Can we, on the day of our tragic yahrzeit, remain calm?

Are we capable, today - when inside the four cubits\(^1\) within which we reside, where the air we breathe is laden with a profound sorrow, soaked in blood and tears - to take our agony out from the depths of our soul?

Why was I not in Częstochowa on that bloody Yom Kippur, when my father, sister, brothers and nearest were struggling in the last hours and minutes of their lives? Where was I on that gruesome Simchas Torah, when the Degenhardts and other Nazi hounds became the rulers over the lives of our dearest?

Many consider the survivors to be fortunate. Can there be a greater misfortune than to be the sole survivor of such a large, gigantic environment?

Where were you in those fearsome, dark days? How can one breathe calmly, how can one speak calmly, calmly walk and stand, calmly smile - when your consciousness is pervaded with grief, when, in your heart, lie dozens of living graves?!

You cannot shed a tear, because you are not the only one! You cannot shed a tear, because your lachrymal glands no longer function. Your source of tears has run dry! Is there, then, anything more tragic?

And the thought - how did you die? Did it take the gas long to suffocate you? Did the bullet, which found you, give you much pain? What did you think in that moment - the moment to go? In the hours of your death? Who else accompanied you in your Sh'ma Yisruel\(^2\)?

And where was God then?! The great, almighty God, who raised His people to the level of being able to suffer and, yet, not to the level of total annihilation? Where was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah? Why is it that He sent those who feared Him, first - those who feared Him, to the gas chambers and crematoria?

We must not ask - it is better to remain silent! Why rebel against the Almighty? But, where were You, the Almighty, when the smoke from the ovens brought You, every day, new thousands, tens of thousands, of Your best children? Why did You render their lives hefker\(^3\)? Did they give too little to charity? Did they not keep the sacred Sabbath? Did they not rouse their children, before the days of Rosh Hashana, to get up for Selichos?\(^4\) Dear Lord, did they disgrace Your Name?

The best and dearest, Torah scholars and prodigies, givers of charity and God-fearing men, those who loved God with all their 248 limbs\(^5\) - gas and fire became one with them!

We must not ask, not question? But why have You left living graves inside the hearts of men?

Częstochowa

How cherished was this town of my childhood and youth! I did not enjoy promenading in the Aleje. I did not go into the park - neither the new nor the old.

On the Aleja, the third house from the railway bridge was my home - the home which raised me, the home where hundreds and hundreds of Jews would come to my father to ask his advice or to resolve a difficult pilpul,\(^6\) the home where yeshiva lads would come on Shabbes afternoons to study a page of the Talmud and eat Shabbes fruits.

Little did I go for strolls in the Aleje and parks. But I knew every stone on the way to the New Market [Nowy Rynek] and the Old Market [Stary Rynek], to Garnarska, Targowa and Nadodrzeza. Those uplifting Jewish streets, where every poor Jewish home was clean and a plush tablecloth lay on the table. Who is then able to encompass, with his thoughts, the whole glory and shine of bygone Jewish Częstochowa? What modern-day historian of our city will now sit down for years, in order to describe every little corner of our Częstochowa, of that City and Mother in Israel [2 Samuel 20:19]?
In Częstochowa, there was a Reb Lajbe'le Landau – my first melamed. Who did not study with Reb Lajbe'le Landau? Who, then, from the last three generations, does not remember his long cheder on ul Mostowa, with the broom and the poor, illegible invalid, who sat in his low wagon directly by the cheder - the one with the green hat with pins.

How could one forget Reb Pinchas Orkusz, the melamed for the wealthy children, where besides Torah one also received a general education, with a “censure” for every half year? How could one forget Reb Icze-Majer Amstower[20] and Reb Motl – those with whom young lads already studied a page of Nedurim[21] with the Rabi[7], or even completed Chullin[7]? As a fortress in Częstochowa stood the “Kesizer Torah” [Crown of T.] Yeshiva, with its dean, Reb Hower’s Rechtman and Reb Michal Szwarcbaum, with its classes and levels, where half of the city’s young men, later and modern-day Mos’laim[7], gimnazjum students and intelligentsia, took in incredible portions of Talmudic knowledge and sharp-minded pija’im.

And the Jewish Gimnazjum - the glory and pride of the city - with its Directors, Prof Bababan and Prof Forst, with its wonderful pedagogues, with its Rabbi Prof Herszberg, Janowski, Lauer and others, and others. A world of pupils, numberbing in the thousands, emerged from it!

 Proud Jewish Częstochowa, with its dozens of institutions, all in service of the Jewish community, with its marvelours kehileh, with its prodigy, Rabbi Nachum Azc, with its Bert Bocian - the first publisher of the first Częstochowa Yiddish newspaper - with its Maggid[Heb., Preacher] Reb Mojsze Halter, with its Mendel Fogels and Simul Goldsztejn[8], with its proud and wonderful youth in all areas - from Azer’s [secular] gimnazjum to the [extraordinary] “Machzikei Ha’Da’ar” [Heldholders of Religion], which was headed by Reb Szaja Zeitman (the son of Herszl Szaja)!

Who is able to calculate the entire pedigree of our incredible Kehillo of Częstochowa? Who is able to go back to the times of Reb Dovid! Lebower[9] Who is able to encompass, within the narrow framework of an article, all these pearls – I would say the crown of Jewish life in Częstochowa.

Częstochowa! How beautiful and dear it was, this Jewish town, to the Jewish people. Ul Kosia and ul Warszawska, the Meat-market Street [ul Targowa] and the New Market, ul Krakowska and the Alee – all, all the streets, where a Jewish life puliliated, where Jews were living, were close to your heart. Jewish life, Jewish thought and creation enveloped the city in its tallis [Heb., prayer shawl].

Jewish Częstochowa is no more! No more is the “alte rande”[10], no more are the Old and New Synagogues! No more is ul Kosia, no more is Reb Lajbel Landau’s ul Mostowa. No more is the “Getzivizinene”[11]; there is no longer a Jewish Gimnazjum, no trace has remained of Azer’s Gimnazjum, no more is Israel Plocker[12] – there is nothing!

Bygone Częstochowa can no longer sprout forth. Also, no replacement for bygone Częstochowa can blossom. Perhaps the Alee and the parks will still stand for centuries, ul Berek Jozewlewicz and ul Garbalskiego - [but,] there will be no Jewish Częstochowa. In the dwelling of my father Reb Lajbel, no more Shabbos guests will be taken in. No more lads will come to be tasted in learning. The Wilno [Edition of the] Talmud will no longer shine from the large, broad bookcase. The children will no longer sit each one at another table, preparing their homework for tomorrow at school. Poor people will no longer come to receive Rosh Chodesh money[13]. No more will the Radomsker Chassidim come in on Shabbos [after the morning prayer service] for a Kaddish[14]. No longer will the Umaner Chassidim[15] dance and sing.

Jewish Częstochowa is no more! Neither the orthodox one nor the secular one. No more are the great Częstochower spirits, which enriched a world. No more are the giants and titans, each of whom was unique in his whole generation!

The last pride of my birth town has also fallen - the rebellious youth! The youth who were unwilling to go like sheep to the slaughter. The youth, who decided – if to fall, it would only be in battle against the enemy!

Częstochowa is one of the communities where the Nazi bandits were forced to pay a price for Jewish life. The account was too late and too little - but, nevertheless, a reckoning was attained!

My birth town is in ruins. No other will sprout forth in its place! Any new [Jewish] community in Częstochowa is only a miniature of what [once] was.

My birth town Częstochowa has been destroyed. Yisgadal v’yiskadesh...

Honoured be the Fallen Heroes!

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[1] [Heb., teacher in a cheder (religious primary school).]
[2] [Heb., teacher in a cheder (religious primary school).]
[3] [Heb., teacher in a cheder (religious primary school).]
[4] [Heb., teacher in a cheder (religious primary school).]
[5] [Heb., teacher in a cheder (religious primary school).]
[6] [Heb., teacher in a cheder (religious primary school).]
[7] [Heb., teacher in a cheder (religious primary school).]
[8] [Heb., teacher in a cheder (religious primary school).]
[9] [Heb., teacher in a cheder (religious primary school).]
[10] [Heb., teacher in a cheder (religious primary school).]
[11] [Heb., teacher in a cheder (religious primary school).]
[12] [Heb., teacher in a cheder (religious primary school).]
[13] [Heb., teacher in a cheder (religious primary school).]
[14] [Heb., teacher in a cheder (religious primary school).]
[15] [Heb., teacher in a cheder (religious primary school).]