holocaust.
May God avenge their blood.

The mourner
Brajna Iglewicz-Meirowicz, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Our father, Reb **Naftali Sapir**, may God avenge his blood, the son of Reb Szlomo Sapir, was a God-fearing Jew. He was one of the students of Rabbi Mordechaj Iglewicz (called Farber [clothes dyer]), and one of the founders and active supporters of *Linat HaTzedek* in our city. He was a Gur Chassid. He was particularly close to craftsmen and professionals and, with them, founded a synagogue (*shtebl* in Yiddish) of craftsmen and the intelligentsia, who were among the congregants of this synagogue. He was gifted with a pleasant voice and led the prayers.

Our mother, **Fejga** (*née* Wattenberg), was his helpmeet, and bore the burden of supporting the family. She was a brave woman. During World War I, she saved two Jewish soldiers who had deserted from their pursuers, by hiding them in our house. One of them was Mr. A. Finkelsztejn, may he live a good life!, who is now in Israel. She was active in the Nowardok Beit Josef Yeshiva in our city, as one of the community workers and managers.

Their only son, **Jakow Gerszon**, was a yeshiva student, first in our city and then in the Lita yeshivas. Their daughter, **Bluma**, was active as an Agudat Yisrael girl. Their youngest daughter, **Sara**, was a member of HaShomer HaDati in our city. With all the community, they were transferred to Slonim, and there, everyone was murdered. (Two of their daughters, Chaja and Rachel Sapir, may they live good lives!, succeeded in emigrating to Israel *via* Vilna during the war, and are now in Israel.)

May these lines be an eternal light, for the transcendence of their holy and pure souls. May God avenge their blood.

Chaya Szperling (*née* Sapir)
and Rachel Rimoni (*née* Sapir), Israel



Josef Makowski



Tojby Makowski

In Eternal Remembrance

Reb Josef, the son of Reb Gerszon Makowski,
of blessed memory
One of the city's prominent residents;
he was a Chassid and God-fearing.
Although he aspired to do so,
he was unable to emigrate to Israel.
He passed away on September 16, 1925.

His wife,
Tojby, the daughter of Reb Jehuda Lejb
Zyman, of blessed memory
who was saved from the claws of the Nazis,
may their names be eradicated,
and was able to emigrate to Israel,
where she passed away.

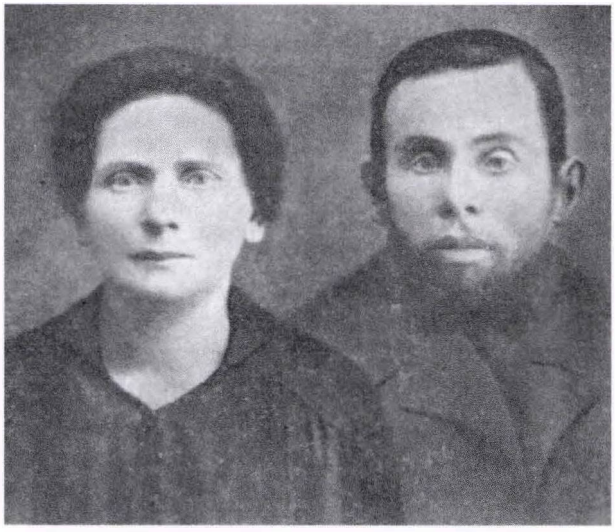
Israel Chaim Makowski
his wife, Cwija
and their only son

who were murdered in the Holocaust.
May God avenge their blood.

We weep for them. In deep sorrow,
The **Kaspi and Makowski** Families, Israel



Israel Chaim Makowski and his wife, Cwija



Bejla Rywka
Sarniewicz

Mosze, the son of
Reb Awraham Sarniewicz



Hersz Lejb Filar and
his wife, Ester Gitel

In Eternal Remembrance

Reb Mosze Sarniewicz, the son of Awraham, of blessed memory
He was an Amszinow Chassid, a Torah scholar and did good deeds.
He passed away after the expulsion from Ostrolenka
on February 2, 1940 in Lomzica (near Lomza).

His wife, Mrs. Bejla Rywka,
a righteous woman. Her heart was always given over to others and to the needy.
She was murdered in Slonim, with all the other martyrs of our city in 1942.
May God avenge her blood.

Reb Josef Sarniewicz and his wife, Rachel Szyfra

Their daughter, Tojby and their son, Menachem Mendel
who were murdered in the Holocaust. May God avenge their blood.

Ester Gitel (Sarniewicz), her husband, Hersz Lejb Filar,
and their only daughter

who were all murdered in Slonim during the Nazi Holocaust.
May God avenge their blood.

With sorrow
The **David Kaspi** Family, the **Yechiel Kaspi** Family
The **Eliezer and Sara Lewine** Family, the **Shalom Kaspi** Family
Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Our father **Alexander Zyskind Zusman**
(An activist and community worker)
Our mother **Chana Zusman** (*née* Frum)
Our brother **Eliahu**, his wife, **Brajna** (*née* Lobel)
And their
daughter **Jochka**
Our sisters **Rejzel and Chaja**

Who were murdered in the Nazi Holocaust.
May God avenge their blood.

The mourners
Shlomo Zusman and his family, Israel
Hindel Nowinski (*née* Zusman), Argentina



In Memoriam

Our mother **Fejgel Ostynowicz**
(*née* Zusman)
And her husband **Chaim Ostynowicz**
Our sister **Chana Ostynowicz**

Who were murdered in the Holocaust.
May God avenge their blood.

The mourners
Zajftel Lewinger and her family, Israel
Noah Laska and his family, Brazilha
Mexico City

In Memoriam

Srolke Frum and his wife, Chawa
(Rozenfeld)

Their son
Jehuda
Their daughters
Chana and Lea

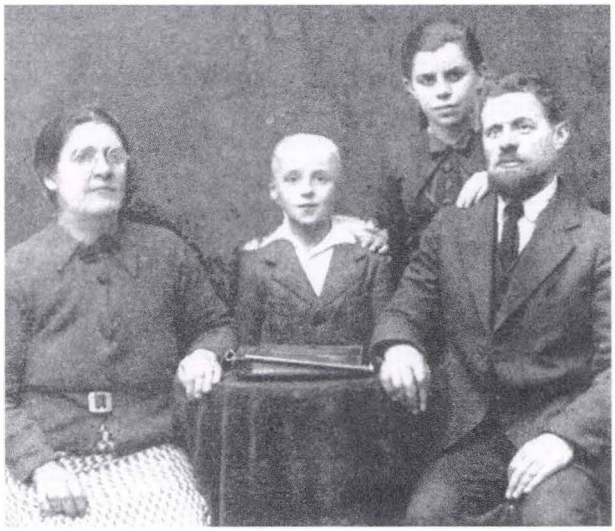
The mourners
Shlomo Zusman and his family
The **Frum** Family
Chava Kaplan-Wajnkranc
Chaya Rywka Szani-Wajnkranc
Sorcia Gidoni-Margalit
Sara Ivri and family
Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Our father
Kalman Wajnkranc
Our mother
Sara Wajnkranc (*née* Frum)
Our sister
Pesia
Our brother
Chaim

Who were murdered in the Nazi Holocaust.
May God avenge their blood.

The mourners
Chava Kaplan (*née* Wajnkranc)
Chaya Rywka Szani (*née* Wajnkranc)
Israel



In Memory of the Gedanken Family

Mendel and Rachel (*née* Frum)
Chaim, Jehuda and Jakow

who were murdered in the Holocaust.
May God avenge their blood.

The mourners
Shlomo Zusman
and his family
The **Frum** Family
Chava Kaplan and
Chaya Rachel Szani
(*née* Wajnkranc)
Sorcia Gidoni-Margalit
Israel

In Memory of the Sredni Family

Lejbel and Ita Sredni (*née* Zusman)
Zyskind and his family
Chana and her family
Meir Ostynowicz
And his wife, Zajftel (*née* Sredni)
and family

The mourners
Shlomo Zusman
and his family, Israel
Zajftel Lewinger-Laska,
Israel
Noah Laska, Brazilha



Lejbe Lewinger



Sara Lewinger



Szlomo Lewinger



Bejla Izrael



Dawid Altarz



Szyfra Altarz

In Eternal Remembrance

Parents	**Szlomo and Sara Lewinger**
Sister	**Szyfra and her husband,**
	Dawid Altarz, and their children
Brother	**Nyske**
Aunt	**Bejla Izrael**
	All murdered

Lejbe Lewinger
Passed away in Israel

The mourners
Aryeh and **Faiga**, Israel
Avraham, Canada
Malka, Israel

In Memoriam

Our beloved father
Reb Naftali Herc, the son of Reb Hillel Berger,
of blessed memory
Our beloved mother
Chana Rywka Berger (Jesinowski),
of blessed memory
Both of them passed away in Lomza

The murdered families
Mankrowicz, Jasztrzemb, Jesinowski,
Keller, Szucarewicz, Rozenfeld, Rotszchild

With sorrow
Sam Berger, Brooklyn
Sara Ivri-Berger, Israel
Grandchildren of Naftali Hersz and Chana Rywka Berger:
Rachel Berger-Lewita and **Yehuda Berger**, Australia



In Memoriam

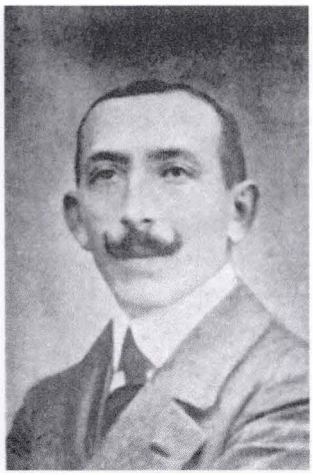
Jakow Berger, his wife, **Fejga**
(*née* Margalit,
grandchild of Reb Aron Jankel Margalit,
of blessed memory)
and **their little daughter**
Murdered by the Germans.
May God avenge their blood.





In eternal mourning
The **Margalit** Family, Israel
Sara Ivri (Berger), Israel
Rachel Lewita-Berger
and **Yehuda Berger**, Australia







In Memoriam

Our beloved father
Alter Berger
Murdered in the Lomza Ghetto.
May God avenge his blood.
Our beloved mother
Rejzel Berger (Lewita), of blessed memory
Passed away in 1940 in Russian-ruled Lomza

Our beloved sister
Etkele
Murdered. May God avenge her blood.
Our beloved brother
Berele
Murdered. May God avenge his blood.

With sorrow
Daughter and sister
Rachel Berger-Lewita
and her family, Australia
Son and brother
Yehuda Berger
and his family, Australia
Brother and sister of Alter Berger
Sam Berger
and his family, Brooklyn
Sara Ivri-Berger
and her family, Israel

In Memoriam

My beloved son
Szmuel Dawid (Kachan), of blessed memory
Passed away in Lomza, nine years old

With sorrow
His mother **Sara Ivri**,
Israel





In memory of my father and teacher

Reb Naftali Cwi Iwri

The son of Reb Israel Azriel,
of blessed memory
Passed away in Czerwoni-Bor (near Lomza)
in 1940

My mother and teacher

Rachel Lea Iwri

(*née* Mejrann)
who was killed during the Nazi Holocaust.
May God avenge her blood.



With sorrow,
Yitzhak Ivri and his family, Israel

May God Remember

The Martyrs of Myszyniec

Murdered in the Nazi Holocaust

May their souls rest in peace, and may God avenge their blood!

Organization of the Jewish Community of Myszyniec in Israel
Gedalia Tikolsker
(Chairman and Founder of the Myszyniec Martyrs Charitable Fund)

Secretary
Moshe Blumshtein

Committee Members
Dov Ulert, Kalman Grynberg, Azriel Elichowski

In Eternal Remembrance

All our pure and holy Ostrolenkans
who were murdered
by the
blood-thirsty Nazi murderers

With eternal mourning in our hearts!

Progressive Young Friends of Ostrolenka

Sam Kachan, Chairman
Morris Topol, Executive Chairman
Irving Friedman, Vice-Chairman
Nathan Lifshitz, Recording Secretary
Sam Ismachowicz, Treasurer
America

In Eternal Remembrance

My unforgettable, beloved and dear parents
Gutman Dawid and Chaja Neszke Topola
Brother **Josef**
Sisters **Sara, Judyt and Rywka**

And all the members of my family
who were killed by the Nazi murderers.
May God avenge their blood.

I will never forget their premature,
blameless deaths.

With sorrow
Herman Topol,
Queens, New York



In Eternal Remembrance

Father	**Jehoszua Chmiel (Camiel)**
Mother	**Cyrl**
Sister	**Chana Fejga, her husband, Szajke Flamenbojm, and their son**
Sister	**Frejda**
Sister	**Sara**
Sister	**Chaja**
Brothers	**Szlomo and Icchak**
Uncle	**Icchak (Icel) Chmiel and his family**

The mourners
Shimon and Menachem Chamiel, Israel

In memory of	**Chana Mindel Chmiel**
and her sons	**Mosze and Awraham**

The mourner, husband and father
Shimon Chamiel, Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Reb Chanoch Henach Flakser
(1897-1943)
A community worker for
many years in Ostrolenka

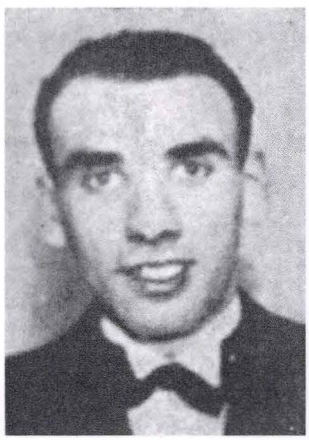




This photograph was taken
in the Ghetto

His wife
Rywka Flakser
(1880-1943)

Their youngest son
Szymon Flakser
(1912-1943)





All murdered in Treblinka.

Their daughter
Frejdel Flakser
(1910-1943)
murdered in Auschwitz.
May God avenge their blood

Rywka Flakser
(1948-1960)
Daughter of Menachem and Niora Flakser, long may they live
Granddaughter of Reb Chanoch Henach and Rywka Flakser
Passed away in America



In deep sorrow
Menachem and Niora Flakser
Brooklyn, New York

Frejdel Flakser, May God Avenge Her Blood

Frejdel Flakser, the daughter of Chanoch and Rywka Flakser, was in Ostrolenka for only five years. After spending the years of World War I in Russia with her parents, she returned to Warsaw, where she completed secondary school. Already as a young girl, the idea of a socialist regime fascinated her. Therefore, she was in the Pawiak [Prison] in Warsaw for a long time. As soon as she was released, she went to Paris illegally. There, her talents as a writer, speaker and community worker developed, until the Nazis caught her.

She studied at the Sorbonne and at the same time, wrote articles for the newspapers of Polish immigrants in France. During all this time, she spoke at workers' assemblies. When France was occupied by the Germans, she performed important missions for the underground and, during one of those missions, she fell into the Nazis' hands. She had gone to save a French partisan, but it was too late, and both of them were imprisoned. They were tortured in the La Santa Prison in Paris. Then, she was transferred to the Drancy Camp, where she taught the children in the camp.

She stayed there longer than other Jews, but she could not avoid the final road to Auschwitz.

People who saw her in the camp said that she was a wellspring of encouragement to those around her. She was always alert and happy, as if the road to death was not lying in wait.

M. Flakser



Mosze Aron, may God avenge his blood

In Memoriam



Szlomit, may God avenge her blood

Her husband
Mosze Aron Sojka

and her beloved children
Szlomit Sojka and Emanuel Niuni Sojka
killed by the Nazi murderers

Forever,
Helen Kajman
New York

In Eternal Remembrance

Noach Alter Wolkowicz
His wife **Hinda Rachel Wolkowicz**
Passed away in Ostrolenka

Jakow Lejbel Wolkowicz
Passed away in Ostrolenka
His wife **Chajale**

Their children **Lea, Michael and Fejgale**
(The children of Jakow Lejbel and Chajale Wolkowicz)
Murdered with their mother in Zelwe



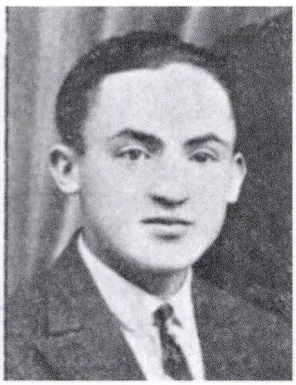
Jakow Lejbel and Chajale Wolkowicz



Fejgale, Michael and Lea



Natan Wolkowicz



Lejzer Wolkowicz

Chackel Michael Wolkowicz
His wife **Sara Brajna (Horowicz)**
Their children **Hinda, Rachel, Frejdka and Noach**
Dwora Wolkowicz (Medzowicz)
Passed away in Ostrolenka
Son **Zelig**
Natan Wolkowicz
Syma Wolkowicz (Medzowicz)
Daughter **Rachele**
Lejzer Zlocisty
Murdered in Slonim

With deep sorrow **Herszel Wolkowicz**
Chaya Wolkowicz-Lis
Norman Wolk
(Noach Wolkowicz), New York



Zelig

In Eternal Remembrance

Parents
Mosze Aron and Rejzel Kaczor
Sister and brother-in-law
Rachel and Berel Zabludowicz
And their three children
Szejna, Dwora and Peszka
Brother
Nachum and sister-in-law, **Dwora**
And their son
Welwel
Brothers
Lejbel and Ajzyk Kaczor
Grandfather and Grandmother
Welwel and Sara Benedon

All murdered by the German murderers. May God avenge their blood.

With sorrow
Shmuel Kaczor and **Wiszka Krieger**, New York
Szaje Kaczor, Los Angeles
Shlomo Kaczor, Israel

Father: **Jechiel Perkal**
Mother: **Sara Cerklewicz-Perkal**
Brothers: **Motel, Jakow** and **Arjeh**
Uncle: **Reuwen Perkal** and **family**
Aunt: **Necha Cerklewicz-Perkal**
Cousin: **Motel**
Uncle: **Chaim Perkal**
Aunt: **Chana Perkal**
Cousin: **Jakow Perkal**
Cousin: **Lejbe Perkal**
Uncle: **Szmuel Frydman** and his wife, **Bazke**
Daughter: **Rywka**
Uncle: **Jakow Dancyger**
Aunt: **Dwora Perkal-Dancyger** and their **son**
Uncle: **Mosze Hendel**
Aunt: **Hinda Cerklewicz-Hendel**
Cousins

Eternally
Chaim Perkal
Buenos Aires, Argentina



In Memory of My Beloved Parents

Chaim Julke and Falka Meyrs

(formerly Mejrann)
Passed away in America
May their memory be blessed.

Eternally, their son
Fiszel Meyrs
and his family
New York

Phil Meyrs
47-50 30th Street
Long Island City, 1
New York, U.S.A.

In Eternal Remembrance

My parents
Szlomo and Fejga Gercek
Brother
Icchak Gercek
Killed by the Nazi murderers

With sorrow
Lan Gercek

Uncle and aunt
Reuwen Nachum and Peszka Gercek
and their two children

Grandfather and grandmother
Jakow and Ita Gercek

Icze Dawid and his wife, Sara
and their children

The mourner
Leibel Gercek
New York

In Eternal Remembrance

My wife	**Lejbe** and daughter, **Gitel Perkal**
My sister	**Rejza and her husband and children**
My sister	**Mali**
Sister's children	**Icel, Mosze and Chaja Rasa**
Our sisters	**Rejzel and Chaja**

With sorrow
Efraim Perkal
New York

For the parents
Fajwel and **Etka Sztrasenberg**
Son
Mosze Symcha and his **wife**
Children
Rachel, Rusa, Fejga and **Rywka**
Gala Laska and her **husband**
Fejga, Cyrl Sztrasenberg





The mourners
Aron and **Shaina Sztrasenberg**
Syracuse, New York

For the parents
Awrejmel and **Rachel Holcman**

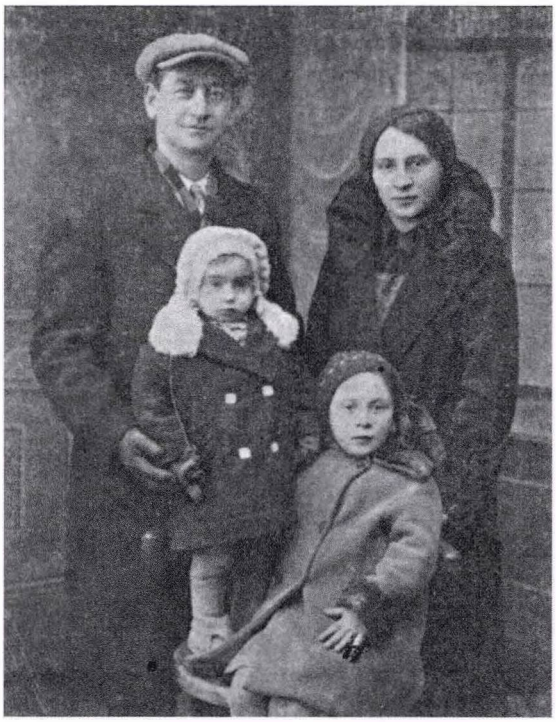


Sister and brother
Awraham Herzl Gercek
and **Mali Gercek**

The mourners
Noske, Shaindel and **Fejga**

Our sister and brother-in-law
Rejzel and Szymon Adonolam
and their little children

Killed by the Hitlerite murderers.
May God avenge their blood.



In deep sorrow
Anna Kramer-Gercek
Leah Woszkowicz-Gercek
Rasha Berenholz-Gercek
and
The Gercek Family
New York

My father
Israel Lejb Rotsztejn
My mother
Etka Chaja Rotsztejn
and families

The mourner
Sara Rotsztejn (Kaltc), Brooklyn, New York

My father
Herszel Kaltc
My mother
Rywka Kaltc
and families

The mourner
Berel Kaltc, Brooklyn, New York

Parents
Chaim and Sara Perkal
Sister
Szejna Perkal
Brothers
Lejbel, Awi and Izrael Perkal
And his brother
Herszel and his wife
and two children

Eternally
Berel Perkal, Brooklyn, New York

Parents
Chaim Szaje and Necha Rozental
Brother
Jehuda
Sisters
Fejga and Syma

Fiszel, Izrael, Szepsel, Berel
Fejga and Tojby Ogrodnik

Eternally
Sara Ogrodnik
Calka Ogrodnik, New York

My parents
Baruch Mendel and
Sara Rywka Wrobel

My sisters
Ester Lejbe Aronowicz
Hinda Sapir

Eternally,
Y. Izrael
New York

For the holy and pure ones

Father **Mosze Jehoszua Sniadowicz**
Mother **Miriam Sniadowicz**
Sisters **Hanja Dwora Sniadowicz**
Szejna Ester Sniadowicz
Rachel Sniadowicz
Brothers **Azriel Arjeh Sniadowicz**
Aron Sniadowicz

Murdered by the Germans.
May God avenge their blood.

The mourners
Shmuel Sniadowicz
Avraham Sniadowicz
Brooklyn, New York

In Eternal Remembrance

My parents
Bunim and Dwora Szapira
Passed away in Ostrolenka

Brother
Lejbel

Sisters
Nechama, Rasza, Miriam and Tojby
Murdered by the Nazis.
May God avenge their blood.

With sorrow
Chana Lewit (Szapira)
New York

In Eternal Remembrance

My father
Szlomo Czapnikiewicz
He helped organize the *Bikur Cholim*
and the Talmud Torah in Ostrolenka.
He cared for the sick and the poor.

My mother
Fejga Czapnikiewicz (Wilk)

My brothers
Israel, Nisan, Nachman and Josef

My sisters
Szejna and Malka

My **uncles** and **aunts** and their **families**

The mourner
Lejbel Czafman (Czapnikiewicz)
America

In Eternal Remembrance

My father
Mosze Nachum Horowicz

My stepmother
Rachel Horowicz

My brothers
Fiszel, Szmerel and Wigdor

My sisters
Dwora and Slawe

With sorrow
Ben Kac (in Ostrolenka, Benyamin Horowicz)
America

In Eternal Remembrance

My parents
Icchak Mosze and Chawa Grosman

My brother
Gutman Grosman

My sisters
Szejna Golda Grosman
Chaja Sara Blum

With sorrow
David Grosman
New York

In Memoriam

Dawid Jehuda, Rachel
and their little daughter, Chajale

Jerucham, Ester and
Jochka Przystanczyk

All the cousins

Eternally
Jonah Kaufman
New York

Our dear parents
Meir and Chaja Sara Chacek

Brother-in-law and sister
Icze Meir and
Hinda Dajczman

With sorrow
Mendel Chacek
Shlomo Chacek
Efraim Chacek
Faiga Chacek
Elke Chacek
Esther Chacek, New York

Our beloved mother
Miriam Pese

Our only sister
Sara Rachel

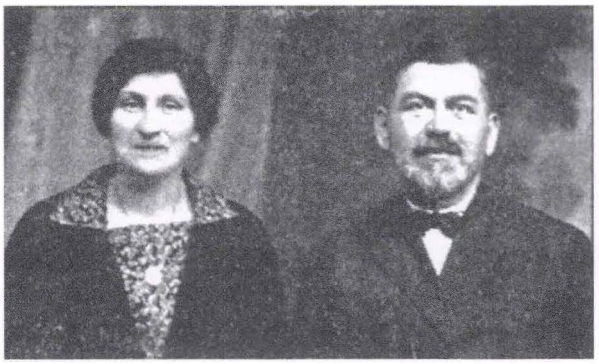
and her husband
Beniamin Symcha

and their **three children**

who were brutally killed by the Nazi murderers.
May God avenge their blood.



The mourners, sons and brothers
Ajbe, Morris and Nathan Topol, New York



Our parents
Chaim Lejb and Alte Szyfra Pedowicz
from Wojciechowice

The mourners
Zelig, Esther and Manes Pedowicz, Uruguay
Mordechai, Freida, Leah and Hershel Pedowicz, Canada



For our parents
Berel (the wagon wheel maker)
and Rajne Garda
Sister and brother-in-law
Jenta and Mendel Zwawe
and their children
Mirel, Mosze, Rywka and Malka
Brother
Bejnisz and his wife, **Ester Garda**
and their children
Frejdel, Reuwen, Aron and **Chaja Garda**

The mourners
Sara (Garda) and **Yitzchak Yehuda Mandel**
Brooklyn

Our father
Jehoszua Mandel
Who passed away in America



Our mother
Szprinca Mandel
Murdered by the Nazis.



Uncles, aunts and cousins

All murdered. May God avenge their blood.

With sorrow
Simcha, Leyzar Berke
and Yitzhak Yehuda Mandel
New York

In Eternal Remembrance

My father
Israel Dawid Goldberg
And my mother
Rywka Goldberg-Bachrach
My brothers
Bunim and Icze Goldberg

Killed by the German murderers

My aunt and uncle
Baruch and Dina Szapira
Passed away in Ostrolenka

My two sisters
Lea and Bracha
and their families
Murdered by the Nazis

With sorrow,
Yosef Goldberg
Mexico City, Mexico

With sorrow
Chancia Goldberg (Szapira)
Mexico City, Mexico

Parents **Awraham and Ester Szlafmic**
Sisters **Chawa and Pese**
Brother **Mosze Mattes**

Eternally, **Isidore Szlafmic**, New York

Jerachmiel, Israel and Icchak Kantor
Chana Kantor (Sredni)
Szlomo Kantor

Eternally, **Shlomo Adelson**, New York

Chaja Gitel Sapir and Shalom Cwibak

Eternally, **Sylvia Mendelssohn**, New York

Mendel and Ester Rachel Wylozny
Arjeh Meir and Ester Wylozny
Awraham Mosze and Lejbe Kaminetz

Eternally, **Sam Weiss**, New York

Father **Chaim Welwel**
Mother **Sara Rywka Dojf**
Two brothers and three sisters

Eternally, **Rajchel Bocian**, New York

Symcha, the son of Reb Chaim Hillel
(Chaim Hillel, the bookbinder's son)

Eternally, **Sam Shapira**, New York

Mother **Ester Jenta Radla**
Sister **Brajna**
Rachel Chmiel and her husband, **Mosze**
Her children
Masza, Fejga and **Welwel**
Czerna Goldman and her husband, **Meir**
Their children, **Icchak, Josel** and **Gitel**
Brother **Mosze Radla** and his wife, **Ester**

Eternally, **Miriam Greblin**, New York

Symcha Arjeh Bresler and his wife,
Chaja Sara
Their children, **Rachel Lea, Chana Fejga**
and **Jenta Rywka**

Eternally, **M. Cooperman**, New York

Zalman and Rywka Wylozny

Eternally, **Chaim Wylozny**, New York

Chaim Eli Holcman
and his wife, **Chaja (Medzowicz)**
Icze and his wife, Dina, Medzowicz
and their children
Israel, Cyrele and **Icchak**

Eternally, **Harry (Medzowicz)**, New York

We will never forget you!

We will always remember

our holy and pure ones of Ostrolenka
who were put to death by the Nazi Amalekites,
may their name be eradicated.
May God avenge their blood.

Independent Ostrolenkan
Young Men's Society

Max Tobjasz, Chairman
America

With deep sorrow, we recall
the tragic annihilation



of our father
Reb Chaim Dow Hakoen Shuw
[Shochet u'Bodek]

our mother
Chaja Bejla

our sisters
Tojby Rejzel
Ita Fejgel

Killed by the Nazi murderers on the New Moon of Av, 5702 (15th of July 1942) in Molczat. They were buried in a big mass grave, in the form of a *dalet* [the fourth letter of the Hebrew alphabet], in which many Ostrolenkan Jews lie.

We bear their memory with us throughout the Jewish Diaspora.

In grief and sorrow, those who remain

Sons	**Icchak Kachan**, Melbourne
	Yakov Shlomo and **Zvi Mordechai**, Moscow
Daughter-in-law	**Chana**, Melbourne
Daughters	**Gute Zysel**, Moscow
	Fire, Moscow
Son-in-law	**Wolf**, Moscow
Grandchildren	**Shmuel**, Melbourne
	Berele and **Chayala**, Moscow



Chaim Dajczman

With deep sorrow, I recall
my beloved parents, may they rest in peace

Reb Gedalja and Chana Cwija Dajczman



Herszel Dajczman

My brothers **Chaim and Herszel**
My sisters **Sara Rywka and Fejgale**

Killed by the German murderers in Slonim in 1942.
May God avenge their blood.

With eternal sorrow
The sole survivor
Miriam Dajczman (now Plotek)
Melbourne, Australia



Fejgale Dajczman

In Eternal Remembrance

My father
Dawid Crempach
My brother
Mosze Hersz
My sister
Ester

Murdered in the Slonim Ghetto
May God avenge their blood.

With sorrow
Naftali Crempach
Montevideo, Uruguay

In Eternal Remembrance
Our dearest and most beloved

Mother **Sara Blum** (Sara Isers)
Sisters **Lejke** and her **children**
Brother **Jankel**, his wife, **Chaja** (Szlafmic) and their **children**
Sister **Daczkale**, her husband, **Mosze Felhendler** and their **children**

Killed by the German murderers in Slonim in 1941.
May God avenge their blood.

With deep sorrow
Rachel and **Shlomo Blum**,
Melbourne, Australia
Aron Blum, Montevideo, Uruguay

In Eternal Remembrance

Our dear, unforgettable

Mother
Chana Rachel (Chancia)
Sisters
Hinda and Lejke
Our mother and Hinda were murdered in Motela, near Pinsk, Lejke – in the *shtetl* Dereczyn in August 1941.
May they rest in peace and may God avenge their blood.

In sorrow
Sons and brothers
Aryeh (Lowke) Lewi, Melbourne
Simon Lewi, Brooklyn
Daughter and sister
Chaika Bromberg, Brooklyn

With deep sorrow and pain we recall
the annihilation
of our dear and unforgettable parents

Meir Josel and Bluma Perkal

Our sisters
Malka and Miriam
Our brothers
Iczke and Shalom

All killed by the German murderers in Slonim, 1941. May God avenge their blood.

With sorrow, the survivors
Daughter **Rivka Blum**
Son **Lotman Perkal**
Montevideo, Uruguay

With deep sorrow and grief
we recall our unforgettable parents

Reb Chaim Mendel and Lea Izrael

Our sister **Ester**
Our sister **Tojby, her husband,**
Meir Krymkiewicz,
and their son, Herszele

All killed in Molczat in 1944 by the German murderers. May God avenge their blood.

Zlata and Lowke Lewi
Malka and Dr. Yitzhak Sonabend
Australia



The Memory

of Our Family

Forever

Esther Perkal

Brooklyn, New York

In Eternal Remembrance

My parents
Awraham Jakow and Lea Edel
My brother
Zew
My sisters
Liuba and Rywka

Killed by the Nazi murderers

With deepest sorrow
Sara Hirsh (Edel), Israel

In Eternal Remembrance

Our beloved, unforgettable family

Father	**Jechiel Meir Holcman**
Mother	**Fejga Lea**
Sister	**Chaja Frejdel (Calka)**
Brother	**Chaim Judel**
Grandfather	**Nachman**
Grandmother	**Ita**

Killed by the Nazi murderers.
With heroic bravery.
May they rest in peace and may God avenge their blood.

With sorrow

Children, brothers, sisters and grandchildren
Esther Rachel and her husband, **Shlomo Orzechowicz**
Hania Gitel and her husband, **Daniel Koberski**
Sara Rivka and her husband, **Shimon Zalman**
Cone and his wife, **Hania**
Yitzhak and his wife, **Miriam**
Grandchildren and cousins
Argentina

The remembrance of

Aron Zusman
Chairman of the Bund in Ostrolenka
his wife
Dr. Sonja Borensztejn-Zusman
and their children
Izy and Rachel (Nana)

Leyzar Eli Zusman
Mizrachi and Keren Kayemeth activist
his wife
Bracha Tejtelbojm-Zusman
and their children
Icchak, Aron, Michael and Bejla

Sara Zusman-Ogrodower
her husband
Leyzar Ogrodower
and their children
Icze and Bejla

Golda Zusman-Aszer
her husband
Szajke Aszer
Member of the City Council,
Bund activist,
member of the Boards
of the Peretz Library
and the Morgensztern Sports Club.
and their son
Aron

Rejzka Zusman

Sorcia Chmiel-Kozlowicz
her husband
Jakow Kozlowicz (from Wojciechowice)
and their children
Lowke and another little girl
murdered in the Bialystok Ghetto

Icchak Grynszpan
"Big Icchak", a well-known reciter of
Tehilim. His *Ashrei HaIsh*
[opening words of Psalm 1] sanctified the
city's study hall.
his wife
Zlata
Shot by the S.S. in the Slonim Ghetto,
while lying in sick in bed
their son
Alter Grynszpan
A great Torah scholar with rabbinic ordination.
Murdered in the Warsaw Ghetto.
his wife
Lea
their children
Awraham Grynszpan and his wife and children
murdered.
Pesach Grynszpan and his wife and
three children
murdered in an unidentified concentration camp
Chana Grynszpan
and her husband
Berel Garber and two children
murdered.

Lejbel Grynszpan
his wife
Rywka Korman and three little children

Efraim Chmiel
Daughter
Rywka Chmiel
Son
Gedaljahu Camiel and his wife and children
all murdered.

May God avenge their blood!

In eternal sorrow
Yisrael Simcha Camiel and
Gitel Zusman-Camiel
Montevideo, Uruguay



In Eternal Remembrance

Our dear parents

Awraham Zelig Nowinski
and his wife, Zlata

Sisters

Ester and Elke

Brother

Icchak

Killed by the Nazi murderers. May God avenge their blood.

With sorrow
Aron Yakov Nowinski and **Genandel**,
Argentina

In eternal remembrance of the family of **Lejzer Blachowicz** (the teacher)



Lejzer Blachowicz and his wife, Gitel
Szylem, Cyrl and Noske – their children

The mourners
The **Blachowicz Family**, Argentina

In Eternal Remembrance

Israel Chmiel,
his wife,
four sons and
one daughter

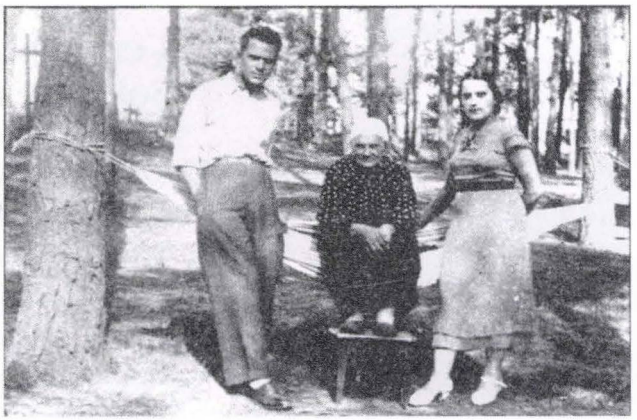
Murdered.
May God avenge their blood.

With sorrow
Zelig Chmiel
and his family
America





Reb Mosze Aron Hakoen Shuw



The daughter, Rachel Lea, the mother, Tojby, and the son, Symcha

In Eternal Remembrance

Reb Mosze Aron Hakoen (Kachan) Shuw [Shochet u'Bodek], of blessed memory
(A son of Reb Szmuelke the Ritual Slaughterer)
And his wife, **Tojby**
Both of them passed away in Lomza.
Their daughter, **Rachel Lea**, and their son, **Symcha**,
murdered by the Germans.
Their daughters, **Kejle and Chawa**,
passed away in America

The mourners
Son and brother
Rev. Hersh Yitzhak Kachan, Florida
The family in America, Brazil and Israel

In Memoriam

Chaja Rusa (from Rzekun)
Motel Rusa
Sara, his wife
Mindel, their daughter
Reuwen, their son

Icchak Ryc
Sara Ryc
Pese Ryc
Male Ryc
Ester Ryc
Chone Ryc

The mourners,
Yosefa Polturk-Ryc and Family,
Haifa, Israel

Awraham, Chaja and Awiezer
Seperowicz

Rachel, Henach, Szlomo, Judel, Tojby, Rejzel,
Chackel and Jeke
Wajncymer

Pese, Menachem, Szmuel, Basia, Rywka, Awraham
Peszka, Zajdel, Gitel and Chackel
Frydman

Eternally
Ben Sapir (Seperowicz), America

In Eternal Remembrance

Alter Granowicz
and his wife, **Chaja Bejla**

Sara Hanja Granowicz,
her husband
Beniamin Kozlowicz
and their son, **Zelig**

Chana Fejga Granowicz
and her husband
Lejbel Szwarcberg
and their daughters



Awraham and Icchak
Granowicz
and their mother **Chana**



who were murdered at the
hands of the enemy.
May God avenge their blood.

The lamenters
Batya and David Granowicz
New York

My beloved parents
Fiszel and Heni Izrael

Sisters
Frida, Chawa and Altki

Brother
Dawid

With sorrow
P. Izrael,
America

In Eternal Remembrance

Fejga Szrejter
Rojza Dojf
Zlata Szrejter
Cyrl Dojf
(from the right, standing)

Mordechaj Szrejter
Lejzer Szrejter
Brajna Lea Dojf
Dwora Dojf
(from the right, sitting)



The mourners
The **Dojf Family**
Argentina

Pinczas Lubin
Elijah Lubin
Szejna Rywka Lubin

Eternally,
Y. M. Lubin,
Montevideo, Uruguay

Father

Reb Szmuel Josef Segal

Mother

Lea (Lejke)
Murdered by the Nazis in 1941

Brothers

Cwi Jehuda Segal
Passed away in Russia in 1952

Henach Segal
Fell in Warsaw in 1939

Sister

Rachel Hadas Segal

Icchak Zew Segal and Cemach Segal
Murdered by the Nazis in Stawisk in 1941

Chajale and Fajwele Segal
Murdered by the Germans

The mourners
Daughter and sister
Fruma Segal-Bogdanowicz

Son and brother
Lozer Segal
Montevideo, Uruguay



Tobjasz the Bookbinder
and his Wife

In Eternal Remembrance

Our mother, mother-in-law and grandmother
Lejbe

Brother, father and father-in-law
Szlomo

Sisters, sisters-in-law and aunts
Sara, Rachel and Frajdel

Uncle
Szlomo Icchak and his family

Cousin
Zalman Henach Gorzelczany and family

With sorrow
Moshe Wajsbord, his wife
and their family
Argentina



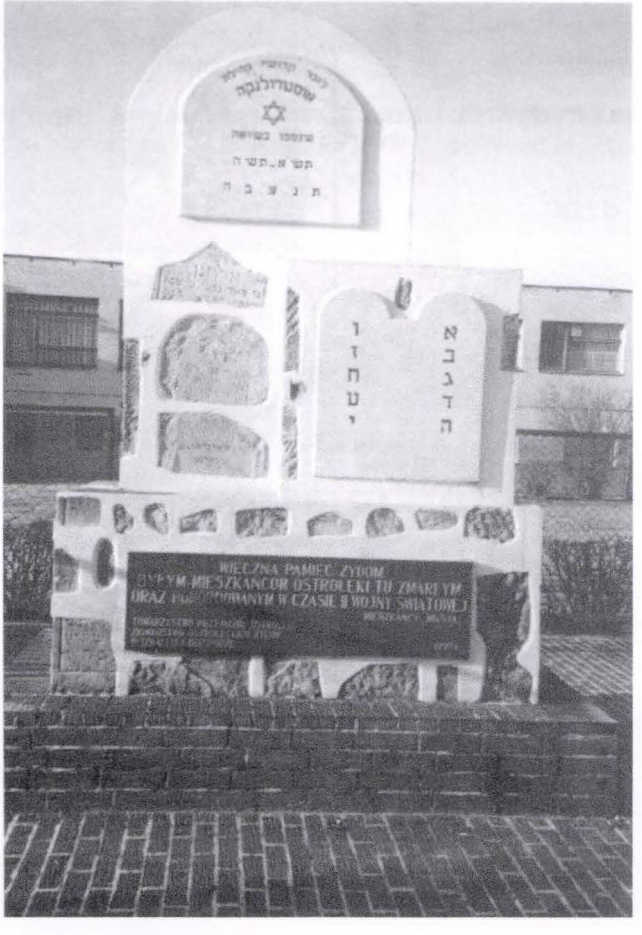
The memorial in memory of the community of Ostrolenka, which was destroyed during the Holocaust, in the Valley of the Communities at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem



A group from the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel Committee near the memorial in memory of the martyrs of our city, murdered during the Holocaust, which was erected in the Holon cemetery



A memorial in memory of the martyrs of Ostrolenka, murdered during the Holocaust, at the Martyrs' Forest, on the way to Jerusalem



A monument in memory of the martyrs of our community, murdered during the Holocaust, erected in August 1991 by our community's organization and the city's institutions. It contains remnants of gravestones from the Jewish cemetery in Ostrolenka, and marble tablets from Israel.
In the background, the Dr. Janusz Korczak Orphanage

In Eternal Remembrance

of the Holy and Pure

Father	**Jechiel Chanikal**
Mother	**Chaja Bracha Chanikal**
Sister	**Bejlke Chanikal**
Sister	**Fejga Chanikal**
Brother	**Lejb Herzl Chanikal**
Grandfather	**Mendel Chanikal**
Grandfather	**Josef Dawid Szodlowicz**
Grandmother	**Hinda Chanikal**



Josef Dawid Szodlowicz

Who were murdered during the Holocaust in
Dereczyn, near Slonim.
May they rest in peace.
May God avenge their blood.

The mourners
The daughter, **Esther Michelson (Choniak)**
and her family in Israel
in Kocniaczow
and her family in the United States



Chaja Bracha



Jechiel

In Eternal Remembrance

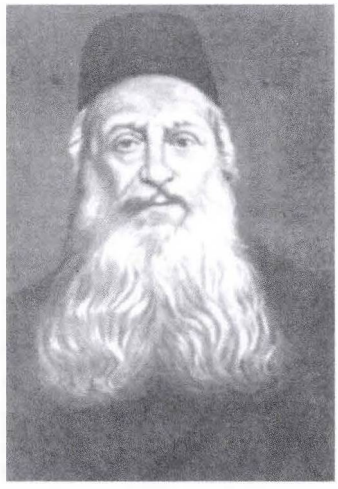
Mosze Markiewicz, the son of Aron Hersz, the technician and dentist
his wife, a dentist,
and their little son

Szmuelke Markiewicz and his wife,
the son of Szepsel, his wife Tusza (the teacher, in Powszechna),
and their little daughter, Milka.
The daughters:
Golda and her children,
Chaja, her husband and their children,
Lea,
Cyrl

Icchak Markiewicz, the son of Aron Hersz,
his wife, Masza,
their two sons and their daughter

All of them were murdered in the Slonim Ghetto from 1941-1943,
except for Lea, Chaja and her family – in the Bialystok Ghetto.
May their memories be blessed.
May God avenge their blood.

The mourners
Bezalel, Aron, Azriel and their families, Israel
The Drezner-Szron Family, Israel



In Everlasting Remembrance of

The Gaon, Rabbi Icchak Bursztejn, Rabbi of the community of Ostrolenka
from 1905-1939, beloved, holy and well-known all over Poland,
born in Lomza, the son of the God-fearing Chassid, Reb Szlomo.
His wife, Jenta, *née* Gielczynski, a righteous woman, also from Lomza,
and their youngest daughter, Syma, and the rest of their family.
The family was in the Warsaw Ghetto.
The Rabbi was murdered in Treblinka in 1942.
His wife and daughter were murdered in the Lomza Ghetto.
May his righteous memory be blessed.
May God avenge their blood.

The mourners

His son	**Bezalel and his family, Colombia**
His daughter	**Peszka and her family, Israel**
His daughter	**Sara Trejstman and her family, Israel**

Organization of the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka in Israel and the Diaspora

May God remember the holy and pure ones

of the Jewish community of Ostrolenka and the region

who found their tragic deaths with the other martyrs of Israel in the Diaspora of the exile.

**The dear members of our Jewish community and of the region,
who were done away with before their time
and were destroyed by the hateful, impure Nazis,
may their names be obliterated,
by means of all sorts of strange and despicable deaths.**

**The deceased, the holy dead,
whose graves were uprooted to their foundations
by the German Amaleks,
during their bitter and evil regime
in our city and its environs.**

**All those, whose names are unknown,
and who were not mentioned in this book.**

**May they rest in peace,
and may God avenge their blood and their shame.**

Organization of the Jewish Community of Ostrolenka and its Environs in Israel
The Editorial Staff of the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka*
The Committee for the Publication of the Book



List of the holy and pure ones from Ostrolenka and the region

The names are as they were given to us by relatives and friends.

A

Adonolam, Szymon, wife Rejzel and children
Ajdenberg (the Optician) and family
Ajzenberg, Chaim and wife Elke Sara
Ajzenberg, Golda and children
Ajzenstejn, Chana
Ajzenstejn, Pines
Ajzenstejn, Rachel (Leszno)
Albrusz, Baruch and Yafa
Alterman, Awraham Lejb (from Myszyniec)
Alterman, Bejla Ester, husband Mordechaj Sokolek and children
Alterman, Mosze Herszel and wife (from Myszyniec)
Alterman, Nisan (from Myszyniec)
Aronowicz, Icchak and one son
Aronowicz, Josef
Aronowicz, Malka
Aronowicz, Welwel
Aronowicz-Lewinson, Lea and two children
Aronstejn, Mosze and wife
Aszer, Josel and wife Bluma Rywka
Aszer, Szajke, wife Golda, and son Aron
Awgustower, Arjeh, wife Ester Fejga (Tobjasz), children Rachel, Szmuel, Meir Icze and Awraham Josef

B

Bachrach, Henach
Bachrach, Mendel

Bachrach, Motel
Bachrach, Noach
Bachrach, Sara
Bajuk, Arie and wife Sara (Thylim)
Bajuk, Awrejmele, wife and son
Bajuk, Berel, wife Balcia (Chacek) and three children
Bajuk, Eli, wife Gitel (Chacek) and child
Bajuk, Jakow and wife Chaja Sara
Bajuk, Mosze, wife and son Chaim
Balfan, Dwora
Baranowicz, Rywka Rejzel, husband Josef, and son
Barszcz, Lejbel and wife Zysel
Benc, Cyrl and two daughters
Benc, Jakow, wife Rywka and children
Benc, Reuwen and wife Chaska
Benedon, Bercie, wife and six children
Benedon, Chaim, wife Necha (Roszeniak) and child
Benedon, Fejgale
Benedon, Lejzer
Bergazyn, Israel, Gedalja, Ester and Ita (from Czerwin)
Bergazyn, Zcharja Dawid, Towa and Aron (from Czerwin)
Berger, Alter and wife Rejzel (Lewita)
Berger, Berel
Berger, Etka
Berger, Jakow, wife Fejga (Margalit) and children
Berliner, Alter, wife Rywka, and six children from Troszyn
Bialy, Mendel and family
Bialy, Motel and family
Biezuner, Icze and wife
Blachowicz, Alter Ben Cyjon, wife Dwora, and daughter Chana Michel
Blachowicz, Chaim Note and wife Chajci
Blachowicz, Chaja
Blachowicz, Eliezer
Blachowicz, Ester
Blachowicz, Mosze and wife Sara
Blachowicz, Szylem, wife and children
Blaszka, Chaja and Jakow
Blum, Chaja Sara (Isers)
Blum, Daczkele, husband Mosze (Felhendler) and children
Blum, Fajwel Lejb Herc and family
Blum, Jankel, wife Chaja (Szlafmic) and children
Blum, Towa (from Myszyniec)
Blumberg, Awraham Mordechaj
Blumberg, Frejdka
Blumberg, Mendel
Blumberg, Mosze Dawid
Blumberg, Mosze Meir
Blumberg, Rachel
Blumsztejn (from the Old Market), wife and children
Blumsztejn, Jechiel Meir
Blumsztejn, Lea
Bocian Family
Bogrzand, Baruch, wife Chaja, and son Welwel
Bomsztejn, Mosze and family
Bonciak, Alter, wife Tobe (Brukman) and children
Bonciak, Fejga and two daughters
Bonciak, Motel and wife
Bonciak, Welwel, Dawid and Szejna
Bonciak, Zalman, wife Sara, and son Herszel
Borensztejn, Chaim and family
Borensztejn, Chaja and family
Borensztejn, Mosze and Chana
Borensztejn, Szmuel
Brojda, Chaim Icchak
Brojda, Chajke Rachel
Brojda, Dow Ber
Brojda, Noach
Brojda, Szoszana
Brum, Alter and family
Brum, Bela
Brum, Chaim Alter, wife Jochewed (Tobjar) and three children
Brum, Chaja Dina
Brum, Chaja Gitel, husband Welwel Wajselfisz and five children

Brum, Herszel, wife Towa, and children
Brum, Icchak Cwi and Brajna Rachel
Brum, Jechezkel and wife Necha (Wojciechowice)
Brum, Perel (Dorfman), husband and children
Brum, Pesach, wife and children
Brum, Szaul and family
Bryk, Irmijahu, wife Chawa, children Chaja Fejga and Szlomo
Brysk, Berel, wife Fejga and children
Brysk, Mosze, wife Cwija, children Israel Meir, Icchak, Bazke and Sorcia
Budnik, Chaim Lejbel, wife and children
Budnik, Lea, children Mosze, Dawid, Sara and Dina
Burman, Note and wife
Bursztejn, Frejda
Bursztejn, Rabbi Icchak the righteous, of blessed memory, Rabbi of the city, his wife Jenta, and family
Bursztejn, Sara, Jeszajahu, Rachel, Chaja Perel and Szmuel
Byszko, Meir

C

Calka, Awraham
Calka, Chaim
Calka, Chaja
Calka, Chawa
Calka, Cwi Mordechaj
Calka, Dwora
Calka, Jakow Cwi
Calka, Joel
Calka, Masza
Calka, Sara and Nechama
Cenman, Jehuda
Cenman, Rachel
Ces'la, Izrael Ber, wife Fejga and children
Chacek Mindel, husband and children
Chacek, Ajzyk, wife and family
Chacek, Awraham and family
Chacek, Awraham, wife Chana and son
Chacek, Berel and family
Chacek, Chaim and family
Chacek, Cwija (Cypka)
Chacek, Eli and family
Chacek, Fajwel Shuw and family
Chacek, Icchak and wife Miriam (Gottlieb)
Chacek, Meir, wife Chaja Sara, and daughter Hinda
Chacek, Welwel
Chacek, Zysel, husband and children
Chelzt, Chaim and wife
Chelzt, Welwel, wife Itki and children
Chmiel, Alte
Chmiel, Awraham
Chmiel, Bejnisz, wife and children
Chmiel, Bunim, wife Miriam, and daughter Sara
Chmiel, Chana Mindel, Mosze and Awraham
Chmiel, Daniel
Chmiel, Efraim (Chamiel)
Chmiel, Efraim, wife Bejla Rywka, children Sara, Fejgale, Naomi and Beniamin
Chmiel, Fejga (Gedanken)
Chmiel, Gedaljahu, wife Chana and children
Chmiel, Icel
Chmiel, Israel, wife and children
Chmiel, Jehoszua, wife Cyrl, children Chana Fejga, Frida, Sara, Chaja, Chome, Szlomo and Icchak
Chmiel, Mordechaj, and wife Chinka
Chmiel, Mosze
Chmiel, Pesia Mindel
Chmiel, Rywka
Chodakiewicz, Szlomo
Chomont, Awraham Jakow and family (from Wojciechowice)
Chomont, Icchak Cwi, wife Brajna Rachel, children Mordechaj and Mendel (from Wojciechowice)
Chomont, Reuwen, wife and children (from Wojciechowice)
Choniak, Bela

Choniak, Chaim
Choniak, Chaja
Choniak, Fejga
Choniak, Hinda
Choniak, Icchak
Choniak, Jechiel
Choniak, Lejbel Herc
Choniak, Mendel
Choniak, Rejzel
Choniak, Sara
Chrempacz, Dawid, son Mosze Hersz, and daughter Ester
Cuker, Josef, wife and family
Cuker, Malka
Cuker, Mendel, wife and children
Cukierkorn, Chaim Note, wife Chaja Rywka, children Brajna and Lea
Cukierkorn, Symcha Bunim, wife Malka and son Jakow
Cwibak, Shalom and wife Masza (Bonciak)
Cwibak, Szlomo and family
Cytrynblat, Frejdel and Family
Cytrynblat, Zyskind
Cytrynowicz Family
Cytrynowicz, Mosze, wife and son Chaim
Cywiak, Chawa
Cywiak, Ester Rywka, Szejna, Nechama, Josefa, Gerszon, Awraham, Icchak Meir and Jochewed
Cywiak, Josef, wife Rywka and children
Cywiak, Mosze Chaim Shuw and wife Chaja Sara
Cywiak, Nachum Eliezer
Cywiak, Pinie
Czapnikiewicz, Israel, Nisan, Nachman and Josef
Czapnikiewicz, Szejna and Malka
Czapnikiewicz, Szlomo and wife Fejgel (Wilk)
Czapnikiewicz, Szymon and family
Czernowin, Chackel Meir, wife Fejga, children Gitel, Dawid and Miriam
Czernowin, Herszel

D

Dajczman, Chaim, Herszel, Sara Rywka and Fejgale
Dajczman, Gedalja and wife Chaja Cwija
Dancyger, Awraham
Dancyger, Jakow, wife Dwora (Perkal) and children
Dancyger, Michael
Dancyger, Zew
Dolowicz, Motel and family
Domb, Szmuel
Dorfman, Alter Baruch, wife and children
Dorfman, Chaim, wife Chana, and son Lejbel
Dorfman, Chana and two children
Dorfman, Dawid, Symcha Hersz, Chana and Sara Malka
Dorfman, Ester Brajna and children
Dorfman, Israel and wife Rachel
Dorfman, Lejbe
Dorfman, Mosze Chaim
Dorfman, Rachel and family
Dorfman, Rejzel
Dorfman, Szejna Brajna
Dorfman, Szejna, son and one child
Dronzek, Hinda Lea and family
Dronzek, Symcha, Chaja Itki and children
Dublin, Symcha, daughter, son-in-law and family
Dyskent, Eli Mosze, wife Chana and children

E

Edel, Awraham Jakow and wife Lea
Edel, Luba
Edel, Mosze Aron, wife Sara Gita and three children
Edel, Rywka
Edel, Szlomo and wife Masza
Edel, Zew
Elbojm, Zundel, Fejga and family

Elkes, Chaim (the Leather Merchant) and wife Pina

F

Filar, Awraham
Filar, Chawa
Filar, Ester
Filar, Jakow, wife Golda, two sons and one daughter
Filar, Jehuda Arjeh (Lejbcze), wife Ester Gitel (Srebrnik) and daughter
Finkelsztejn, Awraham, Szaulke, Ester and Fejga
Finkelsztejn, Chaja Hanja
Finkelsztejn, Chanoch, Chaja Gisze, Dow, Eliezer, Jakow and Dwora
Finkelsztejn, Dawid Jehuda, wife Rachel, and daughter Chawa
Finkelsztejn, Jakow, Nachman, Chaja Sorcia, Szabtaj and Elke
Finkelsztejn, Sara Rywka
Flakser, Frejdel
Flakser, Henach, wife Rywka, son Szymon and family
Flamenbojm Family
Flamenbojm, Szajke
Frajman, Awraham, wife Bracha and three children
Frum, Chana
Frum, Isrolci and wife Chawa
Frum, Jehuda
Frum, Lea
Frydman, Awraham and wife Peszka
Frydman, Basia
Frydman, Menachem and wife Pesia
Frydman, Rabbi Mosze and wife Sara
Frydman, Reb Naftali Shuw and family
Frydman, Szmuel and wife Baszka (Perkal)
Frydman, Zundel, wife and son Chackel

G

Garber, Berel, wife Chana, and two children
Garda, Aszer
Garda, Bejnisz, wife Ester, children Reuwen, Aron, Frida and Chaja
Garda, Berel and wife Rajne
Garda, Herszel and Chana
Garda, Jospa
Garda, Lejbel
Garda, Motel and Cypa
Garda, Pesia Fejga
Garda, Sara Dwora
Garda, Szmuelke
Gedanken, Chaim
Gedanken, Jakow
Gedanken, Judel (Jurek)
Gedanken, Mendel and wife Rachel
Gedanken, Pinie
Geluda, Bejla and daughter Nomi
Geluda, Josef, wife Lea, children Fajwel, Sara, Basia and Bluma Rojza
Gercek, Awraham Herszel and sister Malia
Gercek, Golda and four children
Gercek, Pesach, wife and two children
Gercek, Rasza and husband
Gercek, Reuwen Nachum, wife Peszka, son Symcha, and daughter Rejzel
Gercek, Szlomo, wife Fejga, and son Icchak
Gercek, Zalman, wife Sara, children Fejgel, Mosze, Ester Matel and Mindel
Gielczynski, Dawid Motel, wife Chaja, children Chaim and Dwora
Gielczynski, Eli, wife Syma Lea, children Chaim and Berel
Gielczynski, Eli, wife, children Sara, Motel, Dobke, Dina, Gedaljahu, Rywka and Chana
Gielczynski, Henach and wife Sara Rywka
Gielczynski, Herszel, wife Towa, and six children (from Troszyn)
Gielczynski, Jenta (Rutsky)
Gielczynski, Margalit

Gielczynski, Mendel and wife Sara
Gielczynski, Mosze Jakow Hersz, Lejzer and Israel Mordechaj
Gielczynski, Mosze Motel, wife Neszke, and two children
Gielczynski, Zalman and wife Chana
Gilda, Akiwa
Gilda, Etka
Gilda, Fradel
Gilda, Henach
Gilda, Jechezkel, wife Sara, and daughter Fejga (Perla)
Gilda, Mendel and children
Gilda, Towa
Gilda, Welwel
Glowacz, Pinczas, wife and children
Gniazdowicz, Chaja Rejza
Goldberg, Israel Dow, wife Rywka (Bachrach), sons Bunim and Icze
Goldblut, Mosze
Goldher, Berel, Szejna and Rachel
Goldszlak, Ajbel (Ajbunia) and Michel
Goldszlak, Awraham Mordechaj and wife Cyrl (Sznycer)
Goldszlak, Cwi (Hercke)
Goldszlak, Jechezkel and wife Chawa (Sznycer)
Goldszlak, Zalman and wife (Chmiel)
Goldsztejn, Fejga Rachel, husband Jakow Kuszer, and children
Goldsztejn, Icchak, wife and children
Goldsztejn, Lejbel, wife Chaja Lea, and daughter Nechama
Goldsztejn, Mosze, wife Regina, and one daughter
Goldsztejn, Perel, husband and children
Goldsztejn, Rywka, Henach, Serl, Regina, Mosze, Genandel
Goldwaser, Fiszel, wife and children
Goldwaser, Frajdel
Gorzelczany, Dawid
Gorzelczany, Gitel
Gorzelczany, Zalman Chanoch, and wife Golda
Grabie, Libcza
Grabie, Note and family
Grabie, Rachel (Grynberg)
Granat, Bejla
Granat, Dawid
Granowicz, Alter, wife Chaja Bejla and children
Granowicz, Awraham, Icchak and mother Chana
Granowicz, Majnka, children and mother
Grosman, Rabbi Chaim Mordechaj, of blessed memory
Grudko, Cwi, wife Sara Rywka, and son Szimszon
Gruszko, Alter and wife Bejla
Gruszko, Bejla Basia
Gruszko, Cypora
Gruszko, Icchak
Gruszko, Jechida
Gruszko, Josef
Gruszko, Judyt
Gruszko, Litman, wife Jospa, and one child
Gruszko, Neszke
Gruszko, Nisan and wife Chaja
Gruszko, Szejna
Gruszko, Szlomo Hersz
Gruszko, Welwel
Grynberg, Awraham Mendel and wife
Grynberg, Cypa, husband and child
Grynberg, Elke, husband and children
Grynberg, Fejga and family
Grynberg, Jakow Dawid, wife and family
Grynberg, Jehuda and wife
Grynberg, Mosze Mendel, wife Chajci and family
Grynberg, Pinczas
Grynberg, Reb Szlomo Irmijahu the Learned Teacher, of blessed memory, and wife Szprinca
Grynberg, Shalom and wife
Grynberg, Szlomo, wife and children
Grynszpan, Alter and wife Lea
Grynszpan, Awraham, wife and son
Grynszpan, Fajwel, wife, six daughters and one son
Grynszpan, Icchak and wife Zlata
Grynszpan, Isza

Grynszpan, Lejbel, wife Rywka (Kerman) and children
Grynszpan, Pesach, wife Bracha and children
Grynszpan, Zwulun and wife Szejna Rachel
Gutman the Medic-Healer and wife
Gutman, Dr. Juzek, wife and children
Gutman, Golda and Meir
Gutman, Grosman, wife Chanale (Benedon) and child
Gutman, Josef, Rachel, Lejbel, Nachman and Pinczas
Gutman, Mordechaj, Lejbe, Brajna and Chana

H

Haltarz, Dawid, wife Szyfra, children Gitel and Szepsel
Hendel, Mosze, wife Hinda (Cerkiewicz) and family
Hernsztejn, Mosze
Hochberg, Pesach and wife Sara Rywka (Piaseczny)
Holcman Family (from Kaczyny)
Holcman, Awrejmel and wife Rachel
Holcman, Beniamin, wife and children
Holcman, Chaim Eliahu and wife Chaja (Medzowicz)
Holcman, Fejga Lea, husband, son, daughter Chaja Frejdel, and son Chaim Judel
Holcman, Israel Michel, Dwora, Sara, Fejga, Hinda and Malka
Holcman, Nachman and wife Ita

I

Iglewicz, Awraham Alter and wife Sara Rachel
Iglewicz, Ben Cyjon Jakow
Iglewicz, Szlomo and wife Sara Perel, children Ben Cyjon, Mosze, Mordechaj and Rachel Dwora
Ismach, Jakow
Ismach, Menucha, children Szmuel, Anszel and Miriam
Iwri, Rachel Lea (Mejrann)
Izrael, Arie
Izrael, Awraham and Bluma
Izrael, Berel, wife Sara (Mejrann) and children
Izrael, Chaim Mendel, wife Lea, and children
Izrael, Hercel and Judyt
Izrael, Israel
Izrael, Joel
Izrael, Reuwen

J

Jabek, Aron
Jabek, Chasja
Jabek, Cwi
Jabek, Jakow Jeszajahu
Jabek, Josef
Jabek, Mindel
Jabek, Mosze
Jabek, Noske and family
Jabek, Szlomo and wife Fejga Gitel
Jagoda, Anszel, wife and children (from Lomzica)
Jagoda, Chana
Jagoda, Ester and Chaja Zelda
Jagoda, Maks
Jagoda, Sara Dwora (Barasz)
Jagoda, Zerach, wife Chawa, children Ester and Hercke
Jagoda, Zew
Jakobowski, Reuwen, wife Cyrl and two children
Jalowicz, Josel
Janowski, Naomi, husband Mosze, children Szlomo, Rejzel and Rachel
Jarmus, Hersz (from Lomzica), wife Szejna (Dorfman), and daughter Necha
Jekaliczek, Natan and wife Sara
Jeszczanowski, Szmuel, wife Zlata, children Alter, Bracha and Rywka

K

Kac, Awraham
Kac, Herszel, wife Brajna, and child Icchak
Kachan, Chaim Dow Shuw, wife Chaja Bejla, daughters Fejga and Rejzel
Kachan, Dan and wife Rachel Lea
Kachan, Fajwel Noach
Kachan, Gitel
Kachan, Hersz Josel
Kachan, Israel, wife Selki, children Szmuel and Hinda
Kachan, Jakow Welwel
Kachan, Rachel Lea
Kachan, Symcha
Kachan, Szepsel
Kachan, Zwulun and wife Fejga Golda
Kaczor, Ajzyk
Kaczor, Lejbel
Kaczor, Mosze Aron and wife Rejzel
Kaczor, Nachum, wife Dwora and son Welwel
Kaczyner, Szochet and Family
Kagan (Dentist), wife and children
Kakawka Family
Kalc, Bejla
Kalc, Dawid and Chaim
Kalc, Szlomo
Kalina, Rywka, Szlomo and family
Kamin, Henach (Garbina), husband Judel and three children
Kamin, Rywka Rachel (Skrobacz) and daughter Dwora
Kamin, Sorcia (Szejnman), husband and three children
Kan, Nomi and family
Kanarek, Aszer and wife Rywka
Kaplan, Jakow, wife and children
Kaplan, Josef Chaim and family
Karbowski, Dr. and family
Karlinski, Lejbel and wife Dwora
Karlinski, Noach, wife Malka, children Reuwen and Basia
Karsz, Szyfra Gitel, Yafa, Chana, Bluma and Icchak
Karwat, Fruma
Karwat, Icchak
Karwat, Jakow
Keler, Bercie and wife Chaja Szejtel
Keler, Peszka, husband and children
Keler, Rachel Lea, husband and children
Keler, Tojby, husband and children
Keler, Zusze, wife and children (from Myszyniec)
Kikman, Jakow Hersz, wife Peszka, children Bejla, Rejzel and Mosze Lejbel
Klucznik, Jakow
Klucznik, Lejbel and wife Nechama
Klucznik, Zelig and Malka
Koen, Mosze
Koen, Mosze
Koen, Pinczas, wife Nomi, children Hone and Mosze
Kojfman, Dawid, Alte and Hanja
Kojfman, Herszel, Mosze, Pinczas and Szyfra
Kojfman, Lejbel and wife Ester
Kosowski, Zalman and wife Lea (Kupferminc)
Kozlowicz, Beniamin, wife Sara Hanja (Gronowicz), and son Zelig
Kozlowicz, Chana
Kozlowicz, Jakow Icchak, son and daughter
Kozlowicz, Lewi
Kozlowicz-Chmiel, Sara, children Jakow and Lowa
Krawiec, Israel Lew and Alte
Krymkiewicz, Awraham (Awremcze) and family
Krymkiewicz, Meir, wife Tojby and son Herszele
Kuper, Awraham, wife and daughter
Kuper, Szmuel, wife Hinda, sons Bunim, Noske, Jehoszua, Chaim, Jakow, and daughter Lea

L

Lachowicz, Alter, wife and children

Lachowicz, Chaim Mordechaj, wife Lea, sons Meir, Dawid, Zew, and daughter Zelda
Lachowicz, Jakow Szlomo
Lachowicz, Zelig
Lakcowicz, Szlomo and one child
Landau, Szymon the Scribe, wife Chana, children Symcha and Nechama
Laska, Ester Malka
Laska, Josef
Laska, Mosze, wife Chaja, children Isrolik, and Chancie
Laska-Cywiak, Rywka and family
Laska-Rozoga, Judyt and family
Laska-Rozonowicz, Nechama and family
Lejberman, Chaim Ben Cyjon, wife Rywka Rachel (Brum), and three children
Lejberman, Note Mosze and family
Lejberman, Welwel and wife Sara
Lejzor, Berczak
Lejzor, Chaim Shalom
Lejzor, Chaja Hadas
Lejzor, Cypa
Lejzor, Icchak and wife Rachel
Lejzor, Jechezkel (Chackel)
Lejzor, Perel
Lejzor, Szejna
Leszcz (wife of Hercke), and two children
Leszcz, Chaim Hersz
Leszcz, Fruma (Lewine)
Leszcz, Jakow Dawid, wife Rachel, and son Lejbel
Leszcz, Josef Aron and wife
Lew, Anszel
Lew, Awraham and family
Lew, Icchak
Lew, Jakow and family
Lew, Mordechaj and wife Dina
Lew, Natan and family
Lew, Noske, wife Szejna and three children
Lewi, Chana Rachel, daughters Hinda and Lejke
Lewi, Icchak, wife Perel, children Josef, Dawid, Dwora, Rywka, Nomi and Chawa
Lewin, Chana
Lewin, Herszel, wife Rut, and daughter Bianka
Lewin, Mendel
Lewin, Mojzesz and wife Leja
Lewin, Peszka and husband Awrejmel
Lewin, Rywka
Lewin, Szaje, wife and children
Lewin, Szlomo
Lewinski, Awraham, wife Chana Lea, daughter Sara, son-in-law Owadia Zylbersztejn, and children (from Kadzidla)
Lewinski, Hanja, children Jakow, Cwi and Cwija (from Kadzidla)
Lewita, Bejla, husband and children
Lewita, Berel, wife and children
Lewita, Chaja Rywka, husband Noach and children
Lewita, Rachel and husband (from Troszyn)
Lewkowicz, Israel Cwi, wife Lea Raszka, sons Cwi, Yom Tov, and daughter Hanja (from Kadzidla)
Lewtan, Alter Szlomo, wife and children
Lewtan, Jakow Chone, wife Fejga, and daughter Tojby
Lewtan, Nachum, wife and children (from Rzekun)
Lichtensztejn Family
Lisowicki, Berel, wife and children
Lisowicki, Sara Rywka and children
Litwer, Josef and wife
Litwer, Mosze
Litwer, Nachman
Lonanter, Sara Rywka (wife of Reb Mendel Lomzer, of blessed memory), daughter Chana, husband and child
Lubelczyk, Jakow, wife Necha and children
Lubin, Eliahu and wife Szejna Rywka
Lubin, Pinczas

M

Magryl, Rachel
Mak, Ajzyk
Mak, Azriel

Mak, Chinka
Mak, Itki
Mak, Jenta
Mak, Lejbel
Makowski, Israel Chaim, wife Cwija and son
Malinowicz, Miriam
Malowane, Joel, Szejna, Mosze, Israel, Cwi and Judyt
Margules, Aron Jakow and wife Fejga
Margules, Icze and wife Ester
Margules, Jechiel, Malka and Szmuel (from Czerwin)
Margules, Josef, wife Lejke (Blum), children Szmuelik and Akiwa
Margules, Mosze Dawid and Malka (from Czerwin)
Markiewicz, Chaim Josef and wife Sara
Markiewicz, Golda, Lea, Chaja and Cyrl
Markiewicz, Icchak, Masza, Mosze and Frane
Markiewicz, Mosze (Dentist), wife and son
Markiewicz, Szejna, Mosze, Awraham and Fejga
Markiewicz, Szepsel, wife Masza and daughter
Markiewicz, Szmuelik, wife and family
Ma-Towu, Beniamin Symcha and family
Ma-Towu, Chaja
Ma-Towu, Israel and Rachel Lea
Ma-Towu, Szabtaj, wife Szejna Malka (Balfan), and two children
Medzowicz, Awraham Mosze and wife Cypora
Medzowicz, Daniel
Mejrann, Eliezer, wife Itki, children Beniamin, Arjeh, Meir and Chana
Melnik, Beniamin and Auwa
Mendel, Szprinca
Mest, Icchak
Mest, Josel, wife and children
Midler, Rachel
Miler, Welwel, wife Basia (Lachowicz) and children
Mlynarzewicz, Awraham, wife Gisze, and daughter Chaja Basia
Mlynarzewicz, Lejbel, wife Bluma and five children
Monczik, Bluma
Mordechaj, Shalom Michel, wife and children
Mordechaj, Szlomo, wife Genandel and four children
Morgensztern, Aron
Morgensztern, Dwora
Morgensztern, Mosze
Morgensztern, Nachum Hersz

N

Nadborny Family
Nadborny, Chaim Zalman
Nadborny, Szye, wife and children
Nagel, Jehuda and Fejga
Nasielski, Jakow, wife Elke and family
Nasielski, Josef, wife Sara and family
Niks, Fejga (Frydman), husband Israel and three children (from Czerwin)
Nowinski, Awraham Zelig, wife, two daughters and one son
Nowinski, Jankel and wife
Nowygroder, Chaim and Itki
Nowygroder, Icchak, Sara and Masza

O

Ogrodower, Lejzer, wife Sara, children Icze and Bejla
Oldak, Bercie
Oldak, Frejdka Perkal
Orensztejn, Chaim, wife Lejbe, children Beniamin, Awraham Mordechaj, Rywka, Henach and Chana
Orensztejn, Mendel, wife Ester, children Beniamin, Awraham Mordechaj, Icchak, Jakow and Henach
Orensztejn, Mosze and wife

Ostynowicz, Chaim, wife Fejga, and daughter Chana
Ostynowicz, Israel and family
Ostynowicz, Meir, wife and children

P

Peciner Family (from Kadzidla)
Peciner, Icze Dawid, wife Sara, children Rejzel and Jutka
Peciner, Jechiel
Pedowicz, Chaim Lejb and wife Alte Szyfra (from Wojciechowice)
Perkal, Awraham
Perkal, Basia
Perkal, Berel, wife Pia, children Frederica, Dwora, Basia and Jakow
Perkal, Bunim
Perkal, Chaim, wife Chana, children Jakow and Lejbe
Perkal, Cwi, Lea and Chana
Perkal, Jakow, Chana Sara and three children
Perkal, Jakow, Ester and family
Perkal, Jechiel, wife Sara (Cerklewicz), sons Motel, Jakow and Arie
Perkal, Malia
Perkal, Malka, Fejga and Perel
Perkal, Pinczas, wife and one child
Perkal, Rajci, husband and child
Perkal, Reuwen, wife Necha (Cerklewicz) and son Motel
Perkal, Szejna Dwora, children Arie, Bendet and Ester (from Troszyn)
Perla, Awraham
Perla, Chaim
Perla, Dawid
Perla, Ezra
Perla, Kalman
Perla, Szlomo and wife
Pese, Szejna and five children
Pianko, Ben Cyjon and family
Pianko, Gutman and family
Pianko, Kalman, wife Chancia and two daughters
Pianko, Symcha and wife Lea
Piaseczny, Awraham and wife Fejga
Piaseczny, Chaja, Baszka, Rachel and Mendel
Piekarz Family
Pietruszka, Josef, wife Chaja Sara (Blachowicz) and children
Plotka, Luba
Plotka, Mosze
Plotka, Szmuel
Plotkin, Fiszel and family
Plotkin, Mosze, wife Luba and three children
Podasek, Icchak, wife Fejga, children Gitel, Rejzel, and Gedaljahu
Przystanczyk, Dawid Jehuda, wife Rachel and daughter, Chajale
Przystanczyk, Jerucham, Ester and Jochka
Przyszastkier, Eliezer
Przyszastkier, Rachel
Pszetycki, Fejga

R

Rabinowicz, Ester
Rakowski, Fania (Kagan) and family
Rakowski, Jakow Meir and family (from Kaczyny)
Rakowski, Lejbel, wife Tanya (Grana) and son
Rakowski-Palewski (Dentist) and family
Ramacki, Dwora
Ramacki, Josef
Rezyka, Chaja
Rezyka, Gita
Rezyka, Icchak, wife Itki Lea, and children Fejga Rachel and Sara
Rezyka, Mosze
Rezyka, Nechemia
Rezyka, Szlomo and wife
Richter, Hinda
Richter, Judyt
Richter, Menachem Mendel

Richter, Mosze, wife and three children
Rochman, Welwel and wife Malka
Rostker, Awraham Hersz, wife and family
Rostker, Gitel, Hanja, Bluma and Cypora
Rostker, Mordechaj and wife Ita
Rotbard, Cyrl, Nachum and Itki
Rotman, Gerszon and Lea
Rotman, Icchak
Rotman, Israel, Ester and family
Rotman, Rejzel and Sara
Rotman, Rywka
Roza, Andzie
Roza, Chaja (from Zyskien)
Roza, Genia
Roza, Icel
Roza, Mindel
Roza, Mosze
Roza, Motel
Roza, Pinczas
Roza, Reuwen
Roza, Salusia
Roza, Sara
Rozan Family
Rozen, Fejga
Rozen, Lejbel and family
Rozen, Mosze
Rozen, Shalom and family
Rozenblum the Ritual Slaughterer and family
Rozenblum, Awraham and daughter Chawa
Rozenblum, Bejla
Rozenblum, Gedaljahu
Rozenblum, Hirsz, wife Dina, children Lejbel and Reuwen
Rozenblum, Icchak and wife Zelda
Rozenblum, Rabbi Josef and family
Rozenblum, Rachel
Rozenblum, Reuwen, wife Elke, sons Awraham, Motel, Symcha, Jechiel, Icchak and family
Rozenblum, Tojby and Basza
Rozensztejn, Akiwa
Rozensztejn, Emanuel
Rozensztejn, Fejga
Rozensztejn, Fradel
Rozensztejn, Icchak
Rozensztejn, Malka
Rozensztejn, Rywka (from Wojciechowice)
Rozental, Chaim Szaje, wife Necha and children
Rozental, Dwora
Rozonowicz, Chaim, wife and children
Rozonowicz, Icchak, wife and children
Rubinsztejn, Gedaljahu, wife Dwora, and daughter Judyt
Rubinsztejn, Sara Fejga and daughter Rachel
Rubinsztejn, Wolfke, Guta and their mother
Rudski, Reuwen
Rudski, Szlomo and family
Rudski, Szmuelke
Rumner, Perel, husband and children
Rutsky, Awraham, wife Lejbe, sons Szmuelke and Josel, and daughter Mindel
Ruzga, Awraham Szmuel
Ruzga, Icchak
Ruzga, Szymon
Ryc, Ester
Ryc, Icchak and wife Sara
Ryc, Jehuda
Ryc, Lea
Ryc, Malia
Ryc, Pesia
Rzepka, Chaim
Rzepka, Gitel
Rzepka, Jerachmiel
Rzepka, Meir
Rzepka, Mosze

S

Salomon, Baba (Pianko), children Miriam, Icchak, Sara and Chawa
Sapir, Bluma, Gitel, Lea, Berel, Jakow and Brajna
Sapir, Chana Rejzel, children Mosze, Hersz Lejb and Brajna
Sapir, Icze, wife Chaja and five children

Sapir, Jakow Gerszon
Sapir, Jehuda, wife Rejzel and children
Sapir, Naftali and wife Fejga
Sapir, Rywka
Sapir, Sara
Sarniewicz, Michael, wife and children
Sarniewicz, Mosze
Sarniewicz, Sara
Sawar, Ester and son Mosze
Segal, Cemach
Segal, Chaja and Fajwel
Segal, Cwi Jehuda
Segal, Dawid
Segal, Henach
Segal, Icchak Zew (Icze Welwel)
Segal, Mendel
Segal, Rachel Hadas
Segal, Szmuel Josef and wife Lejke
Sesowicz Family
Sikora, Gerszon, wife and family
Sikora, Meir, wife Rachel and three children
Siwak Family
Skalka, Awraham Icchak and Ester
Skiba Family
Skrobacz, Eliezer
Skrobacz, Herszel
Skrobacz, Lejbel and family
Slazenger, Mendel, wife Cypa and three children
Sniadowicz, Aron
Sniadowicz, Azriel Arie
Sniadowicz, Cyla and children
Sniadowicz, Hanja Dwora
Sniadowicz, Mosze Jehoszua and wife Miriam
Sniadowicz, Rachel
Sniadowicz, Szejna Ester
Sniadowicz, Zlata (Bonciak) and little daughter
Sojka, Icel, wife Rachel, daughter Fejga, husband and son Jehuda
Sojka, Mosze Aron, daughter Szlomit and son Emanuel (Niuni)
Sokol, Cwi, wife Ester (Balfan) and children
Sokol, Welwel, Dawid and a sister
Sokola, Suski
Sokolek, Jechiel, wife Ester Bejla and children (from Myszyniec)
Sorok, Aron Lejb, wife Hadasa, and daughter Frejda Rywka
Sorok, Baruch and wife Fejga
Sorok, Cyrl
Sorok, Jakow Mosze
Sorok, Jones and wife, Szejndel
Sorok, Lejbel
Sorok, Lejzer Dawid and wife Bejla
Spokorny, Bercie
Srebrnik, Mosze, wife Bejla and family
Sredni, Lejbel, wife Ita, children Israel and Chana, and family
Sredni, Zyskind, wife and children
Stawiski, Chaja (Miron), husband and children
Sukna, Fruma and Joel and family
Swartz, Fajwel and family
Swartzberg, Lejbel, wife Chana Fejga (Granowicz) and children
Szablowski, Cyrl, husband and son
Szablowski, Lipa and wife Fejga
Szafran, Chana and family
Szafran, Frejda and family
Szafran, Jakow and wife Raszka (Wygoda)
Szafran, Jechiel
Szafran, Mosze
Szapira, Nechama, Rasze, Miriam, Tojby and Lejbel
Szarfman, Mendel, wife Chaja Rywka and children
Szechnik, Sara
Szlafmic, Mordechaj Mendel, wife and family
Szlos, Chaja Fejga
Szlos, Hinda
Szlos, Reuwen Nachum, Fruma Cyrl, Golda, Rywka and Elke
Sznycer, Chawa
Sznycer, Mordechaj Michael
Szodlowicz, Josef Dawid
Szodlowicz, Sara
Szperling, Cwi, wife Sara, and daughter Szejna Ita

Szperling, Icze, wife Chawa and three children
Szperling, Jechiel, wife and children
Szrejter, Icze and family
Szrejter, Motel and family
Szron, Israel, wife Szejna, son Mosze and daughter Cyrl
Szron, Szepsel, wife and children
Sztejnberg, Miriam and children
Sztern, Berel, Symcha and Szmuelke
Sztern, Fejga, husband and one child
Sztern, Golda
Sztern, Herszele
Sztern, Icchak, wife and two children
Sztern, Israel
Sztern, Jechiel
Sztern, Naftali, wife Chaja Bejla and family
Sztrozenberg, Mosze Symcha, wife, and children Rachel, Roza, Fejga and Rywka
Szulc, Chawa, Jeszajahu and children
Szyman, Chaim, wife, daughter, son-in-law and children

T

Tejtelbojm, Awromcze
Tejtelbojm, Ester
Tejtelbojm, Josef Mosze, wife Rachel and five children
Tejtelbojm, Lejzer, wife and children
Tejtelbojm, Mosze Noske, wife Chana and children
Tejtelbojm, Symcha
Tejtelbojm, Szmuelke, wife Sara Rachel and three children
Thylim, Josef Mosze and family
Thylim, Lejbel and his daughter
Thylim, Motel and family
Tobjar, Aron
Tobjar, Mosze and Lea
Tobjasz, Awraham Hersz, wife Rachel and three children
Tobjasz, Dawid, wife Chawa (Wajnkranc) and family
Tobjasz, Mosze
Topola, Gutman Dawid, wife Chaja Neszke, children Rywka, Sara, Judyt and Josef
Toporowicz, Szmuel

W

Wajncymer, Josel and family
Wajngard Family
Wajngarten, Chaja
Wajngarten, Dawid, Ester Rywka and Mosze
Wajnkranc, Chaim
Wajnkranc, Dina
Wajnkranc, Dobe
Wajnkranc, Kalman and wife Sara
Wajnkranc, Pesia
Wajnkranc, Rachel
Wajnkranc, Szlomo and Dawid
Wajnsztok, Awraham, wife Matel Pesia, children Mosze, Chawa and Herszel
Wajnsztok, Nachman, wife Hadas, children Dwora Rejzel, Chaim Icchak and Mosze Mates
Wajnsztok, Sorcia, daughter Zlatke, and son Chaim
Wajsblum, Symcha Dawid, wife Chawa, children Auwa and Awraham
Watenberg, Chaja
Watenberg, Frejdka
Watenberg, Naftali, wife Gitel, sons Baruch, Gerszon, Mosze
Watenberg, Rywka Rachel and daughter Gitel
Wiater Family
Winograder, Chaim, Itki, Icchak, Sara and Mosze
Wis'ni, Jakow and Icchak
Wis'ni, Mosze and Pese
Wolkowicz, Chajale, children Lea, Fejgale and Michael
Wygoda, Lejbel and family

Wylozny, Aron, wife Rejzel, and son Mosze Beniamin
Wylozny, Chaim Icze, wife Chana and children
Wylozny, Zalman, wife Rywka, two sons and three daughters

Z

Zabludowicz, Berel, wife Rachel, children Szejna, Dwora and Peszka
Zabludowicz, Chana
Zabludowicz, Lejbel
Zabludowicz, Menachem
Zabludowicz, Rywka, husband Symcha Zylbersztejn, children Fajwel and Jochewed
Zabludowicz, Szlomo, wife and children
Zaborowski, Icchak, wife Chaja Bajleke (Szron) and son
Zamelson, Chaim Dawid, wife Miriam, son Mosze Welwel, and daughter Golda
Zamelson, Israel Mordechaj, wife Szejna Lea, daughters Miriam and Pesia
Zamelson, Jakow Herszel, wife Fejga, and father Czapnikiewicz
Zamelson, Miriam, husband and children
Zamelson, Sara Rywka, husband and children
Zamelson, Symcha Bunim, wife Ester (Szafran), children Cypora and Dawid
Zeligman, Chana, children Issachar, Rywka and Nechemia
Zelman, wife Sorcia (Gercek) and family
Zlocisty, Israel and family
Zlocisty, Lejzer
Zlocisty, Szmuel Szlomo and Szejna Rywka
Zloczewski, Szlomo and wife Chawa
Zonenberg, Chaim, wife Cypa, daughters Pese and Rejzel, and son Mordechaj Lejbel
Zukerman, Icze Meir and family
Zukerman, Shalom Hersz, wife Szejna and children
Zusman, Alesander Zyskind, wife Chana, and daughter Chaja
Zusman, Aron, wife Sonja, children Izy and Rachel (Nana)
Zusman, Eliahu, wife Broncza, and daughter Jochka
Zusman, Lejzer Eli, wife Bracha, children Icchak, Aron, Michel and Bejla
Zusman, Rejzel and husband
Zutkiewicz, Motel, son Arie (Luszek), and daughter Judyt
Zwawe, Mendel, wife Jenta (Garda), children Mirel, Mosze, Rywka and Malka
Zylberglajt Family
Zylbersztejn, Chackel and wife Sara Dwora (Makowski)
Zylbersztejn, Cwija
Zylbersztejn, Lejbe Rachel
Zylbersztejn, Zundel, wife and children

Note: Due to lack of information, to our deep regret, many of the murdered families do not appear in this list of martyrs. We therefore ask the forgiveness of their families and friends.

The *Yizkor* Book Committee



Memorial plaque of the Ostrolenkan community at the Chamber of the Holocaust (Martef HaShoah) in Jerusalem

God, Full of Mercy [El Maleh Rachamim]

God, full of mercy, creator of the earth and the heavens, who hears the outcry of the mournful, high protector of widows and father of the fatherless, please be not silent on behalf of the Jewish blood that was spilled like water. Grant perfect rest on the wings of Your Divine Presence, in the lofty abode of the holy and pure ones who shine as the brightness of the heavens, to the souls of our brothers and sisters, six million Jewish men, women and children, and among them the members of our holy community, Ostrolenka, and the holy communities in the region, who were put to death, slaughtered, burned, starved, buried alive or who suffered other forms of unnatural death at the hands of the accursed Nazis and their associates – may their name be obliterated! – in the ghettos of Lomza, Bialystok, Slonim, Molczat, and in the crematoria and gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek and Treblinka and in the other countries occupied by the Nazi enemy. All of them were holy and pure, and among them were heroes of the spirit, Gaonim and the saintly, innocent and sincere, Rabbis and Chassidim, Torah greats and their students. May God remember them to the good, and may their resting place be in the Garden of Eden. May the Master of Mercy shelter them in the shelter of His wings for all time and bind their souls in the bond of life. God is their heritage, and He will take their revenge and remind us of their sacrifice. And their merit will stand in our stead, and in the stead of all of Israel. O Earth!, do not conceal their blood and let there not be a resting place for their cry. In their merit shall the remnant of Israel return to its rightful place, and as for the holy ones, their righteousness shall be in front of the Lord as an everlasting memory. They will come in peace and will rest in peace; they will awake and stand at the end of days. Let us say Amen.

In Conclusion – A Word from the Publishers

Extraordinary efforts were invested in this book until its publication.

Collecting material and making contact with our townspeople in different countries, informing them of the great project begun here, and encouraging them to write and send material, contributions, etc. (Unfortunately, only a few responded . . .) In addition, we had to surmount many obstacles piled in our arduous way, and doubts and fears, lest we not arrive at our desired destination. This required a great deal of diligence, dedication and patience. And indeed, after lengthy preparations, we achieved the erection of this holy memorial, of which we dreamed for many years.

Although much labor and rigor were invested in the contents, format and aim of this book, so that, inasmuch as possible, it would give a multi-faceted and comprehensive expression of all areas of life of our city – it must be said that not everything has been thoroughly articulated. A great deal is lacking. Considering the great difficulties involved in this enterprise, however, we are pleased with what has been accomplished.

The publication of the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* was made possible thanks to the Board of the Organization of Ostrolenkans in Israel, as well as our townspeople in Israel and abroad. From the former came the initiative to memorialize in a book the people of our city and the towns around it, destroyed during the Holocaust.

For the publication of this book, we must first and foremost thank its editor, our townsman, the poet Yitzhak Ivri. He was among the first of its initiators. From the beginning to the end, he was the guiding spirit in recruiting the spiritual resources necessary for writing and editing, and in the work of gathering, collecting, translating and adapting most of the articles that went into the book. He dedicated himself with all his heart and soul. With indescribable stubbornness and devotion, he persevered in everything involved in this difficult mission. For many years, he called on our townspeople everywhere to assist in publishing the book. He worked tirelessly and single-mindedly, both to collect material and raise financial contributions.

It may be said with complete certainty that, thanks to him, we have achieved the fulfillment of our ambition of many years.

We also thank the members of the editorial staff for their faithful work on this holy book. In particular, we would like to express our thanks to our townsman, the writer and poet Dr. Chaim Chamiel, for his participation in the writing of the book and his dedicated work on behalf of its publication. He often entered into the thick

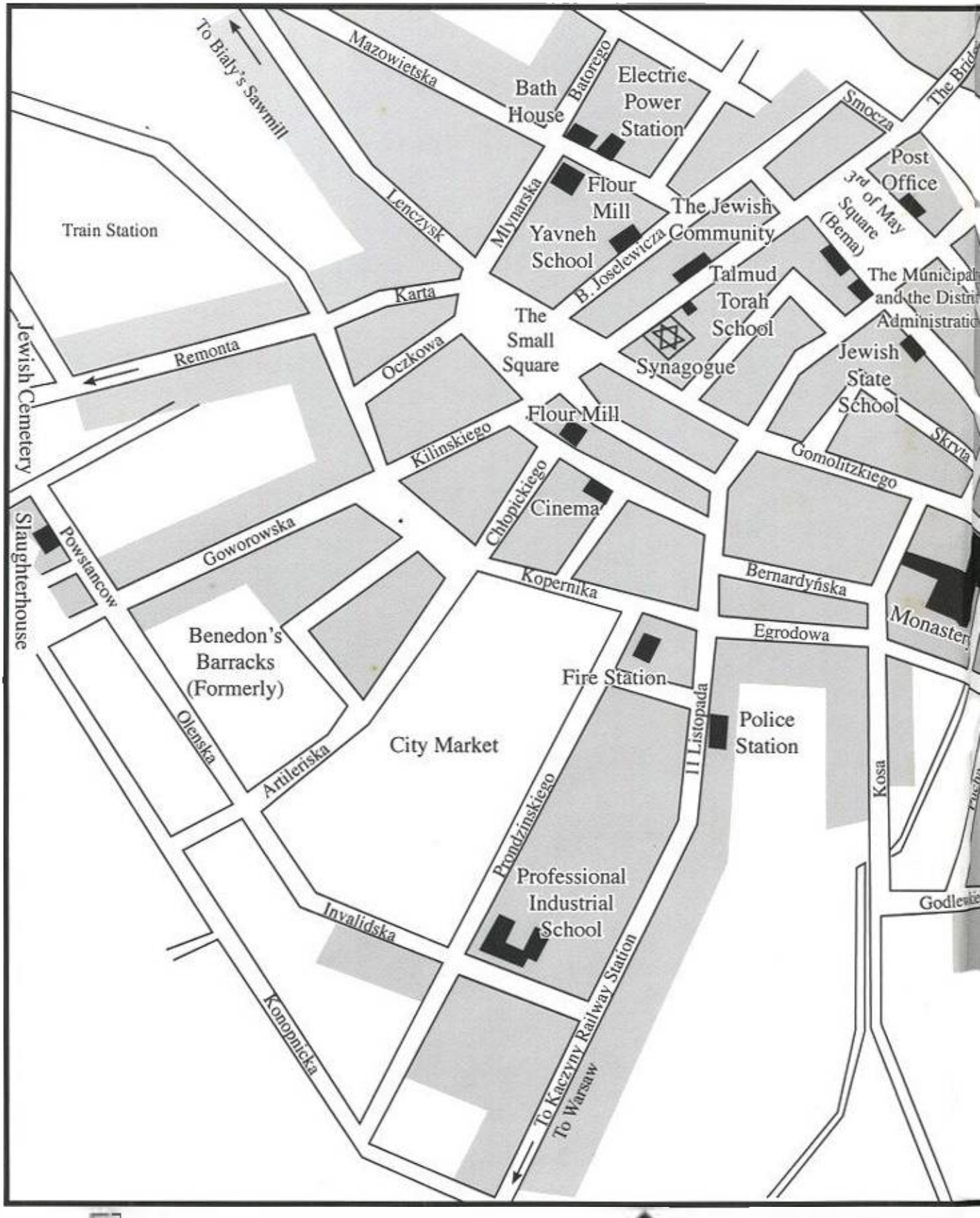
of things, and did much to arouse the attention of our townspeople to the construction of this holy memorial.

We also extend our appreciation and thanks to our townspeople in Israel and abroad, who wrote their articles for the book, and for their faithful work toward its publication. We extend special thanks to our townsman, the writer Mark Rakowski, for his great assistance, in addition to his articles, in obtaining historical material and photographs of the city after the Holocaust, which made an important contribution to the book.

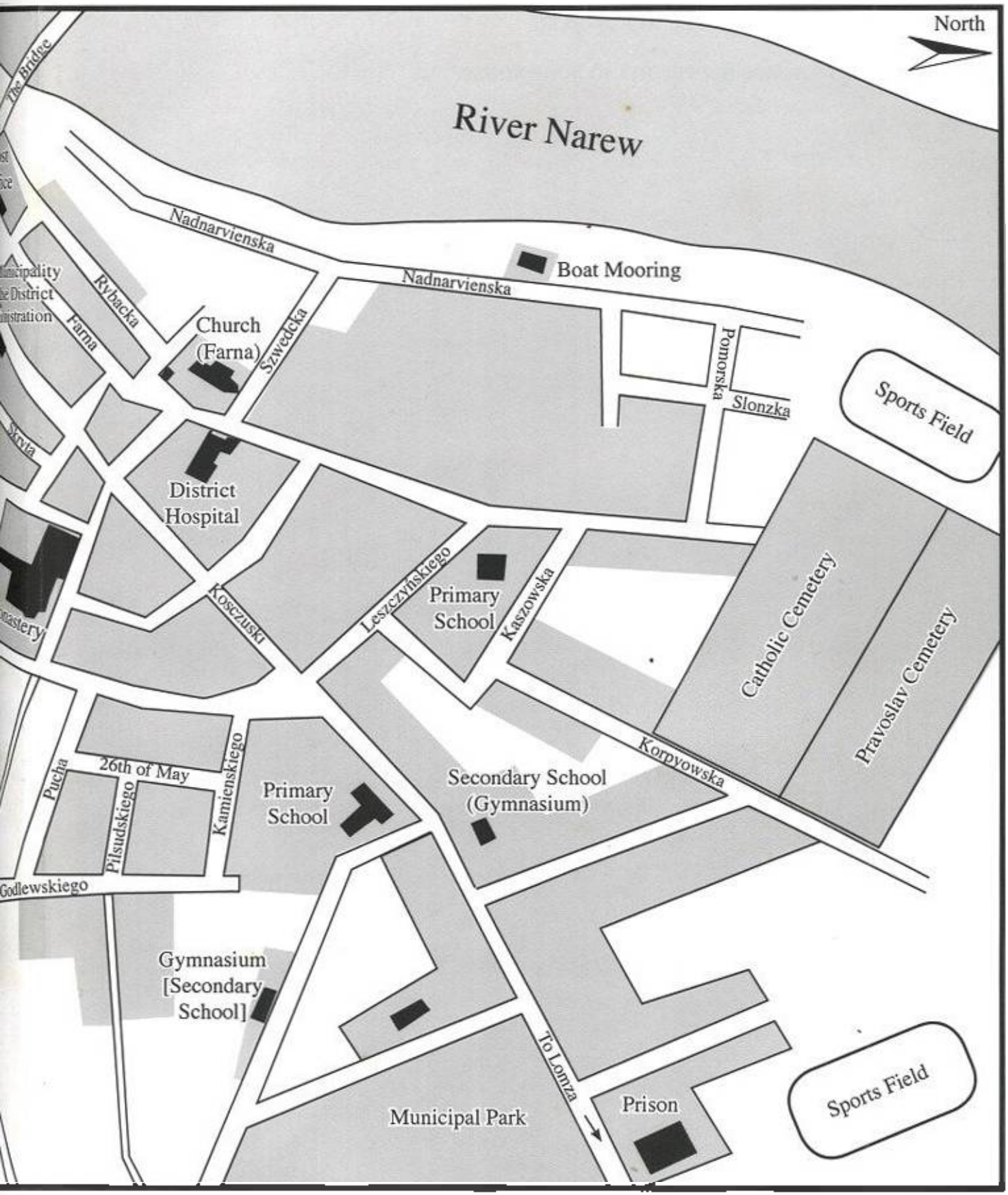
We thank all our townspeople, in Israel and abroad, who responded to our call and participated in the book; to all the members of the *Yizkor* Committees established on behalf of the book, wherever they were, and especially to those who placed themselves at the head of the activities for their enthusiasm for the project.

May the *Book of the Jewish Community in Ostrolenka* be a living memorial for our dear martyrs, for our city and the towns around it – all of which were destroyed – for all eternity!

Ostrolenka During the Period Between the Two World Wars (1914-1939)



Scale 1 : 10000



he city