

In Memory of the Martyrs I Knew in Żarki

Your image, Żarki, from the years I lived in you, has not faded from my heart. On a background of fields and forests, I see you clustered around your square - the marketplace.

On the face of it, the purpose of the market is commercial - for trade with the natives of the land, who are like a mighty river compared to you, Jewish Żarki, and in which you are just like a little boat. But, in truth, it was as if this whole square, with the houses on its four sides, lay entirely upon your shoulders, Jews of Żarki! You held up its corners, like the poles of a *chuppah*.

It was held raised in your arms like a monument, with your heads above it, and your dreams, also, rising above the houses, the fields and the woods all around. Your feet touched, yet did not touch all that was underneath them. You floated in the space of the world, like in the painter Chagall's canvases. I perceived you as strange beings from an exotic land, clinging onto ladders to whose steps one could see no end.

In those years, the heavens still sang of you, Żarki, the same song every single morning when you arose - as they would also do the following day. You kept the melody up, morning and evening, calmly weaving it, without [rendering] accounts [to anyone]. One, who listened closely to the hum of your days within the walls of the square, could hear the songs of your yearning, which stretched from the lips of your elders to the hearts of the youth and infants. These are the bridges which stretched across the meadows of folkloric music, along which the nation, was to tread confidently towards the land of its destiny.

And, on this monument, all your faces are engraved. The face of my teacher and master who, with his words, wove a net to place under the feet of those making *Aliyah*, which was not to tear all the way from Żarki and until they reached their land of destination. I remember the faces of families of merchants and craftsmen, the refined *yeshiva* students, burghers, coachmen and cobblers - a great multitude clinging onto the same rope and trusting their boat.

How could the tree-feller have cut you down? Why were your lives cast down into the furnaces? No mouth can express the scream in your tortured eyes or the sound of your silence. And, although there is no mouth, perhaps our hands have been endowed with creative understanding now that they have come into contact with the soil of Our Land. Maybe they will pass on, to what they sow and plant, that which was in your mouths to say and in your hearts to ask.

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^{*)} The author was not from Żarki - she came there back in the day as a dentist from the assimilationist circles in Częstochowa.