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For the Thirty Eighth Memorial Service - held on 19th October 1980

*The importance of a Yizkor evening is the remembrance of the
death anniversary of the annihilated martyrs*

It is truly an important duty of the *Landsmannschaften* to observe and not to forget the sorrowful date, and appoint a day as the death anniversary of the martyrs.

As we know, there is a Jewish tradition to visit the graves of one's ancestors shortly before the High Holidays. Alas, to our great agony, we shall never be able to visit the tombs of our ancestors and all our dear ones, who were annihilated by Hitler's murderers. The case is the same with the millions of victims - men, women, children and elderly - who perished in Hitler's era, when Hitler sowed destruction and devastation throughout Europe.

We are unable to go to the tombs of our ancestors, to the holy martyrs, because they have no graves. Their remains were scattered everywhere there, in all parts of Europe.

The bones and the ashes of the millions of annihilated Jewish people are scattered in Auschwitz, Treblinka, Majdanek, Chełmno, Belzec and other similar locations. Their non-existent "tombs" are there, where the smoke billowed, day and night, from the crematoria, which consumed the millions of gassed Jewish victims.

This is how it began:

[It has been] forty-one years since the outbreak of the Second World War - the beginning of our most gruesome misfortune - [when] the first bombs [fell] upon the heads of Polish Jewry.

[Under] a bright, starry sky, on a moonlit night in Elul¹, Jews stand outside their homes in little groups, engrossed in lively discussions, with looks of deep concern on their faces, and different opinions are heard - but no good tidings for Jews. People ask one another about what will happen. What does the uncertain future say? How long can such a war last - surely no longer than a month or two? Poland and her allies will definitely not give in - they will clip the wings of the Germans. After all, the Poles are shouting, "We will not surrender a single button!"

And thus the discussions go on in front of every gate, on every street, in every town and *shtetl* in Poland. The night draws to its end - the morning star heralds a sunrise without a single cloud on the horizon. In the morning, a blue sky grows along with the uncertainty - and, here, German aeroplanes suddenly appear, obscuring the pure, blue heavens like a dense, black

¹ [TN: In 1939, the Hebrew month of Elul started on 15th August and ended on 13th September.]

cloud. Bombs fall on all sides. The Polish towns and *shtetls* are transformed into huge, blazing bonfires, and the houses into ruins.

Yes! That is what 1st September 1939 looked like, when the Second World War broke out, [almost] fifty years ago. From the moment Hitler and his barbaric army began marching into Poland, on 1st September 1939, the suffering and pain for the local Jews in the other countries of Europe immediately commenced.

From the very beginning, came the demand that Jews pay large “contributions”. Jews were chased and tormented. Jews were “caught” for work. Jews were imprisoned in dismal, fenced-off ghettos, where *akcje* [Pol. operations] and “resettlements” were later carried out, and Jews were transported to gruesome death camps. There was no rest for the Jews with the Nazi murderers. It was unavoidably a time of suffering, pain, destruction and death.

As much as we have heard and read, hitherto, regarding the suffering and annihilation of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis, it is all just a drop in the ocean compared to that grisly reality. Entire communities of Jews were led out by the Nazis, from the sealed ghettos to be annihilated - specifically during the days of the High Holidays 1942, and also afterwards. This continued until the start of 1943. The grim extermination of Jewish women, children, men and elderly went on continuously, during the holiest days in the year for the world’s Jewry - [while] the big world kept silent. The world of culture and civilisation was indifferent to it all, and the heavens were also silent.

We will never be able to forget those terrible moments - the moments during the horrific times of death and destruction. We will never be able to forget those terrible moments, when desperate, mortally afraid families sought a place of refuge in the ghetto cellars. Children ran, carrying treasures in their little hands - two potatoes, a chunk² of bread. Long lines of mute men and women made their way towards the mass graves, saying *Kaddish* for their themselves. Teachers and their pupils, mothers and their infants, *Rebbes* and their *Chassidim*, rich and poor, Torah scholars and illiterate Jews - all are taken to their deaths. And a child asks his father, “Daddy, must I die so young?” The father replies, “Dear son of mine, think about something else - think about tomorrow...”

We did not know, and we still do not know, who can find an interpretation to explain evil on such a scale. Who can comprehend so much agony and suffering? Whether observant or irreligious, a believer or an atheist, one cannot fathom - is unable to comprehend - what happened in Treblinka and Ponary, Auschwitz and Babi Yar, or Majdanek and Bełżec. How can one understand the destruction?

In the Eastern European countries that are, nowadays, ruled by Communist regimes, there was once a large Jewish life in all those areas. The Jews there, with their creative activities and spiritual elevation, wrote the finest chapter in the modern history of the Jewish people. But now, it is dismal and empty there - there is a terrible silence. There are no longer even any signs there, that there was once a Jewish life in those places. The new generations of non-

² [TN: We have deduced the word “chunk” from the context, as the term used in the Yiddish original – קראשקע – is not to be found in dictionaries or other sources.]

Jews in those countries, who were already born and raised after the Second World War, do not even know what a Jew is.

For the most part, the Jews were annihilated in the Nazi death camps – but many Jews also perished and were slain in the localities where they had previously lived, to the length and breadth of Eastern Europe. Their remains lie in mass graves, but we do not even know their location.

The Jewish victims, robbed of their identities, were left on their own by the entire globe. They were not judged for what they had said or done, but for being who they were - the sons and daughters of a nation which had suffered and bled since the exodus from Egypt. Every occupied country and every underground movement received aid from London, Washington or Moscow – [but] not the Jews. Left alone, they were abandoned to annihilation.

Although the Jews are the primary victims of antisemitism, history teaches us that antisemitism has the potential to disrupt and destroy law and order, even in countries and societies that are strong and solid. We have not forgotten what happened! It began with antisemitic terror - [and] one must cut off a snake's head. If this is not done, there is a danger that the serpent will poison the entire organism, by which time it is too late to do anything.

The *Surviving Remnant* [viz. Holocaust survivors] has called to confidence and not to despair. They are not witnesses who are poisoned by hatred and embittered by vengeance - instead of choosing anarchy, they cling to the Image of God³. Instead of burning cities, they build new ones, turning ruins into sanctuaries. The majority have gone off to make an old dream of returning to Zion come true - of helping to build the Jewish State, which has been so recently established.

We have learned certain lessons. We have learned that, after the destruction and devastation of that gruesome reality, we cannot remain indifferently neutral in critical times. As little as we knew that in our days, after the oceans of suffering of the six million murdered Jews, we would witness new wars and new racial theories, venomously [directed] at the Jewish State.

It is only with the word that the Jewish people has maintained its existence and identified - [both] the written word and unwritten one, the Written Law and the Oral Law⁴. Remembering the past, the memories, and that [duty to] "*Remember the days of old*"⁵ - not with monuments, but with the spoken word.

We shall never tire of telling the world that what has happened must not be forgotten. We shall never tire of speaking and writing about it, to remind the world not only of the destruction of a few individual Jewish communities, but of the annihilation of six million Jewish lives - the Jewish building and the Jewish creation in Eastern Europe.

³ [TN: Viz. the belief in the sanctity of human life; from Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."]

⁴ [TN: The former includes the Hebrew Bible in its entirety, and the latter the rabbinical interpretations thereof, that are found in the Mishnah, Aggadah, Talmud etc., which were originally not written down but recited by heart, and which religious Jews believe to have been given by God on Mount Sinai along with the Written Law.]

⁵ [TN: In Heb. in the original; from Deuteronomy 32:7: "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee."]

We remember our fathers and mothers, sisters, brothers and children of our hometown, Jewish Częstochowa. We remember the heroes of Częstochowa and Białystok, and the heroes of the Warsaw Jewish ghetto, as well as the heroes of all the other Jewish ghettos, the martyrs of Treblinka and the children of Auschwitz, who only died because they were Jews.

Attending today's memorial service, setting a date as the death anniversary of our martyrs, lighting the six candles which symbolise the six million severed Jewish lives - these things bring us back to the horrific yesterday, and are also a reminder to the world that the Holocaust cannot and will not ever be forgotten.

We shall never forget!