

Dr Benjamin Orenstein

Destined

To the poetess Rivka Kopé with reverence,

The Author

*In life, some people are destined
To see the dawn, the sun at its rising;
To gather the fruits of their efforts,
Their fortune to smile with song.*

*Others are forced blind eyes to raise
In supplication to Heaven on high,
And in black sorrow enveloped,
Powerlessly let their arms heavily fall.*

*Some people are destined only to joy,
At every step to brilliant success;
From the field – which never was sowed –
They have a very bountiful, blessed harvest.*

*Yet it is the destiny of others,
That instead of fruits, wild grasses should grow;
That everything should always be upside down;
Go ask yourself – for when and for what¹?*

In the Small Ghetto

Dedicated to the ghetto fighter Zvi Rosenvein,

The Author

*In the Small Ghetto, a life filled with pain;
In the Small Ghetto, a life without the shine of light.
Neither despairing nor depressed, always alert to fight;
Exalted and inspired, with a weapon in his hand.*

*In the wrangle of sorrow, misery, hunger and want;
In the wrangle of sorrow – fighting over a chunk of bread.
Proud, exalted and inspired – fighting against the Nazi hounds;
To defeat and dominate the rule of robbery and sin.*

*In the ghetto bunkers – a life filled with blood;
In the ghetto bunkers – a life filled with courage.
Always ready and alert to fight against the Nazi forces,
To destroy [them] and to kill [them] with weapons and
with might.*

*In the Small Ghetto, a life filled with pain;
In the Small Ghetto, a life without sunshine.
Neither despairing nor depressed, always alert to fight;
Exalted and inspired, with a weapon in his hand.*

**Melody: “Be’Arvot
Ha’Negev”**

¹ [TN: This line is made up of two colloquial Yiddish expressions: “Go ask yourself”, which is equivalent to “Go figure”, and “For when and for what?”, meaning “for what rhyme and reason”; thus, the line, as a whole, would roughly translate as “Who knows why this is so?”]

Bread

*At daybreak, before the shining rays in the sky appear,
There is, in the HASAG-Pelcery camp, a tempestuous tumult.
The trumpet cuts sleep short, calling, commanding,
the starving, tortured Jews to the rollcall.
In rows, in groups and in teams lined up,
They are by the SS tyrants and watchmen tallied.*

*Enslaved all day and to the machine bound,
The heart tormented by piercing pain, suffering and wounds.
The conscience of the world, of mankind, is blind, deaf and without a
tongue –
It sees not and hears not how millions of lives are being extinguished.
On pyres and in crematoria they are being burned;
They are being shot, tortured and hanged up by their hands.*

*With bitter perspiration, we worked from morning to late at night,
Returning to the barrack broken and lost in thought.
We lay on hard wood wool² and paper sacks of straw,
Tossing and turning and lying awake,
Thinking of revenge, freedom, hope and bread,
Of destroying slavery, oppression, hunger and want.
I did not fall asleep but kept my eyes closed,
My fantasy working, dreaming and thinking.
In place of the fallen heroes and martyrs
Shall awake their tortured heirs in the camp,
To the battle for freedom and rights, without dread or fear,
For bright, sunny days and nights serene.*

*Bodies lie unconscious due to hunger and want;
How do we find them something to eat – soup or bread –
To strengthen their weak limbs and encourage their spirits,
And bring them a ray of hope, courage, faith and comfort?
[We must] gather everyone under the flag of the fight for freedom,
For a world of rights, fulfilled ambitions and equality.*

*A wonder occurred: I saw baskets with bread –
Large, deep and wide baskets with freshly-baked bread;
White, long, rounded, delicious morsels of bread.
I roused my neighbours and showed them the bread;
Everyone awoke upon sensing the aroma of the bread.*

² [TN: A mass of fine, soft wood shavings, typically used as packing material.]

*They chewed, eating and eating with relish the bread.
I thought to myself – let them eat their fill of this bread,
To placate the painful hunger, suffering and bitter dearth.*

*I opened up my tired, half-asleep eyes;
Like a dream it all vanished – a dream flown-away.
Was this a fantasy, just a sweet dream?
Yes, [but] this must actually happen in reality, too.
I call out, No! This was no fantasy, nor was it a dream.
This is my vision, and it shall surely come to pass.*

*Hey! My fellow HASAG brothers, figures [so] tragic –
The War is to end, peace shall govern the globe.
Hunger and want shall vanish and you shall not lack any bread;
You shall also not be tormented by lack of food and clothes.
The Western Meteor is soon to go under,
And in the Near East shall rise the sun and the flag.*



The poem *Bread* was written in December 1943 in the HASAG-Pelcery camp in Częstochowa. The “Western Meteor” is a reference to Nazism and the “Near East” to [the Land of] Israel. The poem is built upon thirteen sounds [assonances?]. It was read for the first time, by the author, in Barrack №7 in the HASAG-Pelcery camp on 31st December 1943 and, for the second time, at the first central memorial service of the Częstochower *Landsmannschaften* in the American Zone in Germany, which took place in Landsberg on 20th October 1946.



HASAG

Motif and melody from
Sz. Kaczergiński's
*The Streets and Boulevards*³

*It is the same camp and HASAG
For me and for you –
The same bunks and barracks,
Which will be the end of me.*

*It is the same canister of soup, day after day,
For the shifts of day and night.
Life is truly unbearable,
Filled with agony and without [any] light.*

Refrain:
*It should not be thus,
It must not be thus –
That others are destined to freedom,
And for Jews all is forbidden.
The Nazi wickedness rules –
That is what they enforced.
My heart seethes and boils!
It must not be thus,
It should not be thus!*

*For them the Aleje and boulevards,
For us a crowded quarter;
For them comforts and palaces,
For us fear and a spring of tears.*

*Why for us barbed wire,
Not letting us proceed?
Why is my home to me forbidden,
And my bed like a hard rock?*
Refrain

³ [TN: This is an obvious ref. to the song "Tsi Darf Es Azoy Zayn?" (Does It Have to Be This Way?), which was not composed by Szymon Kaczergiński, but published by him in his 1948 work "Lider fun di Getos un Lagern" (Songs of the Ghettoes and Camps).]