

## Pages from an Old Diary

*We have received, from the Frank family, the following pages from a diary, which was written by Abram Frank z"l in the years 1917-1919<sup>1</sup>.*

### **9<sup>th</sup> Av 5677 (1917)**

Today I was at the cemetery, as is the custom among us Children of Israel on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av<sup>2</sup>.

This time, however, the picture is particularly mournful - freshly-widowed wives and newly-orphaned children, tombstones that are still white and entire rows of yet uncompressed graves. Upon seeing all this, it seemed to me as if I were in the world beyond.

The wailing of the several hundred fresh widows and orphans spread over all the fields. The graves of the epidemic were screaming to the heavens and it was dreadful to hear the wretched cries of the young children. Around the graves, on either side, women and children stood and they could not be made to budge from the spot. Older children screamed, "Who will feed us? Who will wash us? Who will take us to cheder?"

Many people were still sick and lay in the hospital. They did not yet know that their parents or relatives were already in their eternal repose.

When I was going home, I also saw Berl Turner's son prostrated on his father's tomb, imploring him to ask [God in Heaven] that the high cost of living should stop. Everything had become expensive - bread, potatoes, boots...

Everything looks sorrowful, very sorrowful!

### **5<sup>th</sup> Kislev 5677 [30/11/1916]**

Today, the head of the Żarki *Kehilla*, Dawid Turner, celebrated a wedding. The bride was wearing an expensive necklace<sup>3</sup> worth 500 roubles. In the middle of the *chuppah* [ceremony], someone snatched the necklace from the bride - and [go] shout *chai ve'kayom*<sup>4</sup>! The bride was left with the groom, and the other - with the necklace.

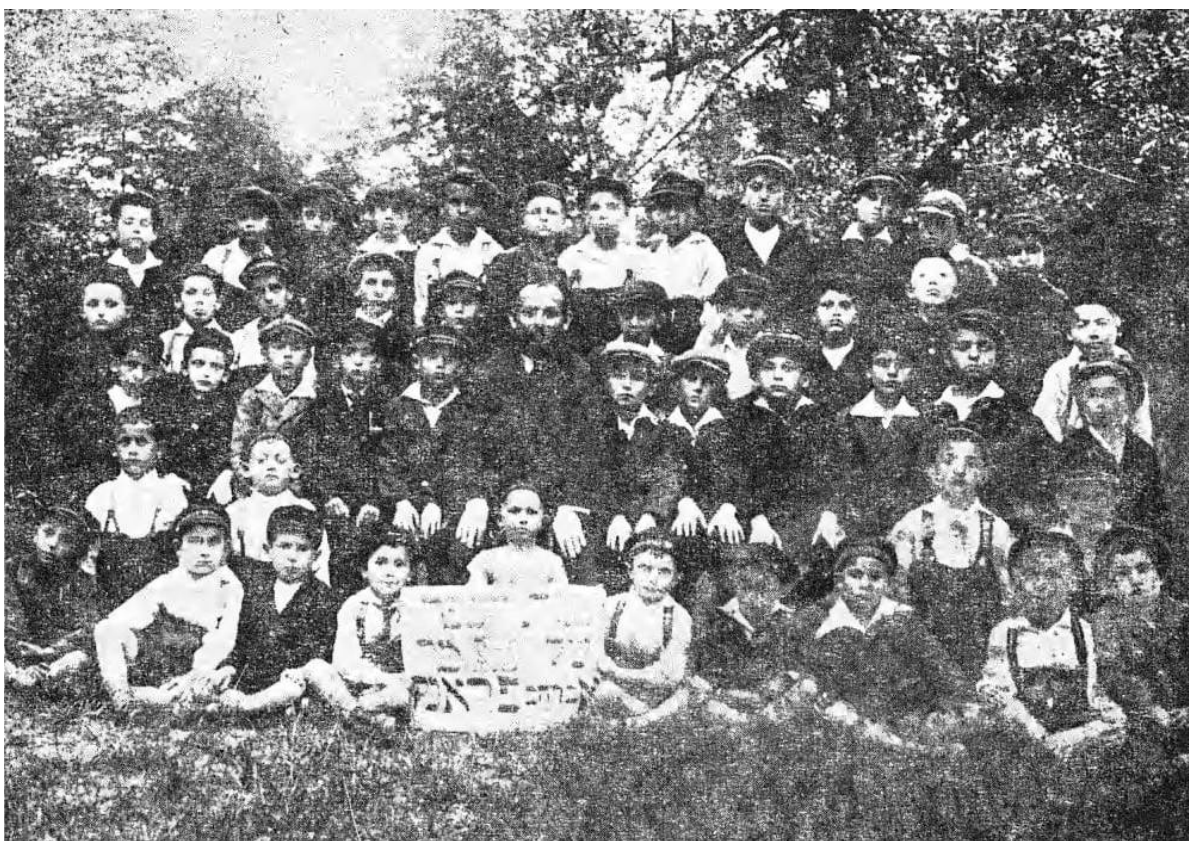
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<sup>1</sup> [TN: The following entries are not presented in chronological order.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: An annual day of fasting and mourning in Judaism, on which both Solomon's Temple and the Second Temple were destroyed.]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: Collar in the original, which we take to mean a sort of necklace.]

<sup>4</sup> [TN: Lit. "Live and Existing"; part of a liturgical poem recited on the High Holidays, which is said in a very loud voice. The expression is akin to "What can you do about it?" or "It's useless to complain," in this case meaning that the thief was not caught.]



*Abram Frank with his pupils*

**22<sup>nd</sup> Kislev 5677 [17/12/1916]**

A happening in town! For the first time, the Study-hall has been fitted with electric lighting.

Everyone all around stood looking at the great wonder.

**23<sup>rd</sup> Kislev 5677 [18/12/1916]**

Today, a ten-day ceasefire from 7<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> December<sup>5</sup> was signed between Russia, Germany, Austria and Turkey.

When is all this going to end already?

**20<sup>th</sup> Sivan 5677 [10/06/1917]**

Today a wedding was celebrated in the *shtetl*, which is meant to work as a charm against the epidemic<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> [TN: These dates are according to the Julian Calendar; they correspond to 20<sup>th</sup>-30<sup>th</sup> December 1916 of the Georgian Calendar.]

<sup>6</sup> [TN: This wedding is also mentioned above on pp.32-33.]

The groom is Abram Hunchback and the bride is the daughter of Szlojme-Duwid *Wyrobnik* [Labourer]. The *chuppah* was held at the cemetery.

The town provided all the necessities for the wedding, which was celebrated with the utmost splendour. No sorrow reigned - only the greatest joy.

The wedding began at dusk. The groom was given lodgings with Abram Hercberg. Groom and bride were escorted with music. The *kleizmers* [musicians] were Abram Fridman's two sons. A special fundraising campaign was organised for the couple. The whole *shtetl* streamed to the cemetery to pay their respects to the young couple. The Rabbi, may he live a good long life, walked at the head, and the entire congregation followed him, with flowers in their lapels.

The graveyard resembled an entertainment venue and the music was playing like at a concert hall. The entire town, headed by the Rabbi, was singing and dancing - one cannot imagine the merriment. Dawid Turner and Lajzer *Chazzan* [the Cantor] donned [big] hats<sup>7</sup>, [climbed] up onto the tables and danced.

Afterwards, the entire congregation attended the evening service and recited Psalms.

The military kept order.

### **26<sup>th</sup> Iyyar 5678 [08/05/1918]**

The cost of living increases from day to day. Today, the [*Kehilla*?] Treasury is holding a meeting concerning the *mikve*. The *mikve* has not been heated for three weeks already, for lack of coal.

There is a plan, according to which the town will pay [the expenses] on a weekly basis and tickets to the *mikve* will be sold.

It has been decided that a petition will be written to the *Województwo* [Province], requesting that a wagon of coal should be sent.

### **28<sup>th</sup> Shvat 5678 [10/02/1918]**

Today, huge strikes took place in the entire region. The Rada<sup>8</sup> has resigned. The order is being kept by the Central Patrol [?]. There have been no confrontations yet. The Ukrainians have taken a piece of Poland. There should [soon] be much more news. Today's strike is a political [one].

### **14<sup>th</sup> Adar 5678 [Purim, 26/02/1918]**

Today, more rumours are spreading about peace - but who knows if it is true? The strikes are stopping. They say that, in the coming days, the Russians and the Germans will sign a peace [treaty].

[The price of] food rises from minute to minute. The currency has no value. Great speculations are being made. The weather is very nasty. We go barefoot, there are no clothes.

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<sup>7</sup> [TN: In those days, Jews in Poland only wore kepi-like caps, and broad-brimmed hats would have been considered comical.]

<sup>8</sup> [TN: The Central Council of Ukraine, which did not exactly resign, but rather was deposed by the Soviets.]

### **9<sup>th</sup> Tevet 5679 [12/12/1918]**

Today, the Christian Committee<sup>9</sup> is giving out flour. The Jewish Committee gives none.

Fear that the Red Guards may come here pervades [us]. Prices have already fallen.

### **25<sup>th</sup> Shvat 5679 [26/01/1919]**

Today is a historic day. Today, elections to the Sejm have taken place throughout the whole of Poland, Schlesien [Śląsk] and Galicia. We, the residents of Żarki, voted for №8 - meaning for the "Temporary Jewish National Council".

Things were relaxed in town. A few old women [?] attempted to strike Jews, but the police immediately intervened. Everything transpired in an orderly manner.

This is also a historic day, because women have received voting rights. They will no longer just stand by the pot, but also be voters.

The Jewish delegates in the Sejm are [Izaak] Grünbaum and [Nojach] Pryłucki.

The Jews are as *hefker* [ownerless] as *chometz* [leavened goods] on *Peisach*<sup>10</sup>. A pogrom was supposed to break out in the *shtetl*, but everything went peacefully.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Kislev 5679 [07/11/1918]**

Today, a truce was declared throughout the whole of Europe. The World War has ended and peace is coming, God willing.

There are clashes in Germany. People say that [either] a new war will break out, or a revolution.

Jews receive weapons for self-defence, that we should not allow any pogroms. There is a very heated atmosphere.

### **The month of Elul [27/08-24/09/1919]**

There is no newspaper to read. We do not know what the news is in the world. Rumours are going about to the effect that the Red Army is marching towards us. Some people say that the Red Army was defeated forty kilometres from Warsaw and that they fled.

Pogroms take place in numerous *shtetls*. Jewish books are burnt. The dearth grows from day to day.

It is very difficult to acquire provisions in town. All suffer hunger and need. We are already waiting for the change that has to come – but when?

**Żarki, 5679 – 1919**

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<sup>9</sup> [TN: Probably meaning the Community Council, akin to the Jewish Kehilla.]

<sup>10</sup> [TN: Due to the biblical prohibition against having leavened goods in one's possession during Passover – "Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses" (Exodus 12:19) – Halacha requires one to disown all chometz which may still be unknowingly found in one's possession, rendering it free for anyone's taking.]