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The Destruction of a Great Jewish Community

The lives of the *Jewish Surviving Remnant* - those who survived the Holocaust - are filled with nightmares. Day and night, we see the images of destruction.

But, when the death anniversaries arrive - the days in the year when the massacres took place - we are overcome with an incredible distress. We factually relive those dark, horrific days and nights and, once again, we feel the unending pain and agony of that great, all-encompassing devastation.

The Jewish community of Częstochowa, which was “a city and mother in Israel” [2 Samuel 20:19], existed for more than 300 years and, before the Second World War, numbered 29,000 souls. During the War, after the Jews from the surrounding small shtetls had gathered [there], the Jewish community in Częstochowa numbered 48,000 souls.

The small number of Jews, who survived the great Third Destruction¹, often go about with a feeling of guilt for having survived – “why did I remain alive, when the entire Jewish people in Poland perished?”.

We therefore feel, upon us, the great, extraordinary burden of desiring to scream out from within ourselves, to weep from within ourselves, the huge tragedy that has occurred to us. But where does one take those strengths and where does one find the language, the words, which can express our agony and pain, words able to split the heavens and make the world tremble? For it is our conception that, until now, the tremendous scope of the Holocaust (despite the fact that so much has already been written about the Holocaust), and the effect of the Holocaust on the future formation of humanity in general, and of the Jewish people in particular, have not yet been brought out.

Who, oh who, is able to weep out the great, tortured, painful road of our large Jewish community, since the time that the German beasts marched into our city on 3rd September 1939? Indeed, just one day later, on Monday, 4th September 1939, the German beasts arranged a bloody spectacle upon the defenceless Jewish populace, which cost the lives of hundreds of men, women and children.

This day is designated, by Częstochowa Jews, as “Bloody Monday”. From this “Bloody Monday”, there stretches a long chain of bloodied days and nights, which descended upon the Jewish population. These were bloody days of burning the synagogues, looting Jewish property and goods, coercing people to perform all kinds of slave labour, deporting communal activists, sending young Jews away to extermination camps and shooting people for no reason.

¹ [TN: Ref. to the destruction of the First and Second Jerusalem Temples.]

This long chain of moral humiliations and physical pain continued until the “final solution” of sending the Jews to the gas ovens [viz. gas chambers and crematoria] ensued. The Jewish populace was then seized by a profound despair and panic. We felt as if we had been crammed into a mortuary, from which there was no hope of being saved. Tell, oh you poets, artists and philosophers – have you ever seen a congregation of 48,000 martyrs in a death wrangle, stuffed into a cage, where the only deliverance from their anguish can be death?

Is there any hope of ever finding the language, or some other form of expressing this hellish situation?

Thus, things continued until 22nd September 1942, the day after Yom Kippur.

The whitewashed [railway] wagons arrived on the day of Yom Kippur and, along with them, a division of the Ukrainian death squads, who carried out the extermination *akcja* under the leadership of the German SS.

On the morning after Yom Kippur, the first eight thousand Częstochowa Jews were pushed into the suffocating wagons and sent off to the Treblinka gas ovens. Between Yom Kippur and Simchas Torah, 42,000 Jews were sent away from the Częstochowa Ghetto.

What tremendous strength, physical and spiritual, are demanded of us, the *Jewish Surviving Remnant*, in order to carry, within our spirits, feelings and minds, these horrific pictures of the last days and nights on the last road to annihilation of those closest to us!

Woe to us for what our eyes have seen! Here emerge some images from hell - the Jewish policemen run about throughout the Jewish streets, telling the people to ready themselves for tomorrow’s “resettlement” and that, today, they are to go to receive the portion of bread and tea as provisions for the journey. From all the houses, the mass of people, sentenced to death, gone wild from hunger and thirst, start running towards the provisions point at the Old Market square [Stary Rynek]. [Some], weak with hunger, collapse on the way - but no one is concerned with them. Jews run from the alleyways Garncarska, Nadrzeczna, Targowa and Old Market. From the surrounding streets, from which the Jews were deported the previous day, an emptiness blows, rousing thoughts of mortal fear.

These questions drill into our minds. Where are the Jews of these streets, who were here yesterday, and where will we, the Jews who are now running, be tomorrow? A Ukrainian murderer, in the service of the SS, shoots at the running mass and, with that, all the questions are answered. A small part [of the crowd] swarms with superhuman efforts to the platform containing bread and pots of tea, which stands next to the church at the Old Market, where several Judenrat functionaries are distributing the one-pound portions of bread and cups of tea.

Overfed Gestapo people stand to the side, taking photographs with magnesium lights [viz. flash-lamps].

More shouting is heard, accompanied by gunshots. The mass of starving Jews is driven back into the houses. The shrieking of the alarm sirens is heard. The streetlamps, which were lit for the extermination *akcja*, are turned off.

A ray of hope dawns within the embittered hearts - could a miracle still happen at the last moment? Could the world have found out about our misfortune and come to our aid? Might the Nazi tyrants not be able to carry out their crimes?

The air-raid alarm was called off shortly afterwards and, once more, shooting was heard, shattering the fantasies that were being woven in Jewish minds. More than one had expressed the desire to fall to a bomb, rather than being dragged away to the Treblinka gas ovens.

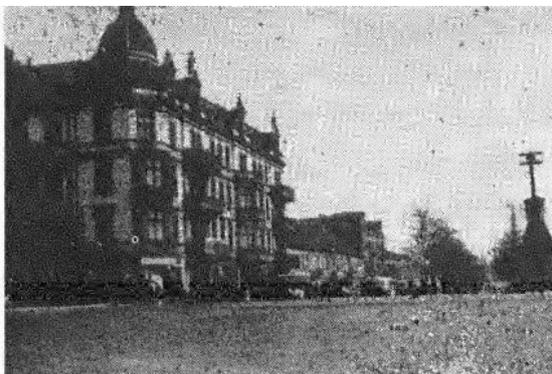
Jews, from other courtyards, arrived through the roofs and told that, during the alarm, Jews had taken advantage of the darkness and fled across the rooftops to the "Aryan side". The Ukrainians shot at them and some fell dead, but others still managed to escape.

A mother takes her best things out of the cupboard and packs them in rucksacks for her children. As she does so, she is unable to control herself and breaks out in bitter tears, "What do the murderers want with us? What is it they wish to do to us?".

A father implores his son not to leave the house, because he wants to be together with him on the last night. A son begs his elderly Chassidic father, who stands gazing through teary eyes into the starry, moonlit night, in a bid to glimpse the terrible secret of annihilation, to lie down and sleep for a couple of hours. Can anyone then comprehend the deep-reaching thoughts in which that old Chassidic Jew was immersed at the time?

The cruel, ghastly night, filled with nightmare images, came to its end. The dawn of the even more gruesome day, that was rising, arrived. This day was marked with the date Monday, 29th September 1942.

That day saw off thousands of holy souls to their eternal repose, to be annihilated in Treblinka. The lips of those marching on their last road uttered a curse on the world and humanity, and on the sun that was shining, at that time, in all its splendour.



***Franke's building on the First Aleja,
near the railway bridge***



The New Market square [Nowy Rynek]