

[221]

Part Four

Waiting for Release

[222 – blank page]

Chapter Fourteen

Secret and Underground Charity

A. In the Name of the Commandment “*A Gift in Secret*” [Proverbs 21:14]

Unbelievably, even in the harsh conditions of the camp, when help became a matter of life and death, there were those who hesitated to accept it.

When Mr Pik, an old friend of the family, offered Miryam Zalcborg 500 złoty as a loan, shame really ate her up. What?! She, the daughter of a good family, would take a handout?

“I cried but, in the end, I took it because hunger is a terrible feeling. Several times, I had no soap, and then Mr Pik bought it for me. He treated me very nicely, but it humiliated me.”

Miryam’s hesitation did not change the grim reality.

As mentioned, there were other girls who were reluctant to accept help, maintaining their pride. As for the men, some were afraid of a bad image, if it became known that they needed help from others. Strange, but being poor was not considered a great honour in the camp either. Therefore, the most common form of help was given in secret.

Jakow Szwarc describes:

“We were lucky, because we were a large family - parents, a son and a daughter, also my friend and another distant relative. Every evening, we would cook a bucket full of potatoes, which we bought in exchange for jewellery, which mother managed to sneak into the camp.

“Several times, we noticed that someone was stealing our food. We set up an ambush at night and saw that our neighbour (a very respectable man), an attorney, was stealing a little food from us every night.

When our mother noticed this, she prepared a little more potatoes every evening and so our ‘family’ grew without the guest’s knowledge!”¹

And there were those, like Aleksander Galster, who was helped by a wealthier friend:

“I talk about it at every opportunity. We are still like brothers to this day.”²

And such cases were not rare.

¹ Testimony of Jakow Shachron, YVA, 03/12272.

² Testimony of Aleksander (Zyskind) Galster, YVA, 0.3/7965.

As is known, amongst religious Jews, “secret giving” is considered a very important *mitzvah* [Heb., commandment/good deed]. Among those, who dealt with the matter, was Jechiel Landau, about whom Sara Ben-Tzvi writes:

“I remember that my uncle, a resourceful and intelligent man, managed to realise small sums of the large amount of money that he had before the War, which he divided equally amongst family members and others in need at the camp who were not from the family, in order for them to buy extra food.”

And on the same subject, Lipman Rajcher, chairman of the former Poalei Agudas Yisroel Party in Częstochowa, was also in the camp.

In his testimony, he states that the situation of the local Jews was much better than that of the new prisoners, because they had connections with the city. Therefore (he does not explain on whose initiative) a kind of “mutual aid committee” was organised in the camp, connected to the underground, which sent money.

The activists on the committee were two Jews from Częstochowa, who made sure to distribute the money among the needy, especially those who were religious.³ Rajcher did not say which underground this was, but it is known that the two benefactors were Nojeh Edelist and Jechiel Landau.

³ Testimony of Lipman Rajcher, YVA, 0.3/2856; cf: Orbach, *Toldot...* p. 142.