

Iskor
Czenstochover and Vicinity Aid Society
at
The Univerwercity of Judaizm October 8, 1961
6525 Sunset Blvd. Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Friends,

I consider it a great honor that on the Nineteenth Anniversary of the distra~~ct~~ of the Jewish Community in Czenstochowa I have been given the privilege to speak on behalf of its survivors.

Czenstochowa - my home-town, where my parents and almost my entire family resided for over hundred years, where I went to school, where I made my first steps in my professional carrier.

Czenstochowa was a very important center of Jewish life and culture: it produced great personalities, like: Rabbi Nochum Asz, an outstanding historian - Dr. Majer Balaban, artist-painter profesor Wilenberg, whose stained glass windows in the old temple of Nadrzeczna were a joy to behold, well known philanthropist - Henryk Markusfeld and many, many others.....

In the year 1942 - fifty five thousand Jews lived and prospered in our City.

Yom Kippur in 1942 will remain for ever in our memory.

This when many of those who are with us no more prayed "Iskor" as never before in dark forboding of the impending disaster. Their heart rending cries and lamentations are still ringing in my ears.

Their premonitions did come true.- a day after Yom Kippur the "akcja" began.

It was Tuesday the twenty second of September 1942 - a beautiful and warm day.

Devil in flesh - hauptman Degenhart put into operation his findesh plans. within three weeks fifty thousand Jews perished in the gas chambers in Treblinka.

The final "akcja" took place on "Symchas Tora" - but for us it was not a "Symcha" - it was a real "Tishebow".

On that day I too lost both my perants.

The once flourishing Jewish Community in Czenstochowa was no more.

We assembled today to remember all those whom we lost in such a cruel way by saying "ISKOR".

Yiskor - how much sorrow, pain and suffering is contained in this single word...

For us who went through the inferno of ghettos and concentration camps it brings back vivid and painful memories of the great catastrophe which struck the entire Jewish nation.....

It reminds us of the first of September 1939 - the day of the outbreak of the Second World War when throngs of panic stricken men, women and children were decimated on highways by German planes;

of the struggle for survival in ghettos;

of sleepless nights spent in terror when a single knock at the door could spell sudden death;

of crowds of men and boys driven in snow and rain to places of forced labor;

of hunger and disease;

It reminds us of so called "akejes" - which resulted in total destruction of ghettos;

of people hidden in underground "bunkers" and torned to shreds by hand grenades and dynamite;

of mass executions in city streets;

of the agonizing cry and despair "Shmaj Isboel" by men condemned to death;

of mass deportations to concentration camps where people perished in gas chambers and crematoriums;

of women beaten with belts and whips on naked bodies;

of people who fainted from pain and hunger and whose faces were beaten again and again;

It reminds us of piles of naked corpses in front of the barracks;

of the misery and despair when women instead of horses, pulled wagons in freezing weather - their bodies wasted from hunger and thirst;

of moral torture mothers went through when their children were murdered in front of their eyes just before they were killed too;

of children whose heads were crushed so that the brains splattered out;

of infants thrown from windows and balconies;

when death was often a welcome and merciful release from all these inhuman sufferings;

Suddenly these long nightmarish and cruel years of our existence came to an end;

The heavy barbed wire gates opened wide and we were free again;

We all rejoiced, but an overwhelming feeling of bitterness and frustration was weighing heavily on our minds;

Why was a mere handful given to survive when millions gave their lives "Al Kidush Hashem"?

Then - an idea dawned upon us; - we who survived have been entrusted with a holy mission to keep alive the memory of these martyrs who laid down their lives on the altar of freedom and in the defense of the honor of the Jewish nation;

Driven by this intense desire, the acrid fumes of crematoriums still in our nostrils, we organized Yiskors all over Germany, where soil was soaked with Jewish blood; innocent;

I will always see before my eyes the first Yiskor on Jom Kippur in 1945 in Bergen Belsen;

The hart rending cries and lamentations of those who survived - are still ringing in my ears.

Today is our "Keiwe Ovesu"

To us it is like saying "Kadish" over the fresh graves of our dearest ones, over the graves of our family and friends, over the graves of the untold innocent victims of the German bestiality;

It is my holy duty to urge all of you not to forget and not to forgive.

May I now humbly bow my head and pray with all of you for our mothers and fathers, sister and brothers, our children, relatives and friends, for our valiant and fearless Czenstochower fighters.

Let us honor their memory. Amen.

Esther Przeworski Prattt