

The Tragic Yom Kippur of 1942¹

A few days before Yom Kippur 1942, I was approached by the late Alter Altman - an electronics technician, who was the *brygadier* [Pol. foreman] at the Enro firm. I was registered as a forced labourer and had a work card from that factory. Understandably, I always wriggled my way out of going to forced labour [with different² excuses. The *brygadier* made me aware that things had become much stricter at the factory and, those who did not come to work, would have their work cards taken away. At the time, Enro was considered one of the most secure *placówki* [Pol., workplaces], and a work card from there could shield one from misfortune. Hearing this story, I already began going to work regularly.

I was then living with my family in the "Big Ghetto", at the home of my beloved mother, may she rest in peace, at ul. Warszawska 23. The Rebbe of Pilica z"l³ also lived in that building. I always worshipped at the Rebbe's study-hall but, regretfully, on that tragic Yom Kippur, I was forced to go to work and transgress upon my tradition and the devout upbringing that I had been given at the religious institutions and at home.

When I was at work, at about eleven o'clock in the morning, Alter Altman came to me and told me, confidentially, that he had just been in the factory's office, where he had found out that the murderous "*Ausrottungskommando*" [Ger., extermination squad] had arrived in the city and a hundred railway wagons were standing, at the railway platform, in readiness to deport the Cześćochowa Jews.

Upon hearing the mournful news, I immediately called together a few of my close friends, who were working with me at Enro. Their names are Jechaskiel Ofman, Fridman and Zborowski. Unanimously, we decided that, under all circumstances, we were to make efforts to return to the ghetto at once and deliver the tragic news, so that anyone, who had the slightest chance, should be saved from the murderous *Ausrottungskommando*.

I arrived in the ghetto in a very oppressed mood and proceeded straight to the study-hall. I delivered the tragic news to those closest to me, among whom were my brothers Godl and Tuwja, and also Dawid Kozak. In the first minutes, they thought this tragic news had been exaggerated. But, very soon, other messengers arrived from various workplaces - including those from the vicinity of the train station, who had seen, for themselves, the railway wagons.

¹ [TN: An abridged version of this article was later loosely translated to English in the 1993 book "Cześćochov – Our Legacy" (pp. 113-114 of the English-language section); our version differs significantly from it, as it has been translated directly from the Yiddish original.]

² [TN: Half of the word "different" or "various" is missing in the original, as is also at least one word before it.]

³ [TN: Ref. to the second and last leader of the Pilica Chassidic dynasty, Rebbe Henech-God Justman (1883–1942), who was murdered in Treblinka.]

The assembled began to disperse, mournful, bitter and dejected. One asked another, "What do we do?" [But] who could give advice at [such a] time? Anyone, who had any hiding place at all - a bunker, an invisible corner in a dark cellar or a camouflaged spot in an attic, began carrying in water, bread and blankets in order to spend a couple of days there. The Jews in the ghetto thought it would all last some two or three days, whereupon the *Ausrottungskommando* marauders would leave and peace would be restored. This assessment turned out to be incorrect. The Nazi destroyers simply conducted a manhunt for the hidden Jews and immediately shot them. Let it also be mentioned here that, in this case, the Jewish ghetto police played an extremely shameful role. They ran about seeking out the hiding places, thus delivering even their own family members and close friends into the hands of the murderers.

As the war between Germany and Russia was underway at the time, the blackout regulation was in effect. Windows of the dwellings had to be covered with black paper, so that no ray of light could be seen from the outside. The same also applied for the streets - absolutely no street lighting was allowed. The close of Yom Kippur was an exception. On that tragic night, all the electric lighting was ablaze. No blackout regulations applied. For Hitler, with his regime and the *Ausrottungskommando*, the annihilation of the Jews was more important than the entire war. The electric lights were put on purposely, in order to hinder or make it impossible for Jews to flee to the "Aryan side".

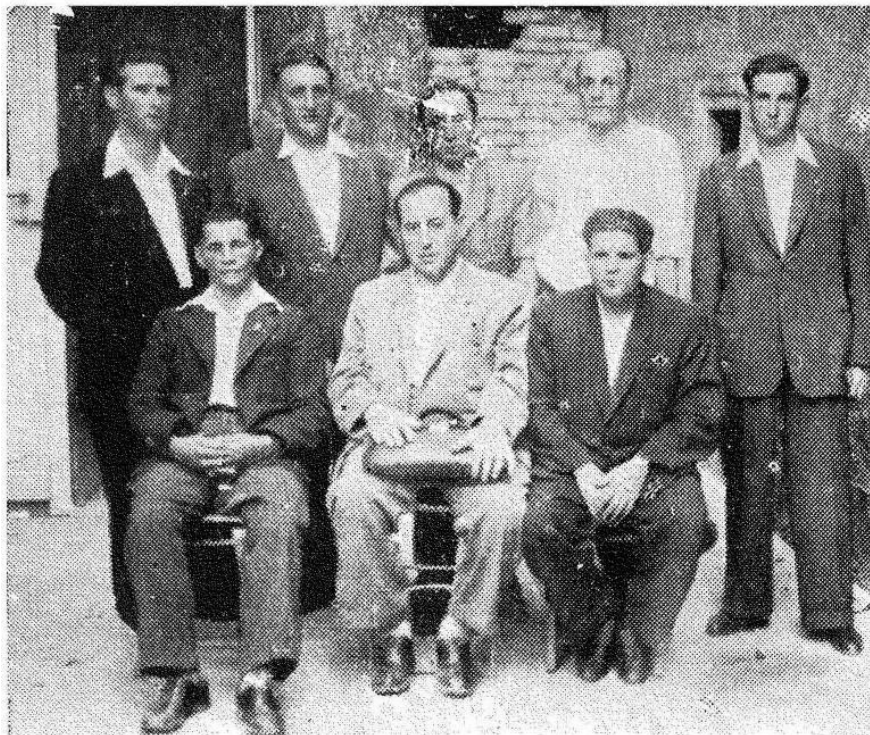
The Jewish ghetto police were running about throughout the Jewish houses, telling everyone to report for the mandatory *Appell* [Ger. rollcall/muster] at the New Market Square [Nowy Rynek]. In fact, it was there that the selection took place for the deportation to death - to the gas-ovens in Treblinka.

I did not attend that rollcall. Firstly, I hid my family in a bunker. Under a hail of bullets, I took my mother, may she rest in peace, and my sister to the Braland factory on ul. Krótka. There was a bunker there in which sixty Jewish souls were hiding. There was a moment when the Nazi arch-murderer Degenhardt, may his name be obliterated, demanded of the Landau brothers that they reveal the bunker - otherwise, everyone would be shot. They, the Landau brothers, were upright, prominent and worthy Jews - and they preferred to die, before delivering sixty Jewish souls into those murderous hands to be annihilated. The Landau brothers categorically declared that there was no bunker in the area of their factory. Even though the Nazis searched, the bunker was not found - and the noble Landau brothers were not shot.

I had an Enro work card. I went from Landau's factory over to the other side of the street, to the *Metalurgia*, where a large group of Jews had gathered. Mr Kołtątaj, Commissar of the Enro factory, arrived and took with him all those who were employed and possessed Enro work cards. Upon marching out from the *Metalurgia*, the gendarme Schott, may his name be obliterated, winked to Degenhardt, may his name be obliterated, who asked one of the Enro workers as to his age. The boy was so frightened, he simply could not speak. His father, Szmul Zelinger, the son-in-law of the Rabbi of Kamyk, answered seventeen. Degenhardt winked to the gendarme Schott, who shot the boy on the spot. That was the first time in my life that I had seen a person shot. It was the first time that I witnessed the writhing of a man shot, the

puddle of blood of a life violently cut short. This image always stands before my eyes, and I shall never forget it to the end of my life.

Never in my life shall I forget that tragic Yom Kippur of 1942, which was the beginning of the deportations and the mass-slaughters of the cherished and hearty Jews of my hometown Częstochowa. I shall never forget my warm-hearted, God-fearing parents - my father Chaim and my mother Dwojra, may they rest in peace; my brothers Godl and Tuwja, may they rest in peace; my kindly sisters Sura and Miriam, may they rest in peace; all my close friends and acquaintances, the Częstochowa Jews, the fighters of the resistance movement and European Jewry in general, who perished on the altar of Jewish sanctity [viz. martyrdom], in sanctification of the Name [of God] and the People [of Israel].



A group of escapees from the Treblinka death camp, among them three Częstochowers.

**In the front row, the one sitting on the right side is Jakow Ajzner;
the first two standing on the left are Abram-Lajb Bomba and Mojsze Rapaport.**