



Vilna & the Orthodox Community Breaking Stereotypes

ILHMEC · November 1, 2017



Photo:
Rudnicki Street entrance to the Vilna ghetto



The Jerusalem of Lithuania

The Story of the Jewish Community of Vilna



Vilna During the Holocaust

Daily life in the Vilna Ghetto

Religious Life

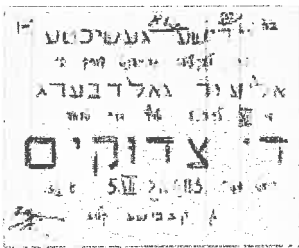


A group of Jews who were murdered in Vilna

Until the Kovno aktion in April 1943 the Jews were not accustomed to recite the kaddish prayer for the people who had been taken to Ponary because their fate was unknown... Although there were people who claimed that the meaning of "Ponary" was known, they weren't going rely on their own opinion to recite kaddish for their family members that had been sent there.

Mark Dworzecki, *Jerusalem of Lithuania in Resistance and in the Holocaust*, p. 280

The majority of Vilna's rabbis were murdered during the aktions. Religious Jews struggled to maintain a religious way of life in the ghetto. People were forced to work for the Germans on the Sabbath and on religious holidays. There were three synagogues in the ghetto and about 70 Torah scrolls, mostly in *batei midrash* (study halls). Outside the ghetto, Torah scrolls and finials from destroyed synagogues were buried. A Jew who found a holy book would bring it to one of the *batei midrash*, which ultimately became filled with books.



A notice inviting the public in the Vilna Ghetto to a lecture on Sunday the 5th of July [1942] in the Butchers' kloize (study hall) about the Sadducees, the seventh lecture in a series about Jewish History by Eliezer Goldberg

Following the aktion targeting people without yellow scheins, the religious circles convened and sent a delegation of rabbis - Mendel Zalmanovitch, Dov-Ber Pilowski and Yitzhak Kurnis Gustmann - to Jacob Gens, head of the ghetto. They told him that according to Jewish Law it was permitted to deliver a Jew to the authorities if an individual had been specifically requested, pointed out or had committed a crime. However, it was forbidden to turn over a Jew if the authorities had not requested a specific individual... The rabbis informed Gens that he was not permitted to select Jews and to deliver them to the hands of the Germans in accordance with their demands. Gens justified himself by means of saying that his cooperation in the selection and arrest of a reduced number Jews, saved

all the others from death.

Mark Dworzecki, *Jerusalem of Lithuania in Resistance and in the Holocaust*, p. 282-283

A religious primary school and a yeshiva were held in the synagogue. Matzo's (unleavened bread) were baked for Passover. On *Succot* a few *Succah's* (temporary huts) were erected and on *Simchat Torah* they danced *hakafof*. The Judenrat did not have a department or financial support for religious affairs but the "Public Committee for Social Work" provided financial support for the religious primary school.

During the period of the aktions there were people whose religious faith weakened, alongside those who did not lose their religious enthusiasm or belief in the redemption to come after the horrors.

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The exhibition was made possible through the generous support of Mr. Nehemia Burgin in memory of his dear and beloved parents, Holocaust survivors Zlata (Zehava) Burgin and Yehiel Burgin of blessed memory.



Eichmann Trial -- Sessions 27 and 28 -- Testimonies of F. Masia, M. Dworzecki, A. Kovner, A. Peretz

Film | Accession Number: 1999.A.0087 | RG Number: RG-60.2100*040 | Film ID: 2039



ד"ר מ. דבורצקי

החיים הדתיים בגיטו וילנה

רוצה אני לספר כאן על החיים הדתיים בגיטו וילנה. על קיום המסורת, המנהגים והתפילות, ועל כמה מבעיות המצפון שנתעוררו בגיטו — במידה שראיתי את הדברים כמו עיני, או שמעתי מפי אחרים. רואה אני חשיבות היסטורית בכך, שעם רישום דברי ימי-השואה לא ייעדר בהם תיעוד החיים הדתיים בימי האימים; ולשם הדיוק ההיסטורי אבקש מניצולי גיטו ירושלים דליטא, אשר אליהם תגיע רשימה זו, שיואלו לכתוב לי ולהראות על חסר או אי-דיוק בשמות שאביא, או בתאריכים, או בעצם העובדות.

יום הרבנים

היום הרבנים לי בשעתו הרב גוסטמאן, שהיה גר בשניפישוק שבווילנה: המעשה היה ב־13 ביולי 1941, במוצאי שבת, ערב שבעה עשר בחמו, שחל כנדחה בראשון בשבוע. בשתיים עשרה בלילה התקברה מכונית לחצר, מתוכה יצאו 3 גרמנים וליטאי אחד. התחילו הגרמנים מכים אותו על ראשו, למה תכוני? — שאל. — יען כי רב הנך! בבית קם שאון, עלה בידו להיחלץ מידיהם, לברוח לחצר ולהסתתר שם בין שיחי תפוחי-האדמה הצמוסים. למחרת נודע לו, כי בו ביום עברו הגרמנים ורשימה בידם, על פני דירותיהם של כל הרבנים בעיר, מדירה לדירה, וכל מי שנמצא בביתו נלקח אתם.¹ יום הרבנים — כך נקרא היום הוא אתר-כך.²

Kalmanovitch, Zelig

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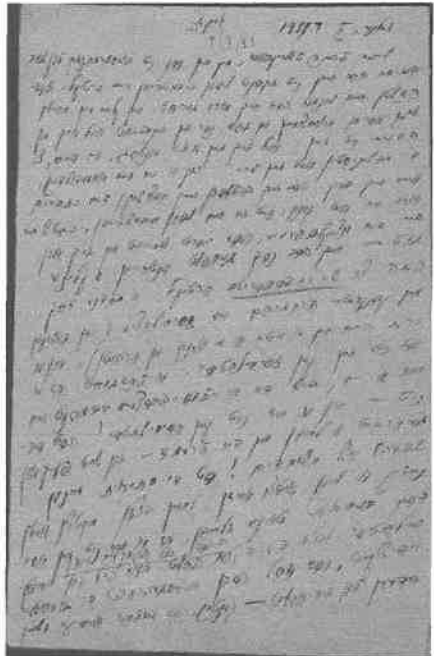
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(1881–1944), Yiddish linguist and translator. Born in Goldingen, Courland, Zelig Kalmanovitch (Yid., Kalmanovitsh) received a traditional education until the age of 15. In 1901, he passed the external examinations for a certificate of Russian secondary school education and subsequently studied humanities, primarily Semitic philology, in Germany. He was in Berlin from 1902 to 1905 and in Königsberg in 1909 and 1910. He then defended his doctorate in Petrograd in 1919.



A gathering of Jewish intellectuals in Kulautuva, Lithuania, 1920 or 1921. Those identified in the photograph include journalist Reuven Tsarfat (2, in fedora); Bal-Makhshoves (4, wearing white boater); David Bergelson (6, on ground with his head on his neighbor's knee), his wife (10, seated, second from left), and son (5, small child to Bergelson's left); Zelig Kalmanovitch (7, with striped tie, center); Jakob Lestschinsky (8, to Kalmanovitch's right); and Nokhem Shtif (9, to the left of Bergelson's wife). (YIVO)

Politically, Kalmanovitch underwent a series of transformations, following Labor Zionism, Territorialism, Folkism, and, finally, Zionism. He was active as a Yiddish translator from 1906. Apart from providing him with some income, translation was seen by Kalmanovitch as a way to enrich Yiddish with modern terminology. He was a friend of Boris Kletskin and worked as an editor in the latter's publishing house, first in Vilna and then, during World War I, in Petrograd. In the 1920s and 1930s, Kletskin published many of Kalmanovitch's translations. In Petrograd, Kalmanovitch was part of Simon Dubnow's circle that later formed the Folkspartey.



From Zelig Kalmanovitch in Vilna to Elye Tsherikover, 5 July 1939, about his reactions to an article by Sh. Rapaport that Kalmanovitch feels promotes assimilation. He also mentions delays in the printing of the "Encyclopedia" due to illness on the part of bindery workers and the publisher. Note: There is a note penciled in on top of first page: "Answered 1 September 1939" (day of outbreak of World War II). Yiddish. RG 107, Letters Collection. (YIVO)

Kalmanovitch's first article on Yiddish linguistics, written under the pseudonym F. Kleyn (Klein), appeared in the Vilna journal *Literarische monatshriftn* (Literary Monthly) in 1908. In the spring of 1921, he lectured on Yiddish grammar for teachers from Minsk. His lecture notes were published by the State Publishing House of Belorussia.

Kalmanovitch lived mainly in Lithuania and Latvia from 1922 to 1928, where he edited the Folkspartey's daily *Letste naves* (Latest News). He also taught in Riga at Yiddish schools and in Panevėžys (teaching Hebrew in the latter city).

From 1928, Kalmanovitch lived in Vilna, where he was a central figure in the YIVO Institute. There he collected material for his never-realized project of a Yiddish semantic dictionary, and also studied folklore as well as the Courland dialect of Yiddish and the linguistic peculiarities of Yosef Perl's writings. At YIVO, in addition to editing the Institute's journal, *YIVO-bleter* (YIVO Pages), he handled administration, teaching, and correspondence, particularly while Max Weinreich, the director, concentrated on educational and psychological studies. Despite his rather slim corpus of linguistic publications, Kalmanovitch played a significant role in shaping the YIVO standard of Yiddish.

Kalmanovitch remained in Vilna when it became the capital of Soviet Lithuania. During World War II, he and his wife were in that city's ghetto, where he kept a diary in Hebrew. The diary was later found by Avrom Sutzkever and published in

Israel by Kalmanovitch's son, Shalom Luria, in the 1970s (YIVO issued it in 1951 in Yudi Mark's Yiddish translation in *YIVO-bleter*, followed by an English version in 1953). During the war he also wrote "Y. L. Peretses kuk oyf der yidisher literatur" (Y. L. Peretz's View on Yiddish Literature), published posthumously in *YIVO-bleter* in 1950. He was, however, chided by many Jewish literati for regarding religious and cultural activities as the most worthy acts of resistance. In September 1943 he was transported to Estonia, where he died in a concentration camp.

Suggested Reading

Zelig Kalmanovitch, "Der yidisher dialekt in Kurland," *Filologiske shriftn* 1 (1926): 161–188; Zelig Kalmanovitch, "A Diary of the Nazi Ghetto in Vilna," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Studies* 8 (1953): 9–81; Yudi Mark, "Zelig Kalmanovitsh," *Di goldene keyt* 93 (1977): 127–143.

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Gennady Estraiikh

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A DIARY OF THE NAZI GHETTO IN VILNA

By ZELIG KALMANOVITCH

Originally published in the *Yivo Bleter* xxv (1951)

Editor's Foreword: The diary kept by Zelig Kalmanovitch in the tragic days of the Vilna ghetto is one of the most remarkable and most poignant human documents to have come out of the tragic era of the Jewish catastrophe. It will undoubtedly take its place among the universal masterpieces of autobiographical literature.

The diary was preserved in an almost miraculous way. After Kalmanovitch was deported to Estonia, Herman Kruk discovered the diary in Kalmanovitch's home and secreted it in the ghetto library. After the liquidation of the ghetto a great portion of the books and manuscripts of the ghetto library was used by the janitor of the house for heating the furnace. After liberation in 1945 Abraham Surskover, the Vilna poet, salvaged the remains of this collection and among other valuable materials he also found Kalmanovitch's diary. He sent the manuscript to the Yivo library, where it is now deposited.

Zelig Hirsch Kalmanovitch was born on October 30, 1881 in Goldingen, Courland. Up to the age of 15 he received a traditional rabbinic education. He then turned his attention to secular studies, graduated from the gymnasium and then studied Semitic philology and history in the universities of Berlin and Königsberg. He began his literary activity in 1906 with a series of studies in Yiddish philology and this remained his major scholarly interest for the rest of his life.

In 1921 Kalmanovitch left Russia and lived in Lithuania, Latvia and Berlin. In 1929 he settled in Vilna and became one of the guiding spirits of the newly-founded Yiddish Scientific Institute. When the *Yivo Bleter* commenced publication he became its editor-in-chief. When the Soviet Union turned over Vilna to Lithuania in October 1939, Kalmanovitch was the only member of the Yivo administrative committee to be left in Vilna and he carried on the Yivo work single-handed until the second occupation of Vilna by the Soviet Union in June, 1940, when he was summarily dismissed from his post by the Soviet authorities. His activities under Nazi occupation form the subject matter of the diary here published. With the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto in September 1943 he and his wife were deported to an extermination camp in Estonia, from which they never returned.

The diary was kept by Kalmanovitch in Hebrew. A few passages were

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[illegible][illegible]

THE FIRST PAGE OF KALMANOVITCH'S DIARY

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**THE LAST DAYS
OF THE JERUSALEM
OF LITHUANIA**

Chronicles from the Vilna Ghetto
and the Camps, 1939-1944

HERMAN KRUK

EDITED AND INTRODUCED

BY BENJAMIN HARSHAV

TRANSLATED BY BARBARA HARSHAV

YIVO INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH RESEARCH

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS

NEW HAVEN AND LONDON

OCTOBER 5, 1942, SIMHATH TORAH

45 YEARS OF THE BUND

Today, to honor the 45th anniversary of the Bund, a group of worker activists got together and modestly and quietly celebrated the holiday date. The old comrade Pati [Kremer] was also among the participants.

After the opening, in which the sad situation of the Jews, the situation of Warsaw, etc., were mentioned, Hersh [Gutgestal] gave a lecture titled "45 Years of the Bund." Herman [Kruk] then read an extract from V. Medem's article "The Bund." Finally, [Comrade] Abrasha [Chwojnik] read an extract from an article by Martov about Arkady and Pati.⁶⁰ The chairman greeted Pati, who was present, and then read a letter from the sick comrade Miriam [Gutgestal] (attached). [The letter is missing.]

The quiet celebration ended with mention of recent events in Warsaw, Kielec, Lublin, Miedzyrzec, and other places.

A lecture titled "45 Years of the Bund" was to be delivered to the groups.

OCTOBER 6 [1942]

ANOTHER ACT OF RASSENSCHANDE

The ghetto was shocked today when a young beautiful girl was taken out, ostensibly because of Rassenschande.

The girl was taken away by the infamous Weiss.

WARSAW

The most varied information comes again from Warsaw. One [piece of news] contradicts the other. The last information: the Aktion took only 125,000 Jews. I write "only" because, according to the news I have already noted, it would be a new miracle in the series of miracles we have recently prayed for. Unfortunately, we live only on miracles. . . .

FROM A SYNAGOGUE — A CIRCUS

In Vilna there is an interesting Lithuanian, a certain Narusis. He is a drunkard, a playboy, a close friend of Hingst and Murer. He goes hunting with them, visits women with them, etc. But at the same time, he also has many friends among the local Jews and does everything possible for them.

Narusis is the head of the [city] Housing Department. Recently Hingst wanted

60. Julius Martov (1873–1923) was one of the leaders of the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party, later a leader of the Mensheviks. Arkady Kremer, a founder of the Bund, was influential in the first years of the Russian party.

to change one of the most beautiful Jewish synagogues in Vilna, the so-called Choral Synagogue (Zawalna 35) into a . . . circus. They got the building, the organizer agreed, but Narusis diverted it onto a very different path: it is a shame to make the building into a circus. Better make a circus in the bigger building, in the empty Halles marketplace, which is bigger and more comfortable. The reason was apparently accepted, and now he is glad—it is 99 percent sure that the building of the Choral Synagogue will be avoided. . . .

Narusis talks about it as a victory over the destroyers. . . .

OCTOBER 9 [1942]

ANOTHER LAUNDRY IN THE GHETTO

A second laundry to serve the ghetto residents is now planned. The laundry will be on the corner of Dzisniński and Jatkowa.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYED GHETTO RESIDENTS

According to the information of the Labor Office, up to September 25 of this year, the number of those working among the Vilna Ghetto residents reached 5,759 men and 3,049 women, together 8,808 persons.

A SEVENTH TEAROOM

[A seventh tearoom] will soon be opened by the Health Department.

SUBSTITUTE VITAMINS FOR FALL AND WINTER

The vitamin laboratory is now about to expand and develop its production.

First of all, what is noteworthy is the imminent production of vitamin D, which will substitute for cod-liver oil. Other interesting experiments are also done to find means to substitute for several vitamins—rich nourishment through a proper substitute, for example, black bread with yeast (a substitute for meat), etc.

AN ORDER FOR TOYS

The universal store or, as it is now called, *Deutsches Kaufhaus* (German department store), has ordered from the [ghetto] Workshop Department samples of wooden toys, which it plans to take in great quantities.

IN THE TAILOR WORKSHOP

A great deal of work was done on orders from outside the ghetto, especially for the so-called Pramprekiba.⁶¹ From the latter came orders for large lots of men's

61. A Lithuanian distribution network.

being placed in these crates in order to ship them to the Hohe Schule.⁷⁷ The chief librarian came. To me he seems nervous and worried. I am afraid that now they will speed up the sending of the books west. To be frank, nearly a year has passed and not even one piece of paper went out there. They even want to take printing paper there.

On Friday, October 2, I received dreadful news about a large community.⁷⁸ Heavens, plead for mercy for me! (The news has reached us today that only 55,000 certificates were issued there, that means that only some 100,000 people out of 500,000 or 600,000 are left.) Lord of the universe, remember Thy compassion! They say that the cup of fury will also be poured over the city of factories.⁷⁹ There are rumors of decrees against cities and towns in the province. "Have compassion in Thy kindness on Thy people, our Rock."⁸⁰

Upon the invitation of the rabbi, I went on Simhat Torah eve⁸¹ for *bakefat* in a house that had formerly been a synagogue and was now a music school. The remaining yeshiva students and scholars were gathered there, as well as some children. There was singing and dancing. The commandant and his assistants were also there. I was honored with the first *bakefa*. H. K. also came to see the spectacle. I said a few words: "Our song and our dance are a form of worship. Our rejoicing is due to Him who decrees life and death. Here in the midst of this small congregation, in the poor and ruined synagogue, we are united with the whole house of Israel, not only with those who are here today and with the tens of thousands of the pure and saintly who have passed on to life eternal, but with all the generations of Jews who were before us. In our rejoicing today we give thanks for the previous generations, the noble generations in which life was worthwhile. We feel that with our song today we sanctify the name of Heaven just as our ancestors did. And, I, a straying Jewish soul, feel that my roots are here. And you, in your rejoicing alone for the aims of a generation that is perishing. I know that the Jewish people will live, for it is written: 'As the days of the heaven upon the earth.' And even if we were

⁷⁷ This refers to Alfred Rosenberg's "Hohe Schule" in Frankfurt-am-Main. For details see Weisreich, M., *Hitler's Profanations* (Yivo, 1946) p. 97-119.

⁷⁸ Warsaw. See note 54.

⁷⁹ Lodz.

⁸⁰ From the Hebrew *Jimury*.

⁸¹ Kaczeleginsky, *op. cit.*, p. 209, tells: "I saw [Z. K.] on Simhat Torah in the *beys-madrets*, where he danced ecstatically with a Torah around the platform." This was in Rabbi Shoulke's *kloz*, at 5 Shavile Street. We don't know the name of the rabbi.

the last generation, we should give thanks and say: 'Enough for us that we were privileged to be the children of those!' And every day that the Holy One, blessed be He, in His mercy gives us is a gift, which we accept with joy and give thanks to His holy name."

Last night we had a big meeting discussing relief measures for the winter. Warm clothes will be collected for those who work in the forest and for the needy in general. H. K. thinks the meeting was successful. Today a concert of the school of music. There are a number of students, some seven or eight teachers and eleven pianos are available. The girls (the majority of the students) would also excel in a large city.⁸² On the same day, at five o'clock, an orchestra concert. At nine o'clock...⁸³ It would be a good thing to go over to the new houses that were added, but the master wants to visit them and the visit was postponed to next Sunday.

[Sunday], October 25. Today I must record. Yesterday all the policemen were assembled and the commandant gave them a summary of the terrible events of the last days.⁸⁴ Horrors, the most dreadful of all trials, but there is no way out. Praised be the God of Israel who has sent unto us this man. All our Jewish brethren in the Vilna district were gathered into one ghetto. In my town⁸⁵ thirty out of eight hundred people remained. Our policemen were sent there with passes to be distributed among the remaining workers, and to turn over the rest of the people, "the superfluous," to the hands of the authorities to do with them what is customary these days. The young men took upon themselves this difficult task. They donned their official caps, with the "star of David" upon them, went there and did what they were supposed to do. The result was that more than 400 people perished; the aged, the infirm, the sick, and retarded children. Thus 1,500 women and children were saved. Had outsiders, God forbid, carried out this action, 2,000 people would have perished.

The commandant said: "To be sure, our hands are stained with the blood of our brethren, but we had to take upon ourselves this dreadful task. We are clean before the bar of history. We shall watch over

⁸² The original reads: *הילדן נרדף על ידי המעצנים*. Perhaps this should be: could also excel.

⁸³ This passage is illegible.

⁸⁴ The reference here is to the liquidation of a number of towns in the district of Vilna, particularly the action in Oszmiana, and the participation of the Jewish police in these actions, which is designated as "the most dreadful of all trials." See Dworzecki, *op. cit.*, p. 414-16.

⁸⁵ It is not clear what city Kalmanovitch has in mind.

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On Sunday, the 14th, at 10 in the morning, the train leaves for Vilna.¹¹
Our narrator witnessed a similar scene of saying farewell to the graves on the next day, Friday the 2nd, in Solv.

APRIL 16 (1943)

ALMOST A BLOOD LIBEL

Our ghetto has had everything except for one thing—a blood libel. Yesterday, that too might have occurred.

An automobile suddenly came into the ghetto yesterday with the representatives of the Gestapo chief, Mayer, Weiss, and a few others, because the wife of an Ipatanga member reported that Jews kidnapped her child and took him to the ghetto. A Jew was even supposed to have said: "You spill our blood, today we will draw . . . yours." No one in the ghetto knew what to say. When the Jewish police chief, Mr. Dessler, laughed at the claims of the Gestapo and made light of them, Weiss—incidentally, one of his acquaintances—said heatedly: "This is no joke, it might reach the point where we will have to 'take children's heads.'" Soon a horse-drawn cab of Gestapo agents came with the child's mother and announced that the child had been found in Maistas, outside the ghetto.

It is hard to say how it would have ended if the second part hadn't happened. So now we have had an attempt at a blood libel, too.

CONCERNING THE DUTCH JEWS

I learn that for the past two weeks, two trains have been halted in Vilna, each with 25 cars of objects, apparently from the Dutch Jews. . . .

A NEW RAILROAD LINE IN PONAR

People here say a new railroad line has been laid in Ponar, which will go deep into the forest. . . .

MORE ABOUT THE DUTCH JEWS

Today a rumor is circulating that there are about 19,000 Dutch Jews in Vievis.

ARCHIVES FROM SMOLENSK AND VITEBSK

I learn that five wagons of archives from Smolensk and three from Vitebsk have reached Vilna so far. The Smolensk archive consists of old tsarist documents; the Vitebsk archive, of Bolshevik ones.

11. Probably an error in transcription. Krik most likely meant April 4, not April 14.

ONCE MORE ABOUT THE DUTCH JEWS
Just now I succeeded in getting a Jewish sign from a Dutch Jew and a copy of the order of the Reichskommissar for the Occupied Netherlands about Jewish property (attached).
[The order is missing.]

APRIL 19 (1943)

Passover

Under the pressure of all the events and the realization of what awaits us, we are celebrating the second Passover in the ghetto. The best thing we can wish one another is that we may see each other a year from now.

By now, there seem to be no optimists among us. Everyone here is convinced that we are coming to the end. For, why should we be different from everybody else? Europe will be purged of Jews. The Jews of Warsaw are being taken to be killed in Malkinia, near Lwów or near Zamość.¹² The Jews from Western Europe are being taken east; their wandering goes on. Transport has recently become very expensive to the Germans, maybe even more precious than money. But transporting for the purpose of ruining and deluding Jews is cheap—it's a war aim!

The Vilna Ghetto has lost all illusions. It is a war aim, and as such, it is the highest priority.

Murer is on furlough. The "Gestapo" has slacked off a bit, and in the ghetto, we spent this year's Passover eve getting drunk.

A lot of Sederers were made in the ghetto, private and public. Everyone who can buy, eats, and drinks, and . . . forgets.

Religious Jews put all their passion into this year's Passover. The religious kitchen on Szawelska 5 is preparing a Seder for 100 Jews today, including the chief, the police chief, and rabbis.

A kilo of matzos in the ghetto costs 300 rubles, like 6 kilos of bread. Nevertheless, it seems there is not a single home without matzos.

The Youth Club is making a Seder. The Zionists use the religious kitchen for a Seder. Even Gens himself organized a big Seder at his home today.

Sederers are also being made for schoolchildren. The first Seder night in the building of the Youth Club is for older students; the second, for younger students. The Hebrew studio also made a Seder with the Hebrew choir and the boys' and girls' boarding schools of Yeladim.

The remaining Świeciany and Oszmiana Jews in the Vilna Ghetto will certainly swim through today's Seder in their own tears. . . .

12. I.e., at the death camps in Treblinka and Belzec.

(10)

place of the murder. He (Laban)¹³⁷ knows everything. Terror seized the entire community. According to reports even the commandant was deeply shaken. He stood as thunderstruck before the events. What shall we say and what shall we speak? Now it is our turn. We are promised. There are orders for several months. But who knows if this is not the end? This is the central event. For a week there is heavy mourning. Later on, the world goes on as usual. Lectures, plays, work, of course. We received our passes and the tin tags. We are marked. The master left for a month's vacation. He used to come daily into the house and search for forbidden food. Time and again we anticipated new evil decrees. (A rumor spread among the physicians that the hospital will be taken away.) If someone is caught with food his entire family is arrested. There were instances of murder. Individuals were freed after the general slaughter. The evil beast has drunk its fill of blood. Verily, each day should be recorded, but I do not have the strength.

In my own work everything is in order. I turned over the material on the Moses legend. Now I am preparing a bibliography on the Karaites. He wants me to go to the cemetery to copy the inscriptions on the tombstones. (They are planning to remove them.) On the whole there is no pressure in the work there. The University is closed and no one can enter the room in which the books of S.S.¹³⁸ were placed.

Friday, April 30. Those arrested at the beginning of the week were freed. Most of them were not involved in the affair. Two or three confessed and returned the stolen articles. The masters pardoned them. These are peaceful days. The master of the community is in town today. He came back from his vacation. Let us see how his return will be felt in the community. Passover is over. There were *sedmim* in the kosher kitchen. "Recitals" and celebrations among "the children" and others. At the second *seder* I spoke briefly.¹³⁹

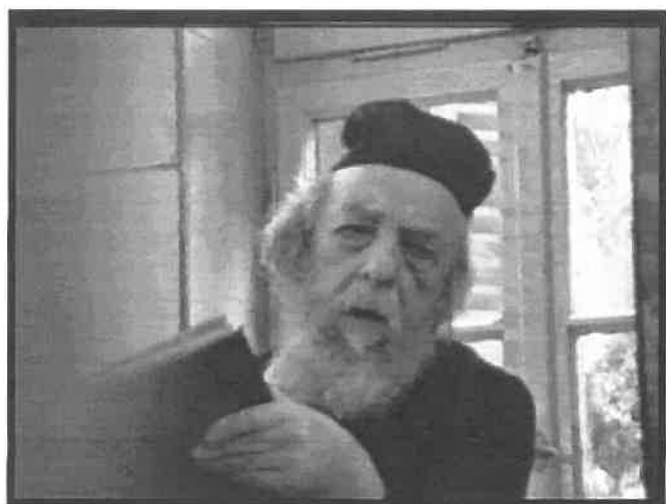
"A year ago some circles of the intelligentsia in the ghetto sought an answer to the question: what is a Jew and who is a Jew? Everybody was tremendously preoccupied with this question. Formerly the majority of these people had never given much thought to this question. They felt they were Jews. Some more so, others less. Some, per-

¹³⁷ Martin Weiss. For his effect on the ghetto see Korshak, *op. cit.*, p. 90-91.

¹³⁸ The Strassun Library.

¹³⁹ The following speech Kalmanovitch recorded on May 25.

haps, did not feel so at all. And if someone suffered because of his Jewishness he somehow found a remedy for it and, in general, occupied himself with other more practical affairs, rather than speculate about such an 'abstract' matter. Now these various people were driven together and locked up in the narrow confines of the ghetto. People of different languages, different cultures, different interests and beliefs, of different and, at times, mutually exclusive hopes and aspirations were gathered and placed under one label: Jews. Confined as punishment: *i.e.* they committed a crime and the crime consisted in being a Jew. Many of them actually did not know what to say about the 'crime.' They did not know what it means 'to be a Jew.' To be truthful, practically nothing resulted from all these speculations and reflections. It was impossible to find a clear and definite answer to the question: who is a Jew nowadays? For only now, in our generations, in the past 150 years, has the concept of Jew assumed so many meanings. Earlier, 'Jew' was a clear concept that had only one meaning. A Jew was one who observed the Jewish law and was a member of the Jewish group. Now various kinds of people are considered and consider themselves Jews, even such as do not observe or cherish the Jewish law or have no idea what Jewishness is. But even in this case I obtained an answer to the question, 'who is a Jew?' from a child in the ghetto. The statement, 'out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou founded strength,' was again confirmed. A teacher of religion in the ghetto school told me the following story of his experiences. In the school are children who were total strangers to Jews, who had never heard either in their homes, or in school, or in the street anything of the Jewish past, of Jewishness. Now in the ghetto many of these children listen eagerly to the stories of the old sacred history, of the Bible. One such child, who had previously attended a Polish school and had spoken Polish at home, studied with great interest the stories of the Bible. When, in the weekly portion of *Toledot*, they studied the story of Jacob and Esau, this child suddenly called out: 'Teacher we are the descendants of Jacob and they (*i.e.* those that wrong us) the descendants of Esau. Right? It is good this way. I want to be of the descendants of Jacob and not of the descendants of Esau. I reflected on this story and discovered that I could deduce from it a method for determining who is a Jew. It is as follows: The fantasy of the individual is free, no walls can confine it. A person in the ghetto can therefore on occasion imagine that he is given a choice: he can divest himself of his Jewish inferior and beaten 'Y' and assume the 'Y' of the master of the ghetto.



Rabbi Israel Zev Gustman, 1908- 1991
Vilna, New York, Jerusalem

