

Hannah Szenes

In a Budapest prison, by a bullet from the Nazi murderers, one of the most glorious Jewish female heroines fell - the young Jewish girl, Hannah Szenes. She was one of the envoys the [Jewish] Settlement in the Land of Israel, sent out to the hell of Europe, to encourage the Jews, organise their resistance and, also, to save anything that could still be saved. Many of these heroes failed to return from their mission and, among them, was also Hannah Szenes.

Szenes was born in 1921, in Budapest, to wealthy, assimilated parents. No one thought that this girl would become a *chalutza* [Heb., pioneer], emigrate [to Palestine], become the first Jewish female parachutist and perish rescuing her brethren.

However, the intensified antisemitism in Hungary, and reports of Jewish suffering throughout the entire globe, caused a turnabout in all her ideas. She became a Zionist. She understood this Zionism in simple terms - to emigrate, as soon as possible, to the Land of Israel and to work there in a collective. She left her wealthy home and family and, at the age of eighteen, in September 1939, she was already in the country.

For some time, she studies in the Girls' Agricultural School at Nahalal. She later joins Kibbutz Sdot Yam (near Caesarea), where she works hard in all branches of agriculture. Come the evening, she is often tired and broken, yet nevertheless finds the time to study, read and write. In her free moments, she writes short poems. Her poems are tender and, at the same time, are filled with life:

**אהבתי את השמש החמה,
האור, השיר, ניצוץ של זוג עיניים**

*(I loved the warm sun,
The light, the song, the spark in a pair of eyes.)*

Several years go by in the Land of Israel, in arduous toil, intensive work on herself and dreaming, on that happy, little island amidst the great deluge of blood. Yet her heart is not at rest. Hundreds of thousands - millions - of Jews are being slaughtered, gassed and burned. They need to be helped. Something must be done. Hannah decides to set out on a "mission". She joins the military, where she distinguishes herself with her bravery and diligence. She is trained as a parachutist and attains an officer's rank.

After receiving the proper preparation, she and other comrades are parachuted into in Yugoslavia, in order to infiltrate Hungary from there. In Yugoslavia - a country where a heroic people is fighting a titanic war against their powerful conquerors, and where female fighters holding weapons are a common phenomenon - Hannah is distinguished for her exceptional daring. She takes part in numerous battles, and becomes a legendary heroine for the Yugoslavians. Different tales circulate regarding her heroic deeds and her person, and they elicit general amazement.

The day comes when the Germans take over Hungary. The Sztójay¹ government is formed. The full-scale physical annihilation of Hungarian Jewry is about to begin. Hannah and several comrades cross over to Hungary.

Here, she is arrested as the result of being informed on by a Christian with whom she had stayed.

Despite all the tortures to which she is subjected, the Gestapo are unable to extract any information from her. During the interrogations, she casts the worst insults at her hangmen and predicts an ugly end for them.

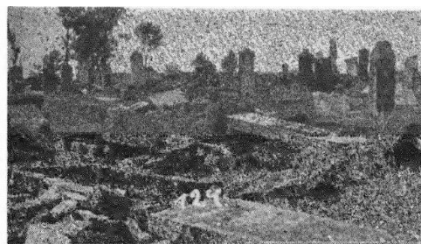
In prison, she elicits general amazement and deference with her bearing. The prisoners speak incessantly of the wonderful Jewish woman - and even the interrogators and prison guards are unable to free themselves from the spell of her personality.

7th of November 1944 arrives. The prosecutor enters Hannah's cell with a declaration - she has been sentenced to death, and has the right to appeal for clemency. She refuses to do so - she wants no kindness from her people's hangmen. An hour later, the sentence is carried out.

In a letter before her death to the comrades, she writes, "Continue on your path, comrades, until the day of victory arrives - the victory of our people."

Her body was later brought to a Jewish burial in the "Martyrs' Corner" of the Budapest Jewish cemetery. How and by whom it was done is unknown to this day. The Budapest Jews had already been deported by then, so a *Chevra Kadisha* [Burial Society] was out of the question.

Let this also be a feat of her person - a feat of her heroic personality already after her death.



R. Federman



W. Levenhoff



A. Chroblowsky

Some of the contributors to the Yiddish press in Częstochowa

¹ [TN: Döme Sztójay, previously Hungarian ambassador to Germany and known German sympathiser, served as Prime Minister of Hungary in 1944.]