In memory of six million Jews, martyrs for humanity, and in honor of the righteous men who never forgot that man is made in the image of God

SCROLL OF AGONY: THE WARSAW DIARY OF CHAIM A. KAPLAN

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A decree has struck at the thousands of Jews who are foreign citizens, who had preferential treatment and availed themselves of special privileges before the outbreak of war with Russia and the United States. First, they were exempt from wearing the "badge of
shame”; second, no one interfered with their crossing borders and the like. They were given special treatment so that the governments protecting them would not take retaliatory action.

Now the wheel has turned upon them. They have become the prisoners of the Nazis, and whoever falls into those hands does not rise again. When registration for Palestine was opened, the foreign citizens—excluding only exiled and deported German Jews, Czech Jews, and former Polish Jews—were not forgotten. In their case registration was mandatory. They had already been required to register once, but that was not enough for the Nazis. This time a special amnesty was offered to those who had failed to register earlier. If they met their obligations now, their crime would be forgiven.

The second registration omitted no one, and we learned its outcome yesterday. All foreign citizens were required, on a few hours’ notice, to take with them a hand valise weighing no more than ten kilos, as well as 20 zloty in cash, and go over to the Pawia. What their fate will be no one knows. Will they be exchanged and transported by the Nazis to Switzerland, as it is said, through the International Red Cross, or will they be imprisoned as enemies of the Reich and transported to some concentration camp?

If I were a student in a Yeshivah today I would ask my Talmud teacher: What is the law concerning a Gentile who is buried among the dead of Israel? When the resurrection of the dead comes, will he too rise to his feet and live? Or when it is written, “Your dead shall live,” does “your dead” mean only the dead of Israel? There are daily instances of Polish youths being taken into the ghetto in broad daylight in a military car, and shot to death in a public place before the eyes of thousands of passersby. One of these cases occurred in Orla Street the day before yesterday. Who was the victim? He was an Aryan, of that there is no doubt. The reason for his death cannot be ascertained, but we can be sure that he was one of the smugglers. The business of smuggling brings the Aryans and the Jews together. It unites them in joy and in sorrow. Why was this man brought to the ghetto to be killed? In order not to irritate the Aryans. An ugly killing such as this would have incited them. His relatives know only that he has been arrested, not that he has been killed, and his body is taken to the Jewish cemetery as soon as he has breathed his last.

As to the question of the “resurrection of the dead,” it bears study.

July 19, 1942

Once you let fly a rumor, it makes wings for itself and soars from one end of the ghetto to the other like an arrow from a bow. A few moments pass and it comes back to you so distorted, its form so changed, that you cannot recognize it.

Everyone is panic-stricken. Will he be exported? Will he die a cruel, ugly death at the hands of a soul-souled Nazi gendarme? The emotional climate is feverish. In the morning hours the decree is final, and not to be rescinded. In the afternoon, the Judenrat negotiates. At this very moment a conference is going on in which Auserwald, Czerniakow, Heller, and the Gestapo representatives participate. The terrible decree is left in suspense—things can go either way. They argue back and forth, and are constantly in touch with Berlin. While one person is still telling you this another comes and relates that Czerniakow is offering 10,000,000 zloty to nullify the decree. You are transfixed between fear and hope. It is hard to believe that all this is merely blackmail for the sake of spoils. The Nazis don’t have to resort to blackmail to extort money from Jews. If the edict is, according to Nazi opinion, for the good of the state or the good of the race, money will be of no avail on the day of wrath. Considerations of profit and pleasures don’t enter the picture.

But it cannot be denied that if you manage to spend the night in peace and live to see the light of morning, you will find a large announcement posted at the street corners stating that the categories itemized below will be forcibly uprooted from the ghetto within twenty-four hours.

The ghetto is suspended over nothingness.

July 20, 1942

The ghetto is quiet. All the terrible rumors are false. Judenrat circles deny them, saying that no proposal for expulsion has been made. All the canards about meetings and bribery are invented. The masses are in a panic for their very lives, and in their eyes potential danger turns into active danger. When the rumors reached the ears of the Nazis, they were angry. One Gestapo man deigned to say: “The sin of anyone who spreads rumors like this is too great to be borne. We will initiate an inquiry, and whoever is caught in this
transgression will be shot." This time the lie was started by some Judenrat group which had a particular interest in broadcasting it. For what end? This is difficult to determine with certainty. There are no grounds whatsoever to suspect one circle or another. When we are privileged to reach better days then these many secrets will be revealed to us, and among them even the secret of the panic which arose in the Warsaw ghetto on Sunday, the fifth of Tammuz, 5702. Who fathered it? From what source did it emanate?

July 21, 1942

The destruction of the sword is rampant in the streets of the ghetto. We shall perish. The day before yesterday there was the panic of deportation. Yesterday the furies abated for a while. Today, again the panic of the sword.

This time we are not dealing with written laws, with a legal code like the Nuremberg Laws, but with German custom—mob rule—where every gendarme and every Gestapo officer acts on his own, but in perfect harmony with the spirit of hatred which permeates the laws themselves. Here is an actual example that occurred right in front of my window. Like an earthquake, it breaks the body and the spirit in one blow.

At 17 Nowolipki Street lives Dr. Sztejnkol. He is a popular doctor and an important personage, without vices or flaws—tall and personable, one of the shining lights of the ghetto. To our sorrow and to his misfortune he left his house at an inauspicious time. Near 26 Karmelicka Street, he was accosted from behind by four killers. Two of them were Volksgenossen and two were gendarmes. One of the policemen kicked Dr. Sztejnkol, a thing he was used to doing to Jews, and the good doctor, bitterness apparent in his face, turned and asked: "Why do you strike me? Am I guilty of some sin?"

At once one of the killers ordered him to go into the gateway. He went through and never returned. The Nazis immediately took a rifle and shot him in the temple. The honored and righteous doctor died instantly. A quick death and a mass funeral: Karmelicka Street is a center of traffic and the shootings in broad daylight attracted a huge crowd. The killer went on his way wiping his mouth. He had done no crime; he had only killed a Jew.

The same day a Jewish policeman was put to death. A gendarme found some fault with him and punishment immediately followed crime, with no trial intervening. When he neared the place of ex-

ecution he was ordered to walk with his hands clasped behind his neck. This is neither the law nor the custom, but the killer wanted it that way. He's sure to get a medal.

And at 13 Nalewki Street, the janitor was killed. A Nazi gendarme was chasing a youth. The fugitive eluded his pursuer and disappeared, presumably into the courtyard of Number 13. The janitor was killed for not revealing the supposed hiding place of the hunted man. A life for a life.

And on the same day, at 20 Chlodna Street, an entire family was put to death in their home. I have no precise details of this family tragedy, but there is no doubt of the fact itself.

Near the bridge at the intersection of Zelazna and Chlodna streets everyone who passed by, coming or going, was searched. Traffic stopped in an instant, everyone fled for his life, and the street was emptied at once. The Nazi officers were left without work. But in the interim they had managed to detain and search tens of people and carry them away. It was as if these people just disappeared from the earth.

But the biggest sensation is that the great dragons were arrested, that is, the elite among the heads of the communal department of welfare. They include A. Gepner, Wielikowski, Sztoleman and some others. This is unquestionably a bad omen for us.

All this happened to us on the eve of the Ninth of Av, 5702. "On this night my sons will weep."8

July 22, 1942

I haven't the strength to hold a pen in my hand. I'm broken, shattered. My thoughts are jumbled. I don't know where to start or stop. I have seen Jewish Warsaw through forty years of events, but never before has she worn such a face. A whole community of 400,000 people condemned to exile.

What we dreaded most has come. The people had an instinctive feeling that some terrible misfortune was impending, but our official circles denigrated it completely and presented happy, smiling faces to the populace. "Expulsion from Warsaw? Nonsense! The Jews are sentencing themselves without reason. The Nazis will hear what they say and do just that." They persisted in this deception in order to avoid a panic. But it was useless. The news was carried by the birds of the heavens and the people felt that

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8 From a dirge recited on the eve of Tisha'ah be'Av.
expulsion was imminent. Even before the notices were posted in the streets of the ghetto, we knew we were being tried in absentia. The Judenrat building on Grzybowska Street was surrounded by police and closed to visitors. The Judenrat leaders met with the Gestapo for a final session about the expulsion. We were even able to determine the exact moment when the order was signed. From dawn to late afternoon we spent the most tense hours of our lives. The spark of hope flared up and then died. And at four o'clock the notice was posted. Our fate was sealed! They say that Himmler is visiting in Warsaw and that this is the gift he is leaving for the Jews. His visit also preceded the decree in Lublin, and for that reason they see a precedent. They also say it was his idea to promulgate the decree on the eve of the Ninth of Av, a day of retribution, a day fated for mourning through all generations. But all that is irrelevant. In the last analysis these are accidental, momentary manifestations. They did not cause the decree. The real purpose is deeper and more fundamental—the total destruction of the Jewish nation.

The order merely verified what we knew without it; the evidences of expulsion were visible earlier. The Jewish police execute the orders, and they live among their people. The first sign was the abolition of the refugee centers. Like passing shadows, their inhabitants were taken away to an unknown place. In the transports were not men but shades. These are the remnants who survived typhus and famine, but now there is no refuge for them. No one doubts that they are going to their death.

The second sign—the removal of the prisoners from the Jewish prison in Gesia Street. They too are going to their death.

The third sign—the moving of all the divisions of the Jewish hospital, which were scattered in various places, to a central location, the hospital in Leszno Street. The patients too are going to their death.

And a fourth category was also among the first to be deported: the street beggars. They were captured by the hundreds and taken away on transports. Where to? No one knows, but everyone understands: to the kingdom of death. Their cries and wails ascended to the heart of the heavens. But who hears cries in a time of such destruction?

These blatant signs boded evil. The notice only added the details to what was known without it. There is one interesting item in the announcement. It was not composed by Auerswald, the Nazi commissar of the ghetto, but by the Judenrat. Later we learned that the commissar had already been fired. The reason for his removal is not known. The Judenrat issued the order and will execute it. The Jews console themselves with this, but only by means of tortuous reasoning. They grasp at straws.

It is not a total expulsion. There are certain categories for whom concessions were made, and the expulsion decree does not affect them. In the next entry I shall itemize these. I will stop now, and go to my night's repose, but it will be a sleepless night, for I am one of those affected by the decree. I have no special status. Is it possible that I shall not be privileged to end this chronicle on a note of consolation?

Today's impressions require an artist's pen. They are so great that they are not subject to forgetfulness, for what is carved deep, deep within the soul is not easily forgot. Their vividness will not be lessened if I write them down tomorrow. Today let us hear what the Nazis have to say:

In comparison with the Lublin expulsion we have before us a liberal document, even though its essence is a savagery and barbarism such as never before existed.

The categories not affected are set forth: Jews who work in the German shop-factories, and the officers of the Judenrat and all its agencies. This paragraph exempts hundreds of officials from expulsion, and with their families, thousands of people. It encompasses the Jewish police, the hospitals, the welfare department, the cemetery administration, the post office, and the House Committees. This is in effect a small state and its various divisions carry on state functions. One paragraph is ambiguous: "All Jews qualified for labor are exempt from deportation and may remain in the ghetto; those Jews who were not heretofore included in the labor force may henceforth be included. They will be taken to barracks where they will work."

Finally a very important note: At a meeting which took place in the Judenrat building on the twenty-second, the official in charge of the deportation granted the leaders of the Jewish Self-Aid Society the right to be considered on a par with Judenrat officers. This means that they too are exempt from deportation.

July 23, 1942

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The deportees are forbidden to take bundles weighing more than ten kilos. Silver, gold, and jewels may be taken without restriction. This is understood: All of that will be stolen from them, not on paper, but on the road. This tactic is already known to us. The time of deportation will begin at twelve noon on the twenty-second day of July in the year 1942. Exemptions apply only to immediate family—wife and children. No more. An aged mother will be exiled, a senile, crippled father will be deported.

Now could anything be more humane? The ghetto residents found some consolation in the paragraph which speaks of “all Jews qualified for labor.” Labor—that can mean both physical and mental; no age limit is specified. That means even men who are over sixty. Everyone suddenly became eager for work. Everyone is prepared to give up hot meals and a comfortable bed at home to go live in barracks, if only to stay put. To be deported means to prepare for death, and it is a lingering death which is the hardest kind of all. The deportees are, to begin with, taken for killing. They are not qualified for work. And as to food, even if a crust of bread were available, would the Nazis give it to them? It has become known that the Nazis flay their corpses, remove the fat, and incinerate the bodies. This accords with a predestined plan: The strength of the healthy and productive are to be exploited for the needs of the German army; the weak, the crippled, and the aged are to go to eternal rest.

Such a plan could have been invented only by Satan.

This is no more than a curiosity of history. The Jews aid the Nazi victory so that the Nazis can expel them from Europe and destroy them. Their cynicism is such that the Nazis say this bluntly. Sometimes a laborer’s work pleases them; then they praise him and say, “May you be recompensed by being the last one to be shot.”

The industriousness of the ghetto is a credit to everyone. It produces three times what was demanded. This is skillful and industrious work which produces goods for the use and enjoyment of the Nazis. The Jewish worker is compensated by having his relatives deported to a valley of death and destruction, while he is left locked within the walls of the ghetto.

The expulsion has already begun. It is being carried out by the Jewish people under German supervision. On the first day the Jewish police furnished the requisite number of 6,000 people; the second day of the expulsion, the police could round up only 4,700 men, women, and children. The Nazis filled the deficit. We remember the words of the elegist: “On this night my sons will weep.” In these two days the emptiness of the ghetto has been filled with cries and wails. If they found no way to the God of Israel it is a sign He doesn’t exist.

July 26, 1942

The terrible events have engulfed me; the horrible deeds committed in the ghetto have so frightened and stunned me that I have not the power, either physical or spiritual, to review these events and perpetuate them with the pen of a scribe. I have no words to express what has happened to us since the day the expulsion was ordered. Those people who have gotten some notion of historical expulsions from books know nothing. We, the inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto, are now experiencing the reality. Our only good fortune is that our days are numbered—that we shall not have long to live under conditions like these, and that after our terrible sufferings and wanderings we shall come to eternal rest, which was denied us in life. Among ourselves we fully admit that this death which lurks behind our walls will be our salvation; but there is one thorn. We shall not be privileged to witness the downfall of the Nazis, which in the end will surely come to pass.

Some of my friends and acquaintances who know the secret of my diary urge me, in their despair, to stop writing. “Why? For what purpose? Will you live to see it published? Will these words of yours reach the ears of future generations? How? If you are deported you won’t be able to take it with you because the Nazis will watch your every move, and even if you succeed in hiding it when you leave Warsaw, you will undoubtedly die on the way, for your strength is ebbing. And if you don’t die from lack of strength, you will die by the Nazi sword. For not a single deportee will be able to hold out to the end of the war.”

And yet in spite of it all I refuse to listen to them. I feel that continuing this diary to the very end of my physical and spiritual strength is a historical mission which must not be abandoned. My
mind is still clear, my need to record unstilled, though it is now
five days since any real food has passed my lips. Therefore I will
not silence my diary!

We have a Jewish tradition that an evil law is doomed to de-
feat. This historical experience has caused us much trouble since
the day we fell into the mouth of the Nazi whose dearest wish is
to swallow us. It came to us from habit, this minimizing of all
edicts with the common maxim, “It won’t succeed.” In this lay
our undoing, and we made a bitter mistake. An evil decree made
by the Nazis does not weaken in effect, it grows stronger. The
mitigating paragraphs are increasingly overlooked and the more
severe paragraphs intensified. At the beginning, the time of the “ne-
gotiations,” a directive was issued to the Judenrat to deport 6,000
a day; in point of fact they are now deporting close to 10,000. The
Jewish police, whose cruelty is no less than that of the Nazis, de-

deliver to the “transfer point” on Stawki Street more than the quota
to which the Judenrat obligated itself. Sometimes there are several
thousand people waiting a day or two to be transported because of a
shortage of railroad cars. Word has gotten around that the Nazis are
satisfied that the extermination of the Jews is being carried out with
all requisite efficiency. This deed is being done by the Jewish
slaughteers.

The first victim of the deportation decree was the President,
Adam Czerniakow, who committed suicide by poison in the
Judenrat building. He perpetuated his name by his death more
than by his life. His end proves conclusively that he worked and
strove for the good of his people; that he wanted its welfare and
continuity even though not everything done in his name was
praiseworthy. The expulsion proclamation posted in the city streets
on the afternoon of July 22 was not signed in the usual manner of
Judenrat notices, “Head of the Judenrat, Certified Engineer Adam
Czerniakow,” but merely “Judenrat.” This innovation astonished
those circles who examine bureaucratic changes in notices. After
the president’s death, the reason became clear. Czerniakow had
refused to sign the expulsion order. He followed the Talmudic law:
If someone comes to kill me, using might and power, and turns a
deaf ear to all my pleas, he can do to me whatever his heart desires,
since he has the power, and strength always prevails. But to give
my consent, to sign my own death warrant—this no power on

earth can force me to do, not even the brutal force of the foul-
souled Nazi.

A whole community with an ancient tradition, one that with
all its faults was the very backbone of world Jewry, is going to
destruction. First they took away its means of livelihood, then
they stole its wares, then its houses and factories, and, above all,
its human rights. It was left fair prey to every evildoer and sinner.
It was locked into a ghetto. Food and drink was withheld from it;
its fallen multiplied on every hand; and even after all this they
were not content to let it dwell forever within its narrow, rotten
ghetto, surrounded with its wall through which even bread could
be brought in only by dangerous smuggling. Nor was this a ghetto
of people who consume without producing, of speculators and
profiters. Most of its members were devoted to labor, so that it
became a productive legion. All that it produced, it produced for
the benefit of those same soldiers who multiplied its fallen.

Yet all this was to no avail. There was only one decree—death.
They came and divided the Warsaw ghetto into two halves; one
half was for sword, pestilence, and destruction; the other half for
famine and slavery. The vigorous youth, the healthy and pro-
ductive ones, were taken to work in the factories. The old people,
the women, the children all were sent into exile.

The president, who had a spark of purity in his heart, found the
only way out worthy of himself. Suicide! In the end the Nazis
would have killed him anyhow, as is their custom in the areas from
which they expel the Jewish population; nor would the president
have been the last to be shot. From the moment of his refusal
to sign the expulsion order he was a saboteur in the eyes of the
Nazis and thus doomed to death. With a president one must be
very exacting. In any event, he did well to anticipate the Nazis.

He did not have a good life, but he had a beautiful death. May
his death atone for his wrongs against his people before becoming
president. There are those who earn immortality in a single hour.
The President, Adam Czerniakow, earned his immortality in a
single instant.

July 27, 1942

Anyone who could see the expulsion from Warsaw with his
own eyes would have his heart broken. The ghetto has turned