

EHRI Online Course in Holocaust Studies

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Ghettos under Nazi Rule – Daily Life

Translation: C04 The writer Leyb Goldin describes a single day in the ghetto and his hunger

Chronicle of a Single Day

Leyb Goldin

How differently my song would sound

If I could let it all resound.

- paraphrase of *Monish*^o

Tired, pale fingers are setting type somewhere in Cracow: “Tik-tak-tak, tik-tak-tak-tak-tak. Rome: The Duce has announced... Tokyo: the newspaper *Asahi Shimbun*...^o Tik-tik-tik-tak... Stockholm... Tik-tik... Washington: Secretary Knox has announced... Tik-tik-tik-tak... And I am hungry.

It’s not yet five o’clock. At the door of the room, a new day awaits you. A quiet breeze. A puppy wants to play with you – jumps up at your neck, over your body, behind your back, nuzzles up, wants to tease, to get you to go out and play. A discordant orchestra of sleepers breathing. As one begins, another – a child – interrupts right in the middle. And a third – and a fourth. The conversations in one’s sleep are over, complaints satisfied. From time to time someone groans in his sleep. And my brain is bursting, my heart is sick, my mouth is dry. I am hungry. Food, food, food!

The last portion of soup – yesterday at twenty to one. The next will be – today at the same time. The longest half, already endured. How much longer to go? Eight hours, though you can’t count the last hour from noon on. By then you’re already in the kitchen, surrounded by the smell of food; you’re already prepared. You already see the soup. So there are really only seven hours to go.

“Only” seven hours to go; it’s no joke. Seven hours – and the fool says “only”. Very well then; how does one get through the seven hours – or the nearest two? Read? Your brain won’t take it in. All the same, you pull the book out from under the pillow. German. Arthur Schnitzler. Publisher so-and-so. Year. Printer. “Eva looked into the mirror.” You turn the first page and realize you’ve understood no more than the first sentence: “Eva looked into the mirror.”

You’ve reached the end of the second page. Didn’t understand a single word. Yesterday the soup was thin and almost cold. You sprinkled in some salt, which didn’t

dissolve properly. And yesterday Friedman died... of starvation. Definitely of hunger. You could see he wouldn't last long. And there's a gnawing in my stomach. If you only had a quarter of a loaf now! One of the quarter loaves over there, a square-shaped quarter loaf, like the ones in that display window, by that table. Oh, brother! You realize that you've jumped up, the idea was so delicious. There's some name of other on page four of the novella: Dionisia. Where she's from, and what she wants – you don't know. There! A quarter of a loaf! There! A bowl of soup! You would make it differently. You would warm it through until it began to boil. So that a spoonful could last five minutes at least. So that you would sweat as you ate. So that you would blow at the spoon, not be able to swallow the soup all at once! Like that!

Maybe it isn't nice to think about oneself in this way – only about oneself, oneself. Remember once; preached a thousand times: the century of the masses, of the collective. The individual is nothing. Phrases! It's not me thinking it, it's my stomach. It doesn't think, it yells, it's enough to kill you! It demands, it provokes me. "Intellectual! Where are you, with your theories, your intellectual interests, your dreams, your goals? You educated imbecile! Answer me! Remember: every nuance, every twist of intellectual life used to enchant you, entirely possess you. And now? And now!"

Why are you yelling like that?

"Because I want to. Because I, your stomach, am hungry. Do you realize that by now?"

Who is talking to you in this way? You are two people, Arke. It's a lie. A pose. Don't be so conceited. That kind of split was all right at one time when one was full. *Then* one could say, "Two people are battling in me," and one could make a dramatic, martyred face.

Yes, this kind of thing can be found quite often in literature. But today? Don't talk nonsense – it's you and your stomach. It's your stomach and you. It's 90 percent your stomach and a little bit you. A small remnant, an insignificant remnant of the Arke who once was. The one who thought, read, taught, dreamed. Of the one who looked ironically from the dock directly into the eyes of the Prosecutor and smiled directly into his face. Yes, stomach of mine, listen: such an Arke existed once. Once, once, he read a Rolland, lived side by side with a Jean-Christophe, admired an Annette, laughed with a [Colas] Breugnon.^o Yes, and for a while he was even a Hans Castorp, by some writer... Thomas Mann.^o

"I don't understand, wise guy. Haven't you eaten?"

Yes, stomach, sure, I ate but I didn't know I had eaten. Didn't think I was eating. "Do you remember, buddy, the first day in jail? You sat in solitary confinement, bewildered, sad; they had just thrown you, like a piece of old clothing, into a pantry. For two days you didn't eat, but didn't feel the least hunger. And suddenly the peephole opened in the door: 'Good evening, Arke! Keep it up! *Grunt sie nie przejmowac, dobrze sie odzywiac* (keep your spirits up and eat well)!^o Listen, Arke, in the corner, behind the radiators, there's bread and bacon. The main thing, brother, is to eat – the next installment comes tomorrow, on the walk.' Remember?"

And yesterday Friedman died. Of starvation. Of starvation? When you saw him naked, thrown into the large – the gigantic – mass grave (everyone covered his nose with a handkerchief, except for me and his mother), his throat was cut. Maybe he didn't die of hunger – maybe he took his own life? Yes ... no. People don't take their own lives nowadays. Suicide is something from the good old days.

At one time, if you loved a girl and she didn't reciprocate, you put a bullet through your head or drained a flowered phial of vinegar essence. At one time, if you were sick with consumption, gallstones of syphilis, you threw yourself from a fourth-floor window in a back street, leaving behind a stylized note with "It's nobody's fault" and "I'm doing the world a big favor." Why don't we kill ourselves now? The pangs of hunger are far more terrible, more murderous, more choking than any sickness. Well, you see, all sicknesses are human, and some even make a human being of the patient. Make him nobler. While hunger is a bestial, a wild, a rawly primitive –yes, a bestial thing. If you're hungry, you cease to be human, you become a beast. And beasts know nothing of suicide.

"Brilliant, my pet, an excellent theory! So how long is it, wise guy, till twelve o'clock?" Shut up, it'll soon be six o'clock. Another six hours and you'll get your soup. Did you see the burials yesterday? Like dung – that's how they drop the dead into the grave. Turned the box over and flipped them in. The bystanders get such a livid expression of disgust on their faces, as if death were taking revenge for the aura of secrecy. For the various irrelevant, unnecessary things that had been tied on to him, now, out of spite, he let down his pants and –here! Look at me, kiss my ass. Like a spoiled child, who's sick of endearments. And do you know, Brother Stomach, how I imagined death when I was a child? I remember when I was four and five, I went to a kindergarten. They played the piano and split their sides laughing and spoke Hebrew. And I remember there was a funeral in the same courtyard. I only saw the hearse entering the courtyard, and soon after, cries and laments. I fancied that the man in the black coat and stiff hat wanted to drag a woman into the hearse, and she didn't want to go, and in fact it was she who was making the noise, and she threw herself on the ground, and he took hold of both her arms, and she was sitting and sliding along, and shouting and screaming. How do you like that, my little stomach? You don't answer – are you asleep? Well, sleep, sleep, the longer the better. At least until twelve o'clock.

Food, food. It isn't my stomach talking now – it's my palate and my temples. Just half a quarter loaf, just a little piece of crust, even if it's burnt, black, like coal. I jump off the bed – a drink of water helps, it provides an interruption. On your way back to bed you fall – your feet are clumsy, swollen. They hurt. But you don't groan. For the last few months you've got used to not groaning, even when you're in pain. At the beginning of the war, when you were lying in bed at night and thinking about the whole thing; or in the morning, when you had to get up, you often emitted a groan. Not now. You're like a robot now. Or maybe, again, like a beast? Perhaps.

Die? So be it. Anything is better than being hungry. Anything is better than suffering. Of, if only one could use arithmetic to reckon *when* one would breathe one's last! That

woman in the courtyard, from No. 37, who died, had been starving for six weeks. Yes, but she ate nothing, not even soup once a day. And I do eat soup. One can go on suffering for years in this way – and maybe kick the bucket tomorrow. Who knows?

I realize that I'm still holding the book. Page seven. Let's see if I can get through it. I turn the pages. Somewhere, on one of the pages, my eye spots the [German] word *Wonne*. Ecstasy. A piquant, magnificent erotic scene. A few pages earlier they were eating in a restaurant. Schnitzler gives you the menu. No, no, don't read it. Your mouth becomes strangely bitter inside, your head spins. Don't read about what they ate. That's right – just as old people skip descriptions of sex. What's the time? Half past six. Oh, how early it still is!

But it's possible that tomorrow or even today I'll give up the ghost. The heart is a sneak – you never can tell. Maybe I'm lying here for the last time and feeling so sluggish for the last time. So slow to get dressed. And handling in a soup ticket for the last time and taking a new one for tomorrow. And the cashier, and the waitress, and the janitor by the door – they will all look at me with indifference, as they do every day, and not know at all, at all, that tomorrow O won't come here anymore, and not the day after tomorrow and not the day after that. But I will know, and I will feel proud of my secret when I am with them. And perhaps in a few months, or after the war is over, if statistics are made of the diners who died, I'll be there, too, and maybe one of the waitresses will say to another: "D'ya know who else died, Zoshe? That redhead who insisted on speaking Yiddish, and whom I teased for an hour and, just to fix him good, didn't give him his soup. He's been put in the box too, I bet."

And Zoshe, *of course*, won't know, as if she would remember such a thing – and then you will have such a high, high [...].^o Maybe it will already have been poured; oh, how magnificently Thomas Mann describes it in *The Magic Mountain*.

I remember his thoughts, the way he delineated them. Never has their brilliant truth appeared so clear to me as it does now. Time – and time. Now it stretches like rubber, and then – it's gone, like a dream, like smoke. Right now, of course, it's stretched out horribly, horribly, it's really enough to kill you. The war has been going on for a full two years, and you've eaten nothing but soup for some four months – no, longer than your whole life until now. From yesterday's soup to today's is an eternity, and I can't imagine that I'll be able to survive another twenty-four hours of this overpowering hunger. But these four months are no more than a dark, empty nightmare. Try to salvage something from them, remember something in particular – it's impossible. One black, dark mass. I remember, in prison, in solitary confinement. Days that stretch like tar. Each day like another yoke on your neck. And in the evenings, lying in the dark, reviewing the day that had passed, I could hardly believe that I had been in the bathhouse that day – it seemed that it was at least four or five days ago. The days passed with dreadful slowness. But when I went through the gate on that side of the street, all the days ran together like a pack of dogs on a hunt. Black dogs. Black days. All one black nightmare, like a single black hour.

At the prison gate friends were waiting – I don't remember all of them. But I remember Janek.^o Yes, Janek. I forgot all about him. Not long ago, last year, I met him. Half naked, in rags, he was tinkering with the gas pipe in a bombed-out house halfway along

Marszalkowska Street. He called to me. And out of the blue, as if twelve years hadn't gone by since we met last, he gave me our standard greeting, "Knowing something?"

"No. And you?"

"Me neither. But it's OK."

Then the supervisor came up and left. So maybe, maybe I should write to Janek. Write to him: Listen, brother, I'm having a hard time. Send me something. Write, then? By all means, write yet more openly: if you could provide me with a quarter of a loaf every day – ah, a little quarter loaf. Yes, when I'm dressed I'll write to him. It may be difficult to send the note but I'll write to him. – A little quarter loaf. And if you can't, then let it be an eighth.

Somewhere in the world people are eating as much as they want. In America sits Hershel eating his supper – and there is bread on the table, and butter, and sugar and a jar of jam. Eat, Hershele, eat! Eat! Hershel, eat a lot, I tell you. Don't leave the crust, it would be a waste, and eat up the crumbs from the table! It tastes good, you become full – true, dear Hershel?

And somewhere in the world there is still something called love. Girls are kissed. And girls kiss in return. And couples go walking for hours in the gardens and the parks and sit by a river, such a cool river, under a spreading tree; and they talk so politely to each other, and laugh together, and gaze in such a friendly way, so lovingly and passionately, into each other's eyes. And they don't think about food. They may be hungry, but they don't think about it. And they are jealous and become angry with each other – again, not eating. And all this is so true, and it is all happening in the world – far away from here, true, but it is happening, and there are people like me over there....

"Sick fantasies!" interrupts the scoundrel, my stomach; he's woken up, the cynic. "What a dreamer! Instead of looking for a practical solution, he lies there deluding himself with nonsensical stories. There are no good or evil stomachs, no educated or simple ones, none in love and none indifferent. In the whole world, if you're hungry, you want to eat. And by the way, it's all nonsense. There are good providers for their stomachs, and there are unlucky wretches like you. You can groan, you idiot, but as far as filling me up – damnation, what's the time?"

Ten past eight. Four hours to go. Not quite four whole hours, but let's say four, and if less, that's certainly to the good. I slowly draw on my pants. I no longer touch my legs. I touched them until, not long ago, I measured them with my fist, to see how far they'd shrunk. No more. What's the point?

And Freidman has died. Tying my shoelaces reminds me of the dozens of dangling genitalia there in the large common grave. And young girls stood around, holding their noses with handkerchiefs, and looked at the islands of hair. Again – is it because animals have no shame? Yes, so it seems, at the cemetery – funeral notices of rich men, of doctors, of good citizens... there is no end of rickshaws, and an easily recognizable crowd gathers – no poor people there. In other words, this kind of person dies too, though they have enough to eat. One doesn't die of hunger alone. Things even themselves out. They'd better get the message.

“Tell me, friend, are you starting up with your stories again? It’s already time to go. Maybe the soup will be earlier today. Move, my dear!”

In the air and heat of early fall the street is full of the smell of sweat and the smell of corpses, just as in front of the ritual cleansing room at the cemetery. Bread, bread everywhere. It costs the same as yesterday. You want to go to a stall, feel, pinch the fresh whole-wheat bread, satiate your fingertips with the soft, baked-brown dough. No, better not. It’ll only increase your appetite, that’s all. No, no – just as you didn’t want to read what the lovers ate in the restaurant on the quiet Viennese street. And fish roe is cheaper. Cheese – the same price. Sour cream is now in season – but it’s expensive. Cucumbers are cheaper, and onions are at the same price. But they’re bigger today than yesterday.

Cheerful tomatoes, full of *joie de vivre*, laugh in front of you, greet you. Trips into the mountains, rucksacks, shorts, open shirts, wild, joyous songs of earthly happiness rising into space. When, where? Two years ago, altogether two years. Tanned faces, black hands and feet. And hearty laughter, and brooklets of unexpected spring water, and bread and butter sandwiches with sweet tea; and no armbands on your sleeves, no mark of being a *Jude*.

Bread, bread, bread. *Razowka. Sitkowka. Vayse sitka. Hele sitka. Tunktele sitka. Walcowka.* First-class bread. *Beknbroyt.*°

Bread, bread. The abundance of it dazzles your eyes. In the windows, on the stalls, in hands, in baskets. I won’t be able to hold out if I can’t grab a bite of breadstuff. “Grab? You don’t look suspicious,” says he, my murderer. “They’ll let you near, they’ll even put it in your hand. They’ll trust you. They can see you aren’t one of the grabbers.”

Shut up, buddy, you’ve forgotten that I can’t run. Now *you’re* the wise guy, hah? “You’re a goner, you are, my breadwinner,” says he. “Just take a look at those two having their identity papers checked at the gate.° Look at the color of their faces. You can bet they’ve eaten today, and they’ll damn well eat again, soon. But look over there – they’re waiting for the car to pick them up. If you were a *mentsh*, you’d have looked after me earlier on, and you’d be eating like a human being, and *not* have swollen legs. And you’d also be able to wheedle yourself in and go along for the ride. They give you half a liter of soup and a loaf of bread a week. Too bad you’re such a *shlemazel!*”

Wrong again, you argue with him, your stomach. To begin with, there isn’t soup every day. Often enough they come back without eating. And they’re not treated with kid gloves either. Sometimes they get pushed around. You take your chances. But now, you’re guaranteed the soup in the kitchen, you have a ticket. And for doing nothing, and without working. Well, where could you be more secure?

The secondhand dealers by the gates look at you, at everybody, according to the value of the jacket you’re wearing, and expertly value the pants that will be pulled off you tomorrow – whether you’re dead or alive. A light breeze carries a torn fragment from the wall: “Four hundred grams of black salt. Chairman of the Judenrat.” Go to him, perhaps? Something rises in your memory: a committee, a hall, not very large, a bell, a carafe of water. You recognize him: a tall figure, a fleshy Jewish nose, a bald head. A small bow tie. Yes, *he* is now the chairman. Maybe you really should go to him? Write to him: Honored sir, I

do not request much of you. I am hungry – you understand? – hungry. So I request of you (and remind him here of your becoming acquainted, in 1935 I think – does he remember?). Therefore, I request of you, Mr. Chairman, that you see to it that I receive a piece of bread every day. I know, much honored sir, that you have a thousand other things to do – what importance at all can it have for you that such a wreck of a person as I am should kick the bucket. All the same, Mr. Chairman of the Judenrat –

You stumble over something on the ground. You nearly fall. But no, your two feet keep their balance. On the ground, across the sidewalk lies a mound of rags with a ... a green, hairy lump of wet dirt that was once a face with a beard. Now for the first time you realize that the calls, “Hello, hello,” were to you. At first you didn’t look around because Jews don’t have names anymore – all Jews today are called...°; but now one of those secondhand dealers is standing by you. Didn’t I see that I nearly stepped on a corpse? Philosopher! As if his jacket hadn’t been sufficiently creased and disheveled? Must I add insult to injury? The shoes have been pulled off by someone and sold; at least leave the pants! What use is it to tell him that I was just thinking about the Chairman of the Judenrat. The gatekeeper walks slowly, lazily, from the gate, carrying bricks and an old, excrement-stained sheet of newspaper, ties it round the dead body and walks slowly away, and that’s it.

According to some clocks, old and crippled, it is already eleven o’clock. You get a liking for the ones that tell you it’s later. Those big ones are haughty and not in any hurry, and you hate them. Another hour. A few dozen minutes – they count for something too! It’s nothing, in deed, but if you were eating a good old piece of bread, eh? What would you do, for example, if you were now to be given a slice of bread – would you eat it right away, or would you keep it for the soup to make it more filling? I think you’d keep it. And if the soup was late, and it came out much later, let’s say, would you also wait? Enough stories for the time being, don’t make a fool of yourself. You’d devour it like a wolf. Oh, how you’d demolish it!

“Just a little bit of bread...,” the refrain of all the criers, from the sidewalks, from the cobbles, a little bit of bread. Oh, you jokers! Don’t you know that I too want nothing more than a “little bit of bread”?

“My father’s dead, my mother’s in hospital, my elder brother’s missing – a little bit of bread...”

You’ve eaten today, you bastard, haven’t you?

“Small children at home – a little bit of bread.” And I would so gladly add my voice: I’m hungry, hungry, hungry. Another hour till soup, another hour – you understand? “A little bit of bread ! ! ! !”

The soup was *not* late today. The steam is already in the air. Plates are already being rattled. The manager is already shouting at the waitresses, the assistant manager is already measuring the length of the hall with his tiny feet and nodding his plump head from side to side as in a puppet show. The second assistant manager is already shouting at some diners. The day of soup giving is already begun. There are more people here than yesterday, just as

yesterday there were more than the day before. Poor fellow! They're starting to hand out the soup from *that* table. So you'll have to sit here until it reaches you. How do you like that –you can eat your heart out.

Time – and more time. You remember the days when the kitchen announced, indifferently, and you thought, vengefully, "There's no meal today." How bitter were the words on the door: "Today's tickets are valid for tomorrow." How hideously long were those days and nights. And yet it seems to you that the people at the table feel superior to you, worthier. Someone or other takes from his bosom a quarter sheet of newspaper and unwraps it, uncovering a thin, round piece of bread. Unlike you, they don't gobble the soup directly; first they stir it, wrinkling up their noses in disgust – just as they do every day, because it's thin; start at the side, where it's shallow; chew for a long time, slowly; pretend to be looking around, as if the soup were of secondary importance and the main thing – the ceiling. After the first few spoonfuls they add salt. They play with the soup as a cat plays with a mouse. And after the soup their faces wear an expression of near-religious bliss.

And it hasn't reached your table yet. And – are you only imagining it? – somehow the people sitting here all have such long faces, not-having-eaten faces, with swollen ghetto spots under their eyes, which give the face a Mongolian look. You think of a master of world literature, a Tolstoy, a Balzac, a Wassermann. How they made a fuss over people, they chiseled every feature, every move. "You seem to be somewhat pale today!" one of these geniuses would write, and the world was enraptured. "You seem to be somewhat pale today," and women dabbed their eyes with handkerchiefs, critics interpreted and serious, business-like gentlemen, owners of textile factories or partners in large, comfortable manufacturing business beneath white marble signs felt a quiver in their cheeks – reminiscent of the first kiss, fifty years ago. "You seem to be somewhat pale today" – ha, ha! If someone *today* were to read or write, "You seem somewhat pale today," when the whole world is deathly pale, when everyone, everyone has the same white, chalky, lime-white face. Yes, yes, it was easy for *them* to write. They ate, and knew that the readers were going to eat and that the critics were going to eat. Let these master *now* show their true colors and write!

"Why don't you eat?" What is this? Everyone around you is eating; in front of you, too, there is a bowl of steaming soup, glistening and glittering with delicious splendor. You were looking across at the people and saw nothing. And did she take the ticket? No, you're still holding it in your hand. What's going on? Should you call? Turn it in? You've already finished with the helping, while around you people are smacking their lips, spitting, sipping as a cat sips milk, and grumbling, exactly as if they weren't eating. And that scoundrel over there, who has such a full plate, full of fried onions sits there sniveling – you could just faint. It's all right, they're hungry, everyone may eat any way he likes. I'm probably comical too when I eat my soup. And there are some who tilt the plate so convulsively and scrape together the last drops... and submerge their whole face in the plate and see nothing else, as if it were the entire earth, the world. Can she possibly have given you the soup without a ticket? You steal a glance – the date is right. She simply didn't notice in the confusion. No,

don't give it to her. Revenge. And she will realize it maybe; maybe not. It can't be – maybe, maybe to get another helping? And say nothing? But she did it on purpose. You know what, Arke? If a *man* sits down at your table now to eat his soup, you'll take the risk; if a *woman*, it's a bad omen, and you won't give up the ticket.

You stare hard. On one side a mother is now sitting with a child. A waitress hurries past, the mother says to the child, loudly, with a smiling, ingratiating look: "Wait, wait, the lady will soon bring you some thick soup." The bench squeaks, someone has sat down. That person is hidden from view; you see a bit of white toast. A fragment of a second: man or woman? – man or woman? A woman! Apparently – a pair of eyes – a mummy, eyes without expression. A woman, a woman, damn it. This means not turning in the ticket, not taking another bowl of soup? Too late, that's the way you set it up. But now the soup is better and better, thicker, hotter. How do you know? That's the way it always is. The later the better. Though it's not so certain. But this time –yes. And so once again, from the beginning. Man or woman, man or woman?

There is movement around you. People come and go, sit down, speak. Polish, Yiddish, Hebrew, German. First here, now there, like a rocket, a question flutters with an exclamation: "Who, him? I saw him only yesterday! Who, her? She ate here only the day before yesterday! They are talking about those who have died, one of hunger, another from "that" louse and today's sickness. And the whisper so mysteriously in each other's ears: "Don't shout – so, died at home, unannounced." But above all other conversations, one theme – we won't be able to survive it. There's such a winter coming. If the war lasts through the winter. Last year we still had something. Parcels were still arriving, it wasn't sealed so shut. What are they splitting hairs about? Whether we will survive or not. What can people do, when they are sentenced to death and know the exact time of the execution? Thus the French aristocrats in the prisons during the great Revolution gambled at cards, acted in plays, until the man in the tricolor came in and called out the names, and "The guillotine is waiting." Yes, you see? But they weren't hungry and weren't threatened with starvation. Yes, indeed, this is really the main point. Well, and during the more recent Russian Revolution? But why am I getting involved in these great stories – man or woman, man or woman?

At this point she showed up, the waitress, and automatically began taking tickets. Everyone held them out, you as well. It's over. And now you dip your spoon in the bowl, in the second bowl of soup – you understand? It really is thicker than the first. Now you can afford to play with it, to eat graciously, like all the rest, and not gobble. You don't eat in whole spoonfuls. Sometimes you spit out a piece of chaff, like a VIP.

In the street the smell of fresh corpses envelops you. Like an airplane propeller just after it's been started up, which spins and spins, and yet stays in one place – that's what your feet are like. They seem to you to be moving backwards. Pieces of wood.

They were looking, weren't they? Involuntarily, you cover your face with your arm. And what if they find out? They can, as a punishment, take away your soups. Somehow it seems to you that they already know. That man who's walking past looks so insolently into

your eyes. He knows. He laughs, and so does that man, and another and another. Hee, hee – they choke back their stinging laughter, and somehow you become so small, so cramped up. That’s how you get caught, you fool. A thief? *Only* unlucky. That one soup can cost you all the others.

A burning in your left side. Your arm, your leg, your heart; not for the first time, but this time it’s stronger. You must stop moving. You feel someone is watching. It’s already too late to respond. A director of social assistance, in a rickshaw,^o is riding down the street. A former acquaintance. Yes, he looked at you; yes. You notice when someone’s looking – it’s your nature. Always, when you see him traveling past, you look at him, wanting to catch his eye, and always in vain. Today it’s the other way around: *he* noticed *you*. Maybe... maybe he already knows.

The director is already far away. Behind him are dozens of rickshaws. But the burning remains. Why the devil did you have to be in the street just *now*? Others go past, actually touch you and don’t recognize you, or pretend not to. And he – saw you from up there in his rickshaw and pierced you with a glance. What will happen now?

By a gate, in a narrow crack, a cucumber. A whole one, untouched. It seems that it fell from a housewife’s shopping basket. Mechanically, without thinking, you bend down, take it, no disgrace, no joy. You deserve it. Just as a dog deserves a bone. A bittersweet cucumber. From looking at the skin you can already taste the sweetness of the seeds. It’s not healthy. Typhus? Dysentery? Nonsense. For thirty centuries, generations of scholars have devoted their brilliant abilities, their youth, their lives to extorting from Nature the secrets of vitamins and calories – in order that you, Arke, by a gat in Leszno Street should munch on a cucumber you found, which someone lost, or threw down for you.

What? It’s impossible to [...]?^o Oh, if you only tried ... if you only tried ... if you only tried to beg. The first housewife that comes along ... make a piteous face ... So what? Better people than you are out begging. Should I list them for you? You don’t want to? Then, don’t! If you don’t want to, you don’t have to – he stopped at L[...].

You feel that today you have fallen a step lower. Oh, yes, that’s how it had to begin. All these people around you, apparently, began like that. You’re on your way [...] The second soup – what will it be tomorrow?

It’s getting dark. The darkness thickens; you could cut it with a knife. It would be good to buy some bread now, it’s cheaper. It would! A round-bellied prostitute gives irises to two of her friends. On their lime-white faces, all skin and bone, the rouge and color on their spear-sharp eyebrows look ghostly.

A small group of people stand on the sidewalk and look across at the other side, from where a long beam of light falls. It’s the children’s hospital. Low down, on the first floor, in a wide, high window, a large electric lamp hangs over a table. A short woman in a white mask moves something very quickly with her hands. Around her, other women, also in masks. A calm hurry. And everything – to the table, to the one who lies on the table. An operation. You’ve never seen one before. At the movies, in a book, in the theater, yes, but in life, no. Strange, isn’t it? You’ve lived some thirty-odd years, seen so much – and now you’re seeing

an operation for the first time; and it has to be in the *ghetto*! But why, why? Why save? Why, to whom, to what is the child being brought back?

And suddenly you remember that dead Jew, whom you nearly tripped over today. What's more, you now see him more clearly than before, when you were actually looking at him. Somewhere, years ago, there was a mother who fed him and, while cleaning his head, knew that her son was the cleverest, the most talented, the most beautiful. Told her aunt, her neighbors his funny sayings. Sought and delighted in every feature in which he resembled his father, his father. And the word *Berishl* was not just a name to her, but an idea, the content of a life, a philosophy. And now the brightest and most beautiful child in the world lies in a strange street, and his name isn't even known; and there's a stink, and instead of his mother, a brick kisses his head and a drizzling rain soaks the well-known newspaper around his face. And over there, they're operating on a child, just as if this hadn't happened, and they save it; and below, in front of the gate stands the mother, who knows that her *Berishl* is the cleverest and the most beautiful and the most talented – Why? For whom? For whom?

And suddenly (you – a grown, tall man, a male) you feel a quiver in your cheek, in your hands, all over your body. And your eyes become so rigid, so glassy. Yes, that's how it must be. This is the sign – you understand? – the equation, the eternal Law of Life. Maybe you are destined now, of all times, in your last days, to understand the meaning of this meaninglessness that is called life, the *meaning of your hideous, meaninglessly hungry days*. An eternal, eternal law. An eternal, eternal process. And a kind of clarity pours over your neck, your heart. And your two propellers no longer spin round in one spot – they walk, they walk! Your legs carry you, just as in the past! Just as in the past!

Somewhere a clock is striking dully: one, two, half past. Four-thirty, three-thirty, five-thirty? I don't know. Here there is no sunrise. The day comes to the door like a beggar. The days are already shorter. But I – I, like the fall, autumnal, foggy dawns. Everything around you becomes so dreamy, lost in thoughts, longing, serious, blue-eyed, concentrated in itself. Everything – people, the world, clouds – draw away somewhere, prepares for something responsible that carries a yoke, something that connects everything together. The gray patch that stands in the corner of the room with open arms – that's the *new day*. Yesterday I began to write your experiences. From the courtyard came the shouts of the air-raid wardens telling people to turn out the light. There's a smell of *cholent*. How come? It's Thursday, not the Sabbath [...]. A forest, a river, the whistle of a train, an endless golden field. Kuzmir, Tatrn [...]. The Lithuanian border. This longing, this wound will never go away, it will stay forever, even if today, tomorrow should once again [...]. Let it be in the city itself, go, go – go forever, without stopping, at least see the bank of the Vistula, at least see just the city. The city that you know. The happiness of quickly turning a corner, then [...] the hundredth. With an open jacket, with happy, swift steps. *Your city*, your second mother, your great, eternal love. The longing pierces your heart. It remains.

Somewhere they are typing [...]. They're reporting. It is reported from Bursels ... Belgrade, Paris. Yes, yes, we're eating grass. Yes, we're falling in the streets without a word of protest – we wave our hands like this, and fall [...]. Each day the profiles of our children, of our wives, acquire the mourning look of foxes, dingoes, kangaroos. Our howls are like the cry of jackals. Our hymn, *papierosy, papierosy* (cigarettes, cigarettes) is like something from a nature reserve, a zoo. But we are not animals. We operate on our infants. It may be pointless or even criminal. But animals do not operate on their young!

Tokyo. Hong Kong. Vichy. Berlin. General number of enemy losses: six thousand eight hundred and forty-nine. Stockholm. Washington. Bangkok. The world's turning upside down. A planet melts in tears. And I – I am hungry, hungry. I am hungry.

Warsaw ghetto, August 1941
(Ringelblum Archive, Part 1, no. 1486)