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Jakow Klajner RIP¹

In the late-night darkness, when sleep refuses to come, the hallowed figures of the recent past appear before my eyes.

In my horror-filled hallucinations, between dream and reality, I perceive their radiant countenances, feel their breath and hear their voices, their last fitful screams – “*Do not forget us!*” To my last breath, I shall not forget them, for these living tombs, the lives that were cut short prematurely, are living their extinguished lives in depths of my heart.

Today, I wish to write about one young prodigy and martyr from my destroyed home town, to whom I was bound by a friendship over many years.

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Our friendship began at the Machzikei Ha'Das *cheder*, which was on ul. Nadrzeczna, in the sixth year, where the *melamed* [Heb., teacher] was Icchok “the Lame”, a bad-tempered Jew, who, with a large rod, would very often vent his rage upon the frail, little heads of the Jewish children. He spared me to some extent, being the youngest and weakest in the class.



Jakow Klajner RIP

But my heart shuddered when I saw him beating Jankel Klajner, who was some two years my elder and a mischief-maker, to boot. We were studying the difficult Talmud tractate *Nedurim*² [Heb., Vows] with the RaN³, and Jankel often helped out ten-year-old me with the complicated treatises.

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¹ [TN: This article was originally published on pp. 321-322 of the book “Czenstochover Landsmanshaft of Montreal”.]

² [TN: Also known by its Sephardic pronunciation as “Nedarim”.]

³ [TN: Acronym of Rabeiny (Our Teacher) Nissim, an influential medieval talmudist from Gerona, Catalonia. The RaN was the first to write a complete commentary on the difficult tractate of Nedurim.]

Our ways parted for a certain period. After [completing] *cheder*, Jankel Klajner attended the Keser Torah Yeshiva⁴. As for myself, at an early age, I became infected with the new winds that were blowing, at the time, in Jewish life. Nevertheless, later on, we did meet in various positions in Częstochowa's Jewish communal life - and our friendship broadened and deepened.

He was a leading member of the religious [Zionist] *Mizrachi* youth movement, as well as a regular, prominent contributor to the Zionist weekly paper *Unser Weg* [Our Way], under the editorship of Dr Meryn. I became a contributor to the *Częstochower Cajtung* [Cz. Newspaper]. Everyone marvelled at the genius of the young writer Jankel Klajner, who began his writing career when he was barely sixteen.

We met one another frequently at various youth conventions and joint meetings. After these sessions, we often continued the discussions into the late evening hours in the Częstochowa streets. The streets were emptied of people and the gates were locked, but we barely took notice of it. We were engrossed in our discussions. Those were tempestuous times – Nazism was on the rise, the bloody deluge was hanging in the air – and yet, we were grappling with Spinoza's *Ethics* and Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*. He always remained a believer in the Strength of Israel⁵, [while] I was a staunch pessimist who, at the time, was writing in the columns of the *Częstochower Cajtung* [the section] *In the Shadow of Doom*, which cast a terror upon everyone. But I always envied him his fierce confidence.

During the terrifying years of the War, our ways parted once more. Despite my profound pessimism, I was in a feverish pitch over the fate of our people, and was in the most perilous positions, taking no account of the consequences. I came upon Jankel Klajner during those years of wrangling, and attempted to pull him into communal activities. I saw that he was completely permeated by an abandoned despair, which had taken over him, and from which he was never again freed.

The last time that I saw him was on that tragic *Kol Nidrei*⁶ night of 1942, prior to the "resettlement"⁷. I gazed deeply upon his handsome, fair features, as if in a bid to engrave them into me for eternity. His invariably smiling eyes, this time, were filled with mortal dread. His lips murmured to me, "We are lost, we are lost."

* * *

My heart is filled with bleeding wounds. Once again, I put forward the unanswered question – Why? Why were such young prodigies so cruelly annihilated? His father and mother, Reb Mojsze-Mordche Klajner RIP and Rywka Klajner *née* Zylberszac RIP, were also killed in the gruesome Holocaust, as well as his younger brother Jechiel RIP.

I cast a deadly curse into the dark night:

⁴ [TN: This was a Częstochowa-based religious academy of the Radomsko Chassidic court.]

⁵ [TN: Ref. to the verse "The Strength of Israel will not lie" (1 Samuel, 15:29). The original Heb. biblical term "netzach", which in this verse is translated as strength, also denotes victory and eternity, and in this context is synonymous with "the eternity of the Jewish people".]

⁶ [TN: Heb., "All Vows"; opening prayer of Yom Kippur.]

⁷ [TN: Nazi euphemism for deportation to a death camp, in this case Treblinka.]

Cursed be the German assassins, who spilt innocent Jewish blood!

The death of Jakow Klajner must serve to awaken those who knew him, and to demand of them not to forget the great destruction caused by the German murderers.

Honoured be his memory.