

# RETURN FROM THE DEPTHS

Part 2

## Remembrances of World War II

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# Plashov

אדר תש"ג – אייר תש"ד

## The Agony of our גלות

I cry when I remember the terrifying scene of the fearsome final liquidation of the ghetto in Cracow. My eyes drench in tears when I again see the infants and the young children on the streets. How can I be consoled when again and again I see the beastly murderer from the SS, when I see him grab the two young daughters of שלמה בראננער ר' from their father's hands, throw them up in the air and shoot them.

שלמה וואדאוויצער – that's what they called him in Bobov – was always the head, the leader, the island of strength – whether it was the grand התונות in the חצר of the קדושת ציון, whether it was פסח when he ran the kitchen from where he fed more than 1,000 בחורים.

All who were fortunate to spend פסח with בן ציון ר' remember how hundreds of noble בחורים stood in a long line to take a cup of tea from שלמה וואדאוויצער. While they stood in line awaiting their turn, the good learners would be מפלפל in סוגיות, others would discuss ספרי חסידים while yet others would discuss anecdotes of צדיקים. Every once in a while the מנגנים would sing pleasant זמירות that the רבי had composed

At times they would sing a famous creation of מאנדלבוים ר' for which ר' יחזקאל ריטענבערג had written "איזהו מקומן":

Remember יידן the place, and what happened there, in ארץ ישראל, to which the בחורים waiting for a swallow of tea would add this chorus:

שלמה וואדאוויצער טייל, שלמה וואדאוויצער טייל, אוי אוי אוי

But from the moment when the beasts grabbed his daughters שלמה ר' was broken and smashed, his heart was torn to shreds until he too was murdered הי"ד.

Among the others murdered that ז' אדר were האראוויטץ ר' אלטר'ל the דזיקאווער ר' and וואדאוויצער ר' אשר אנשיל זעלטענרייך, רב, יחזקאל. And woe is me, worst of all, my personal tragedy, the murder of my dear brother.

Actually, we didn't have the opportunity to absorb the disaster, because the later צרות would blot out the earlier צרות. Because now we found ourselves in a different world, in the underworld גיהנום called Plashov. Roughly 20,000 Jews entered the "protection" of the evil, tyrant and master of cruelty, a גוי from Vienna who was then 33 years old SS Sturmfuhrer Amon Goeth.

This murderer would on a white horse pass through the camp every morning before breakfast, to find a Jew and to murder him. He wore the green uniform of the Waffen SS, and a Luger revolver hung loosely in his belt. His hands were swathed in white cloths lest they become dirtied with Jewish blood. And when it happened that they were defiled by a drop of blood from someone he murdered he would pull off the gloves and throw them away in disgust.

His blue eyes would dart this way and that until he found his קרבן. First he would torture him, and then he would kill him in utmost cruelty. When the camp's population became sparse because of his constant slaughter, he ordered that more groups of Jews be brought in from those who remained in surrounding ghettos.

There aren't enough words to describe the torment I suffered in the 15 months I lived in this nightmare. Every moment we had to remember and to concentrate not to meet the commandant. The moment he met any person, the person lost all hope of life. This vermin was responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent Jews.

When the war ended, the conquering Russians arrested Goeth. He was court-martialed by the Poles and hanged in Plashov's central square. This avenged us a little. But in truth if he were sentenced to a thousand deaths, this would not have been enough to make up for what he had done.

## Our arrival in Plashov

We arrived in Plashov on ז' אדר תש"ג (March 12, 1943). We were arranged into barracks in which there were three levels of wooden bunks. Every prisoner was given a straw mattress and two covers.

Every prisoner was also permitted to bring along one bundle. In my bundle I had my תפילין, my birth certificate, and \$1,100 that I brought from Vishnitze and many postcards that I had from my father in his elegant handwriting. I had received these post cards during the times when I stayed in Bobov from the first day of סליחות until after שמחת תורה. These cards were more valuable to me than anything else that I owned. They brought to mind pleasant memories of days of rest and peace, and were my only remaining connection to my father's house.

Oh how pleasant were those days in Bobov. Weekdays we sat in the בית המדרש and learned תורה, while on שבת and יום טוב we absorbed תורה and יראת שמים from the beautiful שיחות and הייליגע תפילות of our רבי the צ"ל and his קדושת ציון זצ"ל. His טיש'ן were full of luster and had the light of truth and charm and חכמה. חסידים surrounded him and thirstily listened to his every expression, and would dwell and give meaning and פירושים to every קוץ וקוץ.

I remember well the first time I travelled to Bobov in the סליחות days with a group of other boys. We were 12 or 13 years old, and weren't yet fit to sit in the בית המדרש all day. We climbed the mountains around the village and walked and walked hours long, while we enjoyed the pleasant view and the fresh air.

Once we left for a walk right after שחרית and returned late just before מנחה when it was almost night. The רבי noticed us, understood right away how we had spent the day and didn't approve. This extraordinary מהנך stretched out his hand to me and said only three words: שלום עליכם חנא! These words were enough to teach me effective מוסר on not to waste time on things that aren't important. I'm still affected by these words today, more than 50 years later.

With elegant and effective approaches like this, our רבי influenced a whole דור towards תורה and יראת שמים. Every one of his words, expressions and actions

descended deep into the hearts of all the boys and young men who surrounded him.

When the רבי was in Tchebin, I heard from ר' מיכלי קאלוואריער how he understood the פעולות of the רבי. This happened on שמחת תורה תרצ"ו.

The wealthy and respect אשר טימבערג of Cracow invited ר' משה'לי and ר' מיכלי who was the Rebbe's son in law to קידוש in אש'ר'ס hotel room in Tchebin. סטעמפל, who was the Rebbe's son in law to אשר מאיר וואגנר and my friend אשר ר' אשר knew me and invited us too and promised us that we would have an עונג רוחני.

רבי ר' מיכלי began to talk to us in his fiery way about the great קדושה of our רבי and his elevated מדריגות. He described the special זכות of our דור to have a מנהיג who raised the דגל of תורה וחסידות. He continued in this way for quite some time, until he called out loudly: "They sent us a hand from the heavens! Anyone who wants to take hold of the hand should take hold of it!" He jumped up from his chair and left בשיר ורקידה with tremendous שמחה.

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The kapos would wake us every morning at 4 o'clock. The frum Jews would get up earlier to לייג תפילין. We had only enough time for שמע and קרית שמע and שמונה עשרה. We davened the other תפילות while we worked.

Several minutes afterwards we were already standing on the Appel place in long rows. Every day, day after day through hot and cold, the Germans would count the prisoners carefully to be sure that no one had escaped. Then there was breakfast of black bread and a plate of water that they called soup. Once a month the prisoners were given a bread-card, and a piece of this card was torn off on every bread distribution, so that no one got more than a set amount. Then everyone went to his work place.

I've already mentioned that Plashov was built on top of a Jewish בית הקברות on Jeruzaleska Street. As soon as we arrived in Plashov, the Germans forced us to smash מצבות into little bits. This was עבודת פרך. The Germans used the stones to make roads in the camp.

Frum Jews ate only the bread they gave us and nothing else. When workers left the camp to their workplaces, they bought eggs, vegetables and the like from the Polish peasants.

It happened once that commandant Goeth ימ"ש stood at the gates to the camp when prisoners were returning after work. He noticed that their pockets were bulging. After a thorough search he found food and also money, and his anger exploded. He ordered that every second person in the group be shot to death. He summoned Ukrainian police to carry out the order.

There happened to be there a high ranking ordnungs dienst – a simple but good hearted person from Kshanov whose name was משה פיינער. When he saw the bitter and unfortunate fate that awaited the prisoners, he turned to Goeth and said “You want them to die so easily? First, they need to be beaten!” He grabbed his horse whip – all ordnungs diensten carried a horse whip – and started to beat to the right and the left with murderous force.

Goeth very much enjoyed watching one Jew torturing others, and a smile spread over his filthy lips. משה פיינער continued whipping with strength – and at the same time he screamed in Yiddish in a voice that wasn't his: גייטס! אנטלויפטס! – run; go; spread out. He chased after them on all sides until they had all run for their lives. So did this simple person save 25 men from certain death.

Several months later Goeth decided that it was time to rid himself from this משה. One morning we heard that משה פיינער was lying dead near the electrified barbed wire at the camp's boundaries, הי"ד.



## The רב from שידלאוו

We celebrated פורים a week after we arrived in Plashov. There was a long corridor that ran through the barrack. Several hundred persons gathered there to hear the מגילה. The מגילה had been brought into the camp in one of the bundles that we brought with us. Other ספרי קודש and חפצי קדושה had also come into the camp the same way. So many people gathered in the barrack that day that the floor broke from the overload.

I think that the רב of שידלאוו was אלימלך ארי' ראבינאוויטש בעל קורא. He was the son of the ר' שלמה חנוך זצ"ל and the younger brother of ר' דאמסק from כנסת יהזקאל who was the last רבי of דאמסק.

I had the זכות of being with this very special person throughout my time in Plashov. He was a sincere person, a צדיק in his behavior and a פיקח with a straight-thinking mind. He was always available for wise advice, and encouraged us when we needed encouragement. He sat in the barrack על התורה והעבודה all day, as if he were still in his city and the times were normal.

One morning on the Appel, the רשע Goeth decided to select 25 older Jews – including the רב from שידלאוו, and to give them 25 lashes with a whip. Two Ukrainians took turns to beat him with a leather whip with all their strength and with great cruelty. Goeth ordered the רב from שידלאוו to count the number of lashes with them aloud.

The רב from שידלאוו was a weak person, besides being diabetic and having a heart condition. He couldn't tolerate the pain and cried out. His screams bothered Goeth, and he said, "You're screaming? Another 25!"

When they were finished the רב couldn't stand. We had to carry him to the barrack and lay him on his bunk. So he lay several weeks in agony. He would groan and murmur to himself "ראה עניי ועמלי ושא לכל הטאתי".

The רב had three exceptional sons, especially the two eldest. The personality of the eldest was similar to the רב. He was quiet and pleasant, and would come and go without fuss. The second son was the opposite: brimming

with energy, friendliness and warmth. Both stood out in their own ways. They were the sort of men who deserved to be our רבנים and leaders. I think that the sons were killed in Auschwitz. The רב from שידלאוו himself was killed in the Matthausen extermination camp הי"ד.

## ע"ה Rav Nochum Zaltz

After we finished smashing the מצבות, they arranged us in work groups called work-commandos. When I saw that they were arranging a group of workers to manufacture brushes under the supervision of ר' נחום זאלטץ of Cracow I right away placed myself in line, because ר' נחום had davened in our שטיבל and I knew him to be a decent and good hearted person. I think it's right to devote several lines to the memory of this precious man, because his children and grandchildren all died during the war.

Rav Nochum was born in the city of Yavrov in 1880. After he was married he settled in Vishnitze and lived there until World War I, where he knew my father's family well since my father also lived in Vishnitze until World War I. After World War I Rav Nochum moved to Cracow where he and his bother משה opened a small brush factory.

The factory stood near the בית המדרש of ר' ארון on the הויכע גאס. At noon a group of בעלי מדרגה would daven, and when they were short of a מנין they'd invite ר' נחום to join them as the tenth. While there, ר' נחום noticed and was drawn to ר' קלמלי קלאסנער who was a very well known חסידישער יוד of a very special kind. ר' נחום took it upon himself to supply ר' קלמלי with all of his economic needs. When ר' קלמלי traveled to באבוב he would take along ר' נחום. And so it developed that ר' נחום became closely attached to our רבי ר' בן ציון זצ"ל.

This isn't the place to talk at length about the qualities of ר' קלמלי. I'll just mention one remark that ר' בן ציון made when ר' קלמלי died in 1935: the זכות of ר' קלמלי protected all of Cracow.

After ר' נחום became close to ר' קלמלי he began to daven in our שטיבל on the הויכע גאס.

ר' נחום heard one particular comment from ר' בן ציון that made a very strong impression on him. One time ר' נחום pushed others away so that he could כאפ שיריים. Our רבי called to him and said "why do you push the others away, push

others forward, and you'll both have." The remark entered the depths of his heart, and it affected his behavior for the rest of his life.

All those who knew him realized this. He worried first about others and worried last about himself. When the Jews were expelled from Cracow and were forced into the ghetto in Podgurz, ר' נחום, who by then was supplying brushes to the Germans, moved his factory to the ghetto. The Germans demanded that only those who were formally registered for work in the ghetto could remain there. But ר' נחום gave protection to all he needed it. He brought in hundreds of employees, including רבנים and אנשי מעלה, even if they didn't know a thing about brushes. This put ר' נחום in mortal danger every day.

In this way he saved hundreds of lives, who later established new families בישראל. He believed earnestly that in this זכות he too remain alive. After all, the רבי had told him: push others forward, and you'll both have.

He lost his wife and his children during the war, and wasn't זוכה afterwards to establish a family again. This didn't disturb him from being עובד ד' בשמחה and from being משמח אלקים ואנשים. He died in New York on ט' אדר א' תשל"ג at the age of 92. He ordered that on his מצבה there not be written any compliments or praises, only this: "an old man who faithfully served the חסיד and פריש – ר' קלונימוס קלמן – קראקא קלאסנער from קראקא.

## **ר' נחום In the shack of**

When the Germans liquidated the ghetto, they brought all machinery and equipment to the camp in Plashov, including the factory of ר' נחום. About 260 people worked in the factory under his supervision. There were three shifts.

Most of the workers were frum and חסידים. I'll mention several names that I remember: the רב from שידלאוו and his three sons; ר' ישעי' זעליג מיללער from Cracow; ר' חיים; ר' יחזקאל and ר' אלעזר and his sons בייטש the רב from רב ישכר בעריש היילפרין קופערמאן; my cousin שמואל פאלגר who died after the war in ארץ ישראל; ר' נתן דוד; ר' זילברשטיין who after the war was a משפיע in the תל אביב גערער ישיבה; ר' אלימלך בירנבוים; and ר' שמלקא ליפשיץ who after the war was a משפיע in the תל אביב גערער ישיבה.

Our workplace was also our בית המדרש. There were ספרים and סידורים and חומשים. We davened בציבור while we worked.

We barely had to do any work on שבת. We sat at our tables with the brushes – and also with סידורים and חומשים. We davened quietly, and afterwards everyone did his own: one was מעביר סדרה, another was עוסק בתורה or quietly sang שומרי תורה or melodies from צדיקים of the past. Those Jews who weren't שומרי תורה didn't interfere with us during the davening. They sat in a group by their own and sang nationalist and other songs and so on.

Our ordnungs dienst was a kapo by the name of Gershtler. A good and quiet middle aged person, who generally didn't bother us. When a German would approach on שבת he would alert us, and we'd take our brushes in hand as if we were very much involved in our work.

Once a terrible thing happened during the work. A son in law of the daughter of ר' נחום – his first name was אברמ'לי but I don't remember his family name, was one of the very special Bobover young men in Cracow. He was a בן תורה, and noble in his behavior to the highest degree. He would always remind me of my קאנענגיסער ע"ה.

אברמ'לי that day needed to go outside to relieve himself. The rule was that nobody could leave the shack without permission from the kapo. אברמ'לי

approached the kapo Gershtler to get permission to step out, but he found that the kapo had dozed off and was asleep. The sensitive אברמ'לי didn't have it within him to wake the kapo. He decided to leave without permission and to come back quickly.

The moment he stepped out an SS guard confronted and seized him. He pulled אברמ'לי into the shack to the great alarm of everybody. The noise awoke Gershtler and he quickly assumed the role of a kapo who was faithfully doing his job. The German asked him if he had given permission to אברמ'לי to leave. Gershtler answered "no" because he didn't know what had happened and besides he was afraid that they'd arrest him for falling asleep on the job. The German then took אברמ'לי outside and shot him הי"ד

### **תש"ג (1943) of פסח**

פסח was approaching and all the חרדים were concerned about what they'd eat. To this point none of us had eaten anything that wasn't כשר. We didn't want to eat פסח on חמץ unless it was an absolute נפש פיקוח.

For this let the name of that good man, שאול הוטטערער (later in Antwerp), be remembered לטוב. He had the סייעתא דשמיא to supply food that was לפסח to close to 2,000 Jews.

This is what happened in his own words (later published in his ספר "ימי שאול")

When פסח was approaching I met with the רב from שידלאוו and told him that as of now there was nothing that we would be able to eat for פסח because the only food that we were given that was absolutely כשר without a שאלה was the black bread they gave us every morning. The רב from שידלאוו then davened that we find some way to eat כשר food on פסח.

Eight days before פסח I noticed a tall man with a white coat who was walking around the camp. It struck me that this might be a Jew from Katowitz named Hans whom my father and I met earlier in the war. He had no concept of what it meant to be Jewish. He had worked for the SS when they liquidated one of the local villages. He then returned to the ghetto in Cracow and was ultimately expelled to Plashov on ז' אדר.

I loudly called towards him "Hans!" He turned towards me. After some conversation he remembered me and mentioned that here he was working for the head German SS supervisor of food distribution in the camp.

I saw that a ישועה might be developing. I asked him if he had a good relationship with that German. He said "almost like a חבר."

I explained to him our concern about the coming יום טוב and proposed that he act as a middleman to a business deal between me and the SS chief. I would give him bread-cards for the 8 days of פסח – which were worth large sum – and

he would give us potatoes and beets for the eight days and also let us use the kitchen for those days to cook the potatoes and make borscht with the beets.

I told this to the רב from שידלאוו. He said עולם של רבוננו maybe we'll yet be זוכה to have a כשר'ע יום טוב.

The deal in fact worked out well and we were able to כשר the pots and cook in the kitchen.

The רבנים in the camp were also מתיר to eat קטניות in the camp that פסח. bought a kilo of lima beans for the same פסח.

For פסח of the next year (1944) we couldn't get potatoes. We ate corn instead.



## ***מצות in the Camp***

In the darkness of Plashov, where they robbed us of any shred of human decency, there were many groups of us who baked מצות for פתח secretly. All this was done in great danger. The Germans would kill anyone caught, no questions asked.

Here too my friend שאול ר' played a leading role. Two גערער בחורים who slept on his bunk worked in the camp's electricity plant. They were nephews of one of the camp's chief ordnungs diensten, who was a young man from Lodz named Finkelstein. Shaul asked them if they could possibly make an electric oven to bake מצות. They got permission from their uncle and created an oven from a large block of tin, on which they arranged electric wires on both sides. The oven was large enough to bake eight מצות at a time.

In exchange for some bread ration cards, a bakery ordnungs dienst named Leibovitch gave him two sacks of flour. A group then worked on baking מצות the whole night of בדיקת חמץ. משה ר' kneaded the dough. This was a difficult job for the whole group – after working on מצות on night they had to work “normally” the whole next day.

To cover expenses that included the cost of the flour, the kneading and baking equipment and the bribes that had to be paid to many people, the group established a price of 10 zlotys per מצה. I paid 40 zlotys for four מצות. I used two מצות for the first סדר and the other two מצות for the next סדר.

On the night of the first סדר, when we returned from work, we laid on our bunks with the מצות and said the הגדה by heart. What a סדר it was! I can't describe the feelings that stormed in me. The past and present were roared through my head in confusion. The happy סדרים in my father's house together with my brothers and sisters and their dear children. The brilliant סדרים in באבוב when 1,000 בחורים sat with the קדושת ציון. Our present צרה and captivity, deep in the mud of וימררו את חייהם.

On the first day of חול המועד פסח the ordnungs diensten were ordered to arrest 10 prominent רבנים. Late at night the kapos charged into the barracks and seized whomever they found. The רבנים included ר' שם קלינגברג from Zalositz and ר' נתן קופרוואסר in our city Cracow, a grandson of the זיזיטשוב צדיקים and קאמרנא, and was considered one of the outstanding מקובלים of the דור. His תורה were printed in the שם אהלי.

The 10 רבנים who were selected were taken to the field of killings, and were arranged in row before a German firing squad, for no reason. We called those קדושים the עשרה הרוגי מלכות הי"ד.

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After פסח my friend שאול הוטטערער did another business deal with Hans. Hans gave to his SS supervisor all of the טריפה meat that was given to the frum Jews, and in exchange they gave us oil. The camp's kitchen gave us 10 large vats of hot "soup" every day. שאול through Hans arranged that two of these vats be used only for כשר food. Anybody who wanted to could eat from the כשר vats that were under פרום supervision. I with משה ראבי [who later lived in Williamsburg] gave out lunch to our friends from the כשר kitchen. Throughout our stay in Plashov we ate only כשר'ס.

There were some young married men and בחורים – for example ר' ישעיה ניימאן – who didn't want to rely on the כשר kitchen because they were worried that the oil wasn't למהדרין. They arranged their own food from what Polish peasants brought to them while these young men and בחורים were working in the fields outside the camp. They gave the peasants gold and silver ornaments, and the peasants gave them food in exchange.

In Bobov we knew that ר' ישעיה was a תלמיד חכם. He would have a daily שיעור in מנחת חינוך with ר' יחזקאל ראטענבערג. But that he was a בעל מדרגה we realized only in Plashov.

We weren't in the same Plashov area, but I heard lots about his outstanding behavior and care for others in those difficult days. He worked in a

paper factory called "Papier Gemeinschaft." The Kapos and the management of the company recognized that he was a distinguished person, and treated him with respect. They didn't demand that he work on Shabbos. Several of our friends from באבוב sat with him on שבת afternoon. He would give precious talks full of אמונה and בטחון. He was murdered on ט"ו אב תש"ד in Matthausen together with his only son ישראל יצחק הי"ד.

### ***A Miracle***

Although I worked in ר' נחום'ס factory most of my time in Plashov, there were several times that the Germans needed extra hands for other work and they drafted men for these jobs. In the beginning of winter in 1943, the Germans decided to dig trenches around the barracks to see to it that they wouldn't become flooded from rain and melting snow. I was also summoned to work on this job. They ordered us to dig and then load the dirt on wagons. This wasn't a pleasant job. The camp was built on a Jewish עולם. As we dug we found bones of people who had been buried there, and we had to load them on the wagons.

There were also times when I had to do forced labor in the fields outside the camp under the supervision of a Wehrmacht soldier. As we worked, Polish peasants constantly approached us with bread, butter and other foods that they sold to us for money and precious stones. When the Germans would catch any prisoner who had done this, they would shoot him for dealing in contraband as I've already mentioned. Still, many of us dared to buy food from the peasants to relieve the hunger that dominated the camp. I think that the German who guarded us had a spark of רחמנות, and he looked the other way when we desperately bought food.

Once when we returned through the gate after work, two SS soldiers announced that they're making a search for contraband. We trembled because this search meant certain death for the whole group, because almost everyone had hidden under his clothing food or other things he had bought. We froze in place while we silently davened: "אבא ד' הושיעה נא!"

Suddenly our guard protested with force: "I will not permit this search! These people do physical labor, and so what if some of them bring in something light to help them work so faithfully?!"

The words were said with such gravity that they made an impression on the sadists. They allowed us into the camp without a search. This was a rare and exceptional **נס**.

### ***Physical abuse and shame***

The number of Jews in the camp declined further and further. Masses died from lack of food, combined with the difficult work they were forced to do. Among those who expired was my boyhood friend **מאיר ראטענבערג** the son of my teacher and **גאון ר' מענדילי** the **רבי**. He had always been weak and sickly, and in the end he lost all strength and died in the arms of **דוד זילברשטיין**.

In those times one could test the true internal **מדות** of a person. There were those who did everything possible to help their **חברים**. But to our pain and regret there were also those who became cruel like **יענים במדבר**.

The memory of one of these is etched into me. He was from a **רבני'שע** family, the grandson of one of the prominent **רבי'ס**. His name began with **ר**. His cruelty was unbelievable. He didn't hesitate from beating friends mercilessly. Woe is to my eyes from for having seen many events from him and others like him. They lost all feelings of **גומלי חסדים** that the **חכמים** said belong to every Jew, and all for shadow of a doubt that this might save them or give them a whiff of imaginary power.

Many bodies also fell through the murderous behavior of commandant Goeth whose cruelty knew no bounds. He drew enjoyment from torturing us. Day after day he would order a number of men, sometimes 50 and sometimes even 200 or 300, and to whip them 25 times with a horse whip. The soldiers carried out his orders promptly and happily, and Jewish blood ran like water. Many, many couldn't bear the pain and the wounds and died on the spot.



## ***Selections***

It often happened that mid-day all the prisoners were summoned to the Appel-square, where they selected men to be sent to Auschwitz. How can I describe the nervous strain of all of us. Men were selected from my right and from my left, and the terror that I too would be selected was fearsome. The Germans understood that there would be those who wouldn't want to participate in the selections and would hide in the barracks. For this there was a standing order: All found in the barracks during the Appel would be shot to death.

Once I simply didn't have the strength to bear the tension of the selection. My friend בירנבוים מילך decided to hide in the barracks under the bottom bunk with our hands and feet stretched out on the ground. We heard a kapo come in to search for hidiers, but "הכה בסגורים" and he didn't notice us.

As I remember this event, I found it hard to resist a smile. We were hovering there under the bunk at risk of certain death if we were caught. Still, in that very מצב, as we lay there for quite some time spread out under the hard earth, I went into a solid and very deep sleep with a powerful snore.

I think this shows how used we had become to live day to day with the risk of death, until we could drowse with no problems.

Another time we decided not to go to the selection, but were afraid to hide in the barracks. We found a hidden nook outside and there we hid throughout the whole selection. But my world darkened when I realized that our hiding place was in the direct line of sight of the guard-tower, on which a German soldier stood armed with rifles to be sure that all was in order. Our blood froze in our veins as we davened that he not notice us.

Again we were סייעתא דשמיא to זוכה, and ב"ה he didn't notice us. But always when I re-picture this event I wonder whether maybe the guard noticed us, and that for some reason he had רהמנות on us and pretended not to see us.

## ***Tied together in אהבה***

I will forever remember שבת on תמוז תש"ג כ"א. We were sitting at table in the factory of נחום ר'. We had just finished שחרית and מוסף and each of us was doing his own thing. This one said תהלים that one read a ספר, a third sang שבת זמירות to himself.

Suddenly a German soldier jumped in through the window. He was so drunk that he didn't come in through the door as a normal person would. He grabbed the first four men who were at hand and pulled them outside. One of them was ר' שלמה ר' ישעי' זעליג מיללער of Cracow, the father of my friend ר' שלמה.

ר' ישעי' זעליג realized that he and the three others were on their way to be murdered. He immediately pulled out his גארטל that only a moment ago he had taken off when he finished davening. He planned to put in on by way of preparing for the מצוה of קידוש השם that was approaching to him.

But in this he wasn't concerned only for himself. He also wanted to be מזכה the three others, that they too should be זוכה to be קידוש השם while wearing a גארטל. In the commotion and tumult he shouted to them to join him together in the גארטל. And so all three were shot tied together באהבה while they said ד' אלקינו ד' אחד.

Afterwards a group of soldiers broke into the factory and with the help of two Ukrainians hit each one of us 25 times with a leather strap.

All this by way of having a good time after several drinks in honor of the week end.

## **ימים נוראים תש"ד**

אלול approached, a full year after my father was murdered. In the barracks we already heard the melodies of ימי סליחות and ימים נוראים. These תנועות reminded always remind me of the pre-dawn hours of the first day of סליחות in Cracow. The voice of the שמש of the אלטער שול echoed in the quiet streets as he banged on the doors of the houses in the הויכער גאס as he sang the ancient call: יודעלעך יודעלעך טייערע ליעבערע זיסע ברידערלעך שייט'ס אויף שטייט'ס אויף פאר עבודת הבורא

On ראש השנה more than 200 men davened in ר' נחום'ס barrack, and we were זוכה to hear תקיעות quietly. On יום כפור we also davened בצבור כל נדרי, and this time almost all those in the barracks joined, even those who didn't join in תפלות the rest of the year.

Several persons were appointed to stand outside as guards to alert the rest. When Germans approached they shouted זעקס. This was a code word for "danger" that we had set up in advance. When the word was sounded we put away our סידורים and מחזורים, and we grabbed hair bristles in one hand and the iron needles we used to twist the bristles into brushes with the other hand.

But the sound of our תפלות drifted out to one German who was patrolling outside. He stormed in with fury, and in a loud voice thundered "Is this a workplace or a synagogue!" We trembled on the results once news of our doings were reported to the camp leaders. To our great surprise we later heard nothing about this crime.

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There was an "action" on יום כפור morning. This was the German's מנהג – to make actions on יום טוב to add to our יום טוב. They broke into our barracks and grabbed one person to be "קרבן היום". As they took him outside, he looked at us with sad eyes as if saying "Nu, what can we do?" His distraught eyes oppress me to this day.



I then remembered the song "לידעלע" that they were then singing in Galicia. שבת איז הייליג וואיל " גראם used the melody for his famous ר' יהזקאלי ראטענבערג) איז אונזער חלק, מזמור שיר ליום השבת.)

My mother would sing this melody quietly while she was rocking my cradle when I was very little. The words to the song were added after the anti-Semitic Drefus affair: "ווייסטו דרייפוס פארוואס דיר דאס קומט, ווייל די ביסט א יידעלע"

But this slaughter on the morning of יום כפור didn't finish the עבודת היום. Commandant Goeth ordered all those who wore eyeglasses to leave the roll call formation and move to the side. Soldiers stood at the ready to make sure that nobody pulled off his glasses. That day several hundred eyeglass wearers were shot outside the camp. Among those caught up in this selection was the excellent גאון of the תלמיד יעקל, who was יעקב אייכנשטיין, חריף ובקי, בחרור from טשעבין.

My friends in the barrack told me that יעקל would by heart learn בחברותא with ר' אלטר'ל the son of Zhikov and the רב הצעיר of מענדלי הורוויץ "neighbors" heard them reviewing תוספות in יבמות in the middle of the night.

Then I thanked רבש"ע for his many kindnesses. I realized how מעז יצא מתוק I remembered the powerful beating I got from a Polish policeman on that black day in אלול, when I and my brother in law אברמ'לי ענגעלשטיין were captured in the bunker we had dug in Bochnia.

In his temper tantrum he honored me with strong slaps on the cheek that smashed my glasses into bits. I hadn't been able to fix them or buy new ones as צרות afterwards flowed quickly one after the other, first in Rakowitz, then in the ghetto in Cracow, and from there to Plashov. Only now was it clear to me that those beatings saved me from certain deaths. How great are the מעשים of הקב"ה.

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As סוכות neared we were able with a lot of effort to arrange a כשירה for ourselves. Near our shack there was a work group that made mattresses. Many

mattresses were placed outside. We put three of them near the wall of our shack, and places small boards on top for סכך.

To be מקיים this מצוה was a dangerous operation, so we acted with speed. One of us stood watch to make sure that no Germans were approaching while we all stood in a row to take our turn to go into the סוכה. We each crawled in, said the ברכה of לישב בסוכה, made a שהחיינו, ate a כזית and left quickly. Given the situation the סוכה was בא'טעמ'ט "גאנץ בא'טעמ'ט".

## ***A Change for the Better***

At the start of winter of תש"ד word spread that the Germans were retreating on all fronts. We heard that the Allied armies were strengthening their attacks on the Germans: the Russians were pounding the Germans in the East, had pushed them out of Russia and were preparing to invade Poland. The Americans had begin their advance into Italy. American and British planes rained thousands and thousands of bombs on German cities day and night, causing fearful destruction. These reports breathed life into us, and gave us hope that the end of the war was approaching and that we might even survive to leave this גיהנום as free men.

The reports took on more meaning for us when a high ranking general visited Plashov in January 1944. Preparations for his arrival were evident in every corner of the camp. Groups of prisoners were assigned to clean the barracks where we worked and the barracks where we slept. The chief Kapo, a בליעל named Wilhelm Chilowitz ran from one barrack to the other and warned that everyone had to see to it that the reception of the general succeed with honor and splendor.

The day came and the general arrived with all of his officers and aides, and he inspects all that was happening in the camp. When he came into our brush factory we all stood up in his honor. Our kapo (I think this was the Gershtler I already mentioned) approached him with his riding whip and announced with respect "259 prisoners work in this barrack." The general asked him "Please tell me , what is that in your hands?" The kapo answered "This is a riding whip to supervise the workers and to get them used to working properly." The general asked him "Are they horses who need riding whips to guide them?" The kapo dropped the whip.

When Chilowitz heard what the general had said, he right away sent a special messenger to tell the other kapos not to hold riding whips when the general visited. From that day on the Germans in the camp stopped shooting Jews for no reason, and eased off on their cruelty.

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It pains me to tell you that even after the no-reason shootings stopped, a friend of mine with very special מדות was killed in חנוכה תש"ד.

On that cold morning, after they counted us on the Appel-square and we stood ready to go to our workplaces, they announced an unusual order. We were to march towards the fields where the boundaries of the camp were marked with barbed wire. We arranged ourselves into lines of six men each and so 6,000 of us marched to the field.

A German then said "Alles links kikken" – all look to the left! In front of us was a pole on which two Jews were hanged, with a sign on top of them that said this was a punishment for their having tried to escape.

We knew both of them. One was a באבוב'ער חסיד from Amsene. The second was a בחור who was my friend גרינבערג מרדכי from the ישיבה עץ חיים ד'באבוב in Podgurz, a תלמיד חכם וירא שמים and was also a nephew of the wife of טענדארסקי now of Boro Park.

These קדושים were so נזהר in מאכלות אסורות that they would eat nothing from our כשר kitchen. Every day before dawn they would visit the fields near the barbed wire. They would dig out potatoes and cook the potatoes themselves. They would share the potatoes with ר' ישע'ל ניימן. That morning the two had been seized and were shot.

I heard a fearful thing from שאול הוטטערער about the murder of our מרדכי. שאול told me that on the night of יום כפור he dreamed that he was walking in the camp with מרדכי. An SS soldier shot מרדכי and ordered שאול to bury him. While he was burying מרדכי he sensed that someone was pulling his leg. שאול woke up from his dream and he saw מרדכי in front of him, motioning that it was late and time to daven. שאול was agitated by his dream and mentioned it to the רב from שידלאוו. The רב answered: "We need to daven for him."

מרדכי cried to שאול before חנוכה that during the night someone had stolen all of his money. שאול told this to the רב from שידלאוו. The רב was happy about the news, since "עני חשוב כמת" and maybe this was the meaning of the nightmare.

That חנוכה when we were marched past the hanged bodies, שאול hadn't yet recognized who they were. An SS soldier then ordered him and another person each to take the bodies and to load them on small wagons ("totchkes") and to bury them on a hill where all murdered persons were buried. שאול picked up one bodies and was stunned to see that it was his מרדכי.

And he added that when he picked up מרדכי pictures of ר' בן ציון the רבי from באבוב fell out of מרדכי's pockets.

I remained in Plashov until אייר תש"ד (May 1944).

# חורבן אונגארען

In the Spring of 1944 the Germans began to destroy the Jewish presence in Hungary. You might have thought that when the Third Reich was beginning to collapse, and the Germans were suffering defeats on all fronts, the pace of destruction for Jews would slow down. Quite the opposite, with all their energy and power the Germans continued to sacrifice the Jews. In the space of 48 days, from April 16 until July 9, thousands of ancient Jewish קהילות were uprooted. More than a half million Jews, men, women and children, were sent to the גיהנום of Auschwitz, where they were killed על קידוש השם

Among the innocents whose blood was spilled as water were most of the family of my father in law רב יחזקאל שרגא הכהן שווארץ ז"ל, and with him my mother in law, their six daughters, their young son, and their son in law. Only two branches remain from the entire family – my wife מחלה and her brother ר' יחיאל מיכל הכהן.

I want to devote one chapter to explain to you the glory of this very special family. I also want to mark down at least a small, small part of the waves of צרות that overwhelmed them from when they were expelled from their home in Győr – Raab in German – in Hungary, and their final journey to Auschwitz. The words that I'll tell you are those of my wife. She will also mention the נסים about her escape, so that later generations will know the wonders and kindness of השם הברך who saved her from the lions.

### ***The German conquest***

On שבת כ"ג אדר תש"ד (March 18, 1944) the German army conquered all of Hungary. German soldiers entered our city the next morning. They took over all government buildings and offices. They met almost no opposition. The Americans bombed our city only once – on the morning of the fourth day of חול המועד פסח.

My parents asked that my brother מיכל rush home from ישיבה in the city of Papa. They wanted our family to be together in these desperate times.

Decrees against Jews flowed rapidly. They separated us from the rest of the population. Jews were forbidden from doing business or to own stores. All

and ישיבות were shut. My father could no longer give שיעורים to his תלמידים. He stayed home and learned himself all day.

After several days we began feeling pangs of hunger. There wasn't enough food for the family. The older children gave up their portions for the infants and the very young. The younger children couldn't understand what had changed. My heart aches when I remember how my sister הנה'לע pleaded for bread. My mother almost went out of her mind from grief ר"ל. The older children stood around the child's crib while she ate, hoping desperately that הנה'לע would leave something for them when she finished eating.

In those days the local priests announced that every Jew who changed his religion would be given a certificate that would protect him from the Germans. To our dismay many Jews grabbed on to this slender and broken reed, mostly from the reform "neologues," and converted out of a futile hope that their fate would be different than those of the other Jews.

My father watched all this with disgust and contempt. He said of the משומדים: "the mice are running." I don't have to tell you that these certificates accomplished nothing. The Germans thoroughly investigated the ancestry of even full-fledged גוים whose grandparents were משומדים, and murdered them with other Jews. In truth they never even considered the certificates to be more than scraps of paper.

My father devoted a lot of time to encourage and strengthen hearts that were broken by those difficult days. Morning and night people would visit us in our cramped apartment to ask his advice and to get his opinion on our bitter situation. They came to absorb the warmth of his personality, and to arm themselves with his wisdom. His personality, his penetrating blue eyes, his full and plentiful beard, and the pleasant smile that always hovered on his lips, all combined to bring out happiness and a zest for life in all who met him.

I have fresh in my memory the times when ר' אלעזר אלי' געשטעטנער came to talk to my father. Everyone called him "Lali." He was very rich, a millionaire, and owned a large factory that made bricks. Right after the German conquest, they



seized his factory and all of its equipment, supplies and inventory. He was afraid to sit in his house because he suspected that the Germans were searching for the wealthy Jews. In our house he felt safe because he knew that we weren't counted among the wealthy.<sup>1</sup>

On one of his visits Lali sat at the table and discussed the news with my father. The children were walking around in torn clothing. We couldn't send the clothing to seamsters for mending because the seamsters were also forbidden to do their work.

Lali noticed that one of my sisters was barefoot. She didn't wear her torn shoes in the house. Lali looked at her sadly and told my mother "Please, send of your daughters to my house and I'll arrange for a pair of shoes." My mother was too proud to accept gifts from others and said with a bitter heart, "It's all right, we won't be needing shoes any more." When Mr. Gestetner rose to leave, he groaned "Rab Yecheskel, we're already in the lion's mouth, all that's left is for him to bite!"

We still spent שבועות in our house. We didn't know that the end was drawing near very quickly.

After the war the murderous plan of the Germans was published. They had divided Hungary into five regions. The first was Carpathia, where Jews were liquidated from April 4 until June 7. The second was Transylvania that was liquidated from May 4 until June 7. The third stretched from the northern edge of Budapest to the German border, which was scheduled for June 6 until June 17. This area included our city Raab.

The fourth region was to the east of the Duna River, from June 29 until June 30. The fifth was the area to the west of the Duna River, from June 29 until July 9. Their plan was next to exterminate the Jews in the capital, Budapest, but with רחמי שמים most Jews in that city were saved.

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<sup>1</sup> Another wealthy family, in the textile business, hid many bundles of fabric in our house, where they didn't expect the Germans to search. My mother told my sister Yehudis to use some of the fabric to sew clothing for the children. Later, after we had arrived in Auschwitz, I saw a pile of clothing left over from those who had died. Among the clothing, I recognized those that Yehudis had made for my sisters.

שבועות that year fell on May 28 and 29. About two weeks later, on June 11, the first transport from our city left for Auschwitz. The second transport left on June 18. On it was our family.

## ***My father***

My father, the most precious of men, ר' יחזקאל הכהן שווארץ ע"ה, was born in the village of Tissa-Dab in Hungary in March 1899 to his father הרבני החסיד ר' אליעזר מנחם ע"ה. His father named him יחזקאל שרגא after the רבי שינאווער, who had died two months earlier on ט' טבת תרנ"ט.

ר' דוד שמחה<sup>2</sup> was born in 1849 to his father ר' אליעזר מנחם then was Majerczyk<sup>3</sup> When ר' דוד שמחה was 13 years old, he left Zaloshitz out of fear that he would be drafted into the Russian army under the Cantonisten military program. He wandered from place to place until he arrived in Dikla in west Galicia. After several years he married ר' הערש בער ע"ה and worked as a מלמד.

מרת לאה would say that when she was a little girl six years old and fed the geese of her father ר' הערש בער, she would always דאווען that she should be זוכה to have sons who were כשרים וצדיקים. And in fact she was זוכה to build a proud house בישראל. Her sons were well-known חסידים. One of them, ר' חננאל, was a devoted חסיד of the דברי יחזקאל. They said of him that every year he would be in שינאווע with the רבי from ראש חדש אלול until after<sup>4</sup> חנוכה!

After his grandfather ר' אליעזר died, ר' דוד שמחה returned with his family to Zaloshitz to claim his share of the ירושה. He stayed in Zaloshitz for some time – and that's when my grandfather ר' אליעזר מנחם was born. In the end ר' דוד שמחה was cheated of his share of the ירושה and got nothing at all, and set down to work in Zaloshitz as a מלמד. But even at this point he had no מנוחה. The government passed a law that demanded changes in how children were to be educated in הדרים. Since he couldn't be מחנך his children properly in Zaloshitz, he returned to

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<sup>2</sup> ר' שמחה דוד was the son of ר' חננאל who in turn was the son of ר' אליעזר who owned a ווערטץ הויז in Zaloshitz. The parents of ר' דוד – ר' חננאל – and his wife – died in an epidemic in the middle of the night when ר' שמחה דוד was only a month old. A gentile neighbor brought the infant to his grandparents that night. While the neighbor still stood outside the door, his grandmother heard the child's cry and recognized that this was the cry of her grandson.

<sup>3</sup> My relative, Mrs. Judy Rubinstein from Toronto, maintains that many times she heard it said in the house of her father ר' אלי שווארץ, who was my father's older brother, that the original family name was Rabinowitz, not Majerczyk.

<sup>4</sup> Besides ר' חננאל and my grandfather ר' אליעזר מנחם they had three other children: ר' שלמה זאב, ר' יעקב זאב, and מרת פריידא מענדעלאוויטש

Dikla and stayed there for the rest of his life. It was in Dikla that his children became close to the שינאווער רבי

My grandfather הגאון ר' יחזקאל learned בהתמדה in Dikla with אליעזר מנחם. He married וויינבערגער<sup>5</sup> ר' יצחק בצלאל הלוי סעקלער, and received a גדן of 400 guilden. He began to deal in nuts and plums, but didn't succeed and lost most of his money.

He then decided to cross over into Hungary from Galicia. The cross-over wasn't legal – in Yiddish he had שווארצט די גרעניץ. He in fact changed his name to שווארץ and established himself in the village of Tissa-Tab where he studied to be a שוחט and lived 15 years. He then moved to the village of Meza Chatta near Mishkolz where he lived 20 years.

שמעון was an עובד ד' with all his heart and soul. In 1900 his son died at the age of 17 in an epidemic on ערב שבת late in the afternoon. It was too late to bury him that day, and they were forced to leave the body in one room while the rest of the family gathered for סעודה in another room. ר' אליעזר מנחם stood with his שטריימל on his head, held my father – who was then a year old – in his hand, and sang בהשתפכות הנפש שלום עליכם. And so he behaved for the whole סעודה and sang all the זמירות. There was not a sign of pain or grief all שבת: he said "שבת היום לד".

In 1907 his wife יהודית became ill with a serious disease. Her father ר' יצחק came from Dikla to examine her. ר' יצחק בצלאל was as an unlicensed doctor in Dikla – א פעלשער. Although he had no formal education, he did have broad medical knowledge. He examined her and said nothing, but when he left her room and met her oldest son חיים צבי he burst out crying about her poor condition, and that he could do nothing for her.

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<sup>5</sup> Their children were ר' חיים צבי (died in New York in תשכ"א), עטל (the wife of ר' דוד שטיין who was a שוחט in Papa and the father of ר' יצחק שטיין ע"ה), (בני ברק of ר' אלי, מרת (who lived in Serenzh and was the father of מרת ר' יחזקאל שרגא and ר' ישראל יעקב, מרת יהודית אבערלענדער and מרת רחל שווימער ע"ה) of Toronto), (the father of ר' יצחק שטיין ע"ה) שלמה (the father of ר' יחזקאל שרגא and ר' ישראל יעקב, מרת יהודית אבערלענדער and מרת רחל שווימער ע"ה) of Toronto). Besides their son שמעון who died as a בחור in the epidemic I'm about to mention, they lost two other children in that epidemic: שרה at the age of 12, and טוביא מלכה at the age of four.

The family traveled with her to Vienna to see specialists, but to the dismay of the family nothing could be done. She died soon afterwards and was buried in Mesa Chata. The oldest daughter of ר' אליעזר מנחם – עטל – was then already married to ר' דוד שטיין in Papa. My father, who was then only 8 years old, went to live in her house in Papa. She treated him well and raised him.

ר' אליעזר מנחם remarried a woman who owned a grocery in Mesa Chata. She took great care on her husband, who spent most of the day learning בהתמדה. My grandfather died at the age of 84 on י"ג שבט תרצ"ג<sup>6</sup>.

This is what is written on the מצבה on the קבר of ר' אליעזר מנחם in Meza Chato. The מצבה was found בסייעתא דשמיא by a member of our family several years ago. Most מצבות in the בית עולם were destroyed by the Germans during the war, and more were destroyed by neglect in the decades after the war, including the מצבה of my grandmother יהודית. But several מצבות survived in a corner reserved for כהנים, and that's how we were זוכה to find the מצבה of our grandfather:

Here lies hidden

ר' אליעזר מנחם

The son of ר' דוד שמחה הכהן שווארץ

This silent stone shall advise

All who pass in front of it

And will testify that this קבר hides

The dust of a man who was a חסיד and an עניו

From his youth until his old age

Most of his time day and night

He was עוסק בתורה Hashem and was מקיים

Conducted himself with חסידות and the מדות [of his רבי]

His portion is גן עדן, but woe is to those he left behind

His resting place is honorable among those who are [like him]

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<sup>6</sup> After the שבעה, the sons of ר' אליעזר מנחם divided the ספרים of their father. All the brothers agreed that since my father ר' יהזקאל שרגא was the biggest חכם among them it was appropriate that he be given their father's ש"ס. They also allotted to my father several single ספרים, including ספר החרדים. This is the only ספר that survived the war with my father's signature on the שער בלאט. He also inherited his father's box טאבאק.

He was י"ג שבט with a good name on נפטר

And he was buried on י"ד שבט התרצ"ג

ת'ניצ'ב'יה

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After his בר מצוה in Papa, where he learned with great תורה and achieved high levels of תורה. He was also special in his יראת שמים and his מדות. His face had a special charm that enchanted all who saw him. Because of the great breadth of his knowledge and his למדנות he was appointed to be שואל ומשיב in the ישיבה where more than 200 בחורים learned. At a later time he went to Magendorf to learn with ר' יהושע בוקסבוים who later became רב in Galanta.

He was superb in languages and in writing. He was talented on the violin and would play on happy occasions. On his own he studied accounting, passed all the accounting tests that he would have had to take in a university and received a degree. In these efforts he worked together with his friend ר' שמעון שאפראן who afterwards became רב in ישראל פאזען.

But my father never used his degree at all. He decided to devote his life to תורה. He passed the degree on to another person, who used it to make a comfortable פרנסה

In 1924 my father became engaged to my mother מרת שרה זיסל בת ר' חיים אונגער from Papa.

### ***The Family Unger***

The Unger family was one of the most prominent in the Oberland region of Hungary<sup>7</sup>. Family members were respected residents of Tzellim for more than

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<sup>7</sup> For the history of the Unger family we relied a lot on "מסורת אבות" ספר that was published by our relative רב משה אונגער בן ר' שמואל אפרים זלמן אונגער זצ"ל דומ"ץ שיכון סקווירא.

eight generations. My grandfather ר' יהיאל was born in Tzellim to his father מיכל אונגער<sup>8</sup>.

מיכל first learned with ר' שמעון סופר who was then רב in Matesdorf before he later moved to become רב of Krakow. מיכל lost his father while he was a בחור and asked his mother's permission to move to Pressburg for six years to learn in the ישיבה of the כתב סופר. Because of his התמדה in all those years he not once visited his mother.

He was very young and very short when he arrived in Pressburg. When he first walked into the שיעור room to hear תורה from the כתב סופר he stood near the window where he found a sliver of space. In the middle of the שיעור a heated discussion developed among the תלמידים and he too raised his voice and joined in the loud debate. The boy next to him was irritated that this green little child had the nerve to participate, and gave him a strong pinch. מיכל cried out in pain. The כתב סופר heard the shriek and told the בחורים to send מיכל to him. מיכל approached and the כתב סופר comforted him and told him that from this point on he was to station himself at the side of the כתב סופר. And that was where מיכל stood all the years he was in Pressburg.

מיכל ate טעג on each day of the week he ate at the house of a different local בעל הבית. On שבת it was his lot to eat at the house of a very simple בעל הבית who seated him between his two daughters. מיכל left this בעל הבית without telling anyone, and for some time would eat his meager שבת meal, mainly a piece of bread, alone among the trees in the woods.

One time the רביצין of the כתב סופר happened to pass nearby, and she heard a בחור singing שבת זמירות off in the woods. The כתב סופר investigated and found that the boy was מיכל, and he asked מיכל why. At first מיכל wouldn't say, but at the insistence of the כתב סופר he described the events at the בעל הבית.

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<sup>8</sup> מיכל was the son of אברהם צבי of Tzellim, who was the son of הירצקא חיים of Tzellim, who was the son of שלום from Tzellim, who was the son of גרשון from Soin near Tzellim, who was the son of מאיר who had a letter that set out his ייחוס back to the ארז"ל. The letter was lost during the war of 1848. מיכל died on ה' אדר תרע"א and was buried in Tzellim.

The סופר ordered that from that point out מיכל ר' was to eat all סעודות שבת at the table of the סופר himself.

When six years had passed, the סופר told מיכל ר' that it was time for ר' מיכל to go home. He also ordered him to accept the first שידוך that was proposed to him. Since he didn't have any money to pay for transportation, מיכל ר' traveled by foot to his mother's house. Along the way, as he passed by the city of Charna, he walked into the בית המדרש where he met ר' יוסף גרינוואלד ז"ל from Chechowitz. ר' יוסף began to be מפלפל with מיכל ר' on many points in ש"ס, and was very impressed that this בחור was packed solid with תורה. On the spot he proposed a שידוך with מרת ר' שלמה געשטעטנער ז"ל the daughter of his מחותן the respected businessman from Tcharna<sup>9</sup>. The שידוך was completed בכי טוב

His relatives the רבנים of the Greenwald family thought of מיכל ר' as a צדיק. The בעל ערוגות הבושם wrote about him "my cousin הרב הצדיק," and his son the ויגד once said "דער פעטער ר' מיכל איז געווען א צדיק תמים"

He was a מגיד שיעור in "חברי ש"ס" and finished ש"ס may times in public. The last time he finished ש"ס he had already lost his sight and taught from memory. When the גאון בעל קרן לדוד was רב in Tzellim, they often discussed תורה, and the table in front of them became full of ספרים. It often happened that when the קרן לדוד would rise before dawn to go to the בית המדרש he would see מיכל ר' who had been learning all night and was still standing at his שטענדער learning בהתמדה. Then the קרן לדוד would approach the window and say "uncle, it's already time to rest!"

Persons from Tzellim also say that when מיכל ר' would get up for קריאת שמע after learning very late he would be very tired and was afraid that he would drowse off during קריאת שמע. So he said קריאת שמע near the pointed edge of his door opening so that if he fell asleep during קריאת שמע he would hit his head against the edge and wake up.

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<sup>9</sup> ר' שלמה אייזענשטאט who was the son of לייב געשטעטנער, who was the son of ר' יעקב ר' שלמה ר' of Lockenbach, who was the son of the פנים מאירות, who was the son of ר' יצחק, who was the son in law of the sister of the ש"ך, who was the daughter of ר' מאיר כ"ץ, who was the son of ר' משה כ"ץ of the family קאן who at first was דיין in Frankfurt and later became רב in Danhausen near Ansbach in Bavaria Germany.



The son of ר' מיכל, my grandfather ר' חיים, learned in Tzellim with ר' מנחם (one of the most prominent תלמידים of the סופר). After he married my grandmother ר' שמואל זלמן בערגער<sup>10</sup> he moved to Pest where my mother was born. He made a comfortable living as bookkeeper for the Tauber family, who were prominent dealers in wine.

He once noticed that one of his children had done something improper, and realized that life in a big city could damage a child's upbringing. He decided to leave the city and to abandon his comfortable פרנסה. When his wife חנה asked him "where are you going and how will you make פרנסה" he answered that he didn't know that but he did know that there was no way he was staying in Pest. He did leave Pest and moved to Papa, a city that was full of תלמידי חכמים and יראי שמים. He opened a store from which he barely made a living.

After many years, before he died, when he discussed with his children his move from Pest to Papa, he said: -- "א גרויסן קרבן האב איך אוועק געגעבן פאר ענקערט וועגן!" -- "I made a big sacrifice for you."

His wife and daughters ran the store, while ר' חיים himself sat in an adjoining room. He had nothing at all to do with the store and was instead עוסק בתורה all day. But whenever he noticed a customer leave with anything that was sold by weight, for example flour or sugar, he would ask the customer to come back with him to the store to add some more flour or sugar, to be sure that the customer had received the promised weight. Every once in a while he would enter the store and take some pennies from the cash box and drop them into a box צדקה.

He was an unassuming צדיק. He would enter quietly and leave quietly without expecting any notice for himself. He never said something without a purpose. Unlike ר' אליעזר מנחם, my grandfather on my father's side, who was enthusiastic and full of שמחה and energy, ר' חיים was quiet and serious. We almost never saw him smile. On rare occasions he would take the trouble to travel two

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<sup>10</sup> My grandmother was the sister of בנימין בערגער of ר' בנימין בעלעד הי"ד, who was known to all as ר' בנימין בעלעדער הי"ד and was a תלמיד of ר' שלמה from באבוב.

hours on the train from Papa to visit us in our city. We would stand in his presence in respectful and awed attention. We would each with ארץ volunteer to take one of his bags, and we would then stand on the side, as if a distinguished lord had arrived.

He would daven with great emotion and tearful cries. Once they heard him plead during his תפלה his אביסל פאר אונז "רבנו של עולם! פארוואס איז אזוי גרויס דער הסתר פנים! באווייז זיך שוין: תפלה אביסל פאר אונז"

When he would bentsch his place would be drenched with tears. On ערב תשעה באב and ערב יום כפור he could eat only one swallow and no more because of the tears that would strangle him.

It was his custom to borrow a ספר חסידות from the ויגד יעקב, to learn it thoroughly from beginning to end, and then to return it and borrow another ספר. The ויגד יעקב once said that he could say עדות that ר' חיים knew the "נועם אלימלך" ספר by heart.

My grandfather was to build a בית נאמן בישראל. His daughters all married splendid תלמידי חכמים and his two sons were גאוני צדיקים. They were ר' שלמה יעקב ר' אברהם צבי הי"ד from Papa and ר' אברהם צבי הי"ד of Kapa-Var.

He was on Friday תרצ"ט (1938). In his הספד for my grandfather, the ויגד יעקב said "הייליגער ר' חיים! די שכינה האט גערוהט אויף דיר!"

This is what is written on his מצבה in Papa:

Here lies hidden

The honorable G-d fearing

ר' יחיאל אונגער the son of ר' חיים

Who died on עש"ק פרשת לך י' חשון

And was brought to rest on Sunday פרשת וירא י"ב חשון תרצ"ט

All his days חיים asked only for [the חיים or life that he asked for was only]

יראת שמים and תורה

And that he should rejoice only with מצוות that to him were חיים [life]

He was מצווה his sons and household to guard the proper ways of life

Served Hashem with happiness and without idleness  
Merciful Hashem will tie his נשמה into the bundle of life

ת'ניצ'ב'יה

This is what is written on the מצבה of my grandmother מרת חנה

Here lies hidden

The worthy woman מרת חנה the wife of חיים אונגער נ"י

She died on Thursday ט' אלול תרצ"ג (1933)

Her קבורה and הספד were on Friday afternoon

חנה [like חנה the mother of שמואל הנביא] would daven all day and her lips would  
murmur

“please Hashem let me be זוכה to rear sons for תורה

who are true and unassuming יראי השם”

and she davened also for her daughters and was מצווה that they too be honest  
and complete

“please in the great name of Hashem don't let any strange or outside חכמה find a  
place in you

Great will be your שכר if you heed my words – after all the words of חכמים are  
guides

My heart will rejoice if you command the same to your children

to see to it that they too are stable as deeply planted nails

then my pride will rise because my חלק will be with צדיקים and צדקניות in עדן גן

ת'ניצ'ב'יה

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My mother's older brother ר' שלמה יעקב אונגער הי"ד was very similar in  
behavior to my grandfather. During the day he would teach boys who were 12 or  
13 years old, and he was also a מגיד שיעור in חברה ש"ס. His תלמידים say that  
sometimes during his teaching he would pace back and forth with great  
concentration, and would then place himself in a corner and support himself  
against the wall, without making even the slightest movement. In this way he  
would be מדבק himself with הקב"ה for an extended time.

He would not sleep in a bed weeknights, and stayed up all night to learn בהתמדה. Every night he would begin with 18 פרקים of משניות – three פרקים from each of the six סדרים. Afterwards he continued with more נגלה and with נסתר.

He never spoke an unnecessary word, never looked outside his ד' אמות. His seat in the בית המדרש was in the last table on the מערב side.

When ר' שלמה יעקב once joined the table of the ר' שלמה יעקב, who was the רב of Papa, the רב was in a high mood, and shouted at ר' שלמה יעקב: "ר' שלמה יעקב, you tell lies! You say every day "אשמנו" and that's an absolute lie. You were never ever הוטא!"

ר' שלמה יעקב was killed in Auschwitz on י"ז תמוז תש"ד (1944). It's especially painful that there is no remnant of him, because all of his children were also killed during the war.

My mother's other brother was ר' אברהם צבי אונגער the רב of Kappa-Var, and the ספר מקוואות<sup>11</sup> on ספר מחנה אברהם of מחבר. In the beginning of the ספר, in a section called "פתח המחנה", ר' יצחק שלמה the son of the מחבר briefly describes his father's almost super-human efforts and achievements in תורה and עבודה.

My father, ר' אברהם צבי and ר' שמעון פאזען the רב of שאפראן were very good friends. All were strongly tied to the מנחת אלעזר of Munkacz. I remember the one time my father traveled to Munkacz. Munkacz wasn't in Hungary. My father had to get a passport and was forced to take a picture despite his strong הקפדה never to have his picture taken. It was like יום טוב in our house while we prepared him for his trip.

My father shared the שיטות and השקפות of the מנחת אלעזר. Whenever we discussed the parties that were then common in the Jewish street, my father would say in the words of his רבי מיסטען: ציוניסטען, מזרחיסטען, אגודיסטען אלע מיסטען: רבי. When the רבי died on ב' סיון תשצ"ו (1936) my father grieved bitterly. I was only nine years old, but I sensed in the house that something very bad had happened.

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<sup>11</sup> The ספר was accepted enthusiastically in the ישיבה-world with powerful הסכמות by influential גדולים both before and after the war.

The love of ר' אברהם צבי to my father was very strong. He once told my relative בני ברק in יצחק שטיין that:

מיין פאטער ר' חיים האט גענומן פיינע איידעמעס, חשוב'ע איידעמעס, אבער ווען מען וואלט זיי געלייגט אויף איין זייט פון א וואגשאל, אין מיין שוואגער ר' יחזקאל אויף דער צווייטער זייט, וואלט ר' יחזקאל זיי איבער גיוואויגען"

“My father had many good sons in law, but my brother in law יחזקאל outweighed them all put together.”

The only letter that remains from my father is one he wrote to his brother in law ר' אברהם צבי. He wrote the letter on stationery of the תלמוד תורה. My father's ספרי חסידות in עבודה is evident from between the lines. The letter was written shortly before the war, as you can see from his last words.

ב"ה

To my dear brother in law ר' צבי

In my haste I am writing only a few words, because my time is so limited. I am sending you this ספר "זרע קודש" only as a loan, because it belongs to ר' יוסף צבי ספר "נועם". Many thanks to you on your correct advice on learning the ספר "אלימלך". But give me credit that on my own I already reached the same conclusion, to learn the ספר every week, if not the full [section on the סדרה], then at least in part, depending on how much time I have.

I wish you well באהבה, and hope for רחמי שמים and צדק גואל ביאת quickly in our days. אמן.

Your faithful brother in law

יחזקאל שרגא הכהן

## עבודת הקדש

After my parents wed – my mother was 17-1/2 years old – they first settled in Shopron where my father had a job as מגיד שיעור to young בחורים. My oldest sister יהודית was born there. After that my father accepted a job as מגיד שיעור in Győr. That is where his other children were born: I and my brother מיכל and also חילע and אליעזר מנחם, חנה, נחמה, רחל לאה, חוה גיטל and מיכל. None except I and מיכל survived the war. We also had a brother זלמן אפרים who died in his crib when he was less than a year old.

My father was very close to ר' שבתי of Shimone. ר' שבתי was famous in the whole region as a קדוש and a מקובל, גאון. In his youth he learned in the ישיבה of Pressburg under the שבת סופר. Jews in Oberland regarded him as a בעל מופת. בית מדרש was obvious in his רוח הקדש. and many wondrous stories circulated about him.

My father himself had an out of the ordinary experience with ר' שבתי שעפטיל. The story is printed in the "חלק ב' עמוד רכ"ה) ספר "ראשי גולת אריאל" as told by my relative בני ברק in חוג חת"ם סופר of ר' יצחק שלמה אונגער and the son of my uncle ר' אברהם צבי.

ר' אברהם צבי once traveled to Budapest by train to visit his father ר' יצחק שלמה in the hospital there. His train arrived in Győr on Thursday and he had to wait three hours to change to a second train to Budapest. ר' יצחק שלמה decided to make use of the time to visit my father. When he met my father, my father was holding a post-card he had received that day from ר' שבתי שעפטיל. This is what it said:

להטביל את פרוסת המוציא בליל שבת בין של הקידוש. וזאת סגולה נגד כאב לב, עבד לעבדי ה'. שבתי שעפטיל ווייס

On Friday night dip your קידוש into your הלה. This is a סגולה for heart pains. [Signed: from a] servant to the servants of Hashem. שבתי שעפטיל ווייס

My father expressed surprise at the postcard. He didn't know to whom the words were intended. ר' יצחק שלמה thought that maybe the words referred to his father who was in a bed at the hospital and that possibly his father was suffering heart pains. But when he arrived at Budapest and visited with his father until Tuesday, it became obvious that the רב from Shimone didn't mean his father, who had no heart pains. Oh his way back home after visiting his father in Budapest, ר' יצחק שלמה again traveled through our city and once more he came to visit my father. And by then the meaning of the postcard had been revealed.

ר' שלמה יצחק found my father sick and lying in bed. That Friday night after the סעודה my father had suddenly suffered a strong heart attack and, try as he might, the doctor could do nothing to relieve the pain. He suddenly remembered the postcard that the רב from Shimone had sent him. On the table there was still some חלה left from piece he had used for המוציא, and there was also a little wine left from קידוש. My father signaled to my mother that she should dip a piece of the חלה into the wine. She did this and gave it to him. As soon as he tasted it he felt an improvement in his condition. When the doctor came to examine him afterwards, he was astonished and said that my father was completely healed, that he should lay in bed for several days to rest from the weakness that the attack had caused, but the disease itself was totally cured, and that this was a remarkable event.

As I mentioned, my father gave a שיעור to boys of בר מצוה age. Afterwards the boys generally left to one of the many ישיבות across Hungary.

From this position, my father drew a spare פרנסה. But, although we weren't comfortable, we weren't hungry either. My mother labored to raise her many children, and worked hard to see to it that the house ran smoothly. Occasionally she reorganized our old furniture from one part of a room to another to generate an optimistic feeling of renewal. My father, who by nature was cheerful and happy, tried with all his abilities to support her and make her happy with words of strength and encouragement.

He also took pains to constantly educate the children in fundamentals of אמונה. He liked to repeat the traditional story about the מהרש"א who was so desperately poor that he couldn't support his family. Once there was a long period when his children hadn't tasted anything, and they were in pain, weak and crying for bread. מהרש"א let out a groan out of great רחמנות for his little children. But instantly he regretted that groan and berated himself: "Do you have more רחמיו על כל מעשיו פסוק says רבון כל העולמים on your children than רחמנות on whom the פסוק says רחמיו על כל מעשיו – he has רחמנות on all he created?" My father continued that the teeth of מהרש"א became black from his many תעניתים for making that groan. In this way, our father worked to instill in us אלקי עולם in אמונה.

At night before he went to sleep he learned זוהר הקדוש. My relative זלמן from האפפמאן ירושלים told me that once his father אבא חייא האפפמאן stayed in my father's house overnight. When he woke up in middle of the night he found my father seated at his table while he delved deeply into סתרי תורה.

My father paid enormous attention to חינוך for his children. Every שבת he learned with מיכל in "דרך חיים תוכחת מוסר" מיכל. When I and my sisters wanted to play with friends, he generally didn't agree that we could go to their houses, saying that it was better that they come to our house. This was his way of getting to see our friends to decide if they were right for us.

His תלמידים gathered into our house for שלש סעודות every שבת because the city המדרש בית was אשכנז and didn't arrange שלש סעודות. My father would say דברי and would also tell beautiful stories to influence and instill אמונה and יראת שמים. They would sing זמירות pleasantly.

## <sup>12</sup>מיכל

My father decided to send מיכל to learn in Papa when he was only 11 years old because he was the only boy among many sisters. First he learned in the ישיבה of ר' אברהם דירנפעלד ז"ל. Later he had the good fortune to study with the

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<sup>12</sup> Editor's Note: to our grief, our uncle מיכל הכהן שווארץ ז"ל was on נפטר (2001), and we decided to include some details of his history.



who was the רב of Papa, and to become personally close to him. When מיכל was just past his בר מצוה the רב once asked him “מיכלי, you’re a כהן, so please tell me what כוונות you have in mind when you stand on the דוכן for ברכת הל according to the תורה?” answered: “I have in mind that the ברכות should be according to the הגדולה of אנשי כנסת הגדולה!” The רב enjoyed this clever response, and with a fatherly smile told him “maybe during your learning, you can also avoid having to understand a גמרא by saying the גמרא means what the הגדולה say it means?!”

After the פטירה of the רב, מיכל learned with his son גרינוואלד ר' יוסף and his father's successor as the רב of Papa<sup>13</sup>. Altogether he spent five years in Papa until the Germans broke into Hungary in תש"ד as I mentioned earlier.

In (1941) תש"א, the רבי from Vizhnitz Monsey came to learn in the ישיבה of the רב of Papa for one year. It happened that he and מיכל slept in the same room. מיכל would later say that on the night of ל"ג בעומר, the יארצייט of ר' שמעון of יארצייט, the רבי wouldn't go to sleep but would pace here and there with great emotion and דביקות all night.

On שבת חנוכה תש"ד, several months before the German invasion, מיכל traveled to Budapest to be in the presence of ר' אהרן מבעלז. He would later often talk about that שבת מברכים of שבת חנוכה. When the רבי finally lit the נרות חנוכה that מוצאי שבת dawn had already come, and they closed the shutters of the windows so that the daylight not come into the room.

מיכל would also describe the scene when he gave a קוויטל to the רבי from Belz that מוצאי שבת. Since the רבי had difficulty reading because of his poor eyesight, the גבאים decided that they would put all the קוויטלך in a sack and that the רבי would read them later one by one, so that all who came with a קוויטל would that night only get to accept שלום from the רבי and a ברכה. מיכל stood in line where everyone in front of him gave the רבי his hand and passed by quickly. When his

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<sup>13</sup> He was נפטר in New York in תשמ"ד (1984). ר' יוסף was our relative because my great grandfather ר' שלמה געשטעטנער and his great grandfather גרינוואלד ר' were both sons in law of ר' יחיאל מיכל אונגער.

turn came, the רבי stopped him and asked him his name. מיכל was seized by a great fright and was afraid to answer anything. But the ר' דוד שפירא, גבאי, handled him properly and screamed at him: "Say already what they call you!" He was then forced to answer with his name, his father's name and his city. The רבי seized his hand and benched him again and again.

מיכל would always say that he is certain that the ברכות of the רבי בעלזער were what protected him in the terrible years to come, and that in either זכות he was many times saved from death to life. Many decades later, on his only trip to ארץ ישראל, he visited the ציון of the רבי בעלזער on הר המנוחות. He broke out into an emotional cry because he said that he knew that to the רבי he owed his whole life, and the life of his children after him.

## **בפרוע פרעות**

On Tuesday איסור הג שבועות the Germans announced that all Jews had to leave their homes to a ghetto they had set up in several streets in the Jewish quarter of the city. This decree was not difficult for us because our house was inside the ghetto area, and we didn't have to move.

But it didn't take long – only a week and a half –until the liquidation of the ghetto began. They brought the Jews to a desolate square in the edge of the city, where gypsies had lived in miserable shacks. We were among the first sent there from our city, but there were already some Jews who had been brought from surrounding areas. We found our place in a big building that had been a factory before the war, together with several thousand other Jews.

When שבת arrived the family in our corner was broken-hearted. Terrifying thoughts pounded in our minds; we didn't know what the next day would bring. But not my father. He approached his place and with much שמחה began to sing שלום עליכם the same as on every other שבת with no change at all. He also repeated מזמור לדוד ד' רועי לא אחסר: תהלים in מזמור כ"ג until the end. It was then that we learned another lesson in the הלכות of אמונה and בטחון and שמחה, right there in the valley of sobbing.

Sunday morning פרשת שלח (June 11, 1944), only three days after we had arrived in our "new apartment," we saw a long line of railroad cars at the nearby train station, from where they took the first transport to Auschwitz. The Germans announced that the trains were taking their passengers to a rest area for families they called "family camp." Many Jews placed their trust in this story, but my father wasn't persuaded. His thoughts were shut into himself, and his heart within him was torn by this disaster.

On Wednesday כ"ג סיון (June 14), we were forced to board the second transport. There were some who hurried to board the train, because they hoped soon to arrive to the relaxation of the family camp, and they could no longer stand the cramped life in the ghetto and the now-filthy factory. Those who kept

their heads reproved the optimists: "Where are you hurrying?" There was a pervasive great and bitter sadness.

Suddenly a coarse voice began cheerily singing אז ישיר. We all turned to see who was singing. We were stunned that the singer was a very plain Jew and total עם הארץ named Schwartz. It was he who had broken into song, and who urged the others to accept בשמחה whatever had been decreed מן השמים.

The "פינטעלא יוד" that burns in every Jew was here revealed to all. Here was one of the plainest (his wife didn't even cover her hair). Besides, he limped and had no chance of remaining alive. Still, his emotions had become alive with simple faith and he was dancing and jumping אז ישיר with his unworldly voice.

The Germans ordered that 70 people enter each wagon. Our family all boarded the same wagon and we tried to arrange ourselves in one corner. When the wagons were filled, the Germans shut the doors with a heavy bolt. They placed barbed wire on the windows. There was also one armed guard for each wagon who was prepared to shoot anyone who dared to try to escape.

When the train began to move, my father looked through cracks in the wall to see the direction in which we were traveling. He said, as if he were talking to himself, that if we were traveling towards the west to Vienna, then it might be true that we were going to a "family camp," but if we were going east he didn't know. When he realized that we were going east he said nothing more. He didn't want to depress us, but we could tell from his face that the situation wasn't good.

We traveled crammed into the wagons all of Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and part of שבת. The conditions were indescribable. It was סיון תמוז and the weather was already hot. I was dressed in all the clothing that I had, one on top of the other, and so were my sisters. My mother worried that he might not have enough clothing when we arrived at the family camp. I also held on to a doll I had received as a little girl. Even though I never played with it, this toy meant a lot to me. My mother bought it for me once when she was in Budapest. This was the only gift my mother ever gave me.

Each wagon had three pails of drinking water and two empty pails to use as a bathroom. This alone caused tremendous embarrassment and unpleasantness, as you can understand yourself. Filthy straw was spread on the floor. The stench was fearful. My father told יהודית who was nine months pregnant to sit near the cracks in the wall so that she could breathe more easily.

In the middle of the trip an old woman went out of her mind ר"ל. She was the head of one of the very prominent families in our city. She screamed and stepped on people who were spread on the floor. Many old and weak persons couldn't tolerate the conditions and died on the train, including the ר' בן ציון סנידערס of our city. It was remarkable that the unfortunate children sat quietly throughout, without crying.

morning, my father put on his טלית and davened שחרית with the feeling of every ounce of his soul. What a נשמת he let us hear! He said every word with total concentration and a holy flame. Every utterance is carved into my mind.

It was then June 17, several days before my birthday on June 22. My father turned to me and said "זאלסט וויסן אז אין א פאהר טעג וועסטו אלט זיין אכצען יאהר!" Know that in a few days you'll be 18 years old. I think that he wanted to alert me to be strong in all the trials that would come my way, and not to move away from דרך ישראל סבא -- from the old Jewish ways. Who knows, maybe his heart told him that I alone would survive from all of his daughters?

We arrived at the gates of Auschwitz-Birkenau on שבת at three in the afternoon. My mother understood that we would be asked our ages. She didn't know if we should add or subtract from our age, until she decided that each girl should say that she was younger than she was.

The wagons stopped. The doors opened and a group of SS soldiers stood before us with Jewish workers who were called "heftlingen". The soldiers jumped onto the wagons and with whistles and shrieks commanded that we go down immediately "alles arunter". When we tried to pick up our packages on the floor of the wagon, where we had more clothing, and where we had also hidden silver

and other valuables, they pushed us and screamed and cursed: "Out, out, don't take anything with you. Accursed Jews, leave everything here!"

The Jewish workers removed the dead, including רב סניעדרס. One grabbed him by the hands, the other by his feet. Two SS men looked at the רב and the other dead and said mockingly "Very brave. Very brave."

The men were separated from the women. They placed us in two separate lines to stand ready for the "selection." Each line was five abreast, and so we marched all of us, young and old, for some time. My youngest sister ח'י לע, who was then not quite two years old, called out happily "La-le, let's go for a walk!" She couldn't yet pronounce my name מהלה and called me La-le. My heart shrinks when I realize that this precious child was no longer among the living a short time later.

Then I saw him, the מלאך המות himself. He was dressed in a handsome uniform very well arranged. His right hand was covered with a white glove that was spotlessly clean. He was the enemy Josef Mengele ימח שמו וזכרו. Without any effort or concern he was pointing with his thumb to his right and to his left. Then we didn't know the significance of what he did. It was only later that we realized that the right meant life – at least temporarily – and that the left meant prompt death in the gas chambers.

My father stood together with my brother in law ר' שמואל פרענקל<sup>14</sup> and with מיכל who held the hand of my little brother אליעזר'ל. My mother came running to them, to tell my father happily that she had persuaded a soldier to let her take אליעזר'ל to the side of the women. She took אליעזר'ל from מיכל and took him with her. This was the hand of Hashem that saved מיכל from certain death, because it was the local "מנהג" that anyone who held or carried a child was sent to the left, regardless of his health or physical condition. My father הי"ד was sent to the left. My brother in law and מיכל were sent to the right.

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<sup>14</sup> A sterling young man who knew all of ש"ס.

Our turn came. I and my sister חוה גיטל stood together. We resembled each other so much that one could say we were twins. Mengele turned to us and asked if we were twins. I said no. When he asked me my age, I said that I was 16, subtracting a year as my mother had directed. I was sent to the right. He then asked חוה גיטל how old she was. She answered 14 although she was already 15, and she was sent to the left. With them went my mother and my sister יהודית, both pregnant, רחל לאה, נחמה, חנה, חיל'ע, and my brother אליעזר'ל.

For a long time I faulted myself: why was it that I answered no when he asked if חוה גיטל and I were twins. Maybe it would have been better to say yes, and then maybe חוה גיטל would have been saved. It was only after the war, when the world learned about the cruel medical experiments that Mengele conducted on each pair of twins who came under his control, that I understood that my answer was directed מן השמים so that at least one of us would survive.

On that day there arrived in Auschwitz yet another transport from Galante and surrounding areas. Most were murdered על קידוש השם, among them their respected רב יהושע בוקסבוים, רב, who was one of the major גדולים in Hungary and who had been my father's רבי in his youth, הי"ד.

From the מחבר that the מבאבוב זצ"ל קינה

Cry out heaven and earth on the thousands of cities fortresses of תורה  
The lands of Europe and her קהילות who inherited and carried out our מסורה  
אמונה with true חסידים, elders, צדיקים  
From when we were expelled from our land, there was no fearful  
extermination like this.

## **In the valley of death**

I spent seven bitter weeks in Auschwitz Birkenau Camp B.

Every morning, after they gave black coffee to the thousands of girls in the camp, they ordered us to stand on the Appell plaza all day. When we returned from the Appell plaza at night they gave us black bread and rotten soup that not even a dog could eat.

How can I describe to you the pain and grief that we had standing on the Appell so many long hours from morning to night, with the hot summer sun beating down on our heads, until we thought we would lose our minds. Woe to the unfortunate girl who lost her strength and sat herself on the ground for a rest. On the spot she was taken to the side and included in one of the groups that were on their way to the gas chambers. Both to my right and to my left there were the empty spaces of missing girls who were murdered. I thank Hashem for giving me the strength to bear the suffering of those six weeks.

In these difficult times I was encouraged by memories of my father's house. Even the image of my father's refined face eased my suffering. While I was still a little girl my father had taught the משמועה רעה לא יירא נכון לבי – תהילים in פסוק 'ה'—that like my name מחלה begins with 'מ' and ends in 'ה'. As a child I had gotten into the habit of saying this פסוק, not only at the end of שמונה עשרה, but also every night after קריאת שמע before אדון עולם. Even בגיא צלמות in the valley of the shadow of death I continued to recite the פסוק again and again, 'ה' נכון לבי בטוח בה', and this put deep into me a gift of בטחון.

Besides the pain of standing at attention on the Appell, there were daily “selections.” SS men passed through the rows of the girls and took out for murder all those that they didn't like because of some actual or imagined defect. To be wearing glasses was enough of a defect.

A member of the SS once addressed us in a crude and loud shout: “Jewish women. Listen and remember. No more Jews will be born!” We listed to



him like mute stones. Who could then think of giving birth to children and to establish דורות.

After the war when I was *בית נאמן בישראל* to build a *זוכה בעזרת השם*, I remembered that lecture every once in while, and I would think to myself, “I only wish that that person could see my dear children and explode in anger and jealousy.”

35 years later my husband and I opened a basement store in our house in Brooklyn where we sold maternity clothes mainly to Jewish women.. Again I thought about the speech by that *רשע*, and I said that this new business of ours served as more revenge to him.

After six weeks I was part of a group of 500 girls, mostly non-frum, who were put on a train to work camps in Germany. This time the train wasn't as packed as we were on the fateful *שבת* when my family arrived in Auschwitz. After several days we arrived at a work camp in Lippstadt, near Dusseldorf on the River Rhine, in the state of Wstafalen near the border with Holland.

### ***Lippstadt***

The major work done in Lippstadt was to make gunpowder. There was also a factory where they fixed machines. Most of the workers were German women who lived in the surrounding towns and were forced to dedicate several hours a week for the benefit of the “fatherland.” When we arrived there they set aside several shacks for us and added us to the workforce.

At first the German women were stunned to see us. They couldn't believe the strange sight in front of them: hundreds of girls, with their heads completely shaven, dressed in rags and tatters, with the right sleeve made of different rags than the left to humiliate us, all topped with a yellow star.

They gave us coffee every morning, and at night a little bread and margarine, and soup that was black and filthy water. Once in a while when a horse was killed by an American bomb, we were served a bonus – salami from the dead horse was added to our soup.

The work in the factory never stopped. There were three shifts a day, each for eight hours. Hashem helped me at every step. I was given an easy task, to

stamp a seal of quality on every bullet. I never had to work on the night shift. An extra חסד from Hashem to our whole group -- very rare among the tens of thousands of Jews in the concentration camps in Germany and Poland – was that during our entire stay in the camp we were never infected with lice. I also want to tell you that throughout the war I never saw a dead body. The Germans did not kill anyone in Lippstadt. Our entire group survived the war except for one girl who died of pneumonia.

I was זוכה to other open בנים. In the factory there were separate tables for German women and separate tables for us. One day, for a reason that I could see, the woman in charge ordered that from that point on I would sit with the German women.

How can I thank Hashem! This order tremendously eased the burdens on me and many of my friends. I sat myself near a German woman named Hildegard Shulde, who took a liking to me. Whenever she could she secretly give me something to eat, sometimes a piece of bread, or onions, or a little milk. When she learned that I was about to fast on יום כפור she passed me under the table two pancakes filled with apples to help me prepare for the תענית. She offered to give me bread on יום כפור itself but I refused.

Hildegard gave me the opportunity to חסד to others. I never ate the onions she gave me. Right after work I visited the hospital and gave the onions to the patients, because my mother had told me that onions were good for patients, especially patients with pneumonia.

When I heard after the war that native Germans had no food to eat, I made a special trip to Lippstadt with bread to give to Hildegard, to repay her a little for the good things she had done for me. But after a long search I was disappointed – I couldn't get in touch with her. To this day I'd be so happy to talk with her and thank her for her many favors.

We were in Lippstadt for about eight months, from the middle of אב תש"ד until the middle of ניסן תש"ה. As פסח neared I exchanged my portions of bread for potatoes.

Starting in Spring of תש"ה word began to leak in that the Germans were suffering major military defeats. In the days before פסח we heard American bombs and artillery in the distance. On March 7 the Americans and their allies captured Cologne near Düsseldorf and they built a bridge over the Rhine river near Remagen. We knew that it was only a matter of time before Lippstadt too would fall to the Americans.

### **יציאת מצרים**

On ערב פסח, March 27, I left work and returned to my bunk, burdened with sad thoughts. "Tonight was the first night of פסח! Less than a year ago I was with my family in our own house and my father led the סדר with his special חן. Now, what had happened to us. I have no idea where my family was. I'm alone in captivity working for פרעה in מצרים."

Suddenly a siren sounded for us to assemble on the appell immediately. We were ordered to line up in rows of five, and that we were to march out of the camp on foot. We didn't have anything valuable to pack, and each of us took only the woolen blanket we used as a cover at night.<sup>15</sup> I couldn't believe the miracle. It was the night of פסח and we were being מצרים to זוכה! But in fact the קץ הגאולה hadn't yet arrived.

We were ordered that throughout the journey two girls would carry a huge pot of black soup to eat while we were on the road. The pot was very heavy, and we took turns carrying it.

We walked and walked three full days. Thank G-d that I had good shoes that they gave us in Auschwitz so that the walking wasn't hard for me. We walked all day without stopping, and rested a little at night in any cow barn that we found that had straw on the ground. No sooner did we fall into a deep sleep than the Germans woke us up with screams and shouts of "further, further! We couldn't stay long in one place because the Americans were approaching quickly. We heard later that the US First Army and the US Ninth Army had come from different points and joined in Lippstadt only four days after we left.

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<sup>15</sup> I kept that blanket until the war ended. Afterwards I used it to sew a suit for my brother מיכל who had no proper clothing.

On the fourth day of our march, which was April 1 the second day of חול המועד פסח, we arrived at an open field inside a forest near the city of Koenitz. We were told to sit in a large circle, so that no girl would be blocking any other girl. We were surrounded on all sides by SS soldiers. In trembling and in fear we watched as they set up machine guns and were preparing to shoot us. We saw that all hope was lost, and that they would cruelly murder us at the last moment before freedom.

But תשועת השם can come in the blink of an eye. We're sitting and waiting for the staccato of the machine guns to end our lives, when we hear American tanks in the distance. We notice that all our SS captors have disappeared. The German women who are guarding us are removing their uniforms and putting on everyday clothing. They hurry off and leave us. We sit stunned at what happened. Here we were waiting to be slaughtered like sheep, and in one instance, the wheel is turning, and we are free!

So we sat trembling until we gathered the strength to leave the open field. We walked into Koenitz. White flags of surrender to the Americans were fluttering from every roof. I walked on the streets with a woman from my city of Gyor who was a משומדת, together with her two daughters. As we passed one of the churches, we heard the bells ringing – it was Sunday. She turned to me and her daughters and said “Come let's go in to give thanks.”

I left them in their silliness, and walked off with several other girls into a German house. We found the family sitting at their lunch table. They were alarmed to be confronted by Jewish girls with their heads shaven. When we said that we were hungry, they gave us food to eat and to drink.

Our lips expressed thanks to Hashem for letting us survive to be freed from the Germans.

# Virste Giresdorf – May 1944

I'm returning now to my own happenings.

We spent four long and bitter days in Gross-Rosen. In the morning we waited for nightfall and during the day we prayed for the night. On the fifth day we were ordered onto open trucks near the entrance to the camp. Forty of us were each crammed into trucks made to carry 20 men. SS men then trampled on us with their boots to make room for more. Two Wehrmacht soldiers mounted each truck to guard against escape attempts. We soon came to realize that Wehrmacht soldiers were not as evil as the SS. It wasn't the only desire of these soldiers to oppress and torture us.

We traveled an hour and a half about 50 miles to the south until we arrived at a Gross-Rosen sub camp. This was a small camp in the state of [Silesia] called Wueste Giersdorf in the town of Ober-Wuestegiersdorf. There was no camp here before the war, and there were no huts throughout the camp as in Plashev and Gross-Rosen. There was only one building of several stories. Each floor had barracks for about 1,000 persons. There was also no permanent electrified barbed wire as in Plashev, but instead the barbed wire had been installed poorly and in haste. We spent nine months in the camp – from May 1944 until February 15, 1945.

My friends Nosson Dovid Silberstein and Meilech Birnbaum were with me in Vierste. All three of us were together from the beginning of the war, and we went from one גלות to the next, first to the ghetto in Cracow, then to Plashev and now to here. One other esteemed person from our שטיבל in Cracow was with us, Rav Yakov Einhorn<sup>16</sup>. Also R. Mendel Brachfeld and his brother Moishe, R'

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<sup>16</sup> He was the son of R. Yeshaya Einhorn שו"ב from Teshin and later from Cracow. R' Yeshaya had traveled to the דברי היים in Sanz and then to the רבני באבוב. R' Yakov was the father of the exceptional הי"ד ראוּבן who was a תלמיד of ר' בן ציון from Bobov, and the father in law of R' Hershel Zitronenbaum.

Yeshaya Beigel<sup>17</sup> and his father, and R. Moishe Ziskind<sup>18</sup> from Bobov. But most of the Jewish prisoners weren't שומרי תורה ומצוות.

There were also many Hungarian Jews who had been forced from their homes in 1944. To our dismay, many died soon after they arrived. They couldn't bear the forced labor. They couldn't adjust to the terrible food situation in the camp, because it was only several weeks ago that they had lived in their comfortable homes, and their bodies couldn't stand the abrupt change

Among those who arrived from Hungary were R' Lipa Lefkowitz from Gross-Vardine<sup>19</sup>. We spent a lot of time together. He told me at length and in detail about the liquidations that the Germans had conducted after they conquered Hungary on כ"ד אדר. He himself had been arrested on the train from Gross Vardine to Budapest. At the last moment he had managed to hide his children with his gentile neighbors, and constantly worried about them.

R' Lipa told me that מרן ר' שלמה and his family had stayed in his house at 6 Vamhas-Utza Street. This information was like refreshing spring water to our tired souls, because much time had passed before we had heard any news about ר' שלמה, and we hadn't known whether he had escaped from the ghetto in Bochnia to Hungary. R' Lipa also told us that ר' שלמה and his sisters and their children had later managed to escape from Budapest to Gross Vardine near the Rumanian border, and were waiting for the right opportunity to cross the border into Rumania.

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Working conditions in the camp were both hard and easy depending on מזל. There were several factories on the grounds of the camp. There was also a big kitchen, and houses where prisoners prepared large quantities of food for

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<sup>17</sup> Lived in Antwerp after the war.

<sup>18</sup> R' Moishe was the son of R' Itzik Leizer Ziskind, and they called him משה ר' איציק לייזער'ס. R' Itzik Leizer and his children before the war owned a hotel opposite the house of ר' בן ציון in Bobov. This hotel was the most respectable in town, and was used by the wealthy persons who could pay the high rates the Ziskinds charged.

<sup>19</sup> After the war he lived in Williamsburgh in Brooklyn. In his old age he moved to Monsey where he died in 2004 at the age of 90.

other camps in the region. Thirty prisoners worked in each of these houses. In general, all those who worked on the camp grounds didn't work hard.

Not so was the lot of those who worked outside the camp. Each morning, whether winter or summer, they walked nine kilometers (about five miles) to their workplace. They spend the entire day in back-breaking labor together with other Jews from neighboring camps, to make steel train tracks. After working all day they were marched back to camp, again on foot. This was a daily effort of 15 hours, without enough food, and without enough sleep.

The Germans here didn't beat us as much as we had become used to in Plashev.

### ***R' Yakov Vulcan***

Let's talk about the splendid memory of my close friend, the unforgettable Belzer חסיד ר' יעקב וואלקאן הי"ד, חסיד By nature R' Yakov was an עסקן and full of energy. Besides he had an unusual talent to do "business" with the Germans, even though he was their captive. Many unusual benefits came to my group from his activities.

As soon as we arrived at the camp, I told him about the packet of cash I had. I gave him some of the money to bribe those in charge to arrange easy labor for us inside the camp.

מצליח he was בעזרת ד' For several hundred dollars, he received permission from the head German to give me and R' Yakov jobs in the kitchen. The result was that we were never hungry. R' Nosson Dovid and Meilech were appointed to jobs in a factory where they made tables and chairs.

Actually R' Nosson Dovid never did do any work in the factory. He sat there and learned תורה all day. He used גמרא's that men from קרשאנוב and אושפיצין had brought with them early in the war, when people were still allowed to take packages with them to some labor camps. It's for this reason that in Vierste there were שופרות and תפילין such as תשמישי קדושה and סידורים and גמרא's.

R' Nosson Dovid had special סייעתא דשמיא. Not once was he forced to be מחלל שבת. R' Yakov Vulcan took special care to see to it that R' Nosson Dovid always had enough to eat. Nor did R' Nosson Dovid ever have to eat the soup or the other טריפה foods that were served in the camp, because every day I cooked potatoes for him in the kitchen.

R' Yakov also arranged with the chief of the kitchen, for a bribe, to distribute a tray full of bread every day to the שומרי תורה ומצוות in the camp. To this day I am thankful and happy that I was זוכה with my money to join in the accomplishments of R' Yakov.

### ***A Dangerous Mistake***

One of my jobs in the kitchen was to get up at 4 or 5 every morning to prepare 5 huge pots of hot black coffee to give to the workers when they woke up. Once, I had an idea how I could benefit my group with more food. Every day there was food left in the kitchen from supper. I put the leftovers in one of the pots, and I placed this pot in a line with the other pots full of coffee, so that my friends could eat.

But this idea was a total failure. Not only didn't the plan succeed, but I almost paid for it with my life. While the chief of the kitchen supervised the giving of the coffee he noticed something strange: steamy vapor was coming out of four of the pots, but not from the fifth. He looked into the fifth pot and saw that it was full of food. On the spot, I lost my job and was in great danger. The kitchen chief could shoot me or torture me. Hashem had רהמנות on me, and the chief's temper eased and he didn't touch me. But I was liable to be sent to hard labor outside the camp.

Immediately, R' Yakov worked to get me another easy job. I was appointed as a worker in one of the food storage houses. In the end, this job was even better than the one I had in the kitchen. There was lots of food in the storage house, and I had many opportunities to help persons in trouble. Here again I saw נסים מגולים of הקב"ה: my dismissal from my kitchen job was a טובה for me and for others.



There was one event in the food storage house where I endangered my life because of a foolishness. There were cartons of butter, each of which held 10 small packs. One day I took one of the small packages with me to the barracks. When I later returned to the storage house, the chief yelled at me. "You dumbhead. You took one small package of butter! You put both me and you in danger. What would you have done if there an inspection today? The inspectors would have found a carton with only nine packages! They would have blamed me for not supervising you! You should have taken the whole carton, and then nobody would have noticed." Despite all this, the chief was a man with a heart, and let the matter pass.

### **יום כפור תש"ה**

The memory of this יום כפור is fresh in my mind. More than 300 men walked up to the top floor to daven together and to hear a דרשה in the German language from a Rabbiner who had lived in Hungary. He spoke about קדושת היום and added בתהון and אמונה on דברי התחזקות were there.

Of course, the entire gathering was without permission from the Germans. Woe to us if the Germans had heard about the אסיפה. They would have suspected that we were organizing a revolt and without a doubt would have shot us all to death. But all of us, including many who weren't שומרי תורה ומצוות, were prepared to endanger our lives, to get התעוררות and התחזקות on יום הקדוש. 300 broken and oppressed Jews, burdened with צרות and pain in a country of hunger, death and darkness, davened לא-ל עליון to be זוכה to a year of life and liberation. In fact the year was to be a year of life and liberation, but, unfortunately, not for all of us.

We were זוכה to be מצות סוכה once more. We arranged boards and made a סוכה that was small but כשר. One person at a time entered to be בירך לישב and to eat a כזית. He then left to make room for another.

That winter they gave us winter coats against the frigid cold. There was no shortage of coats. There were more than enough that were taken from the קדושים who had died in Auschwitz. The person in charge of distributing the coats was a

fine Jewish בחור from Berlin named Morris. Morris was an accountant for the Germans and would often visit my food storage house as part of his accounting duties. When a bundle of coats arrived from Auschwitz, Morris would distribute them. He gave me a good, warm coat with a fur collar.

When it was the turn of R' Nosson Dovid to get a coat Morris told him jokingly, "to you I'll give a long חסידיש coat that you'll enjoy." And in fact he gave him a long coat. When R' Nosson Dovid put on the coat he felt something hard in the lining in a sleeve. When he cut the lining he found a fortune in cash: two \$50 bills and 10,000 Czech marks! חבל, for sure some Jew had hidden this אוצר there when he prepared to travel to a place he didn't know.

### ***The תפילין of R' Mendel Brachfeld***

Although my תפילין were taken from me in Gross-Rosen, all of us were מקיים מצות תפילין every day in Vierste with תפילין that were in the camp. All the frum people in our group awoke every morning a little early, before the others awoke, and stood in line until their turn came to be מניח תפילין. There wasn't enough time for us to say שחרית with the תפילין. Instead, each of us said only קריאת שמע with the תפילין and then passed the תפילין on to the next person in line.

My friend Mendel Brachfeld was one of those who had a pair of תפילין. I already knew R' Mendel "Mishlinizer" from Bobov in the old days. Mendel, a tall man with round eyeglasses, stood out as an exceptional תלמיד חכם among the very many בחורים then in Bobov. The fact that his reputation was known even among the בחורים in Cracow emphasizes his גדולתו בתורה. There were in באבוב hundreds of בחורים from tens of towns, and we generally knew none of them, but our משפיעים would point to Mendel, and urge and encourage us to be and to behave like him.

When Mendel and his brother arrived in Gross-Rosen, the Germans took away their תפילין. This affected Mendel very deeply, because there hadn't been a day since his בר מצוה when Mendel wasn't מניח תפילין.

Although in Gross-Rosen there were tall piles of תפילין, no Jew could approach them. It was forbidden on pain of death even to go to the bathroom without permission from a Gunman guard.

Mendel contacted a גוי who was a political prisoner and described what תפילין looked like, and asked the גוי to get him a pair. In payment, Mendel, who was very hungry, gave the גוי the piece of bread that they gave Mendel after his long trip to Gross-Rosen. Several hours later the גוי gave Mendel a pair of תפילין. All the pain of R' Mendel's hunger disappeared. But his שמחה wasn't complete when he found to his surprise that both תפילין were של יד. Mendel described to the גוי carefully what תפילין של ראש looked like, and in exchange Mendel agreed to give the גוי Mendel's bread from a second day. The next morning Mendel already had תפילין של ראש.

When Mendel and his brother משה were to be sent from Gross-Rosen to Vierste with 400 other Jews, the Germans ordered that each had to put whatever they had on a table in front of the Germans. The German officer warned that there would be a strict inspection, and that anyone found with anything not put on the table would be shot. Moishe whispered to Mendel that it made sense to hand over the תפילין. Mendel refused and hid them well under his clothing. He turned to Moishe and told him: "I doubt that they can do a good search of hundreds of men. Besides, what's the use of living if there isn't even one pair of תפילין among 400 men."

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One day a Jew approached Mendel at the instruction of the "lager elster" a non-frum Jew named Lutek. The messenger said that the Yahrzeit of Lutek's parents was approaching and he very much wanted to be מקיים מצות תפילין. It wasn't fitting for him to stand in line with other Jews to be מניח תפילין. That's why he wanted to borrow the תפילין so that he could be מניח them while his friends were still asleep. He would return them to Mendel afterwards right away. The messenger assured Mendel that it wouldn't hurt him to do a favor for the lager

elster. To the contrary, the lager elster would owe Mendel favors that would make it easier for Mendel to survive.

Mendel answered that many people had already promised him many favors to sell or at least lend his תפילין to them. But Mendel realized that no Jewish prisoner could make any promises in the camp, because nobody knew what the next day would bring. Mendel had therefore decided not to lend his תפילין no matter what. If Mr. Lutek wanted to be מניח תפילין he was welcome to come to the barracks early in the morning, and Mendel would then gladly let him use the תפילין.

Lutek didn't give up. Again and again he sent his messenger to Mendel to tell him that every night in his sleep he dreams that his mother demands that he be מניח תפילין. Lutek is prepared to be מניח תפילין but can't do this in public, so he asks that Mendel have רהמנות to lend the תפילין to him just once to satisfy his mother's demands.

Finally, Mendel agreed and loaned the תפילין to Lutek on condition that Lutek return them the next morning. Mendel and Moishe got up early the next morning and stood outside the barrack where Lutek lived, and waited anxiously for Lutek to open the door and return the תפילין. When some time passed and the door was still shut, they stood up and shouted "Lutek! Lutek!" Nobody answered.

Our barrack was near Lutek's barrack. When R' Yakov Vulcan heard the shouts outside he was alarmed and looked out the window from his bunk and recognized Mendel and Moishe. He rushed out to see them and they told him the whole story.

R' Yakov told them that, knowing Lutek, it was clear that Lutek had tricked them. He was sure that Lutek had sold the תפילין to Hungarian Jews who were imprisoned near Vierste. Very many Jews were there without תפילין. Some of these Jews had managed to bring a lot of hidden money with them, and they had undoubtedly agreed to pay as much as several hundred dollars for the תפילין.

As Mendel and Moishe walked off in dismay, Moishe noticed a Jew walking ahead of them with his back hunched over, obviously holding something under his clothing. Moishe was suspicious, because the man had the walk of a גנב caught in a מחתרת. Moishe strode over to him, seized him and demanded “give me the תפילין”. The other was stunned that Moishe knew he was holding the תפילין, and out of alarm and fright, took them from under his clothing and gave them to Moishe.

When Lutek learned that his business deal was upset, he became poisonously cruel. He implicated Mendel and Moishe to the camp leaders in some made-up crime, and caused them to be sent to Dernhau, a branch of Vierste about three kilometers away. There too, Jews – many of them from Munkacz – used Mendel’s תפילין. Every morning they stood in line, but because of the greater number of those waiting, each person was מניה only either של יד or של ראש.

When the Americans neared, Mendel and Moishe were sent from Dernhau to Zaifer-Wassa. Working conditions there were especially hard and bitter. The German planed to build an underground camp there that could withstand American attacks.

In the middle of the forest they set up carton shacks for 12 persons each. The cold was fearsome. There were no fresh water pipes, so health conditions were bad anyway. There was no kitchen in this camp -- food was brought from Vierste and other neighboring camps. When it happened that pots of food from neighboring camps overturned, there was no make-up for the lost food, and all the prisoners were ravenously hungry. Persons died right and left.

R’ Yakov Einhorn was also imprisoned in Zaifer-Wassa. On יום כפור he davened שחרית before the עמוד with special מתיקות, but he didn’t have the strength to daven מוסף. He was taken to the camp infirmary, and on the next day, he and other sick prisoners were sent to Auschwitz where they were killed.

Several days before ר' יעקב died, he told others that he had dreamed that he saw ר' בן ציון from באבוב surrounded by אנשי מעשה and חסידים. He complained to ר' בן ציון about the tortures, the cruel killings....

ר' בן ציון had answered:

קריאת שמע of פסוק פשט Listen to the

"וחרה אף ד' בכב"

Even where there's אף חרון still ד' בכב in the sense of עמו אנכי בצרה

These words of ר' יעקב spread like lightning through the camp. They encouraged all those who were בצרה ושבי' that געלותם ולא מאסתם ולא געלתם לכלותם

Three weeks after Mendel became sick, and had to be taken to the infirmary. He was treated by a Jewish doctor from Holland. The doctor told Moishe that the Germans were planning another "clean-up" of the infirmary the next morning by sending them in a transport to Auschwitz.

Moishe furiously sought every possible way to get Mendel out of the infirmary. The doctor suggested that Mendel be taken out of the infirmary that night to stay in the regular barracks until after the transport to Auschwitz left. But Mendel was too weak to stand on his own. Moishe and a Jew named Moishe Leib grabbed him one from each side to walk him out of the infirmary, but Mendel was too weak to move even a step.

Moishe proposed to the doctor that they hide Mendel somewhere in the infirmary when the "action" takes place, but the doctor was afraid. Moishe had no other choice and asked that he stay with Mendel in the infirmary, saying he was prepared to join Mendel in the transport to Auschwitz. The doctor couldn't believe what he heard, and said that in effect Moishe was committing suicide.

Moishe told him: "Listen my friend. It's now five years since the war broke out that I've been with Mendel. Neither of us has moved even a small step without the other. We hid together in great danger in an attic when the ghetto in Cracow was liquidated. We were together in Plashev, in Gross-Rosen, in Vierste, in Dernhau and now in Zaifer-Wassa. It's not only once that one of us risked his

life for the other. That's why I don't intend to leave him now at the last moment. Wherever Mendel goes that's where I go."

Moishe in fact remained in the infirmary that night, and the next morning both were put on the transport. To their great מזל the train didn't arrive at Auschwitz, and the Germans returned the entire transport to Dernhau. They found out later that the tracks to Auschwitz had been cut by American bombers.

But Mendel's condition wasn't good at all. His entire body was swollen and he was in desperate pain.

We heard about Mendel's condition from captives in Vierste who worked outside the camp and who had met workers from Nederhau. We were shocked by the news and were determined to do whatever we could to cure him and strengthen him.

Every day I and Moishe Roth sent bread through R' Yakov Vulcan to workers who worked outside the camp, to pass to workers from Dernhau for Mendel. After several days we heard that the swelling was slowly subsiding. More days passed and we heard that Mendel could stand on his own. And so the news continued to come until we finally heard that Mendel was fully recovered.

Mendel survived through the war, and afterwards established a בית נאמן בישראל לשם ולתפארת. All these years I'm joyous that the pleasant task fell to me to be a partner in his survival. Mendel on his part always remembered these events and was מכיר טוב. During the wedding of one of his children he sat himself near me throughout the חתונה and we reminisced together about those days.

## Flossenberg

On February 13 and 14, the British air force mounted a sustained attack against the city of Dresden that is near Gross-Rosen and Vierste. Day and night they rained down thousands of bombs until the city was aflame. Once the attack was over, there wasn't one whole building in the city. The Germans had boasted about the beauty of Dresden. Now it was totally destroyed.

We left Vierste the next morning. From this point until the end of the war we stayed in no place for more than two or three weeks, because the Germans were retreating from Russian advances from the east. But so long as the Germans could, they took great care to drag surviving Jews with them, to kill them at a good opportunity.

If I were to describe to you all the צרות and יסורים that passed over our heads in those two months until we were liberated in April, time would end before I would end. It's impossible to lay out even a part of my feelings from the cruel events that I saw. But my heart tells me that I ought not to be totally silent, and that it's not right that later דורות not know at least some isolated details. So I'll force myself and gather strength to tell you a little about this time. But know that I'm mentioning a טפה but keeping silent on two טפחים of the emotions that storm in my heart on חללי בת עמי.

An open wagon without a roof waited for us. The crowding, pain and grief can't be described. In this condition we traveled many days without a piece of bread. Friends died to our right and to our left. There were about 30 bodied in each wagon of our train when it finally stopped after several days and we got out.

We were then given a piece of bread. A 17-year old בחור named Friedman approached me and gave me his portion, saying "נעם איך דארף עס שוין נישט האבן". After an hour he was no longer among the living.

There wasn't much time to rest before we received an order to proceed. This time we went on foot. We walked and walked without a stop. Anybody who felt weak and sat down on the roadside was shot. Many persons couldn't continue and sat down knowing that they would die. Those who couldn't continue said good bye to their friends, sat down and accepted their fate.

We crossed the boundary between Germany and Czechoslovakia into Sudetenland. This area was a Czech state that the Germans had seized before the war based on the claim that most residents were ethnic Germans who spoke German. As soon as we crossed the border we noticed that the structure of the houses and the way they were painted were different from houses in Germany.



Czech people weren't as evil as the Germans and the Poles. Once when we walked under a bridge, Czechs used ropes to lower food packages to us. But we couldn't enjoy the packages because the German soldiers who guarded us took the packages for themselves. They also ordered those on the bridge not to lower any more packages.

We passed through Marienbad, where we spent a whole night near the train station before we continued.

After two weeks, in early March 1945 we arrived at Flossenberg, a large concentration camp in south central Germany. The camp held several thousand captives.

They ordered us to remove our clothes and forced from me the good coat I got in Vierste. We were pushed into a large bath house, saying that they wanted to remove our lice. I noticed the water faucets in the ceiling, but after several moments I convinced myself that that they had tricked us, that this was no bath house, that this was a gas chamber and that my end had arrived – until I felt a stream of hot water raining on our heads.

We walked into shack where the Germans designated for each of us a bunk in a barrack. My place was on top near the roof. We were then ordered to the outside assembly area – the appel platz – and to stand there in straight rows. One of the officers announced that all car mechanics should step out and stand on the side. I stepped out with the other mechanics because I thought that it's better to accept some work, because who knows what will happen to those who have no work. Actually, they didn't need my "services."

During the two weeks we spent in Flossenberg we did hardly any work at all.

### ***גיהנום of Ice***

But don't think that we were on vacation. We suffered from the evil cruelties of those who ran the camp. The nights at the end of winter were freezing cold. The ground was covered with ice. At three or four o'clock every

morning we were awakened and ordered to the appel platz to stand in straight rows. The purpose was to confirm that the number of captives agreed with their lists and that nobody had escaped.

The Germans were dressed in parkas and warm boots. They acted as if they were caught up in their jobs of counting us two times and three times. On this pretext they made us stand in the cold hour after hour.

There were many times we stood this way in the cold until seven in the morning! We wore torn clothing. I've already mentioned that they had seized the warm coats we had received in Vierste. We stood pressed against each other to get some warmth. We almost went out of our minds from the pain. Many bent over and fell down dead. To this day I don't know how I managed to stand on those hard nights.

In the morning we again arranged ourselves on the appel. They also arranged for counting all those who had died on the appel in the night, as well as those who had died in the shacks. Accounts had to be balanced with Prussian accuracy.

There was a small crematorium in the camp to burn corpses. It could handle no more than two corpses at a time. Since multitudes died that winter, they couldn't burn all the corpses right away. Instead they arranged the מתים in piles one on top of the other to the height of a one story building. So they remained until space became available in the crematorium.

After several nights of this ice, I decided that I could no loner bear this. After they counted me on the appel, I quietly slipped out of my row and stole into the barracks, went up to my bunk and let myself fall asleep. But not for long. Apparently someone reported me to the Germans. Policemen raided the barracks and searched until they found me, and woke me with shouts and shrieks. They grabbed me and pulled me and tore at me to take me outside and to pass me to the chief. He announced that for this עבירה I was to be whipped 50 times.

They tied me to a post. On both my sides stood Ukrainian peasants who were noted for their viciousness, each with a leather strap in hand. With all their strength they whipped me. When one stopped to rest, the other sprang into action. For the first 10 whips, I still felt the pain, but afterwards I felt nothing at all.

### **הצלת נפשות**

As a bonus to our situation, there was an outbreak of dysentery-diarrhea. The Germans decided not to give food to anyone who was affected. They also marked an X on his head as a sign of death, and added him to the other unfortunates who were marked for death at selections that were done on a regular basis.

The scene was awful. The sick person said goodbye to his friends at night. Then he would move away and cry and they would move away and cry. Three persons slept on each bunk, and it wasn't unusual if in the morning only two stood up.

To my misfortune, a friend who slept next to me on my bunk came down with the disease. He weakened so that he couldn't keep any food in his stomach. You can imagine that to sleep next to him in these conditions wasn't easy.

A voice on a bull horn announced that we were to appear on the appel because a number of workers were needed for a neighboring camp. I don't remember if my friend was already marked, but he was obviously sick, and we thought it almost certain that he'd be removed from the appel and be transported to die.

We decided on a very dangerous step to save him. I stood in one row and he stood in the row next to me. After the officer counted me in my row and walked to the front of the second row to count that row, my friend and I changed places and the officer counted me again in the second row, without ever looking at my friend. *בט"ה* the plan worked and we weren't discovered.

This was only half of a *ישועה*. We now had to worry about curing my friend's *מחלה*. A certain cure for diarrhea is toast. But how to get toast in this

גיהנום? In fact there was an oven for warmth in the center of every shack. But it was absolutely forbidden to fry or grill anything on the oven, and this was under the supervision of the shturm elster who was a cruel and vicious גוי from the Ukraine.

I had a sudden idea that I knew as a little dangerous. I gathered up my courage and approached the גוי. I asked him if I could honor him by cleaning his boots from the puddles, mud and filth of the late winter.

This peasant didn't know how to react to my strange question, whether to hit me or to kill me. He was silent for some moments, until, to my happiness, he agreed. I told him that I was sure that "his honor" would order that the capos not interrupt me during my work, and he agreed to this too.

So I succeeded in making toast by drying boots. The גוי liked my work and gave me his boots day by day for almost two weeks until my friend was healthy again.

We were in Flossenberg until the week before פסח

## **Loenbeck**

In March 1945 they brought us in an uncovered train to Loenbeck. In this city there were two big underground factories dug into a mountain. They manufactured Messerschmitt airplanes and needed more workers.

We worked six or seven hours a day. ברוך השם the work wasn't hard. In front of us there were big cartons and bags that held thousands of nails and screws of every size – wide, thin, long and short. It was our job to separate the nails and screws by size and type. They would then use these nails and screws to attach the plane's wings to the plane's body. Actually, despite all our efforts, not one plane was built. The German war machine had already almost collapsed. They didn't have the materials needed to build a plane.

During our work we sang ניגונים. We had enough time to sing every last ניגון that our רבי ר' בנימין ז"ל had been מחבר. I then realized the tremendous power and worth of a warm חסידיש'ע ניגון that's full of feeling and שמחה and קדושה. At a time

when we couldn't learn תורה we drew strength and בטחון from these קדושים ניגונים. Through them we returned to an earlier world that had disappeared.

I remember how again and again I sang the "רבון כל העולמים אדון כל הנשמות" that we say ליל שבת קודש after שלום עליכם in the pleasant נוסח of our רבי. Here I am standing on a plain Monday and slowly sorting nails and screws, while I sing to myself "מלך הדור מלך ותיק מלך זך מלך חי עולמים..."

In those times I sensed again the strong influence of our רבי. There rang in my ears the fiery words that ר' מיכלי קאלוואריער said on שמחת תורה of תרצ"ו:

The – ר' משה סטעמפל and ר' מיכלי from Cracow had invited נגיד ר' אשר טימבערג – the son-in-law of our רבי -- for קידוש in his hotel room. Since ר' אשר also knew me and my friend מאיר וואגנער from the שטיבל in Cracow, he invited us too.

ר' מיכלי began to talk with great power and emotion about the holiness of our רבי and his elevated מדרגות. He described the special זכות of our generation to have a מנהיג תורה וחסידות who raised high the flag of תורה וחסידות.

ר' מיכלי continued as if on fire until he announced:

מ' האט אונז אראנגעשיקט א האנד פון הימל! דער וואס וויל זיך אנכאפן זאל זיך אנכאפן!

And he sprang up from his seat and left with a זמר and a רקידה in great joy.

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Although the work in Loenbeck wasn't hard, the food situation worsened every day. The Germans themselves had little food because Allied airplanes bombed important German cities day and night without stop. On most days we lived on some soup and the fat from salami made from horses that died in the bombing raids.

I realized that it was no תכלית to go without food, so I arranged with a capo to arrange bread loaves for me. I paid him \$50. Afterwards I was no longer hungry in Loenbeck. But this deal gave me only four loaves of bread before we traveled away.

There was no food to eat in תש"ה of פסח. That was the first time throughout the war that I needed to eat חמץ בפסח because of פיקוח נפש. In every other year I had managed to arrange potatoes for our group, but now there was nothing that could last eight days.<sup>20</sup>

## More Treks

The Germans suffered defeat after defeat. On April 1 the Americans surrounded the German army near the Ruhr River and advanced eastward towards Berlin and to the south towards our region by way of Frankfurt and Nuremberg.

On the morning of April 6 we received an order to arrange ourselves in rows of 6 by 6 because we were traveling away immediately. I then still had one bread loaf. I gave a sizable portion to ר' שמואל פיינער that gave him the strength to continue. The rest I and put it into the lining of my short jacket to save for an emergency.

They were rushing us to march in the direction of the mountains, where they had dug caves and long tunnels. I trembled when I heard the order to march into the mountain. The thought entered my mind that maybe they wanted to finish us off there, by exploding a tunnel while we were inside, so that no one would ever know and there'd be no זכר left of us.

The road into the mountain was deep and wide and we marched forward for half a mile. I breathed more easily when I saw daylight on the other side.

On the road we saw thousands of German citizens who were also fleeing the American advance, some on wagons and some on foot.

It's hard to describe the marches in these days. If the march to Flossenberg was very hard, this march was double and triple hard. We received no food for several days. It was only once in a while that they threw us something to eat. There was no place to rest for the night. Instead, in the middle of the night

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<sup>20</sup> I heard afterwards that my friend R' Nosson Dovid, who at this time was still in Flossenberg, managed to avoid eating חמץ even in this פסח. He exchanged his portion of bread for two measures of sugar and ate only sugar the entire יום טוב.

they ordered us to rest several hours in some silo or barn that they found along the road, and if they found no barn, we slept on the ground כדומן על פני השדה. After rainstorms; we slept in the mud and the filth, wet through and through. At least then we had enough to drink and they couldn't rob us of the water. In the morning we again moved on and on.

It was almost impossible for a person to survive these bitter marches. Many of our friends who were weak or sick couldn't continue and sat down on the roadside to rest a little. But the German soldiers who guarded us – they were mainly middle-aged because the younger soldiers were at the front – were under orders not to leave even one Jew behind, but to shoot and kill them. Several hundred persons died this way. Among those who were killed was my friend R' Yakov Vulcan who did so many favors to his friends in this צרה.

Fixed into my memory is how I trembled when I saw a terrifying scene from afar. For a moment I thought it was a caravan of שדים. But it was Jewish girls from Hungary who were weak and hungry and were also being moved forcibly. They were gaunt and bent, and wore rotten rags around their shaved heads. Woe to eyes that saw this sight.

This continued until we reached Koeflink which was a branch of the Dachau extermination camp. There were no shacks here, only rooms dug underground that we called "דרערד ליגערס". We were there for 10-12 days without doing any work. They gave us a little bread with some spread similar to margarine. When I got up one morning I saw that someone had stolen from the lining of my jacket the half loaf of bread I had hidden there. Only some crumbs were left. This caused me great עגמת נפש. I ate almost nothing in those last days of the war.

On April 14 we left Koeflink and walked to Muehldorf, which was also a branch of Dachau, about 50 miles from Munich near the Tural mountains and the border with Austria and Switzerland.

The German plan was to concentrate all surviving Jews into one place where they could be prepared for slaughter. In fact, several thousand Jews were

killed in the Tural mountains at the very last moment. Until all Jews were gathered into one place, the fate of each group of Jews depended on the lieutenant who was in charge of them. The central question was whether the Americans would liberate us before the final slaughter.

With me in Muehldorf were ר' יהושע בייגעל, שמואל פיינער, שלום בירנבוים and ר' שמעון יונגווירטה. Our job there was to carry bundles of potatoes from the train station to the camp.

## **Waldorf**

Muehldorf was divided into a main camp, that was the central point for all captives, and Waldorf, a forest-based camp that was about 15 kilometers from a village called Hemp ping.

Two persons who were later to be my brothers in law were in Waldorf. They were ר' שמואל פרענקעל who is my wife's brother, and ר' מיכל who was the husband of my wife's sister. The קלויזענבערגער רבי was also in this camp.

Captives in the camp slept in informal winter shacks that were built from plain wooden boards, mainly underground except that their roofs were at ground level and were covered with dirt to protect against rain and cold. The walls were lined with barracks, and only a little space was empty in the center of the shack. Every bunk held a sack with a little straw that counted as a mattress. One small window above the entrance let in some light. These shacks were spread all over the camp. The camp itself was surrounded with electrified barbed wire

The captives were to build an airport and missile launchers from which to fire missiles to London and other big European cities.

Jews worked there 12 hours a day at hard labor. Besides, they had to walk five miles from the shacks to their workplace. They walked on wooden shoes on narrow paths that twisted through the thick forest. This walk would have been difficult in any case, but the walk back, after a full day of work, was almost impossible for the captives. The SS guards, who were anxious to return to their



warm and comfortable shacks, liberally used their whips to hurry the captives along.

My brother in law ר' שלמה couldn't bear these pressures. His strength gave out and he was sent to an extermination camp.

מיכל saw death closely more than once. One time he and other Jews faced a firing squad and all the others fell like flies. The bullet that was aimed at מיכל flew right in front of his eyes without grazing him. They let him go.

Another time they wanted to impale him with a spit. He sensed that at the last minutes someone put his hand on his head and pushed him down. He was saved by this נס

Another day he and a friend did something that a German didn't like. This רשע punished them by taking them to a bomb crater that was two stories deep. He led them down by ladder and then removed the ladder.

The walls of the trench were straight without any finger hold. Somehow מיכל and his friend managed to grab at grass growing on the wall and to use this to climb out. He tells me often that to this day he doesn't know how he did this. The next morning the German who put them in the trench asked how they had escaped. They answered and he let them go.

During these times there rang in his ears the ברכה he received from the Belzer Rebbe in שבת חנוכה in Budapest. He feels that because of this ברכה he was לזוכה לסייעתא דשמיא at every step.

מיכל got to know the קלויזענבערגער רבי well in Waldorf. The רבי often encouraged him in ways that saved his life. The Germans ordered Jews to carry 50 kilo sacks of cement on their backs and to carry them to the mountain. On one occasion מיכל and the רבי were charged with standing on a truck to lift the cement sacks and place them on the shoulders of captives standing below. When מיכל

was about to collapse from this effort, the רבי would encourage him by joking "מיכל'ע איז שוין געווארין פויל".<sup>21</sup>

מיכל often mentions an event from those days. One day, when the Jews were at hard labor in the forest, the Germans killed a Jew for no reason at all. מיכל and his friends were broken in spirit by this אכזריות.

While the German guards had turned away for a moment, one Jew sat down on a tree trunk to rest for a moment. He began to sing to himself the well known ניגון on the פסוק of "והי' ביום ההוא יתקע בשופר גדול". The song restored the spirits of מיכל and the others and their will to live.

## Air Raid

On April 16 the Americans entered Nuremberg and continued to advance to the south. American planes rained down thousands of bombs daily. Since we were behind the German lines we were also targets of these dangerous attacks. In fact many died from these bombs and from machine gun fire from the planes.

This was one of the sad facts of this war, which was one big tragedy altogether. Thousands of Jews who went through שבועה מדורי גיהנום with the Germans through the war were cut down at the very end by American fire.

One day while we were working outside on a road, an air raid siren warned that American bombers were approaching. The American practice was to first send high flying reconnaissance aircraft to select and mark targets with white flares. Bombers would then follow to attack the marked sites.

As soon as we heard the siren we wanted to run off the center of the road, because as a rule the Americans sought to bomb highways to destroy them, and even more so where they saw many persons working on the highway. But the German soldier who guarded us insisted that we first arrange ourselves in rows to count us and be sure that no one had escaped.

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<sup>21</sup> In this period מיכל constantly accompanied the רבי and was משמשו בנאמנות. מיכל was also close to the רבי after the war in Feldafink. The רבי was מהבב מיכל to the point that he wanted to adopt him as a son. I'll discuss this further in a later פרק.

To our luck, one person wasn't present at the count. The guard insisted that nobody could go to the side of the road until the missing person appeared.

This wait of several moments was to cost us a lot. 10 bombers appeared and we were one of their targets. They bombed us. This time we no longer waited for permission but ran to the nearby fields and spread ourselves on the ground with our faces deep in the tall grass. Suddenly we heard a deafening noise from a bomb that fell squarely in the middle of the road. The bomb left a crater 20 meters deeps and 10 meters long and wide. Shrapnel from the bomb flew in all directions, and I felt shrapnel in my neck and back. There was darkness from all the big and small stones and dust that flew up and then fell down.

When that bomb exploded and wounded me, I was certain that this was the end and with all my strength I said שמע ישראל ד' אלקינו ד' אחד.

The attack ended and the airplanes flew away. The silence of death floated in the field; many were dead. The dust and earth settled and daylight appeared again. I saw that בס"ד I was alive, but I felt strong pain from the back of my head, my neck and my back. The wounded cried for help.

Those who weren't wounded stood up to help the wounded. There was great confusion. Some screamed, others cried, and others acted as if they were out of their minds. שלום בירנבוים lost his hearing for several hours. Shrapnel entered his head and also wounded a nerve to an eye. שמואל פיינער had half of his lip torn.

After several hours a truck arrived for the wounded, me included. They brought us to a field infirmary that had two rooms and was serviced by two German doctors. The doctor who treated me was honest and good and treated me properly. He washed the wound with antiseptic to avoid an infection, and placed a bandage, but the pieces of metal from the shrapnel are still in my neck and back. Once when I took an X-ray, the doctor asked me in surprise "what's with your back?" I told him that this a memento of an air raid in April 1945.

I see in myself an interesting phenomenon. Though throughout the dreadful war we suffered so much physical and mental pain, we didn't think much about them in the first several years after the war. We were still stunned, as if we were drugged. The things done to us and that we witnessed were so terrifying in quantity and quality that our minds couldn't absorb the depths of the events. Even more so during the war itself when we had no time to absorb one event before we were struck by another. But with the passage of years, as one year goes by and then another, I again remember those years "שאינן לי בהם חפץ" and I find myself more and more understanding the details of what happened.

Now more than 40 years have passed since the air raid in Muehldorf. But many times at night, when I stand ready to go to sleep and to say קריאת שמע שעל המטה, and the house is quiet and restful, I again see the whole scene. It passes before me how I'm pressing my head in the grass near the road. Airplanes fly overhead and drop their deathly cargo. I hear the alarming noises of bomb explosions, and I see the world suddenly turn dark. I imagine to myself that these are my last moments on this world and from the depths of my heart I cry out with feeling "שמע ישראל ד' אלקינו ד' אחד"

## **The False Liberation**

The Germans announced on April 24 that we were to leave Muehldorf. News arrived that the Russian army had entered Berlin and were engaged in house to house fighting, and that the Americans were slowly advancing in our direction. So the Germans knew they had to move. They didn't know where to go, but this they knew: they would hold on to the Jews until the end.

When the news came I was in the infirmary together with שלום בירנבוים. Still, I decided that, no matter what, I was leaving and wasn't going to remain in the infirmary. I knew the German מנהג to kill sick patients when the Germans left a place. I announced my intention to the doctor, who again cleaned my wounds and put on a new bandage. שלום and I then joined the traveling transport.

After the liberation I heard that the sick patients who remained in Muehldorf were liberated before me and the others on the transport. They were closer to the American lines and the Germans there surrendered before they could harm the patients.

This to me is another proof that a person can't plan out foolproof ways of הצלה. If he is fated מן השמים to stay alive, then even if his every step is dangerous and not logical, these steps will work and he'll be saved. On the other hand, if חס ושלום the opposite is true, then all of his חכמה and all of his energy and activity will come to nothing and instead might even lead to his doom. I saw this countless times during the war.

We left Muehldorf on an open train on the next morning, April 25. The Germans distributed some food and gave each of us one raw potato. We traveled from place to place for two days and finally stopped on the 27<sup>th</sup> in the village of Poenk near Munich, where we stayed for a while. There were thousands of Jews on that train. Besides the Jews from Muehldorf there were also Jews from surrounding camps. My brother in law and other workers from Waldorf were also on the train.

I hadn't eaten a thing on the 52-hours of the trip. I didn't eat the potato in my pocket, because I was still holding it in reserve. I kept the potato in my pocket until several days after liberation.

The driver of the train, who wore a uniform and a red hat, suddenly pointed to several Jews excitedly and said "Do you see! Americans have already advanced to the main road that's only two kilometers from here." Those who heard him let out a shout of "קול תרועת שמחה וצהלה" and announced "Liberation is here!"

On hearing this, all the captives got up and began to race out of the Poenk train station to Poenk itself which was nearby. The Germans themselves didn't know how to react, and didn't stop anyone from leaving the train. This fact itself increased the impression that our liberation had come. Many Jews entered

German houses and demanded to be served food and drink. After all, the war had ended and the Germans were defeated.

How disappointed we were when after four or five hours armed soldiers arrived and ordered us back to the train station. These were air force officers who had a base near Poenk and who hadn't yet received an order to surrender. They attacked us in hate and anger, and were prepared to shoot anyone who resisted them. They surrounded us and ordered us to hold our hands up. They hit with their rifle butts everyone they encountered. One approached me but missed me when I fell to the ground.

Their lieutenant announced that anyone who wanted to live had to rerun immediately to the wagon cars. In sad spirit we returned to the wagons after having briefly enjoyed the sweet taste of freedom.

My brother in law מיכל tells me that in his part of the transport the Germans shot blindly at the Jews and killed hundreds if not thousands. A blood bath. They ordered the survivors to reboard the train.

This almost liberation became notorious forever as the "false liberation."

Oppressed and broken we found ourselves again on the train. All night the train traveled back and forth without any destination, while we worried that they would take us into some forest to kill us all.

This was a very bitter night for me. The wound in my back became infected and dripped out moisture. There was crowding and every moment someone would rub against my back and cause me excruciating pain. My stomach was famished and screamed for food.

### ***Liberation***

They ordered us off the train early on the morning of April 29. Dachau was liberated that day by the American 7<sup>th</sup> Army. We noticed that American airplanes were approaching to attack. This time they dropped no bombs, but when they saw the train tracks and a long train, and the movement of thousands of people, they attacked us from nearby with machine gun. בס"ד I managed to run from the

tracks while there was still time, but many standing closer to the train were killed. This was only one day before liberation.

We again entered the train that night until we arrived at Zeishaubt, near Feldafink, early the next morning on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

The train doors opened and we got out. We saw 40 or 50 German soldiers. At first we thought that they were to be our guards. But after a few moments we realized that they weren't wearing their weapons as if they were ready to shoot, but instead carried the weapons on their backs. We all thought that this might mean that liberation was near, but we didn't want to put ourselves in danger again for nothing.

We stood there for about two hours. We whispered to each other the news that Hitler the צר הצורר had committed suicide that day in his bunker under the Reichstag in Berlin. We also saw SS officers tearing from their uniforms the black patch of the SS. They didn't want to be captured by the Americans as SS officers who had committed unspeakable crimes against innocents.

A German approached and pointed with his finger to where the Americans were nearby. This time a group of Jews from Greece, who are by nature brave, ran off towards Zeishaubt. I turned to יהושע בייגעל who was near me and said "לאמער לויפן" and we joined the group from Greece in their run to the city.

A tank with an American star passed us as we were running on the road. It wasn't hard for the Americans to recognize that we didn't belong to the soldiers they were fighting. Our faces were pale and scrawny and we were dressed in the colored "uniforms" of German captives. The tank stopped and we climbed in with the help of the soldiers. We traveled with them two or three miles until their base.

While we were in the tank, they had רחמנות on us and showed us cans of חזיר and other foods. Based on our weak and unhealthy state we were certainly מותר to eat these foods. But I understood that in my situation, with my stomach shrunk from not having eaten so long, fat foods were liable to be dangerous, and

especially so for food that was canned and not fresh. I asked them for some cookies and hot water, which they gave me.<sup>22</sup>

The remaining Jews in the transport were liberated two hours after we ran off. Many Jews afterwards entered German houses and asked to be served. When they received the standard answer “we have nothing,” the Jews forced their way downstairs into the cellars and found barrels full of marmalade and other good foods.

I walked into an empty German house and found a suit that fit me. I took off my colored “uniform” that I had been wearing for more than a year, and put on the suit instead. I then walked outside as a free person for the first time in five years.

I raised my eyes upward in thanks to הקב"ה for letting me survive through so many נסים, and I spread out my hands in a תפילה for the future. Please Hashem, give me the כוח I need to be become strong again and to be healed. May it be your רצון that I can live as a Jew and to be מקיים your מצוות with הרחבת הדעת. Please let it also be your רצון that I be זוכה to build a בית נאמן בישראל, to leave a שם ושארית to my destroyed משפחה. To my children and their descendants I will tell of all the חסד that you have done to me, that you saved me from the lions and that you brought me back from the depths.

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From the באבוב ר' שלמה by קינה

Have רחמנות on the remnants of the הקדושים who numbered 6 million

Raise up the בית המקדש and be מנחם us

Elevate us and bring us to ירושלים and ציון

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<sup>22</sup> Thousands of Jews who survived the war came down with typhus because they couldn't immediately digest the foods they were given after liberation. Those under American control were sickened less by this disease because American doctors took care to feed those liberated only food that was easily digestible. Not so in the British sections where soldiers fed those liberated without taking care to follow the advice of doctors. Many of those who contracted typhus died after the liberation my wife's uncle שלמה שווארץ. At least he managed before his פטירה to be reunited with his daughters Mrs. Oberlander and Mrs. Schwimmer, who afterwards set up בתים נאמנים בישראל



